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Interviewer: Ben Houston

Interviewee: John Seigenthaler

H: It is June 16, 2003, and I am in the offices of the Freedom Forum with Mr. John Seigenthaler to talk about Nashville and Nashville=s history. Sir, can we start with saying when and where you were born, please.

S: I was born in Nashville on July 27, 1927. I will be seventy-six next month.

H: How did you start in your involvement with *The Tennessean*?

S: I was a child of nepotism. My uncle was circulation director and chairman of the board of control of both newspapers [the *Nashville Tennessean* and the *Nashville Banner*]. The newspapers were independently owned, but they had what was called a joint operating agreement in which they shared the building, the business staffs B advertising, circulation, and finance and human resources B and profit-shared, with the approval of the Justice Department=s Anti-trust Division. There were at the time twenty-two joint operating agreements in the United States. There are much fewer today.

H: And you took over the city editor desk in the 1950s. Is that correct?

S: I went to work there in 1949 and became weekend city editor in about 1954 or 1955, somewhere in there. I was basically an investigative reporter from 1951 until I became weekend city editor. Then, three days a week, I worked on special projects. In that interim, I also had a stint of about six months on the *Sunny Magazine*, which the newspaper operated. But I followed that same route that most young journalists in those days followed. I wrote obituaries, and then I covered police for a couple of years, and then I covered the courts, and then I covered county and local government, state legislature, then became a Washington correspondent. Over a period of six years, I did just

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about everything on the paper. From about 1956 through 1958, when I became a Nieman Fellow at Harvard, I was city editor and an investigative reporter.

H: Okay. So, you were wearing multiple hats.

S: I was wearing multiple hats, at least dual hats.

H: Describe the Nashville of the 1950s, especially talking to an outsider such as me, an outsider from Nashville and also from that time period.

S: It was a relatively small town. In 1949, it was a town with separate city [and] county governments, like most places in the South, indeed, like most places in the country. It was a provincial, southern community, proud and wedded to the past. It had called itself the Δ Athens of the South,[@] largely resulting from the centennial celebration. The centennial celebration resulted in the location of Centennial Park. The park was named at the time of the anniversary, and that celebration was sort of dedicated to Grecian ways. The only exact replica of the Parthenon stands in Centennial Park today as a result of that celebration. Beyond that, there was a wonderful pageant, I say wonderful because I didn't have to sit through it and watch it. But sort of an adventuresome intellectual named Sidney David Mtrron Hirsch [Nashville personality and mentor to the Vanderbilt Fugitive poets] basically wrote the script for this pageant that was sort of a throwback to Greece with goddesses and gods cavorting across the lawn in front of what was then, I think, the nearest thing you had to, sort of, a plastic Parthenon, which later became permanently put up in concrete. So, that is where we got that moniker, Athens of the South.

More recently, we have become known as Music City, U.S.A., largely as a result of the emergence of country music in Nashville. And that sort of story spins off on its own. I mean, in my youth and even when I went to work in the newspaper, it was called hillbilly music, not country

music. Hillbilly music was focused in Nashville largely because WSM radio station, which was a Clear Channel [Communications] station [giant media corporation], began this country music show on Saturday nights under a tent in east Nashville. It went out on Clear Channels, reachable as far away sometimes as the West Coast, but at least always as far as Texas. The music was not as popular in Nashville as it was elsewhere, but WSM, owned by National Accident Insurance Company, sold insurance by radio, and WSM National Life said that WSM stands for AWe Shield Millions. Their logo was a shield with the station's call-letters on it. So, Athens of the South became Music City, U.S.A., and that was beginning to take hold when I came to work for the paper. When I came to work for the paper, country music was sort of a negative. By that time, they had moved to the old Ryman Auditorium, which is still standing at Fifth and Broad, just off Broad. The auditorium was built by Captain [Thomas G.] Ryman, a steamboat captain who wanted Billy Sunday [American evangelist] to preach there, which Billy Sunday did, and many others did. It was, in effect, a tabernacle, but National Life bought it, and the [Grand Ole] Opry took it over. When I was younger, when I was working on the paper, everybody went to church downtown on Sunday in those days, or most people did, and as you would turn up Fifth Avenue to go to **McKendree** Methodist, or what was then First Presbyterian or St. Mary's or the Greek Orthodox Church, you would find all this litter out on the street from Saturday night's Grand Ole Opry. Churchgoers would curse National Life and WSM for littering downtown. It was not long, however, maybe a decade, before country music caught on in Nashville and enhanced the industry of the city. Suddenly, you found some representative of the music industry every year on the Board of the Chamber of Commerce, playing an active role in civic affairs. So, we moved from Athens of the South to a different sort of culture, a country music culture. In a very real sense, whether we were

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the Athens of the South or Music City, U.S.A., we were still basically a southern community with provincial ways.

H: If you look at historians= treatment of Nashville, it has sort of a reputation as a genteel, liberal city, but there is also this sort of strong undercurrent of, they call it, cultural conservatism, the sort of provincialism that you are referring to. How do you reconcile those two strains in trying to understand Nashville?

S: I don't think the city operated in a vacuum. I think, first of all, it always was and is, as we sit here, although there is some change in this, [exhibiting] an ongoing loyalty to Democratic politics. Much of that stems from the fact that [U.S. President] Andrew Jackson [1829-1837] and [U.S. President] James K. Polk [1845-1849], both very partisan Democrats, founded the party. Jackson founded it. While the Whigs made great inroads during Polk=s tenure as governor [of Tennessee, 1839-1841], and, indeed, he lost the state when he ran for president, middle Tennessee has been still largely loyal to those Democratic roots. At the same time, there was, in this mid-state area, and I think generally across the state, a heavy complement of federalist installations. [The] Tennessee Valley Authority, located in east Tennessee, and before that, in northern Alabama at Muscle Shoals, really was a statewide institution, and there was, as a result of that, a pretty substantial federal commitment of resources, from TVA in the east to Millington Naval Base in the west. There was less hostility for the federal government. I mean, thousands and thousands of people worked for the federal government. So, federalism had a much easier time in Tennessee than it did in many other parts of the South.

H: In thinking about the Nashville of this time, can you explain where the centers of power were and how power functioned in the city?

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S: Basically, as I grew up here and later came to understand the dynamics of power in Nashville, there were three interlocking directorates B that is probably not exactly accurate, but it is as good a metaphor as I can find B the [Nashville] Chamber of Commerce, the Vanderbilt University Board of Trust[ees], and the Belle Meade Country Club. Now, the leadership of the Chamber of Commerce and the Belle Meade Country Club changed year-to-year. You would have a different board of directors, you would have different offices. But the power structure remained the same. For many years, Nashville=s three major banks, which were, in the days I am talking about, First American, Third National and Commerce Union. Those three banks and the two insurance companies, National Life and Life and Casualty, both in the top twelve in the country in insurance companies, and they in themselves were interlocking, because the insurance companies also had relationships with the banks, but those five institutions basically provided the economic stimulus for much of what went on, and much of the wealth here was indigenous. I think there were eight founders of National Life, no more than four or five of Life and Casualty. Old Commerce Union Bank grew out of an older German-American bank, which appealed to the German Americans who had settled here, [which was] a rather large community, most of it in north Nashville, but some of it elsewhere. I am a Seigenthaler, and from about 1845 on, on my father=s side, we had relatives here. But those banks all represented indigenous wealth.

The insurance companies, I thought, in a unique way, represented an entrepreneurial spirit which carried on, still carries on in generations, at least until this generation. So, that indigenous ownership, I think, instilled a sort of deep-seated pride in the investment those leadership families had in the community, and that evolved. When I was growing up, it was said, tongue-in-cheek, Nashville was a son-in-law town, which meant that second- and third- and fourth-

generation executives of many of the indigenous companies had married well. It did not hold true if you looked very deeply at it, but, on a superficial basis, you could see evidence that somebody's son-in-law did well in the corporate structure. Now, the amazing thing was, they not only did well in the corporate structure, they did well in leading the company. But if you take those two factors together, one, the large commitment to the federal resources that were available across the state and in middle Tennessee and, two, the pride that comes from family investment in a community, I think you get a sense of why Nashville was slightly different than many other cities. When I say slightly different, I mean that, when there was a crises, I always thought this city responded a little less rigidly, sometimes substantially less rigidly, to those crises than other cities in the South.

H: And do you consider that applicable to crises involving race relations?

S: I think involving race relations more than anything else. Just to give you an example, I think when a bomb went off at Hattie Cotton School on the first night Nashville desegregated [their schools, in September 1957], the response across the community was, this must not be allowed to happen here. Nashville had adopted, I think, a stair-step school plan [referring to the plan to integrate one grade per year, thus increasing total school-system integration over twelve years], and only one child enrolled in Hattie Cotton School who was an African-American, and that school was blown off its foundation. The principal of that school was **Kate**. Her father was, I believe, maybe director of schools, and her brother was later vice-mayor. She appeared before the school board and said, this school must be put back into operation before the end of this academic year, and it was. Most often, when there was violence here, the city repudiated it, and the merchants of violence most often found that their acts of violence were self-defeating, not because there was not massive support for the racist ideology and philosophy. It was because [city leaders] had a greater pride in

the city, and this was not going to be a [Klu Klux] Klan town if the city fathers had anything to do with it, and they had everything to do with it. They made a difference. I have used the analogy, think of a city with a steel backbone. When heat was applied to the steel backbone of this city, it responded to the heat by bending somewhat, and then it would become rigid again. Then, another crisis, and the heat would apply again, and a little more flexibility than before. That does not mean we were spared racist demonstrations and violence directed towards the civil rights demonstrators. It simply meant that the tolerance for the violence and the tolerance for the radical racists, there was a lower level of tolerance for that. As a result of that, we did not undergo the ordeal of a Birmingham or a Montgomery or a Jackson or even some of the cities in Louisiana and Georgia.

I think that Nashville, it was not just that it was a border-state. Indeed, much of the state was heavily populated with blacks, particularly in the west, and Nashville, in the days it was a separate city/county, was about thirty percent black population. Just to dwell on that for a half-second. In the late 1950s, Nashville adopted an idea of putting together a city and county government, that that would be a positive step; We would reduce overlap, competition in overlapping agencies. The first trial, we had a health director here named **John Lentz**, who was a brilliant old man, a medical doctor, committed to public health. When the Salk vaccine [for polio] became available, there was something called Cutter=s vaccine, which, [it] turned out, caused polio and created a great scare in a lot of places. **John Lentz** took the Salk vaccine, and Nashville was the number-one city in America in inoculating children against polio. **Lentz** was responsible for that, and because he was so popular, he was able to convince the county and the city that he could do a better job than the two competing agencies could. So, the city gave up its health department to the county, and that sort of set the tone for one government, which ultimately came

about in 1962. The rule was, the voters in both the city and the county separately had to vote for one government. In the first election in the late 1950s, it failed. The city supported it; the county did not. In those days, there was a provision in the statute that allowed a city to arbitrarily annex surrounding territory, without the permission of the surrounding territory. So when [the push for] Metropolitan Government failed the first time, the city, the mayor, Ben West [1951-1963], decided that he was going to take what I called a doughnut. Really, it was the large tax residential and industrial area immediately contiguous to the old city. He grabbed that, and immediately the people affected in that doughnut area who did not receive additional services were outraged, [and] the people in the county outside that doughnut were fearful they would be next. The next time around, [there was] a bitter editorial fight. The first time, both newspapers, *The Tennessean* and the *Banner*, had endorsed "one government" [city/county consolidation]. This time, *The Tennessean* stayed with "one government", and the *Banner* went the other way. The *Banner* was close to Mayor West, who was a good man and a visionary, but the result of that was that "one government" came into being in 1962, because the voters in the doughnut and the voters in the outer area now wanted what the voters in the city wanted. They wanted to be part of one government. You know, it's better the devil we know than what we don't know.

H: I noticed that when you mentioned what you saw as the three centers of power in Nashville, you had nothing to say whatsoever about the religious establishments in Nashville, which are popularly associated with the city.

S: No, and I do not think that the religious establishments really had any real influence in power-brokering. It always has been, and still is, basically, a religious community and, for the most part, dominated by the two conservative groups, Southern Baptists & more conservative today than in

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the past B and the Church of Christ. Although, not that either of those is unhealthy, but there is a very healthy mainstream Methodism, Presbyterianism, Episcopalianism. Catholicism and Judaism [more] fractional [in importance]. But if you take those three power centers that I said brokered the power, I think you would be hard-pressed to find many people in those circles who really held the power who came from fundamentalist religious backgrounds. Most of them were mainstream Protestants. Basically, the churches had some influence, obviously, over their own members, but I would say that civic pride substantially outstripped religious influences in guiding the course of the city.

H: The civic religion trumps the....

S: Yes, and I think corporate and financial religiosity held the power and kept the power, and was jealous of the power. Just two quick notes of that: in the mid-1960s, Nashville decided it was going to make a move from a dry town with package stores to a city with beverage alcohol for sale in restaurants and bars. It was a dogfight, with the conservative religious community strongly opposed. In the midst of that fight, the leading Southern Baptist layman, maybe the leading Southern Baptist in the nation, [was] a man named **W. Max E. Jarman**. At the time, he was chairman of the board of **Genesco**, which was a national corporation that owned, among other things, Tiffany=s in New York. In the middle of that, Max E. Jarman wrote me B I was the editor and publisher of the paper B a three-sentence note in which he said, ADear John, I don=t know that anybody is really interested, but if you think it=s worth anybody=s knowing, I favor the legal sale of beverage alcohol in restaurants and bars in Nashville. Best regards, Max E. Jarman.@ It was front-page news the next day. It sort of undercut the Southern Baptist commitment on the

other side. I can remember a debate over that issue, in which I was invited to a church to debate some fundamentalist preacher brought in from outside, and I took along a copy of the King James version and read the [section on the] marriage feast of Canaan and sat down. I think I won the debate. Anyway, just one example, but **David K. Wilson**, who was president of the Chamber of Commerce that year, a leading conservative businessman, and later chairman of the Board of Trust[ees] at Vanderbilt University, committed the Chamber of Commerce board, and they endorsed liquor-by-the-drink. Belle Meade [Country] Club, that institution that is the very heart of that upscale enclave known as Belle Meade, ZIP code 37205, Belle Meade Club closed its bar. You could not get a drink at Belle Meade Club during the course of that campaign. Nor, as a result of Belle Meade=s involvement, any other country club. The town was dried up. You did not hear much praise from the preachers about that, because they were working the other side of the street. At any rate, I think that sort of explains in a general, probably not too effective, way my own view of how ineffective the church was in helping guide progress and social issues, particularly race relations.

H: In the 1950s and 1960s, you get a sense of how Nashville sort of set itself up as an exemplar of moderation, and I want to ask you what that word means to you, because it is sort of a nebulous word.

S: Yes. I think in the 1950s and 1960s, it basically meant a city that would find its way through racial turmoil that was felt all across the South. I think that is what most people think of when they talk about the moderation of the 1950s and the 1960s. I mean, it was a city that had its share of racial fanatics, racist fanatics. John Kasper [itinerant racial demagogue from New Jersey] was basically a race-baiter who came to town, and amazingly, one of Vanderbilt=s most distinguished English

faculty members, Donald Davidson, stood beside Kasper. The Vanderbilt English department was ultra-conservative, and Davidson, I mean, Vanderbilt believed in academic freedom, up to a point, and there was a point that they didn't believe in it much anymore. But there was very little criticism of Davidson on the campus. He had his critics, and they were outspoken, but he was not condemned, nor was there any suggestion that he had, sort of, violated the community's moderate culture.

H: At what point did he stand with Kasper?

S: During school desegregation. As I recall, it only happened once, and I think he felt a great deal of community pressure as a result of it, both from inside the Vanderbilt community and from the business community. He apparently was a wonderful teacher. He had been what was called an Agrarian. The Agrarian movement was basically economically conservative. They published a book, the Agrarians, in maybe the late 1920s. It was called *I=I Take My Stand [The South and the Agrarian Tradition]*. My recollection is that Davidson's position, in effect, described industrialization as a juggernaut that was going to crush Southern ways and Southern mores and Southern values. Maybe he meant it was going to crush white-supremacy values. It is easier to characterize Nashville as a moderate city in retrospect than it was in those days, because if you saw Kasper on the street raising hell, leading a rabble, cursing, condemning, damning blacks, cursing, condemning, damning [U.S. President] Dwight Eisenhower [1953-1961] and Attorney General Bill Rogers over Little Rock, it did not seem like a very moderate town at the time.

H: How, then, do you draw the distinctions between these professed moderates and the fact that there was some semblance of a reactionary community with Davidson and the segregationist groups. I mean, are those papered-over differences?

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S: I think it came back to that basic sense of civic pride. The leadership simply was not going to let its good name be tarnished by what its members considered radicalism, racial radicalism. There was an organization called the Watauga Society. It was a secret group, met in secret. The membership was secret, but anybody who was a CEO with decision-making power of his or her institution B and there weren't many Aher@ institutions B but anybody who was, was probably invited to be part of Watauga. I never felt, from what I knew about it, that Watauga was a very effective institution. As president, publisher and CEO of *The Tennessean*, I was invited to be a member and declined, both during **Bill Earthman=s** term and again during **Rodsen Ingram=s** term. A couple of people had thought I did belong, but I did not and could not. I mean, it was a secret organization. I could not be a journalist and be inside there and have decisions made by that power-structure and not do something about it. But I thought it was basically an ineffective organization. I mean, it came out for progressive schools, but it never made much of a difference that I could tell one way or the other. Although it did probably serve as a place where attitudes and ideas could coalesce.

H: What about the various interracial, racially liberal groups in Nashville at the time?

S: As President Kennedy once said, Anot since Thomas Jefferson dined alone,@ Race Relations Institute at Fisk [University; historically black college in Nashville], operated by Herman Long, was the one exceptional place in town, maybe the Unitarian Church when it finally went up. But outside that, I mean, you had to go to Highlander Folk School, later identified as a Communist training ground in billboards all across the state. I mean, you really had no opportunity for interaction or communication.

H: Were you familiar with the Tennessee Council on Human Relations?

S: Sure.

H: Did they do anything?

S: You know, in every community, there is always a small group of do-gooders who sit down and talk to themselves about doing good, and they are valuable and they are worthwhile and, you know, when there is a crisis, they serve a very useful role, because people who think that they are on the extreme left suddenly find out that they can be useful in trying to help bring about comity. But, generally, I felt that there was no really effective agency in which communications over race did much. I mean, they were basically supporters of *The Tennessean*, because of its editorial policy. There came a period when they were a little disgusted about that, but basically those groups... Let=s see, who did I know who was the leader of the Tennessee [Council on Human Relations]? I guess Baxton Bryant might have been at one point. Does that name ring a bell with you?

H: Hm-mm [yes], in the later 1960s.

S: Yes, and Baxton was largely ineffective. A good fellow.

H: A very controversial figure, as I understand.

S: Yes, but only because he made himself controversial. His ability to provide a bridge over which people=s differing points of view could walk together, I think, did not exist. On the other hand, you need radical voices in a community to bring about change. I do not say Aradical wrong,@ and I do not say Aradical right.@ He was Aradical correct.@ I mean, he understood the problem, but, you know, there was no more possibility that he was trusted by many people in the black community, or anybody in the white community, as an agent of change. He had very little following on either side, except people in the black community liked him, respected him for what he said. But as to trusting him to carry the mail for them or to carry water for them, they knew that he had no ability to

do that, because he was outside the leadership. But a good man.

H: Yes. Martha Ragland was also active in that group.

S: Martha Ragland was basically a political leader. She basically was leader of the women=s Democratic movement in Tennessee. She basically was part of, first of all, the Estes Kefauver wing of the Democratic party, and later the Kefauver/ Gore [Albert Gore, Sr.] wing of the party, opposed by the Clement/Ellington [Frank Goad Clement and Buford Ellington, Tennessee governors] wing of the party. She was a wonderful do-gooder. She had a better following than Baxton, largely because she was close to Kefauver and Gore, but she was not someone who sought the limelight or was very often focused in the limelight. She basically worked through goodwill and through politics to get things done. In the lexicon of value, she was far more effective than Baxton was. They were both good friends of mine, but looking at their effectiveness, I think that is probably an accurate account of how effective they were. But having them there helped. Having people there who were willing to stand in moments of crisis was helpful. And they were not by themselves. There were others. But both of them had leadership qualities, and each in his and her own way did provide a different sort of leadership than the leadership I am talking about from those power-brokers. [End of Side 1, Tape A.]

H: Since we are on this subject of white southern liberalism, maybe we can go outside of Nashville for a second, because you perhaps have a unique perspective on this. What is your sense of how white southern liberalism has changed from the 1950s and the 1960s and the 1970s? This is an incredibly general question that you could do whatever you want with.

S: I think it is basically the same. White southern liberals carry a lot of guilt that basically drives them. They generally are uncomfortable with blacks who talk about the melting pot as a stew [Mr.

Seigenthaler refers to the metaphor of America as a melting pot=s amalgamation of different cultures, versus a stew, where each culture retains its own identity but within a larger community]. They still, down deep, are committed to an integrated society that is color-blind, and they are not comfortable with blacks who are disillusioned by the failure to make more progress. The other day, I did an interview with a black professor at Vanderbilt who believes in affirmative action without a racial component. I was talking to her, and I said to her, you sound like President [George W.] Bush [2001-present]. What I was really saying to her was, I am very uncomfortable with what you are saying, because I still believe we are ten, twenty years short of when we can afford to end affirmative action. She was very uncomfortable with what she sensed. I did not say much about it because I was interviewing her, but she was uncomfortable with sensing my position. She is very bright and very articulate and very tough. But in my scheme of things, she is about ten years ahead of her time.

H: So, you think that guilt on the part of white southern liberals is both...

S: I think it drove them then and it drives them now, and thank God it was there. Finally, I think that when you saw dogs chewing on children and fire hoses turning whole men upside down on the street [referring to images from the civil rights movement], that guilt went far beyond reactions of liberals. People who were on the fence jumped off quick. Now, those who were on the other side of the fence laughed and applauded, but I think for its time, guilt was a valuable impulse.

H: Do you think it was also an impediment as time wore on and as blacks became more disillusioned with this, sort of, perfect color-blind scheme?

S: I do not think so, but that is my southern guilt talking. The diversity of this country is the one element of greatness, and its potential for making us even a greater society really depends upon

our willingness to be a melting pot and not a stew. That stew metaphor is not mine. I first heard it from a black educator who swears by it. I understand it. I mean, I understand that African-Americans, Hispanics, even Native Americans, Asians not so much B [they] for some reason seem more secure B but I understand the fear that you are going to give something away, or lose something, if you gain too much. Those are the same fears in another century that generations of Irish and Poles, Germans and Italians felt. Acculturation makes a big difference.

I will tell you a story. It is not a Southern story, and it is not a national story. But I have a grandson who is five years old, Jack Seigenthaler, and [for] Thanksgiving, I was visiting him at my son=s home in Connecticut. [My grandson] is really John Seigenthaler, not III [the third], because my son is John Seigenthaler Jr. My job is to read to Jack before he goes to bed, instead of his parents, on nights I=m there. The night before Thanksgiving, I go in, and my son comes in, and I am getting ready to read to Jack. I usually read three short stories or three chapters of something. He was into *Harry Potter*, and my son said, tonight, Jack: Long day, long night; long day tomorrow. One story. Do you understand? Yes, Dad. Gran, do you understand? Yes, Dad. So, he leaves, and I read Jack one chapter of *Harry Potter*, at the end of which he said, Gran, Dad said you could read me one story. He didn=t say you couldn=t tell me another story. I said, fine, Jack. I will tell you one quick story. What do you want to hear? He said, I want to hear about you in Montgomery, Alabama. I said, Jack, how did you know that I was hurt in Montgomery? He said, we saw a documentary, and when I asked about it, Dad told me sometime to ask you. Tell me the story. I said, Jack, quick story:

There were some very mean angry white people in Montgomery, Alabama.

Parenthetically, on Monday before this Wednesday night, I had taken Jack to kindergarten that

morning and noted that there were two African-American kids in his class, asked his mother about it, and she said, it has never come up. He has not asked. We have not said a word. We know he must be thinking something, but he has not said a word, and we are not going to say anything until he asks, and then we will explain it so that he understands. So, now, I am saying, Jack, there were some very mean white people in Montgomery, Alabama, and I absolutely blotted out that earlier conversation with my daughter-in-law. I said, some black people wanted to ride the bus. The mean angry white people tried to stop the black people. I tried to help the black people. They were beaten up, I was beaten up. They put us in the hospital, but, you know, we got out very soon, and we got well quick, and we are just fine. And, you know, Jack, now everybody can ride the bus, and that is the end of the story, and it has a happy ending.

There was a pause, just about as long as you just heard from me, and my grandson said, Gran, are you black? It took my breath away. It took my breath away. Quickly, I realized what I had done. I said, Jack, it really does not matter, does it? When I got home, I wrote him a letter and said, I told you it did not really matter; it does, and it is not going to be long before you find out; but maybe by the time you are my age, it really won't matter anymore. Now, I don't know what you asked me that prompted that story, but we are about to have a generation with that attitude, where, with most people, it really won't matter anymore, and you won't need affirmative action. And I won't need the guilt anymore.

H: Wow. As interesting as this is, we should probably shift back to Nashville.

S: Right. I'm two generations and a thousand miles [away].

H: I know that, in the 1950s, you actually had an interest in labor unions. Historians have not written anything about Nashville labor unions. Perhaps it will end up being an aside, but can you comment

briefly on the dynamics of labor in Nashville, and did they play a role in the race relations of the era?

S: They played something of a role. First of all, most of the labor unions in the South were segregated, and most of them were happy with segregation. There was one labor leader, a man named Matthew Lynch, who was president of the state AFL-CIO. Before that, he was in the old CIO, and he paid the price. He had sought to organize textile mills. He had been beaten a lot of times. Tall, rangy. One of those labor intellectuals who spoke [with the] the common man=s touch and a very wily politician. He moved behind-the-scenes effectively to try to bring about positive change. Now, he did not try to do the impossible. Each union had its own culture and its own nepotism, and nobody could break through that. For example, there was a lawyer here who was a high-school classmate of mine named George Barrett. Organized labor helped put George Barrett through undergraduate school at Spring Hill [College] with the Jesuits and through Vanderbilt Law School, and he emerged as one of the great forces to bring about racial change in Nashville.

Another labor lawyer, Cecil Brandstetter, who was really George=s mentor, was another powerful force for good. To a limited degree, labor made a difference, a very limited degree, and it was almost an indirect difference. Matt was right. He made a change where he could. He did not risk his own political hide in doing it. I am sure everybody in labor knew where he was. But most of what he did simply served to bring about change in as many different ways, but little ways, that he possibly could. Of course, labor was not a powerful force in the community. It is basically a right-to-work state and a right-to-work city. On the other hand, union membership was pretty consolidated. When there was a strike, you would find general support across the spectrum of labor for that strike. They would kick in a little dough, they would honor the picket-lines. But again, there was not

an industry here until Ford Glass Plant came to town with UAW [United Automobile Workers]. That really made a difference. Even in the UAW, there were negative influences. I remember after the March on Washington, United Way put up first-aid stations, or paid Red Cross to put up first-aid stations, along the way of the March on Washington. Nashville United Automobile Workers refused to contribute the following two or three years to United Way because those stations had been there to support the March on Washington. Now, I am not suggesting it was a unanimous vote; it certainly was not. But that is what they voted not to do, and it created a real crisis in United Way. Funding dropped precipitously for a couple three years. They had to go out then and show the union members how the agencies were being denied money [which] were helping their retarded children, were helping their indigent parents. It was a whole selling job. So, while the leadership of labor had its heart in the right place, its ability to really reform itself, much less the community at-large, really was not there. The only dynamic that ultimately changed the community was the [the civil rights] movement. The Movement created the heat that caused the flexibility in that steel backbone I was talking about earlier. The Movement made the difference, and if it had not been for the Movement, some progress would have come ultimately through the courts, but there would have been a lot more hell to pay for much longer.

H: Why the Movement, then? What about it succeeded when other places failed, especially in Nashville?

S: I have thought back over my own time in Nashville as a boy. Were you in the room the other day when I was talking about childhood, riding on a bus or trolley car? I remember as a child, you know, [Ralph] Ellison writes *The Invisible Man* about being black and not being seen, and I can remember sitting on those busses and trolley cars well into my teens and never seeing black

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women walk by, never feeling the slightest guilt at Rosa Park=s counterparts, many of them bearing bundles, probably taking home some white family=s washing to do it overnight and bring it back. I never saw them, never felt anything, no guilt, and I have to wonder where my head and heart were and where my parents= heads and hearts were, because I never felt any twinge of guilt, never recognized the injustice, the corruption of the system. On the other hand, I was read to a lot as a child and read myself a lot, and I remember the first time I had, sort of, an awakening. A math teacher in high school gave me a book, *The Mind of the South* by W. J. Cash, which is more about white southerners than the black South, but if you read Cash and you were where I was, you suddenly understood a little bit about yourself. The interesting thing is that the priest who gave me that to read B years later, I am now at the newspaper B I had no idea why in the hell he gave me that book. I did not have a lot of contact with him, not a lot of conversation with him. I was not a good math student, and I probably took the book and read it largely to impress him. I do not remember whether it improved my math score or not, but it did improve my mind, and it made me understand some of why I was the way I was.

By the time I got into the military B I was a control-tower operator at MacDill Field, and this was before President Truman desegregated the military B I understood, seeing blacks on one side of that field in reveille, blowing the horn up in that tower, and whites on the other, falling out of barracks and going to separate mess halls, [that there was] something screwed-up about the mind-set of a country that has got soldiers, black and white, fighting for the same freedom, committed to the same liberty. I mean, I am up there, and not a black soldier had a chance to get up there, because that wasn=t blacks= work. The insanity of that was beginning to take hold.

Anyway, I go to work for the paper, and I have been there, and I have had some

successes in investigative reporting. I get a call one day from Avon Williams, who later became a great civil-rights [lawyer in Nashville], he was very young at that time. He told me this story about a sawmill-hand had been murdered in west Tennessee in Benton County. He had been murdered by a white taxi-driver over an eight-dollar bill. The case had been covered up. I said, thank you very much; I will tell my editor, and we will try to look into it. Why did you call me? He told me the name of the priest [that gave Mr. Seigenthaler *The Mind of the South*]. He said, he is the pastor at the parochial school where my son attends, and he said I could trust you. And this is, how much longer? Five, six, seven years had gone by. So, I go down there. The murder had taken place. He had stabbed him in the heart, had run over him, broken his neck, threw the knife in the river. It was reported by the employer, the black man. They arrested him and released him on his own recognizance on Saturday night. On Monday, the grand jury meets. His father-in-law is on the grand jury. No true bill, and nothing had been done all those months until this lawyer calls me. I go down. My editor sends me. We support it. I stay there for a long time. I get another veteran reporter into it to help me. We run the story, they indict him, [and] they ultimately convict him. First time since the Reconstruction anything like that had happened.

That was the first civil rights story I covered, and I think it conditioned me, as a city editor particularly, because [David] Halberstam was covering the sit-in movement, most of it. [Wallace] Westfeldt [*Tennessean* reporter] was covering the crisis at Vanderbilt when they threw [Reverend James] Jim Lawson out of Vanderbilt Divinity School for directing the kids who were in that movement. I think I had a better understanding of who I was and where I was as a result of, one, the reading and, two, the exposure to that murder. You can't go through experiences like that and meet the people involved and things like that and not come to a really deeper understanding of

self. That is my thought about it. When the Movement started, I knew that I was glad I was on that paper, that I was interested in being on the cutting-edge of change, and I was glad that there was another paper in town that I considered absolutely neanderthal on the subject. Everything we said was right, they were going to say it was wrong. They would condemn violence. They condemned the blowing-up of the school. They condemned a radical like John Kasper. On the other hand, there was also a *but*. We condemn John Kasper, *but* these outside agitators ought to leave these young black kids alone. Well, Jim Lawson was the outside agitator.

So, I think I knew where I was reasonably early on. I knew, as I watched those kids, I mean, they told the story themselves better than anybody else. Nothing they saw in Nashville when they went downtown comported with what they read in their civics, political science, and history books. There was a gross contradiction as to the meaning of liberty. *One nation under God, *ae pluribus unum**, I mean, none of it made any sense. Certainly not *all are created equal* made any sense. Under Lawson's guidance, they made a decision they were going to change the town. The business community, those three interlocking directorates, looked at them and thought, well, June will be here soon, they'll all go home, and it will be business as usual. You know, the sit-ins are trouble, most of these black parents do not want these kids involved in this anyway. The kids were just smarter than their parents and certainly smarter than that interlocking directorate. When the sit-ins created trouble, but did not bring the department stores to talk, [the black protestors] upped the ante, they created an economic boycott, a downtown withdrawal, during Easter. They knew June was coming, too, and they dried up Nashville. By the time Easter arrived, Nashville was on its knees, looking for an opportunity to bring about change. Through all of that, I think Halberstam's reporting on the sit-ins and Westfeldt's reporting on

Vanderbilt Divinity School brought about a remarkable change. From the day Mayor Ben West stood on the city square, [Z.] Alexander Looby, a civil rights lawyer, Avon Williams= partner, his home had been blown up that morning. [There was] this silent march downtown and a confrontation with the mayor. The ultimate question asked by a young woman named Diane Nash, I think a sophomore at the time, maybe a junior. ΔMr. Mayor, Is it morally right?@ And he thinks about it. If you ever see the film of that, you see him think about it. And he says, no, it is not morally right, and [that became the] headline in our paper the next morning. From that point on, the wall started to crumble. It was only a question of somebody in the leadership telling... Now, that interlocking directorate had supported him, and now he was telling them, let=s get this city on its feet. So, they got up off their knees and got on their feet, and we moved on.

H: Talk somewhat about the African-American antecedents to the sit-in movement. You had a thriving black middle-class in the 1940s and 1950s with Fisk [University] and Meharry [Medical School] and others.

S: That is right. See, I think when you got Tennessee State [University], Meharry [Medical College; black medical school] and Fisk [University], and American Baptist [Theological Seminary], a very small institution, but also one that is producing an awful lot of ministers of the Gospel, and you have got a powerful black church, you have got, not only a black community of domestics, which was largely the situation in places like Montgomery and Birmingham and Jackson, Mississippi, I mean, you have got a black middle-class. You have got not only the faculty and students at those institutions, you have got professionals in town who are graduates of those institutions who are supporting them. And it helped. For the first few weeks of those sit-in demonstrations in 1959 and 1960, what you really had was the black adult community scared to death. Most of these kids were

not their children, although some were. There is a great film. When Westfeldt went to NBC, one of his early documentaries is a White Paper done by **Frank McGee [news anchor]**. I do not know if you have seen it, but there is a woman, Matthew Walker [is her] husband and he is a distinguished physician, and she is standing in front of, maybe, her house being interviewed, and she talks about the first time her son was involved in these sit-ins and she didn't really know it. He calls her and tells her he is in jail. She is telling the story and [says], Matthew Jr., my God, what are you doing in jail? And she begins to cry. She said, I didn't know what had happened; I knew these things [were going on], but I did not know Matthew [was involved]. And then she started laughing while she was crying. Matthew Jr. said, be cool, Mom, be cool. It is a very touching moment, but you can tell it was the moment that moved her from where she was to where she needed to be, and the black adult community went with her. They got up the bond money, and the kids did not want to make bond. They put the pressure on the city, and the city began to change. When the black boycott came, when that boycott of downtown Nashville came, the adult community was with them 100 percent. If you went downtown and shopped, you got a leaflet and you probably got a call from your minister that night, maybe a knock on the door saying, please, you did it today, do not do it anymore. We are making a difference. And they made a difference. They changed this town, and they got on the Freedom Rides, those kids did. Some of the same kids, they changed the culture in Nashville, the culture of the region, and went on to Selma, [to] the Edmond Pettus Bridge in Selma [site of A Bloody Sunday, @ a brutal attack on civil rights demonstrators by Alabama state troopers]. I mean, they changed the country. Somebody once said, a child shall lead them. Damned if those children didn't lead us. I will tell you, they sure did.

H: What influence, do you think, you had from the early inroads of African-Americans in politics, on

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the city council and the school board in the 1950s?

S: Looby was the only lawyer in the Tennessee, I believe B everybody is a J. D. now, a *juris doctor*.

In those days, he was a doctor of law. He earned it, and he was the only one in Tennessee that I know anything about. Made it very nice; Judges could refer to him as Dr. Looby.

H: Instead of Mr.

S: Yes. Instead of Alexander or whatever. But he and Bob Lillard were lawyers and city council members. They did an interesting thing. When it came time to get Metropolitan Government, they supported Metropolitan Government, and they did it knowing that it would substantially dilute black voting-power. It went from about 35 percent to, maybe, 20 percent, maybe less. I think they both thought it was progress, that school integration was going to need good schools, that many black kids were going to be going to previously white schools. Beyond that, I thought they had seen the enhancement of health services in the black community as a result of **Dr. Lentz**= merging of the two departments, and they went for it. By and large, the black community voted for Aone government.@ Both had great respect. They were totally different personalities. Lillard had come up in the Fire Department. Looby was an intellectual. He and **White**, who was head of the NAACP, were close friends. He was a civil rights advocate. Bob Lillard was basically a politician. They were two different types, but each had a very purposeful effect on how the white community reacted. I really think that it helped to have, largely, the two of them. There were other leaders in the black community, too, but the two of them and ultimately Avon Williams, who came on later, as Mr. Looby got older. It was helpful to have Looby on one side and Lillard on the other. Anybody Looby couldn=t talk to, Lillard could. Anybody Lillard was uncomfortable with, Looby was very comfortable with.

For a long time, that was almost the only dialogue you had, except for Herman Long=s Race Relations Institute. I mentioned **Pat Wilson** and his presidency at the Chamber and his stand for liquor-by-the-drink. He also decided that there needed to be more communication between the black community and the white community, and he called a breakfast meeting of the Chamber. They had it at the old Hermitage Hotel, which is still there. The ballroom seated about 300 people, and the room was packed. Dr. Edwin Mitchell, from Meharry, who was head of something called the Independent Political Council, spoke. It was a scathing indictment. I ran the full-text in *The Tennessean* the next morning. It was so tough that Pat Wilson had nobody shake hands with him and thank him that day. I had to walk down the street with him. It was chilly. But he did it, and they heard it. The dialogue did go on for a while. There was an effort to continue it. I remember after that, Rotary Club sought to integrate, bring in the presidents of Fisk, Tennessee State, and Meharry, and that was beaten, rejected. I remember I was sitting in the back of the room the day they announced it, and I wrote my resignation on a napkin and turned it in. The next day, Alexander Heard, the chancellor of Vanderbilt, and **Herb Shein** and **Brendan Schreib**, two Jewish business leaders, also quit. Nobody else did. It was twenty years before the Rotary Club changed its position. I made up my mind that day that I was not going to be a member of anything in the community, simply because it really made it difficult for people on the staff to cover it and also made it difficult for people in the community at-large, knowing I was a member, to be able to read the paper and not think that how I felt one way or another about something. When the National Conference of Christians and Jews came to town, I did agree to serve the beginning year on that board and did. I made the exception only because they said, we are having a terrible time

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getting started, and it would be helpful if you do this. I did that for a year, but I never belonged to anything else in the community. I belonged to a lot of national journalism organizations, but I never belonged to another community organization after that.

H: I am really glad that you brought up the example of Rotary, because I was actually going to ask you about that. In the 1950s and 1960s and 1970s, how do you feel informal race relations changed, as opposed to the institutional? What were the dynamics of that?

S: It was incremental, basically. This is not a direct answer to your question, but I am sort of a workaholic and I needed a place to work-out. I joined the downtown YMCA and I joined Richland Country Club. At that time, Richland Country Club was just about five blocks from [me]. I lived right down on the seventeenth fairway of what was then Richland Country Club. It has now moved out to the suburbs. But I never went to a meeting. It was a place to play tennis on the way to work or on the way back from work and occasionally to have lunch or dinner. Before I went in, I asked about open admission. Yes, anybody can apply; no, there won't be any criteria. A fellow came by to see me one time. He was in the music industry. He says, a friend of mine from the music industry wants to get into the club with us. Would you sign his membership? I looked at it and signed it. I didn't look at the fellow's name or his business. My friend asked me to do it, and I did it. A few weeks pass, and I am playing tennis one Sunday, and the president of the club comes and sits beside me and says, did you sign this application? I said, yes, I sure did. The only thing I remember is that the guy who asked me to do it said, he promotes the Grateful Dead and he is a real force in the industry here and we need to make him welcome. So I said, yes, I signed it. He said, what do you know about him? I said, well, I know enough to sign his application. He is a

leader of the music industry. He said, you know, we did a little investigation, and he pays his bills very slowly, and there is a lot of opposition to him because of that. I said, Henry, he promotes the Grateful Dead, and he is worth millions of bucks. He makes a big income. He can't be slow about it, or if he is, it is because he is traveling with the Grateful Dead or some other group. Like, gimme a break. Well, I am telling you, it doesn't look good. I get home that night, and my friend calls me and says, they are going to blackball him; he's Jewish. I said, do me a favor. Call **Henry McCall**, and tell him you told me this, and I said, if he is turned down, this is probably not a front-page story, but it is going to make some news. Henry calls me on the phone and says, I just talked to Rick; do you really think that would make [news]? I said, Henry, [there=s] no way to keep it from him. I said, I've got a couple of Jewish friends I have been thinking about bringing in. I think I will bring all three of them in at once. That was about 1964 or 1965. In 1980, by this time, admission to the club was probably \$20,000 or \$25,000. We have some Jews in the club, and we have some Japanese from Nissan [Nissan has a production facility near Nashville] in the club. We still haven't got a black member in this club. So, I started asking around and [was told,] nobody has got the money. The richest black guy in Nashville, **publishing board, T. B. Boyd**, and I called him and said, how about stopping by my office? He comes by, and I said, look, you probably don't have any interest in this, but I'd like to put you up for membership in Richland Country Club. They may deny you admission, in which case I will resign, and a few other people will also, a couple of judges, but it is not going to make a hell of a lot of difference if they turn you down. But I don't know anybody who has got the admission fee except you. He said, well, if I can get you out of that club, I would be glad to go for it. He just wrote the check right there and filled out the application. I got a conservative fast-food owner, who was facing a civil-rights suit for discrimination, to sign on

and sent it through. I went home and told my wife. She said, great, we can finally leave those Republican bastards and get out. So, that was really unfair. One of the other two Jews who came in was now president of the club. I did not know him. He called me on the phone and thanked me. He said, this is going to slide through the board, I guarantee you. We might have one vote against, [but] this is going to slide through. He said, now, can you get a second one? I said, yeah, I'll find a second one. **John Maupin**, the president of Meharry, finally came to town and could afford to get in. There are now a couple of others.

But, hell, that was 1985, maybe, and we still hadn't broken the line in a single country club in town. You know, it is just one tragic commentary about, is there communication going on? Is there contact going on? I mean, where would it happen? Nobody is going to **T. B. Boyd=s** bank to borrow money? If you are black, you might come to a white bank, but that is hardly, you know, if somebody is doing you a favor, they are letting you borrow money. It is a hell of a thing to think about, but I do not think it is Southern. I think that sort of dialogue doesn't go on anywhere. Earl [G.] Graves is a friend of mine. He is the [founder and publisher of] the leading black entrepreneur magazine [*Black Enterprise* magazine]. He has exactly the same problem in his hometown. He puts on a big convention every year, [and] it is all black. He is doing it because it is a lucrative business, but his social contacts are so limited. We are still a segregated society in many ways. I guess that guilt is still southern. You know, in a way, it is this old southern white boy. I think Nashville has changed dramatically. We have had a black chief justice of the state Supreme Court. We have had black elected officials countywide. We have a black vice-mayor who beat a good strong liberal white candidate for vice-mayor. So, there is progress. You know, there aren't going to be any more white juries. Black lawyers provide a real function in the community. Black doctors

are not all at Meharry now. There are distinguished black doctors at St. Thomas and Vanderbilt and Baptist [Hospitals]. That is progress.

But if you ask yourself... Not long ago, about a year and a half ago, I had a book party at my house for **Robin Nagle**, who had written a novel. I guess, over four hours, 200 people showed up. After we have this book party for Robin Nagle, he says to me, I was really impressed. He said, I must have signed the books of thirty-five, forty black people tonight. Is this the way it works in Nashville? I am really impressed. I said, I wish it were, and I told him this story. I said, *the* social event in Nashville is called the Swan Ball. It goes to support Cheekwood [Mansion and Botanic Gardens, which includes an art museum] art and horticultural sciences, and it is a celebrity event. Basically, my wife and I had stopped going unless there were people in from out-of-town. It is white-tie, and it is not too expensive. They could charge a hell of a lot more and probably should. Anyway, about seven or eight years ago, the wife of a Vanderbilt physician, a young woman named **Carol Sert**. I say young, everybody is young to me now that I am seventy-six. Carol called on the telephone and said, I want to make sure that, for once, under my chairmanship, the Swan Ball is visibly integrated. *The New York Times* did a story on it, came down and covered it. They quoted her, and they quoted me, and they quoted one of Nashville=s oldest and most distinguished citizens. He said, I don=t know what this big thing is all about, I mean, I don=t know why they wanted to come to our party anyway; I don=t go to their=s. I am paraphrasing that, but he was one of the most distinguished members of that interlocking directory that goes all the way back, and he still hadn=t gotten over it. He is dead now, or I would mention his name. He was a lovely man, but he never got over it, and finally he was old enough to say he hadn=t gotten over it. And it is too bad. It is still an impediment to progress, and it ranges today from a sense that

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medical care at Meharry is inferior to why is it that Tiger Woods [golfing champion] and Serena Williams [tennis champion] get all this publicity? They are getting it just because they are black. I mean, I hear that [being said] regularly and routinely. It is crazy, but it is still there.

H: Maybe a couple more specific target issues. How do you think that Nashville reacted to Black Power in the 1960s?

S: I keep giving you anecdotal responses that do not really have general application, perhaps, but Vanderbilt students for a long time put on something called IMPACT, an annual program in which they had two days, a weekend, sometimes Friday night, Saturday and Sunday morning, but mostly Friday night and Saturday, and they opened it up to the total community. They had it at Vanderbilt Gymnasium, and they used to pack that gymnasium. The last time Robert Kennedy appeared there in 1968, it was for a special program, and they put chairs on the basketball court. They had 70,000 people in that building. You look at the pictures of it, and it was just phenomenal. At any rate, one year, IMPACT had a program that, during the day, included, I remember, Strom Thurmond [South Carolina governor, 1947-1951, and later U.S. senator, 1954-2003, known for his early segregationist leadership of the Dixiecrat Party], Frank Rose, the president of the University of Alabama, a very progressive southern educator, Martin Luther King, Jr. [civil rights leader] and Stokely Carmichael [Black Power advocate]. **Hedley Donovan**, the CEO of *Time* magazine, was there. Stokely spoke that day. Martin spoke that day. Both packed houses, the same crowd. There may have been a couple of speeches between each one. The nearest thing to a radical statement that Stokely Carmichael said that day was, I want to tell you, if a white man lays his arms on me, I will break it. A perfectly [conventional] self-defense statement. I would say half the crowd gave him

a standing ovation. King said something like this, you whites who would like to be with us, but because of political pressure or family pressure or social pressure or economic pressure, cannot be with us, I will tell you, we will liberate you. He got a standing ovation. Stokely, I mean, nobody booed him. There was polite applause among some, but enthusiasm among many students. That night, he spoke at Fisk, [made] a much tougher statement, and a riot broke out. The minute the riot broke out, I was at Alexander Heard=s home having dinner. Hedley Donovan from *Time* magazine had a daughter at Vanderbilt, and my wife and I and Alec and his wife, Henley and his daughter and another couple, a lawyer and his wife, were there. Suddenly, they told me I had a phone-call, and I went and they said, we are having a riot in north Nashville and **Bobby Johnson**, one of our photographers, is caught out there and they are stoning his car. I said, I will be right there at the office. See if you can get the chief of police on the phone and tell him I would like to talk to him and I will be there in a few minutes. So, I go back in and sort of say to my wife, I need to go to the office. Can you drop me off? Henley said, look, I=ve got a car, John. Why don=t you take your car, and we will take your wife [home]. I said, great. Alec, meanwhile, had been called to the phone. As I walk out, he comes out of the little alcove where the phone was and he said, that was **Jimmy Stone**, the publisher of the *Banner*. He just told me I was responsible for a riot in north Nashville. [He said,] I began to explain to him exactly what Stokely had said here, and he said to me, Alec, you are a goddamn fool, and hung up. Because of that riot in north Nashville, Stokely and Black Power had a bad name. It has been reported that it was in Nashville that John Lewis was unseated by Stokely as the head of SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee]. There was a meeting in the afternoon or in the early evening, and John tells about it in *Walking in The Wind* [John Lewis=s autobiography]. He was elected. He went to bed. They had a rump

meeting and ousted him and elected Stokely.

Black Power scared white people everywhere. It disturbed white people who were committed to integration. I basically looked at it, in my own way, as part of the natural evolutionary process of the black movement. It was inevitable that somebody who was black, who was seeing those students being mauled, would say, hell no, I am not going to take it anymore. If it wasn't Stokely Carmichael, it was going to be somebody else. It **could have been** Marion Barry [former mayor of Washington D.C.]. Marion was in the Movement in Nashville. He was golden. John Lewis still is mush-mouthed when he talks. As he has said, I'm ugly. Marion was dynamic. But It **couldn't have been** Marion, although Marion was committed, totally committed to the Movement, I thought. I did not know him that well, but he was a bright and shining young star. Jim Bevel was an iconoclast, unpredictable, committed to the Movement but far ahead in the way of thinking than anybody else. It was Bevel who took John and Diane Nash & later his wife & with him to see King to say, we want children on the streets in Birmingham. Bevel was always pushing the envelope. But Stokely, I always thought of Stokely as a bit of a hustler. I was not surprised that he wound up married to Miriam Makeba and living in Africa. I always thought the two things probably went together, because his wife was one of the great African-American entertainers, and he kept in the style to which he thought he was entitled. On the other hand, I don't want to knock him too hard. If I had been black, I might have been burning down the streets, burning down the city. I do not know where the hell I would have been if I had had to go through that shit. Who knows? You can't say. So, he was entitled to say, Black Power. He is entitled to say, you put your arm on me, I am going to break it. I do not blame him at all. I chaired a committee a couple of years ago that gave John the Kennedy Library & Profile in Courage® Award.

That is a roundabout answer to your question, and the answer is that Nashville did not take it any better than anyplace else. I think it scared people, black and white, all over the country. I think there are many black people, who are adults and seniors who were frightened by it, too, for different reasons. The one thing I thought that it did that was very negative was, it gave the Klan-cry resonance, and that was hard to cope with. That was hard to deal with. It was hard to defend editorially, too, because it meant whatever you thought it meant, and [Carmichael] was not very good at defining it and did not want to be. Inside the Movement, there was talk about that time mau-mauing whites, and I think they had more fun mau-mauing white liberals than anybody. It was an interesting phenomenon. In some ways, it was amusing to watch, because much of it was an act. The truth is, Stokely wasn't [H.] Rap Brown [another more militant black activist]. He was not a Panther. He was a late manifestation of SNCC, and he took it one step [further]. I mean, to the extent that Rap Brown and the Panthers took it another, it got a bit frightening. It got violent. Stokely took the rap for what Rap ultimately stood for and for what Angela Davis [radical black activist] came to stand for in the minds of many Americans. Although, you know, if you are black, wouldn't you be where Angela Davis is? The odds are very strong that if you are thoughtful and you are looking at economic injustice and how it affects your people, short of the violence that she came to espouse, you very well might be a socialist or a communist.

H: So, why do you think some black people were leery of Black Power, especially in this city of nonviolence?

S: I just think there is one clear compelling reason: they are Christian. They absolutely believe in the black church. If you listen to words of that black national anthem, until victory is won, and they know victory is going to be won, but it may be when they are on their way to the throne that it is

finally won. I mean, I do not think there is any other explanation for it. They are a much more religious people, I think. They are a much more Christian people, in what I consider to be the generic definition of the word "Christian" than others, than mainstream white Protestants. I mean, what else explains why everybody did not do what Nat Turner [slave revolt leader] tried to do a century before? Emmitt Till [a young black man brutally murdered by racists in 1955 in Mississippi] is the classic example, but the lynching that went on across this country...I mean, blowing up a black church, killing four little girls, [referring to Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama] and there was not a black riot. It is remarkable. It is amazing. Maybe it is the tradition of segregation. I prefer to think it is the tradition of really believing "we shall overcome." I remember when I was in the Justice Department during the Freedom Rides calling Diane Nash, telling her that I was speaking for the Attorney General and the President of the United States. [I said,] I have just been with this wave of Freedom Riders. They were mauled, they were beaten, their skulls were fractured, [their] arms were broken. Do not send these children down here. You are going to get them killed. She said, sir, we signed our wills last night.

H: What do you say to that?

S: I said, I will call the Attorney General and tell him I failed, which I did. He said, get back to Birmingham and see if you can get them out of jail, because they are going to be there by the time you get there, and they were. If you listened to Lawson and you listened to Lewis, they tell you why. They truly believed. Diane Nash told me that day, that morning on the phone, early in the morning, before dawn, we cannot let violence overcome nonviolence; nonviolence must win. [I said,] you are going to get somebody killed. [She replied,] we have signed our wills; and if we are killed, there are others who will come. Now, of course, that is exactly what happened. The beating

in Montgomery, hell, they filled the jails. They filled parts of the prison in Mississippi, the so-called hell-hole of American corrections. Let me tell you something. They are a phenomenal people to come from slavery to this.

H: Since you brought up Reverend [Jim] Lawson [leader of student sit-in movement in Nashville; expelled from Vanderbilt Divinity School in 1960 for his work]...I have anecdotal information about this, [I was] hoping maybe you could [add some details.] I have gotten the sense that his run-in with the Divinity School and his expulsion had some sort of fallout with the other colleges and universities in the town, perhaps indirectly similar issues. Does that mean anything to you?

S: No. Can you bring it out? It might ring a bell.

H: Someone told me that was the case and didn't give me any more information.

S: Without any further information, I don't know. I thought, first of all, two members of that Board of Trust[ees], [James G.] Jimmy Stahlman and John Sloan from Cain-Sloan department store B my grandfather spent his whole life working for Cain-Sloan department store as head of the drug department B those two men on that board, I mean, Sloan being victimized, so-called, by the Movement and Stahlman simply believing that we were dealing with an inferior people, and I don't think they doubted that. Bob Churchwell, who was a black reporter on his staff, was excluded from Christmas parties. But Stahlman really ran that vote through the Board of Trust[ees]. Harvie Branscomb, who was the chancellor, would have preferred that it not pass. He had integrated the school.

H: I had read somewhere that Stahlman actually supported earlier an African-American enrolling in Vanderbilt.

S: The Board had approved Harvie=s plan. I mean, this is the law of the land now, and we are going

to start this in the law school. We are going to start at the very highest level. We need black lawyers. Nothing Jimmy could complain about there. You had Bob Churchwell back there in the back of the newsroom, and he knew that these lawyers are going to be treated over here the same way I am treating Bob Churchwell. He would have been happy at the pace of Harvie=s gradual integration plan. It was when Jim Lawson decided to affect the economy of the city in order to bring about change. This is force. This boycott is hurting the business downtown specifically.

If you looked at [the *Tennessean*=s] income, it came from two sources primarily, department stores and grocery stores. Department stores were being hurt, and he knew what that meant. **He was standing with people who stood with him.** It goes on and on. It took three waves. You had a wave of lunch-counters in department stores. Then you had independent free-standing restaurants, and that was another movement for another year. The third was the movie houses. Each time, there had to be another wave of demonstrations, and each time, the city resisted until the heat got there and then the city got straight and did the right thing. But I remember the then-president of Cain-Sloan, **John Dukeson**, coming to see me with **Ed Shea**, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, executive director of the Chamber of Commerce, asking me not to cover the demonstrations. I do not know whether they were independent restaurants, and I think that is what it was, or the movie houses. Dukeson said, I want to be clear. I know I am your number-one advertiser. Do not take this as a threat. I am asking for cooperation. These groups are killing the goose that laid the golden egg in this town, and they are going to drive them out of business, and that is going to hurt your business. If you just put it in the back of the paper or forget it, unless there is somebody who is killed or hurt or unless they fill up the jails again. He said, I would deeply appreciate it. He said, you know, everybody is afraid to come to town,

because there is going to be violence. I said, there is nothing I would like to do better than what you asked me to do. You are our number-one advertiser, but let me tell you, I have got an obligation to people who come downtown to let them know that there is going to be the possibility of violence. I cannot let them come downtown and not let them know that traffic is going to be blocked, going to be re-routed. If it is going to happen, I have got to tell them. That is what I am in the business to do, I said, because they read what we write. I mean, you advertise to bring people in, and I said, now, I understand what you are saying. They are drying up your business, and I am going to get hurt and you are going to get hurt, but I will just tell you, you ought not be talking to me. You ought to be talking to those free-standing restaurant-owners and telling them you have taken the step and it didn't hurt you. I said, I will support that editorial. We shook hands, and they went their way.

H: Did they do that?

S: Yes, and were doing it while we were talking. They were hammering everybody to bring about change.

H: So, in each of these waves, it really was the Chamber of Commerce types who sort of yanked the leashes of these movie houses.

S: Finally, yes. You know, if I had agreed to what he wanted me to do, it would not have changed a goddamn thing. Those kids would have still been down there pressuring, and by now, they had their adults with them. The one thing they did not want was another downtown boycott, so they put the pressure on B&W Cafeteria and Cross-Keys Restaurant and all those places downtown, and it brought about change relatively quickly.

H: You sort of alluded somewhat broadly to pockets of African-Americans who were perhaps a little

tepid about the movement or perhaps opposed to [it], and that is something that historians do not, somewhat understandably, talk about much in terms of the Movement. Can you elaborate on that in any way?

S: I think the best evidence of it is in one of these documentaries, you see Bernard Lafayette, one of the leaders of the local Movement, reading a letter from his parents, and what he is saying is what parents all over Nashville were saying. His last words are, after he reads the letter, they just don't understand. They really don't understand. I think it was more than pockets. It was pretty massive. They were ambivalent about it. For one thing, it was the children. I mean, these children are going to get arrested, and they are going to have a blot on their record. They will never get employed. They will never get in graduate school. They will never go to law school. They won't be able to complete their educations. They will be thrown out. They will be expelled. Governor Ellington expelled fourteen students from Tennessee State University who were involved in the sit-ins. The adults knew in their minds, they just positively believed, that this would be a badge of dishonor. The kids all thought of it as a badge of honor. It was just that simple, I think. Gradually, the children taught not just black parents, but white business leaders, that they were going to overcome. I remember as we were planning the strategy of covering these things, we would say, what is going to happen this week and how do we take care of it? In my own mind, I had grave doubts about whether they would ever win. It had been so long since there had been any change. And you knew where the power was. When you saw those kids assaulted at a lunch counter, and they were arrested and the assaulters go walking laughing down the street, I mean, you know that it is not only economic power against them, [but] you got the police power against them, too. I do think that having a progressive editorial voice in the community helped. I do think that having that spotlight of

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Halbersam=s coverage of the sit-ins and Westfeldt=s coverage of Vanderbilt helped. I think for the community to know that the Vanderbilt Divinity School faculty *en masse* was resigning made a difference, and gradually change came about. I think Lawson was back here at our place on the campus twice last year, and he is very proud that, a few years before that, Vanderbilt invited him back as the alumnus of the year, and he has a very friendly feeling, because he is a very loving man. That Christian spirit is alive in his breast.

H: What about the issue of busing in Nashville?

S: Well, it was controversial.

H: I am sorry. Before I get into that, I meant to do a follow-up on the African-Americans. You mentioned that there was a thriving black middle-class. Do you think that there were some African-Americans who had actually done quite well for themselves in a segregated society serving that black middle-class? Did they have any resistance to the Movement?

S: I do not think so. I think they were in for a penny and for a pound. There might have been one or two people who felt that way, but they knew Nashville. This was a long time before we really knew that we were going to have health care provided, and even then, there was some sense that an integrated society was better for them long-term and certainly better for their children. So, I do not think there was much of that. I never ran across it.

H: Okay. So, in terms of how Nashville took busing.

S: Busing was tough. Finally, integration meant blacks and whites going to school in previously all-white schools. Finally, it was going to mean some suburban kids being bused into the city, so it was controversial. After a little while, it was controversial two ways. I mean, black parents didn=t like their kids being bused two or three hours to some place in the suburbs, far removed from their

homes. But generally, I think most black parents thought the kids were going to get a better education. Most white parents thought their kids were going to get a poorer education. The reason for that was that the physical structure of the schools were inferior in the inner cities. But after five, six, ten years, support for it wore thin, and both the black community and the white community generally, I would have to say, turned against it. But I think immediately after it, there was reasonable confidence that this was going to work, that it would be a positive force.

H: Certainly, there was some resistance in terms of Pearl High School and the black community having to maintain a sort of cultural anchor that sustained them.

S: Right. Finally, Black Power meant something other than violence. It meant keeping our heritage. You can understand it. I mean, you can understand the faculty at Tennessee State saying, we want to maintain a black enrollment and we want to maintain a black faculty. Now, when **Judge Wiseman** ordered them to have meaningful desegregation, there was big resistance to that at Tennessee State, and there continued to be meaningful resistance. Part of that is cultural, and part of it is economic. For every white faculty member who comes to teach at Tennessee State, some black faculty member who is teaching there may have to go somewhere across town to teach. That does not have anything to do with race, just, I do not want to go over there.

H: I know that a lot has been written about this, but can you comment generally on how you see the role of the press factoring into the dynamics of the race relations?

S: I think the fact that the *Banner* was so negative, it was so far right (or so far wrong) that it forfeited the middle ground, and it gave *The Tennessean* an opportunity to bring up the moderate center and to take the reasonable position. Doing that gave some courage to politicians and gave some cover to business leaders. Now, Stahlman was a powerful force among the power-structure,

largely because they knew he was vituperative and that he would not hesitate to call anybody he thought a damn fool a damn fool. He had a front-page editorial column called "From the Shoulder," and all our staff members at *The Tennessean* referred to it as "From the Armpit." Stahlman was a very powerful force and a negative force, I thought. When he believed something was in his best interest and the community's best interest or the *Banner's* best interest, he stood for it. He was against daylight savings time and we were for daylight savings time. The clock on the front of our building read one hour on our side and another hour on their side. He was an old curmudgeon, a difficult man to understand. For all his bombast and for all his bullshit, he was an old-school gentleman. There is not an issue I can think of that I agreed with him on. He was unfailingly courteous and very often kind to me. He knocked my head off in our editorial policies in his "From the Armpit" column, but the next day, I would see him on the elevator and he would put his arm around my shoulder and tell me how much he liked me, and he meant it. In a sense, we were business partners, but he was not tough to compete with. He gave away the center and thereby not just gave away the editorial position but, I think, gave us an advantage on circulation.

H: Certainly in the black community.

S: Absolutely, and beyond that, I think, as time passed in the white community. We did have circulation cancellations over our positions on race. I found, particularly during the years I was editor, that you would have somebody cancel the paper because of a cause, maybe even start a boycott. If your news coverage was consistent and reasonably vital, they couldn't stay away. They would go to work that morning and somebody would say, are you reading *The Tennessean* this morning? I don't read that rag. Well, you ought to read this story, because it says... You know, there is so much more in the paper that people need to know about than race or what the

editorial page says. I generally thought that they gave away too much and needlessly. [Stahlman] was writing his memoirs when he died, and the working title was called "Sons of Bitches I Have Known." My guess is I was somewhere on that list.

H: You mentioned that *The Tennessean* had the room to take the moderate perspective on the editorializing and stuff. What were the dynamics of taking the moderate position instead of the liberal position?

S: Well, the moderate position was seen as the liberal position. I mean, it was the "nigger-lovin'" *Tennessean*. It was the "pink" *Tennessean*. It didn't stop the hate-mail or the hate telephone-calls for that radical fringe, which was a pretty substantial fringe. I mean, if 25 or 30 percent of the people hate you...It didn't stop the phone-calls, it didn't stop the hate-mail, and it didn't stop the occasional boycotts. But it made it possible for you to pull to your side that fringe of the center. If the *Banner's* position had been, this is inevitable, but let's go slow, you know, look at grade scores. If they need tutoring, let's bring them along. He endorsed that stair-step, grade-a-year integration plan as if it were holy writ. That was the best he could do, but it didn't stop him from saying the whole damn thing is dumb and it is not going to work in the long run. H.L. Mencken once said, a hundred years won't make a difference, and I think Stahlman believed a hundred years wouldn't make a difference. As I say, he was a big tipper, unfailingly courteous to waiters and shoeshine men, but that's about as far as it went.

H: Has sort of a *noblesse oblige* paternalism to it.

S: Yes. It was all wrapped up in his understanding of his love of country, his intense patriotism. I mean, *The Banner* was the American flag, and when we got color presses, it went red, white and blue. That is the way he was. He was a man of intrinsic values, who was seldom wrong and never

in doubt. I was happy with that. He gave away too much, but I was glad to take it.

H: Maybe not so much in terms of Stahlman, but certainly when you think about Donald Davidson B this is maybe a concept that is unfamiliar to someone of my generation or age B was there such a thing as a thinking segregationist, or was that a contradiction in terms?

S: We used to periodically get foreign journalists coming through, and the State Department would always call and say, could you entertain these foreign journalists while they are here? Yes, what do you want them to do? Invariably, they would like to meet a thoughtful segregationist. Well, if you look at one, I mean, one of the most distinguished lawyers in town was a man named Cecil Sims. He was our paper=s lawyer for a long time. Before I became editor, he was our paper=s lawyer. He was the lawyer for the school board. If you look at those documentaries that have been done on Nashville integration, you will hear him say, with restrained anger, breaking bread is a sacrament; you choose people with whom you break bread; you do not commit a sacrilege by degrading the sacrament. That is nut-ball stuff from a brilliant, thoughtful, intelligent lawyer, and a friend of mine. I admired him, except when I heard that. You know, he was older, part of another generation, did not want to see change come, I am sure laughed at racial jokes, laughed at Stepinfetchit [black minstrel], felt *Gone With the Wind* was wonderful. These foreign journalists would come to town, and they would always want to meet this thoughtful segregationist, this lawyer named Jack Kershaw, [who is] still here.

H: An artist.

S: An artist, yes. I mean, he=s got Nathan Bedford Forrest up on the interstate [referring to Jack Kershaw=s sculpture of Forrest, visible off of Interstate 65]. I was in some public-forum not long ago, and I said that Nathan Bedford Forrest was astride a jackass on the outskirts of town. I got a

letter from Jack, with an enclosed picture, really attacking me for attacking that statue. He said, I would like to take you out there someday and let you see it. I wrote him back and said, I have been out there, I have seen it. I said, I did say it, and I don't take it back, and I still think that if you put him on anything, you should put him on a jackass. Anyway, Jack used to meet with these foreign journalists, and there would be four or five Africans in the group, and Jack would always say, now, you can jump higher than I can jump, but my brain is three centimeters B I don't know how much a centimeter is even B larger than your brain, and therefore I can think better than you can think, even though I can't jump as high as you can jump. It was like waving a red flag in front of a bull, and when it was over, near the end I would say, whoa, wait a minute, you all said you wanted to meet this guy. You met him. What do you expect? I mean, he is what you said you wanted. He is what he says he is. He is an old-fashioned segregationist, and old-fashioned segregationists believe in inferiority of colored peoples, and Jack believed in that and believes in it to this day. Nothing has happened. I used to tell him, Jack B I knew he had read a book called *Foxes of Harrow* [by Frank Yerby]. I said, do you know Frank Yerby is a Fisk graduate who lives abroad because of people like you? He said, I didn't know that, [and] I am not going to read any more of Mr. Yerby=s books.

H: What is there that I have not asked you about that I should have?

S: I think you have been thorough and complete.

H: Hit all the high points?

S: I think you have, yes. The only thing you haven't touched on is the Freedom Rides and that period I spent in the Justice Department, but that is only peripheral to Nashville and the Nashville culture. It just happened to be that a Nashvillian served as an administrator, and it just happened

to be that a Nashvillian was sent down there to help them and failed to help them and got hurt himself and made news about it. So, I do not think there is anything in there that is really important.

H: Except for the influence of Nashville on the Freedom Riders and you.

S: Except for the influence of Nashville on the Freedom Riders, and I have covered that. [End of tape.] Yes, you have got it all.

H: Perhaps you are unduly prejudiced by this knock on your head, but do you get the sense that there is a difference in the border South mentality versus the Deep South mentality?

S: You know, there are good people and bad people everywhere. If you look at this state, I mean, middle Tennessee is different, and I think those forces I talked about earlier do affect it some. I think there is more moderation here because there is less hostility, or was for a long time, less hostility with the federal government, and still is. If you get into the southern border counties, from Shelby County up, Haywood [County], Fayette [County], up that strip, west Tennessee borders an extension of Mississippi, and then you get an extension of Alabama B although north Alabama is more progressive than south Alabama. But north Mississippi is not much. You get around in Georgia, and you can find as much racism from Stone Mountain to the Tennessee line as you find anywhere. There are eight states that touch our state. It is a more sophisticated conservatism when you get to Virginia. North Carolina is pretty moderate. Kentucky and Missouri, pretty moderate. Arkansas can be pretty bad. So, I think, as a state, it is a pretty diverse state. Middle Tennessee has northern Alabama mostly on one side and southern Kentucky on the other, and I think those influences sort of merge. Given the other factors that I have talked about in middle Tennessee, less antagonism for the federal government, a good deal more commitment to

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traditional democratic values, a heavier complement of both academic and religious influences, I think it helps the moderation here. I would add a continuing reasonably progressive editorial policy, and I do not maintain that mine was any more than that. *The Tennessean*, for example, was for a state income-tax from the year I became the editor, as it had been against the poll-tax in all the years before I became editor. I think that tradition of identifying with democratic, little Ad@, values has been part of that editorial philosophy it has been about and politically, for a long time, capital AD@, although I endorsed Howard Baker and Lamar Alexander before and other Republicans.

H: It is interesting, in talking about how Tennessee sort of blends all these influences, and perhaps Nashville most pronouncedly between west and east Tennessee, it is interesting that the first flashpoint of racial conflict was in Clinton, in east Tennessee twenty miles from Oak Ridge, that federal...

S: That is exactly right. So, it does not suggest for a minute that there aren't radicals and racists everywhere. Clinton was pretty rural. Oak Ridge, except for that heavy complement of, really, academics. But, you know, a Baptist preacher who took the black children by the hand in Clinton, they attacked and blacked his eye.

H: Paul Turner, yes, and he later came to Nashville, as I understand.

S: I remember he was here, yes. But that one act, I mean, the National Guard being there was an influence, certainly, but when they hit him, I think attitudes immediately shifted. They had a good editor there, Horace Wells, a good man. He had come off *The Tennessean* originally. He was before my time there. But a very progressive editor for a small town. If you read the editorials in his paper immediately after that happened, you get the same sort of, you know, this must not happen. We are better than this. This town can handle this. We have got the National Guard. He was good.

H: That begs an interesting question. Why do you think that Clinton and Nashville had this tendency that, once there was this threat of societal disorder and violence, they immediately stepped in. Where is the difference, considering that violence and disorder were so prevalent through the earlier twentieth century with lynching and the racial violence and all the things that you identified earlier?

S: I do not know. The Columbia race riot, of course, in the 1940s, is the worst example of it. I just do not know how you explain it. But you know that by 1954 with *Brown v. Board of Education*, the difference is there. If you look at what a Tennessee politicians said, which was basically "let us pray" and what other southern politicians said, which basically was "let's raise hell," you know that there is a difference. Part of it may have to do with numbers. I mean, the white community in Haywood and Fayette [Counties] evicted blacks who wanted to vote. [John] McFerrer's Tent City [referring to outpost of poor rural blacks in Fayette and Haywood Counties] is one of the great untold stories of the civil rights movement, but, you know, that reaction is a Mississippi reaction. They were Tennesseans, and Mississippi has got enough to be blamed for, but then every black population down there scared an awful lot of farmers, and they suddenly realized, oh my God, we are going to have a black sheriff.

H: I think this is as good a place as any to finish. Because I am just starting out in this project, especially when I am getting into the political dynamics and especially these behind-the-scenes power-brokers you alluded to, is there anything I need to be aware of as I am sifting through city politics in the 1940s and 1950s?

S: The most dramatic political shift has been the emergence of the Republican Party in the South. In virtually every case, that movement was aided by white racism, and it is the reason that voting-

rights legislation needed to be extended. The Republican Party's evolution in Tennessee, led by Howard Baker, Winfield Dunn, and Lamar Alexander, was a totally different phenomenon. It was not rewarded by black votes, but it was not a racist movement.

H: It was a moderate Republicanism.

S: A moderate Republican movement, and Baker is really the leader of that. Ones who have held statewide office, Howard, Lamar, Winfield Dunn, Fred Thompson, even **Bill Brock**. Even though it was a dirty campaign they ran against Al Gore, it was not a racist campaign. Not a word out of Brach's mouth, [but] some of the media stuff was bad. The same is true of the Democrats. The same is true of Kefauver, old **Gore**, young **Gore**, and is true of Ned McWherter. If you look at Ned McWherter's judicial appointments, a southern conservative Democrats from west Tennessee. Frank Clement. [Buford] Ellington described himself as an old-fashioned segregationist and was elected, if you look at it, [with] 31 percent of the vote. That was not really what the majority of the people in the state wanted, but there were four candidates then, and that was how you got elected. 1954 is sort of the watershed. From that point on, politics in this state, I think, was characterized by moderation on racial issues. That is the dividing line. It is not that the emotionalism was there. I mean, if Howard Baker had been a racist and if Lamar Alexander had been a racist, it would have been different. I remember when Lamar was running, Harvie Branscomb, the former chancellor of Vanderbilt, came to see me and said, you know, I had trouble over the Lawson matter, you know the story behind that. He said, I do want you to know that the editor of the *Hustler*, which is the Vanderbilt [student] paper, when the times were most difficult and racism on the campus was most flagrant, the editor of the *Hustler* was Lamar Alexander, and I would like for you to remember that. I did not know it, but I sent out and got some back-copies of it,

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and, sure enough, no stronger than our paper, but it was a stand of moderation by that campus newspaper. That does not make them any more politically liberal, but it means that you do not have to worry about politics in Tennessee being racist.

I will tell you one last story. It is a good story. I can't tell you the woman's name. She is entitled to her privacy on this. She is a black woman. I was commending her once and expressing some disappointment that she had decided not to come to work for me as a journalist. There had been a sheriff here named **Robert Poe**, and there had been a black man who had died in his jail cell, and if he had been taken to the hospital, he could have been saved. Everybody agreed with that. A reporter called him, and he said, every time I call an ambulance, it costs the taxpayers \$25, and I didn't think a dead nigger was worth \$25. We ran that, and we opposed him, and we beat him on that one statement alone. *The Banner* supported him. I think that story sort of says something about Nashville's sense of self-pride.

H: Or at least decorum.

S: Yes. Here was a politician who just absolutely disgraced the city. Nothing else he did was bad, wicked, evil, corrupt. No bad money. No shake-downs. He just said the wrong word in a community where that was not acceptable. He could have kept his mouth shut and thought it, and probably most of the people who voted against it did keep their mouths shut and thought it, or many of them did. But they wouldn't vote for him, because he violated the new culture of the community. I thought it was pretty positive.

Just one other thing. Periodically when I was the editor, there were generational rebirths of the Klan, and Pulaski [birthplace of the original Ku Klux Klan in 1867] was in our circulation area.

That is where the Klan was born. I remember after a while, during one of those periods, I would wake on a Sunday morning and find a picture of a Klan roadblock on some rural county square taking up money and people putting money in some bucket or container [and] stories about that **same southern park**, Klansmen in regalia showing up on school buses monitoring, showing up at school-board meetings seeking to intimidate decisions. Not much more than that, but I assigned a team of reporters to investigate that generational rebirth of the Klan, and they literally covered the South with that. They ran into David Duke in New Orleans. **Both of them** had college educations, and both of them were smart as hell, and both of them were very careful, even funny about saying, you know, we don't have anything against blacks and Jews; we are just for white people. We are going to promote the white causes. The media and everybody else are promoting blacks. We are going to help white people find their identity. I didn't get out of that series what I wanted. They exposed a lot of problems. They would go to Klan rallies in Florida and California. **Tom Metzger** was out in California. They would go to Stone Mountain and see a big cross-burning. But we never got out of Duke or **Wilkinson** what we really were looking for. I asked a member of the staff, a guy named **Jerry Thompson**, who is dead now, to infiltrate the Klan, and he did. He served for eighteen months. He was in both Wilkinson=s Klan and before that in Duke=s Klan. A great series. He went to a Klan recruiting meeting in Birmingham, to the home of one of the five most distinguished doctors in town. It was a great series. He got inside those Klan meetings, those Klavern meetings. Guns everywhere. They would come in, and they would check their guns. Duke, Wilkinson, it was nigger, nigger, nigger, kike, kike, kike. We can't take it anymore. We have got to take a stand. Always short of violence, but it was implied. He came out and wrote a series about it and then wrote a book called *My Life in the Klan*. The trouble after he came out was to find

something for him to do. He couldn't go to city council meetings anymore, you know, and he didn't want to be city editor. He had been city editor. He took the assignment to get away from it.

But the result of that series, or for those two series, I think, was that there was a Klan organization going on here we didn't know about. Nobody knew about it. It was underground, run by a woman, an old grandmother, well, not old, late fifties, maybe sixty. They planned to blow up WSM television tower, where there was a Jewish anchor and commentator, **Teddy Bart**, who has a morning radio-program now, and Temple **Ohabai Shalom**. They put the bomb on the Temple grounds, and the cops caught them. When the Klan tried to march in whatever parade there was without a permit, the police moved in and said, you can't march without a permit. Get a permit and you can march, but not without one. Nobody marches without a permit. I think Jerry's series alerted [the public]. Now, it scared the hell out of many people in the Jewish community. They said, all this anti-Semitism is bothering them as you are exposing it. But, in the long run, I went out to the Temple and talked to them. After they stopped that bomb, the rabbi called me and asked me to come out. He said, the last time we talked to you, we were criticizing you for doing this. Now, the Temple board has voted [to offer an] award of thanks to you and Jerry Thompson, and we are going to honor him as our man of the year, and we appreciate it.

But you asked about the influence of the newspaper, I think if the newspaper is alert to the problems that are growing in the community and tries to expose them, even though there is sometimes opposition to it, it is a very helpful thing. I look back on those years I was there, and I look at it now, and I think it is a progressive force in the community, and it gives diversity of opinion a chance to breathe.

H: Did you want to continue with your story about the woman who turned you down?

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S: I told it. I just short-circuited and got her out of it. The story was the one in which the sheriff was defeated.

H: Very good. Thank you very much for your time.

S: Thank you very much.

H: This concludes the interview.

[End of Interview.]