

GARTH REEVES

BIOGRAPHY

Garth Reeves inherited the *Miami Times* from his father and has led the paper ever since. Born February 12, 1919 in the Bahamas, Garth Reeves grew up in a segregated Miami and was profoundly affected by his military experience in World War II. Initially displeased with the hypocrisy of the United States, which employed him as a soldier in World War II but denied him basic rights because of segregation, Mr. Reeves thought about leaving the country for good. Instead, after a talk with his mother, he threw his energies into using the newspaper to advocate social change. He established himself as an important figure in the Miami community during the civil rights movement by taking a direct role in desegregating Miami beaches and golf courses. Mr. Reeves also maintained a voice in the governing of local boards and charities, using his clout to “prick the conscience” of other Miamians in order to bring about social justice. His service to his community is borne out by countless awards from the Boy Scouts of America, National Business League, the Urban League, Florida A&M University, the Urban League, YMCA, and the National Newspapers Publishers’ Association.

SUMMARY

Mr. Reeves reflects on growing up in vibrant community of Overtown, and how Interstate 95 disrupted that neighborhood. He discusses how his service in World War II shaped perspectives that influenced his management of the *Miami Times*. Of particular note in this interview is Mr. Reeves’ lengthy discussion of his involvement in the civil rights

movement and beyond, and how the *Times* strove to provide an important and otherwise ignored perspective to the white Miami newspapers. He also comments on issues important to Miami today, including the controversy over religious leader Henry Lyons and how the rapid infusion of ethnic minorities in Miami has affected blacks. This discussion of specific events lends a particular energy to his concluding remarks on the role of journalism in society.

Garth C. Reeves, Jr. was interviewed by Julian M. Pleasants on August 19, 1999, in Miami, Florida.

P: When and where were you born, Mr. Reeves?

R: In Nassau, Bahamas, on February 12, 1919.

P: When did your parents come to Miami?

R: May 11, of the same year.

P: Why did they come to Miami?

R: My father was on his way to New York to buy printing equipment to start his own business. He had a small printing business on the side in Nassau that he operated out of his home. He worked for the Nassau *Guardian* newspaper. He had a brother, Fred, who lived in New York and he was going up there to buy equipment and come back and open his own business. He never got to New York because he stopped here in Miami, and he met some friends whom he had known before from the Bahamas.... They said, this is the place you should drop your anchor; this place has a lot of potential. Now, I do not know how they could see potential in Miami back in 1919. Really, I do not think there were 30,000 people in Miami at that time and [there were] strict segregation laws and things

like that. I guess those old people had vision. They said, we think that something is going to happen here. Instead of going to New York, he stayed in Miami and opened a business. He never went to work for anybody else in this country. He bought printing equipment, and his two friends went in with him. I think they formed a company, the Magic Printing Company. Like all new business, it did not flourish right away. It took a little time..., [eventually] my father bought them out for a grand total of \$375, which was a lot of money in those days, and he kept the business going for himself.

P: The *Miami Sun* was the first paper?

R: Yes. That was, I think, in 1920, and it only lasted eight months because World War I was going on, and there were people shortages and other problems.... He was a master printer. He was very good at his craft, and he did well with his job printing. [On] September 1, 1923, he started *The Miami Times*. It was a struggle, but he was proud of his reputation of having gotten out a paper every single week. Every single week, he got out this newspaper, in spite of hurricanes, mechanical failures, [or] labor problems.... We will have completed seventy-six years, on September 1 [1999], and we have never missed an issue in those seventy-six years. I feel very proud of that, too, having taken over for my dad. But it has been a struggle. I remember we had paper shortages during World War II. In fact, *The Miami Daily News* was the dominant paper here then, instead of *The Herald*, and we used to buy paper from them, the end of their rolls that they would usually throw away. They would cut it up in flat sheets and sell it to us, and it kept our paper going. I never forgot that....

P: It must have been difficult during the 1926 hurricane. It is amazing you could get

a paper out under those conditions.

R I remember the electricity in our part of town stayed off more than a week. That was the only way we could get the paper out, by turning the wheel by hand, and I remember seeing those men do that.

P: When did you start working for the paper and what did you do?

R: ... I have never had another job in my life other than the four years I spent in the Army, serving Uncle Sam. But, I started off as a printer's devil around the print shop, sorting pie.... Sorting pie is the type, when individual characters get mixed up and you put them all in a pie box. My job was to sort them [and] clean up the place. Then I got a paper route, I guess I must have been ten when I started.... That was a good experience because I remember my dad used to print the paper one page at a time. First, he would fold the page in half and print that. Then, he would print the other side. Then, he would have to reverse that page, and then he would print the other two pages (a total of 8 pages). The press we were working on was no more than a twelve by eighteen press. Boy, it was a real project getting out newspapers in the old days, but that is what you had to do....

P: What was your readership, in numbers?

R: We printed about 500 or 600 papers a week when we started.

P: Is this where you got your love of journalism?

R: No, really, I was not really [in] love [with] journalism.... I was not obsessed with journalism because my dad never made a lot of money out of that newspaper, but his commercial job printing subsidized the newspaper in those lean years. I would always wonder why he spent so much time on that newspaper instead of on his job printing

where we were making a good deal of money. I remember him saying to me, one day, this newspaper will be more important than the job printing. I could not see that in those days, but he was right. There came a day in the 1960s, maybe the 1950s, after the war, [when] we continued to have the job printing and the newspaper, but the newspaper began to catch fire. Job printing began to get in the way of the newspaper because the newspaper began to grow....

Then, having coming out of the Army and having been treated like I was, made me take a different look at the newspaper part of [journalism], the power of the press. I knew that segregation was terrible. I suffered in the Army because I had to accept that. They sent me away from here saying, you are going out to make the world free for democracy, and we have to defeat men like Hitler and Mussolini. They were waving that flag at me, but they treated me like a damn dog, because I am black. It was a terrible thing to accept: you are laying your life on the line, you are overseas, and you see them treating the German prisoners better than they treat you. It just does something to you. It takes your manhood away. I never could deal with that. That bothered me. It bothers me today.... I have a twenty-five foot flagpole in my yard, on the water where I live, and I have never hoisted the American flag on that pole. I just cannot do it for some reason.... But I will never forget the way my country waved that flag at me and then treated me, under the false pretenses that I was really there to help save this world for democracy....

P: Did you volunteer, or were you drafted?

R: No, I was drafted. In fact, I went in the first black contingent to leave Miami.

Everything was segregated....

P: What unit was this?

R: I went overseas to Europe with the 383rd Engineer Battalion.... I was assigned to coast artillery... and was fascinated by the ninety-millimeter guns, and I put in for officers' school. I was accepted, and they cut my orders and sent me to Fort Belvoir, Virginia.... A black sergeant picked me up at the station. He looked at me strangely and he said, are you Sergeant Garth Reeves? I said, yes, I am. He said, well, I am supposed to take you to the fort, to officers' training school, right? He said, are you sure they did not make a mistake? I said, here are my orders. So, we are riding back to the post. This was a black guy, and he said, Sergeant, I have been on this post for twenty-two years, and I have never seen a black guy come... into this coast artillery school. I said, well, you see one now. I said, they did not make a mistake. He said, well, I'll be damned. And, I went to the post. I got there at night around eight o'clock. He took me into this captain who was on duty, and the captain looked at me strangely. He told the sergeant, put him in the room down there. The sergeant took me down there, so I slept that night. I got up the next morning, and they had cut orders for me... and moved me right out of there. They just overran the orders from the headquarters in Europe.

P: Were you in the Pacific theater?

R: I was in Hawaii. We went back at the time when we were getting ready to invade Japan, because the war in Europe ended while we were still at sea on the boat going over [to Japan]. Boy, we were all happy about that. We wanted the ship to turn around. They said, no, we still have another enemy over there; Japan is still there. So, they were building up the forces in the Pacific to invade Japan. God, I saw the intelligence reports, that we were really expecting 2,000,000 casualties in the invasion of Japan. None of us felt very good about that.... We figured we could win the war but, God it was going to be

very costly. But, sure enough, they dropped the big one on Hiroshima, and the Japanese changed their minds. I was very happy about that. The war ended, and we were still there in training in Hawaii.

P: Did you have white officers in those segregated units?

R: Yes. The first unit I went into, [had] all white officers. They had one colored [man]. He was the chaplain, the minister. The NCOs were all black. Only the officers were white.

P: While you were in this unit, were you discriminated against by these white officers?

R: No, not the officers themselves. I believe they realized that they were taking men into combat. You arm them and you know you [have] to treat them like men, or you are not safe. I think they were smart enough to realize that. It was not the discrimination. It was just the policy and the practices of the Army.

P: You attended Booker T. Washington High School in Miami, which obviously was a segregated school. Give me some idea of what kind of school it was and what kind of education you received.

R: Booker T. Washington had a great building. I thought it was the most beautiful thing I had seen when I went to that school (1931). [But]... in the classroom, the Bunsen burners were broken in the science labs, and I noticed that our science teacher, when he did an experiment, he did it, and we just watched. I wondered why we did not do our own experiments. He said, well, this equipment is broken, and they have not repaired it. I remember, the whole year, they never did repair it. Another thing was the books: we got the secondhand books from the white schools, hand-me-downs and things like that. We

never got new books. Even the athletic equipment. The black schools did not have any athletic budget to buy jerseys and football togs. So, Miami High and Miami Edison used to give us their old togs from the last year, and we used it in practice. We would have to buy jerseys to have for the games. That was the way things were.

I remember when I was going away to [my military] service, I confided to my mother: I said, my heart is not in this; I am going against my will. She said, well, I want you to be a survivor; I want you to come back home, you do not have to win this war by yourself. She said, you try to make it back home because I say things have to get better one day, but it is not going to happen overnight. I thought about that a lot of times because I had some situations in the service that were very disgusting. I remember once when I, heading to the Pacific coast to go overseas, over to the Pacific, I got on a train in New Orleans.... The conductor came by. I got my ticket, and I said, when are we eating; I am hungry. He said, just sit down over there; I will be back. An hour later, he had not come back. When he came back about an hour and a half later,... I said, I am hungry, and I am ready to go to bed now; I wish you would show me where my bunk is. He said, I am busy right now; you sit down over there, and I will be right back. Three hours went by, and the guy never came. I never ate. So, I confronted him. I said, look, you have my ticket there. I said, I have meal coupons to eat; I am tired, and I want to go to bed. He said, you sit down; you sit down right in that coach right there. I said, no, no, no. I said, something has got to be wrong here. They had military police riding on the train, so I went to the military police and I said, I want you to come with me and talk to this conductor.... I am ready to go to bed, and I have not had anything to eat.... So, the conductor looked at him, and the military police [man] told me, you do what that white [man] told you to do, or

I will have to lock you up on this train.... So I rode across the country sitting up in a coach, and I had to buy my food because I could not go into the dining car. Something like that, it is kind of hard to get out of your craw.

P: What was Overtown like in the 1930s? I understand it was sort of a Harlem of the South.

R: It was great. Neighborhoods were really neighborhoods. Any mother in that neighborhood could discipline anybody's child. It is quite different today. If Mrs. Johnson next door saw me getting out of line, she would straighten me out, even to the point of punishing me, spank[ing] me. Then, when my parents came home, she would tell them what happened. Well then, I would get another whipping. But everything was so different during that time. Booker T. was a closely-knit school. We had a lot of pride in that school. [There was] no graffiti on the walls or anything like that. Nobody was tearing up anything. I had gotten so that back in those days, I guess, the segregation did not bother me that much because I had not seen anything of the outside world, and I seemed to have had everything in my neighborhood that I thought I needed or wanted....

P: What is your view of the impact of Interstate 95 which went through Overtown?

R: It really destroyed the black community because up until that time, we were all right there together, and we had our own real community. But when I-95 came through, it came right through the heart of the city, right down 6th Avenue.... The people started moving out. The thing is, there was no place to go, because when you moved out, really, from Overtown, the nearest place was Liberty City.... So, where we are now was all white [back then]. From 62nd Street on back, it was all white.... The real estate agents got into it, too. They saw a good way to make some money. They started selling homes to blacks

in these fringe areas. Well, the whites started to move once one black moved into the block. It was like everybody had to go then; they had to leave. That is how Liberty City opened up. Then, a lot of people were stubborn about leaving, and we had some terrible incidents about integrating some of these neighborhoods. They had a bombing.... Blacks just started moving in, and the whites did not like it. They set off a dynamite charge in one of the vacant apartments.... I guess I reacted just like everybody. I got my gun and put it in my pocket, and I [went] out to see what in the hell was going on.... The police came, and nobody was hurt or anything, but the hostility was in the air. It was like they were bringing a war to our community, and the black people were very upset. But, we managed to get over that....

P: You started as a reporter. What did you cover?

R: Everything. In a black newspaper, you had to be versatile. You had to write an obituary today and a wedding story tomorrow. That is why I think a black journalist had an advantage over a white journalist because when a white journalist went to a newspaper, they gave him a certain spot, a niche, and that was all he did. We had to do everything.

P: Did you have any journalism courses at Florida A&M?

R: When I went to A&M, the only school of journalism was at the University of Florida. I told my English teacher, and he said, do not worry about that. He said, just take all the English courses you can, and you will end up being a good journalist. So, we took all the English courses, literature and all that. It is really enough. I worked on the school newspaper. I got the bug for the newspaper, the journalism bug, when I came back from the war.... I told my mother when I came back, I [was] not going to stay because doing my four years in the service, I had been to a lot of different countries, and I had been to a lot

of states.... So, I told my mother, I am going to try someplace else. She said, well, your dad is kind of depending on you; you are the only boy, and he was hoping you would take over the business. I said, really, I would like to help him but if I stayed around here, mama, I will get in trouble. I said, I think I have made a sacrifice for my country, and they do not respect me for that. She said, you do not solve problems by running away from them. It kind of caught my attention there, my mom talking down to me. I said, well, this problem is a little too big for me, and I do not think I can solve it. She said, you have not tried; anyhow, you think about it. When men have done their best, angels can do no more--my mother always told me that. She said, but make sure you have done your best before you give up....

So, I thought about it and I said, I will tell you what: I will give you a year [to] see if we can do something. Then the newspaper became my primary objective. You have got to have a propaganda arm in order to get anything done. I had not been active in the NAACP, but I became an active member. I got the newspaper in the fight, publishing the protests and... writing articles about the evils of segregation. We had a very good president of the NAACP, Reverend Theodore Gibson.... He was a fiery leader of the NAACP. I remember Father Gibson used to stop by the office sometimes and say, Garth, what problem will we attack next? I remember one day, I told him, you know, we really ought to go after the golf courses. I said, you know, I like to play golf, but they only let us play on Monday.... Monday was the day they maintained the courses. They were watering the lawns and cutting the grass and you are out there trying to putt.... He said, well, hell, let us do something about it. Sure enough, we organized a group called the Cosmopolitan Golf Association, which was a group of black golfers.... we started...

planning our fight... with the municipal golf course. We had two good NAACP lawyers there. We did not have any money to pay them, but these guys were committed. If we got the \$380, I think that is what it cost in those days, to file a suit, they would file it for us. So... we decided to file the suit. We did this back in the 1940s, but the suit lasted seven years, I think. It went all the way to the Supreme Court, and it became a landmark case.... (*Rice v City of Miami*. Joseph Rice was a regular member of the Cosmopolitan Golf Club). The Supreme Court ruled that you cannot take tax money, build a golf course, and restrict any of the residents. Simple as that....

P: Was the black community in Miami aware of the tremendous significance of Jackie Robinson breaking the color line in major league baseball, the number one pastime in America?

R: Oh definitely, because boy, everybody loved baseball. We had our black league, the thing was to really get it opened up. We knew it would happen one day. Believe it or not, I was one of those lucky guys.... When the season opened in Brooklyn that Monday, the Dodgers and the Giants in Brooklyn, I was in the stands when Jackie Robinson took the field for the first time. I saw it: major league baseball integrated. To me, that was a great day.

P: Was the audience integrated?

R: Oh yes. Because it was Brooklyn.

P: Do you think people today recognize what an extraordinary hero Jackie Robinson was and what he had to go through, what courage it took?

R: I do not think many people realize it. That was a tremendous thing that he did. Pee Wee Reese [MLB player, 1940-1958] died this week, and I remember how Pee Wee was the only guy on the team who stood up for Jackie. I'll never forget that, when they

were booing Jackie.

P: At the *Miami Times* you started as a columnist. Then you went to managing editor, then editor and publisher. How did that transition take place, and what different responsibilities did you have in each job?

R: They were actually overlapping because I always did whatever had to be done in the newspaper and, at the same time, [kept] the commercial job printing going, because that [was] where the real money was. When I became active with the NAACP and we started the civil rights struggle, I had to keep that part of it going. That was my job to write the articles. My dad always wrote the editorials. He never wanted anybody else to write his editorials. If I had a strong position on something, I usually took it to the front page, in a front-page editorial, and he maintained his column....

P: Did the *Miami Times* write editorials trying to persuade the community as to how to vote?

R: Yes, we would do that. We always made our endorsements, and we have such a following, a believability in our newspaper. Black people believed in the *Miami Times*. What they saw there was bible to them. We built that up over the years, I imagine, by fighting their fights and not sacrificing integrity in any way.

P: For example, would you have urged them to vote for John F. Kennedy [35th U. S. President, 1961-1963] in 1960?

R: Oh definitely. We supported Kennedy all the way. He was the only president for whom I left Miami to go to his inauguration. I was really enthralled with that man. I thought, this is a new type of politician here; this country has got to change with a bright, young man like this who, I thought, had his head screwed on correctly....

P: There were some fairly serious riots in the 1960s in Miami, and there was one in 1988 in Liberty City. What was your position, editorially, on those riots in the black community?

R: Editorially, we did not call them riots. We called them protests. Sure, everybody else called them riots but, editorially, we were saying that the people were not just rioting to be rioting. They were protesting wrongs that were piled upon them year after year and that it looked like nothing was being done about it.... That is when we had ... some serious problems with police brutality. We were protesting editorially and every way we could, in mass meetings and everything. But we could not get the city officials to really react to this thing, to really do anything about it. So our editorial strategy was, let us attack the top law enforcement person in the county, the state's attorney. Someone said, you are crazy; how are you going to attack Janet (Janet Reno, States Attorney for Dade County, 1978-1993; U.S. Attorney General, 1993-2001)? Janet is our friend. She is the only decent person down there. Why are you going to jump on [her]? Yes, but we have to get attention to this problem of police brutality.... And it worked. We wrote a piece in our paper saying, Janet Reno is to black people what Hitler was to Jews. That was awful. Janet asked me ... how could you write that about me? I said, we had to get your attention. The *Miami Herald* picked it up and said what the black newspaper said: Janet is a racist.... People started talking about it, saying police brutality in this town is bad. Then, the grand jury got on it and everything. Later on, I had to apologize to Janet. I said, Janet, you have to do what you have to do sometimes. I said, that is what we had to do; we had to use you to get the attention. So, once the state attorney's office was attacked, they had to respond, well, what could we do?....

Things really changed after that. The police were getting away with too much. We had a chief (in Miami) named ... Walter Headly [who] was known to have a dossier on every official in the city.... Nobody bothered Walter Headly. So the *Miami Times* came out one week with a front-page, saying, Headly should be fired; he is a disgrace to this city, and we do not need a man like that running this police department because brutality is rampant [and] he is not doing anything [about it]. Oh, we raved about it, and the *Miami Herald* picked it up the next day and said, the black newspaper is calling for the dismissal of the chief.... Everybody said, aren't you scared writing about him? Hell no. You have to bring these things to the attention of the public if we feel that we are right, if they are mistreating us and they are not doing a damn thing about it.... Sure enough, Headly was fired a couple of years later. We started the movement....

P: After that, they began hiring more African-American policemen?

R: Right. Well, we had African-American police even with Headly there.... The (black) police went through a lot, too, to maintain their jobs. You know, they were not policemen fully; they were patrolmen. They could not arrest whites. They were restricted to black areas. Still, it got our foot in the door. That is why in my civic activities around Dade County, I wanted a seat at the table. If you did not have a seat at the table, how could you be heard?....

P: In civil rights, how did you view Martin Luther King's gradual, pacifistic approach as compared to, say, the more aggressive tactics of Malcolm X and the Black Panthers--where did you stand in that ideological split?

R: I was with King to a certain extent. My mother always said, you do not pick a fight you cannot win. You cannot win if the other guy has a gun, and you have a slingshot. We

did not have any guns. We did not have anything to fight with. I was afraid it was going to be a real serious bloodbath if we did not go with King. If we went with Malcolm, it was going to be really, really rough. Things might have changed faster, but it would have been bloodier. King was making a lot of sense, and history proved him right. I think the real reason King was murdered is because King was beginning to get the poor white people of the South to see that, really, it is not just what [was being done] to black people; [someone with] white skin [was] not much better off with low wages....

P: How was your paper received by the white community? Obviously, the *Miami Herald* read what you wrote. Did other civic leaders?

R: They always viewed us as a responsible black press. Responsible--I liked that. My dad was far more conservative than I was, and he always used to quote an English philosopher, I think his name was James McKinley, who said, never have a group of men resolved a situation more meaningfully than when they sat around a table and talked about it. He thought that if you talked about a problem in a meaningful manner and truthfully, being honest with yourselves, you can do it. You know, that worked [with] integrat[ing] the beaches in Dade County.

I will tell you the story on the beaches in Dade County. We arranged a meeting with the county commissioners at Crandon Park. They agreed to meet with us, the NAACP delegation.... They did not know what to expect. They did not know if we were planning a demonstration, because demonstrations were going on at the time.... Our strategy was, we would bring all our past tax receipts from the county, and we would appeal to their sense of fair play. We said, gentlemen, we are here today for a redress of a grievance that we have, that you have about twenty-eight public beaches here in Dade

County, and blacks are restricted to only one, Virginia Beach. We feel that is wrong. All of us are residents of Dade County. We are all taxpayers, and none of us have criminal records. We brought along our tax receipts so you could see that we were freeholders ... and we [had] paid our taxes. Now, we notice on this tax pie chart that eleven percent of our taxes goes toward the maintenance of parks, playgrounds, [and] beaches, so we think that you are doing wrong when you restrict us to one beach and you are taking our tax money and maintaining the total of twenty-eight beaches. They listened to us, and nobody said a word.... They had all the commissioners there. We said, we have had our attorneys research the laws of the state and the county, and there is no law on the books that says, black people cannot enjoy the public facilities. So, we would like an answer from you. They would not give us an answer. They said not a word. [There was] nothing to say.

So we said, we are coming back at two o'clock today to use this beach and if you want to put us in jail or beat us up like some of your police officers have been doing, that is all right. We feel that we need some sort of answer and some sort of resolution to this problem. And we left. Though we might have had a dozen or fourteen people with us that morning, when we got ready to go back, we had about half that many. But we went back at two o'clock. There were a lot of policemen out there.... They did not know what to expect. We did not know what to expect, either. Somebody told us, do not go into the bathhouse. We could hear a lot of noise in the bathhouse. They said a bunch of white hoodlums were in there, waiting to beat us up when we come in to change into our swim trunks, and the police were going to conveniently not answer the call. So, we did not go there. What we did [was] we slipped on our trunks under our clothes, and we walked

down to the beach. The police didn't stop us, and we just walked down to the beach,... kicked off our sandals, took off our slacks, and went into the water. Nobody said a word. No police officers came up. Some reporters were out there because they did not know what was going to happen. We stayed in the water, maybe, a half hour or so, and we came out of there. From that day, and I think it was November 7, 1957, the beaches of the county became integrated.... Blacks slowly began going to different beaches, any one they wanted.

P: What was the *Miami Herald's* position on all this civil rights activity?

R: *The Herald* was not editorially positioned, as it is today. You see, it was not popular to take the position of blacks during the civil rights struggle. I guess they were looking towards their population. Ninety percent of their readership, I guess, was white. They skirted a lot of issues, and they tap danced around a lot of them.

P: Didn't the *Miami Times* get bombed one time?

R: Yes, and believe it or not, by a black group. They had an organization called BAMB, the Black African Militant Movement, I think it was. These guys were always attacking us for not being militant enough. They thought we should urge the people to riot. A lot of it did not make ... sense to us. Editorially, we were not going to do that. We would get these letters to the editor saying we were not militant enough and [that] people should rise up and all that. But one night ... they threw a bomb, more like a Molotov cocktail, in our front door. It smashed the glass, but ... it burned just the front. It burned out before it could do serious damage to the building.

P: Did you ever get any phone calls or threats or letters from the Klan or other racist organizations?

R: Yes, we would get those, but we would just throw them away. We would not even print them.

P: When a racial incident took place, the white press would give one interpretation, so you had to reinterpret or clarify some of the facts. Was that an essential part of your function?

R: We called it writing it from a black perspective, because the white perspective was quite different from the black perspective. I have been convinced in my general experiences that objectivity is a myth, because a writer can take that story and turn it anyway he wants to. So, if the white reporter views a demonstration in the community as a riot, the *Miami Times* might view that as a protest. That is it.... You can be as objective as you want to be, I guess.

P: Another thing that you did, and I presume this is part of your function both as a newspaper editor and a human being, is that you have been active in not only the black community but in Miami-Dade, in general. Did you feel that was a specific responsibility that you had as editor of the paper?

R: Definitely, because there were so many powerful white organizations that really ran the town, like United Way. They did not have any blacks on the board. And the Boy Scouts. I wanted to get in there because I was going to have my say. You know, you are not going to like what I am saying, but at least I will have my say, and I am going to say it in such a way [that] I am not angrily accusing you of racism as such. When I sat on the board of Miami Dade Community College ... the legal team would come in and I would say,... how many minority lawyers do you have on your staff? He would say, well, we really do not have any; it is not that we have not been looking for them, but none of them

have applied to our firm.... So I said to him, you know, this community college represents all segments of the community and, possibly, you should not wait on them to come to you; you might seek them out because we would like a legal staff to represent... all segments of the community.... The second time he came, I did the same thing. I think he had one Hispanic the next time. The third time he came, I shoved it to him. I said, no, I am protesting right now, and I am asking all my trustees to vote with me against this law firm representing our college because for six years, I have been asking him to include minorities on the firm. He has not done it, and I think it is time that we make a move. Mr. President [and] Mr. Chairman, I think that we should look for another law firm.... Moved him right out like that. You see, if you have a seat...and you do it in such a way [that] when you are in this dominant white group and you are the only black sitting at the table, whatever you say is not going to mean very much to them because they know they have the votes, but you kind of prick their conscience....

P: You were the first African-American, I believe, to serve on the board of the United Way?

R: Yes.

P: The same for the Boy Scouts?

R: Right.... They did not feel uncomfortable with me, I do not think, because I had paid my dues in the community. I felt I had done a good job, and I was working for the same thing [they] were working for, for a good community, a good wholesome community. So, nobody really objected. But then, I would always be their conscience.... You would be surprised to know the racism that could go on in a meeting if only all whites are in the room. So, I am listening carefully to what is said, and I am making my little

notes....

P: Would you do editorials about, say for example, the law firm that was dismissed?

R: No. Believe it or not, I did not even write it up because I did not want people to think I was using that as a forum for a newspaper.... It was not my job to make news for my newspaper. It was to get something done, to help this community become more rounded.

P: How many readers did you have in the 1950s and how many do you have today?

R: In the 1950s, our circulation was possibly about 7,000 to 10,000. Today, we are 22,000.

P: What is your major source of advertising?

R: Corporate. We get a great deal of corporate advertising. We have Sears, K-Mart, General Motors, Coca-Cola, [and] Pepsi.... I remember, five to ten years ago, we were heavy on automobile advertising. Right now, we do not get a lot of automobile advertising.... We usually get a lot of grocery advertising.... Now, the health organizations today are big because everybody has health services. Everybody has some Medicare or Medicaid.

P: That reminds me of another struggle you had, to integrate Jackson Memorial.

R: That is right. My mother had diabetes, and she was losing a leg. I went out to the hospital to see her. There was no air conditioning in this west wing where they put all the blacks. It had an electric fan that was doing a poor job. I had to do a sit-in outside the administrator's office. They kept me out there all day.... I made some phone calls to some politicians and things like that. The next day, they moved my mother to a ward in the wooded building. A couple of black nurses came up to me and told me, that is the first

[time] a black person has ever been in that building. She said, I have been working here twenty-two years. I said, well, things change after a while. If nobody could test it, you see, nothing would get done. Everybody seemingly would go along with the status quo. My newspaper never protested it..., but it hit me right at home that my mother was about to lose her leg and, Jesus, look at the conditions. Segregation is such a terrible thing, and it is senseless....

P: Let me ask you about another controversial issue. You might recall the controversy over Reverend Henry Lyons [former president of the National Baptist convention].

R: Yes.

P: Reverend Lyons was charged with several illegal activities. Some of the members of the black community defended him in the beginning because they thought this was the white authorities unfairly prosecuting Henry Lyons. What was your reaction?

R: Listen. There is only one way to put it. Henry Lyons was a crook, and I abhor people who would try to smooth that over. If you are a thief, you are a thief. We do not do ourselves any good by protecting a thief. Here is a man head at one of the largest black religious organizations in the world. He could have done so much good, had he been an honest man. But, he was a dishonest man, and he hurt so many people by that. I do not think we should find excuses for dishonest people.... Everybody should be accountable. Newspapers, too. But, we have not had that accountability.... I do not want to make excuses for politicians who are being tried for bribes and stealing money. Damn it. A lot [of people] said, but the white guys are doing it. Well, it is still not right. I tell a lot of black guys that. I say, and don't you think, with your black face, you can do everything a white

politician can do and get away with it. I say, the country is not like that.... I saw in the paper recently that people are trying to shorten his (Lyons' prison) term. Why? He has done his harm to the black religious community of this country. Why let him out to do more? No. Let him stay there and pay his debt to society. That is the way I look at it.

P: What do you think are the most important functions of your newspaper?

R: Number one, to keep the people informed, basically, and to educate. Education goes a long way because there are so many services that are offered by government that people who are not well-informed, do not even know that they are there.... Like health services. There are a lot of free health services that you could get almost everywhere. But, if you do not know about them, you are going to be sitting over here with diabetes, dying from it, and not even know you have it because you have not availed yourself of these health services where you can go down and get examinations.... There are lot of social services even that are available to people that people do not know about. There are a lot of people in our community who are really not sophisticated enough to interpret a lot of things to their best advantage. We need to educate them, explain this to them and make it known to them.... I think the black newspapers have to work very closely with the churches because our people believe in their churches....

P: When you took over the paper from your father, did you change much?

R: No. I found that the things my dad told me that I thought were not exactly right or not good for the paper, he had a lot more smarts about him than my young mind thought he had....

P: Has your audience changed, from 1950 to the present?

R: Not basically. We usually hold onto our readers. I do not know if we have as many

young readers today as I would like to have, but we kind of aim ourselves at the middle-aged voting community.

P: How has Miami changed in the years since you have been with the paper?

R: I thought that the Mariel boat lifts set the black community back twenty years, because once... the Cuban refugees came to this country, we sort of changed our attack against beating the drums for black people to [include all] minorities, and that was a mistake. I hate to admit it, but that was a mistake because we included the Hispanic brothers along with the black.

... basically, the Hispanic refugees never really joined with the black community in any way, and we included them in our suits when we amended our suits to say minorities. That was meant to show that we are fighting for all minorities, but we did not get that kind of cooperation from the Cuban refugees. They did not really come in with us. In fact, I think that the refugees hurt the black community of Dade County more than it did anybody else.... Instead of all the black people really sticking together in their fight for equality and human decency, I see some divisions between American blacks, Caribbean blacks, the Haitians over there, the Jamaicans over there. America is a melting pot like that, but I think that black people must understand that they are in a position where they are easily identifiable, and the history of this country has shown that there has been always this kind of innate resentment of blacks. This is where we come from. We have not overcome it yet. Racism is still rampant in the country. I think there is so much more work to be done.

P: Have you changed your editorial policy, now, back to strictly supporting black causes, as opposed to minority causes?

R: We are slowly doing that. I think it is necessary....

P: How have the letters to the editors changed over the years?

R: Not a great deal. We do not get as many today as we used to get. I do not know if people are getting complacent and feeling that they have it made or that the problems of this country have been resolved. I do not know. We invite letters to the editor because we like to know what people are thinking. I wish we had more to give us a better insight on people....

P: How has technology changed the newspaper business?

R: Considerably, from the day we set type one character at a time.... My daughter is installing a new technology system now, and it is on order. It is going to be the most up-to-date thing that we have....

P: One theory is that in a few years, everybody will use the Internet, and people will not have the physical newspaper anymore. Do you see the end of newspapers?

R: I do not think so. I think the newspaper will always be a part of the community. I remember when segregation was supposed to end in the schools and the different public facilities.... Everybody was saying that this would be the end of the black press, that there was no need for a black press now with the segregation ending. But, that was not true. In fact, that pointed out that the black press was needed more than ever....

P: How many other African-American newspapers are there in the state?

R: We have about fifteen.

P: Are most of them the same size?

R: We are the largest....

P: Do you use syndicated columnists, like William Raspberry, the Pulitzer Prize

winning nationally-syndicated columnist for the *Washington Post*?

R: Yes. In fact, let me tell you a story about Raspberry. We have been using Raspberry for many years. The *Miami Herald* had the rights to the Raspberry column, but they very seldom used it. When I originally wrote for the rights, they said the *Herald* had that territory. I wrote back and said, well, they are not using it. I said, I read the *Herald* every day, and I might see one Raspberry column every two weeks. So, they started sending me the column, and I started using it. Then, the *Herald* picked it up. They would not miss a Raspberry now....

P: Any other columnists you use?

R: Yes. Carl Rowan [African-American syndicated columnist] and Jesse Jackson's [African-American political leader, clergyman, and civil rights activist; U. S. presidential candidate, 1984, 1988] column.

P: Do the columnists provide a more national view, and expand the parameters of the paper a little?

R: That is right, but I try to stay as black as I can. I try to pick the news that you do not see, that you will not find, in the *Herald* or the *Ft. Lauderdale Sun Sentinel*.

P: Would you use a white columnist?

R: Sure. In fact, I had a white sports editor way back in the 1960s. He was the only white on my firm. I did like the whites. I put him right up at the front desk.

P: So everybody could see him.

R: Everybody could see him.

P: Looking back on the time that you have been with the paper, what would you say

is your most important contribution to the community?

R: I believe, bringing the people the news of their community every week in an unbiased sort of way, from a black perspective, and trying to steer them. You are not supposed to steer, I guess, but we try to do that. We try to kind of steer them in the right direction, editorially.

P: What do you consider your most important personal contribution?

R: To this community, I think my most important contribution other than the newspaper was taking a leadership [role] during the civil rights struggle, in things like the golf law suit and the beaches. Somebody had to do that. Everybody knew it should be done, but everybody was standing around waiting on somebody else to do it... Somebody had to step forward. If you are writing about it every day, protesting it and saying, this is wrong and we should do something, well, when they ask for volunteers, your hand should go up, or else you are not for real.

[End of interview.]