

UFLC 72
George Allen
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Pp. 1-10: George Willie Allen was born on March 3, 1936 in Sanford, Florida. He remembers attending the segregated public school in Sanford, where several teachers, such as Mrs. Reyfoyd in 6th grade, inspired him to read and study. Allen also remembers his first racial conflict, when he was in grade 7 and his 8th grade friend Percy Lee “sassed a white...old cracker.”

Allen excelled in his high school studies. He was president of the student government association and showed leadership qualities. Nevertheless the black “power structure at the school” decided that others should receive university scholarships, as he “came from the wrong side of the tracks.”

Allen successfully applied to Florida A & M at Tallahassee. To support himself through school, Allen pressured the dean of students and obtained a job at FAMU. In addition to his studies he also participated in student government, NAACP, YMCA, the Baptist Student Union, and ROTC.

Pp. 11-15: Before he graduated in 1958, Allen partook in the public transportation boycott in Tallahassee, conducted to integrate that public transit system. In the late 1950s, Allen met Virgil Hawkins, who was denied entry into the UF Law School, where “the white power structure was trying to keep [him] out.”

Allen’s graduation from FAMU, with a degree in political science and a minor in economics, coincided with a commission in the army as a second lieutenant. He was among the top 10% of his army class, and was selected to receive training in army intelligence. While in the army, Allen had access to the officers’ clubs and learned social graces; he investigated espionage activities, became friends with some of his white army buddies, and realized--for the first time in his life--that Jim Crow extended north of the Mason-Dixon line.

Pp. 18-24: In December 1958, while still in uniform, Allen married Edith Lowe, whom he had met at FAMU. They headed to an army assignment in Berkeley, California. There, Edith passed her nursing exams with the state Medical Nursing Board. Allen’s army stint was over in July 1960. He applied to the law schools at Berkeley, Harvard, and UF. Accepted by all three, he chose to attend UF law school, because “that is where the action [was]...where all the integration was going on.”

Pp. 25-49: During the first year in law school, some students befriended him, others shunned him. He studied hard. Allen related some of his experiences. He received telephone threats and he would routinely threaten the caller back. Whenever confronted, Allen became aggressive. He never backed down. In December 1962, he was the first black student to graduate from UF law school.

Pp. 50-55: Upon graduation, Allan took a job with Orr & Kaplan in Miami, but left six

months later to practice on his own. He made more money in private practice in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, where he remained to date with his family. Discussing the Virgil Hawkins court appeals, to overturn the decision to prevent Hawkins from enrolling into the UF law school, Allen found whites' fear that Hawkins's attendance would cause civil disturbances was just so much hot air. The real reason that Hawkins was refused entry, he asserted, was racial discrimination. He indicated the appeal court judges were "evil people."

Pp. 56-61: Allen talked about his political contacts first with the Democratic Party, then with Republicans. Although both offered him the opportunity to run for positions in the judicial system, he declined. In Fort Lauderdale, Allen is active with the NAACP, the Urban League, the United Way campaign of Broward County, and the American Bar Association, as well as the National Bar Association, a nationwide association of black lawyers. He was the president of NBA 1975-1976. He formed a partnership with Alcee Hastings, who subsequently was a judge and currently serves in Congress.

Allen felt that although he personally succeeded without it, affirmative action should be maintained, because "it rights a wrong that is still there and the playing field is not level."

Pp. 62-71: Allen thought that bar admission exams are a way to "hold down the numbers" of lawyers entering practice and are "skewered toward the Anglos and Europeans." Allen also felt strongly that the UF law school practice court should remain named after Virgil Hawkins, even though Hawkins never graduated from UF, just because he is the symbol of those who first tried to overcome racial barriers.

Pp. 72-80: One of Allen's own "firsts" came along in 1970, when he sued the Broward County School Board, to integrate the schools in the county; and then for 25 years, until 1995, he monitored the county's school system. He was involved in "a lot of civil rights litigation." Nevertheless, Allen states that he "never wanted to be a black lawyer. [He] wanted to be a good lawyer." Allen is active in his community and cares for all people in it, "black and white."