

YBOR 70

Interviewee: A. Leon Lowry

Interviewer: Alan Petigny

Date: June 8, 1993

P: It is June 8, 1993, I am sitting here at 11:00 a.m. with Reverend A. Leon Lowry. I am going to have him spell his name and everything in a minute. Reverend Lowry is the minister of Beulah Baptist Church, as he has been since the middle of 1950s. He was the first black person elected to public office in Hillsborough County. That being the school board, I believe in 1974 and he no longer serves on the Hillsborough County School Board. Until recently, he served on the Hillsborough County School Board. Finally, Reverend Lowry was the former head of the NAACP for the state of Florida. What was the title, Reverend Lowry?

L: State President.

P: State President.

L: I was the state president of one of the NAACP branches.

P: I am going to turn the tape recorder off briefly and just make sure that the sound is okay.

[Break in tape]

P: I just turned the tape recorder back on. Reverend Lowry, can you spell your name out and everything?

L: Lowry, A. Leon Sr.

P: What does A stand for?

L: It stands for Alfonso.

P: Are you a junior?

L: No, my brother is junior. **Benjamin J. Lowry, Jr.**

P: I am going to begin by, for your reference, asking you some questions about your own personal history, then some questions about the civil rights movement and then some general questions about social relations in the 1950s and a few final questions after that. Where were you born and when?

L: I was born in Savannah, Georgia, June 12, 1913.

P: Who are your parents?

L: Benjamin James Lowry Sr. and **Evelyn Solomon Lowry**.

P: What did they do?

L: My father, at that time, was a common laborer. My mother was a young housewife.

P: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

L: I had two brothers, one other brother born in Savannah, Benjamin J. Jr.

P: Older brother, I assume?

L: No, they are both younger than I. Benjamin J. Jr., born in Savannah two years after I was born and Leonard W. Lowry was born in New Haven, Connecticut. My father, after the birth of my second brother, moved to Connecticut where conditions were better. Where he might continue his education that had been aborted some time previously.

P: Did your mother work?

L: Mother did days work from time to time.

P: What sort of work?

L: Cooking, house cleaning, things of that nature.

P: What schools did you attend?

L: I attended Public School 45 in Brooklyn, New York, and Manual Training High School which was, at that time, a comprehensive high school that offered pre-college courses, industrial arts, whatever one might have been interested in as far as a career. They prepared that individual for that.

P: I assume that you graduated from high school in New York City, is that right?

L: In Brooklyn, New York.

P: What year was that, do you remember?

L: It was 1934. It was a long time ago.

P: Do you still go to class reunions?

L: No, we have not. Across the years, we have not attended any high school class reunions.

P: When you say we, are you referring to your wife?

L: No, I did not meet her until many, many years later subsequent to those early days. The we refers to some friends of mine who also attended Manual Training in Brooklyn.

P: So you graduated in 1934, did you go on to college directly thereafter?

L: I went to **Morehouse** College in Atlanta, Georgia in September 1935.

P: Were you on a scholarship?

L: No, we somehow managed to pay the tuition which at that time was far below what it costs today. 800 dollars a year, which means that for the four years, in terms of tuition, and that included room and board, you are talking about some 3,200 dollars.

P: This was in the 1930s, though, right?

L: Yes, the mid-1930s. 1935.

P: There was a depression going on.

L: The depression was winding down, nearing its end. Still a time of depression but it was sort of winding down at that time.

P: What did you study while you were in college?

L: I had a pre-med course, advanced biology and zoology, physiology.

P: Were you a science major?

L: At that time I was thinking in terms of medicine.

P: I see. How did you end up becoming a minister?

L: That is a very peculiar story. One that is very difficult to explain. It had nothing to do with low or failing grades, the grades were good, I graduated with honors. I could have graduated with higher honors than I did, but the time extra was spent playing football, running track and part of the thespian group in Shakespeare plays and such. Some of the other things that I did, Sociology, Criminology, naturally, English and then somehow or other, what we usually say in things of this nature, the Lord redirected my thinking. I found myself going into the ministry and it is very difficult to explain what we refer to as a call.

P: Did you have a religious experience?

L: I grew up in a religious family. My dad was a minister at the same church for 63 or 64 years prior to his demise. So I grew up in a home where religion was one of the main things. We had morning prayers every morning, same thing in the evening. All day Sunday we spent at church. Sunday morning to Sunday night, all day. In fact we did not leave the church building. This went on for a good number of years until I guess I was about eighteen or nineteen years of age.

P: Please tell me that you did not do that with your own children too?

L: No, I did not require them to do that. I was not as strict in that regard and yet I have one deceased son, the youngest son passed away about eight years ago, and the oldest son repeats what he learned at home. He goes to church every Sunday, he has two boys and they are there with him, they are youngsters, one is thirteen and the other will be seven this November. So he, the children and his wife are in church every Sunday morning. Sunday school, taking a very active part. He is a member of the _____ committee in his church. He does everything but preach. He is a bureau director with the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, that is a mid-management position and he is doing quite well. He attended Bethune-Cookman College, Florida State, he has two degrees from Florida State, his Bachelors in Science and his Masters with a major in government.

P: I am going to ask you some more questions about your family, but to redirect you were saying how you became interested in the ministry.

L: Right. That is what we call a providential call, a call from God. I cannot explain because I did not have any cataclysmic experience or saw any visions so to speak, nothing of that nature. So I would have to say that as a result of the training, I cannot explain to be very truthful, but I do know that I had a leaning, an urge, to do that. I had been thinking of Dentistry or medicine and those two career choices consumed my mind. Subsequently, I am moving from the area of medical science over to the area of religion. That oftentimes happens with people. I have many friends who have had that experience and were headed for the law or some form of government.

P: After you graduated with your Bachelor's from **Morehouse**, where did you go after that?

L: I went to Massachusetts. I had a scholarship to Andover-Newton Theological Schools, one of the oldest theological schools in the United States.

P: What is it called?

L: Andover-Newton. Two schools merged, although retained some individuality. Andover was a congregational and Newton a Baptist school, so those two came together to provide theological education.

P: How long were you there?

L: I was there three years. In those days you studied three years for the Bachelor of Divinity. Since that time that has changed. In three years you get a Master of Arts, maybe in Theology or religious education or secular education. Three years will give you that masters degree now. So you combine that time I spent for the obtainment of the Bachelor's degree and you get you Master of Arts in three years.

P: When did you graduate from this Divinity school?

L: In 1942. Subsequently I had a years study at Boston University. Another year at Harvard University.

P: There is a divinity school there as well?

L: Yes, both of those had divinity schools.

P: So you were at Harvard Divinity School and Boston University Divinity School?

L: Yes, but not at the same time. For one year, 1942-43, at Boston University. 1943-44 at Harvard.

P: Didn't one of your students, Martin Luther King Jr., also go to Boston University?

L: Yes, he was a Boston University graduate. That was subsequent to my time at Boston University. I was about to say that during my student days at Boston University in 1942, I became pastor of the Massachusetts Avenue Baptist Church.

P: In Boston?

L: In Cambridge, Massachusetts, just across the Cambridge River.

P: So you were an ordained minister while you were still continuing your education?

L: Yes, I had graduated from Andover-Newton in 1942 and that same year I was ordained by the Baptist Association of Long Island and Brooklyn. I came home for the ordination. It was an integrated association.

P: How did you meet your wife and who is your wife, by the way, we did not mention her?

L: She is a native Georgian, born in **Reardon Augusta**, Georgia. Educated in Augusta, Georgia.

P: What is her name?

L: Her name is **Claudia W. Lowry**. Her maiden name was Whitmore.

P: Where did you meet her?

L: In Augusta.

P: Where we last left off in your career, you were at Boston University and later at Harvard, you were pastoring the church in Cambridge. Did you subsequently move to Georgia?

L: I did.

P: Directly from

L: From Cambridge, Massachusetts. I had an invitation by Dr.**Douglas E. Mayes**, president of Morehouse College, my alma mater, to return and to work there. At Morehouse I had an opportunity to teach philosophy and church history.

P: At this point, did you have a Masters or Ph.D?

L: No, I just had the Bachelor in Divinity and the Bachelor of Arts. I had done some work toward the PhD, that is the work that I did at both Boston and Harvard. When I became an instructor at Morehouse and some other things happened, I never went back to claim those hours to continue that work towards the doctorate or PhD. While at Morehouse I became the first Director of _____ Life which is equivalent to the Dean of Men.

P: What year was this that you went to Morehouse?

L: 1944-45 and then subsequently was when I went to Augusta.

P: Before we explore that, let me just ask you a few more question about your personal history. As a young man growing up in New York, in Brooklyn, right?

L: Yes.

P: Were you there during the 1920s at all, in New York?

L: Late 1920s, yes.

- P: Then I suppose this was subsequent to **Garby's** time then, he had just passed the sea.
- L: Yes, I had heard about him from my father. I was a youngster, you are talking about a kid nine, ten, eleven, twelve years of age, so anything that I might have heard about him has grown out of my memory at this particular time. In fact, at that particular time, I had no interest whatever in civil rights, I just thought, like any other kid around, being very naive, that things were O.K. I knew that there was a difference between blacks and whites, in terms of opportunities and things of that nature, but I had no idea what segregation was all about. About the problems that black people were experiencing.
- P: As a young man, growing up in Brooklyn, and later as a young man completing his education on a post-secondary level, who are your heroes, who are your mentors, who influenced you?
- L: In school at the time, **Dr. C.D. Hewitt**, who became interim president at Morehouse prior to him was **Dr. Archer**, I cannot recall his first name. But Dr. Archer expired after my second year at Morehouse and a Dr. C.D. Hewitt became president proterim. On the faculty, there was an outstanding math teacher by the name of **C.B. Densley**, in sociology a **Walter Sugars**, in Biology the **Eversens Brothers**, in physics there was a **B.T. Harvey**, English there was **Edward Chandler**, in Ethics there was **Dr. Strong**.
- P: You are naming a lot of people, but I am trying to find out which ones really influenced you?
- L: O.K. **George Kelsner**, who became my very close, personal friend. He was an ethics teacher, as he moved up higher. The other is known as **Dr. William Holmes Borders**, who was teaching at the college and was pastoring at Wheat Street Baptist Church.
- P: Wheat Street?
- L: Yes.
- P: Where was this?
- L: This is in Atlanta. Then there was a Walter Sugars who was my sociology professor, also taught me Criminology. Those individuals were among my favorite people. Those were my very close contacts.
- P: You are now in Atlanta and you are teaching philosophy and you are the dorm master. Is it at this point that you had, as a student, Martin Luther King Jr.?

L: Yes, he came one day to Morehouse actually about the same time as my arrival there. I had departed, of course when I graduated to _____ Church in Augusta, Georgia. Martin came on campus. Strangely enough, I knew his father and mother quite well.

P: You knew "Daddy" King?

L: Yes I knew him quite well.

P: How did you know him?

L: My dad was a member of the National Baptist Convention of America and in my earlier years, I would accompany him to these conventions that met across the country annually in September and as a result of that, I met Dr. King. Then when I moved to Atlanta to work at the college, I joined the Baptist Ministers Association of Atlanta, being a minister although not actively engaged in the pastor, I attended those meetings, where quite a number of those outstanding Atlanta ministers were involved, and I had dealings with him. Then after that when I became pastor of the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Augusta.

P: Of the what?

L: Tabernacle Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia. Dr. King was a member of the congress and of the association and of the state convention.

P: Now, we are talking about Sr.? "Daddy" King?

L: "Daddy" King, that is correct. Martin, of course, during those days, after I left Morehouse, had gone on to Crozer Theological Seminary and then to Boston University.

P: Was Martin Luther King in one of your classes?

L: Yes, in one. In philosophy.

P: I know it is many years ago. Did he stand out in your mind as a promising student?

L: Yes, Martin was promising. I did not see Martin as a straight-A student at that particular time, in fact I do not remember that he was, but he certainly was an honor student with a developing mind, inquiring, inquisitive, who asked many questions, who was, I consider, a spokesman for the underdog and he would take the part of the underdog or under-privileged people, let me put it that way.

P: Was he particularly articulate?

- L: Quite, no question about it. An excellent speaker, even prior to becoming a minister. He had no intention, as many of us, of becoming a preacher. That was something that came a little bit later.
- P: Any other students who, perhaps not as big as Martin Luther King, but to give other prominent students?
- L: **Larone Bennett**, the black historian. He has written any number of outstanding books and when you got back to the library, just check that name and you will discover that he is quite an outstanding black historian.
- P: He was one of your students as well?
- L: Yes. There were some others whose names escape me. I have to go back and look at the book and see.
- P: You still have those old records?
- L: Some of them, but in moving about, sometimes you lose things.
- P: I just turned that tape recorder back on. Now, before you came to Tampa, you left Atlanta and you pastored a church.
- L: In Augusta, Georgia, one of the old historic cities of Georgia that played a prominent role during the days of the civil war. I became minister of a historic church, _____, with the outstanding black **pulpiteer** of the last century, **Dr. C.T. Walker**, whose life story reads like a fairy tale. He pastored a number of years in Augusta. At the same time, he pastored the **Oligard** Baptist Church in New York, sort of dual-pastor. Which is something that today a _____ man in a small, rural area is not heard of. Usually you have one church, a station church, to which you give service every Sunday and you are there weekly, other than going on speaking engagements.
- P: What year did you take this church over in Augusta, Georgia?
- L: In 1946, as I recall, and then until 1955.
- P: Then in 1955, you came here to Tampa?
- L: I came to Tampa. I arrived on December 30th, 1955.
- P: To pastor?
- L: Yes, and my first day in the pulpit was January 1, 1956.

P: Here at Beulah Baptist Church?

L: At Beulah Baptist Church.

P: How do you spell Beulah?

L: Beulah. The full name is Beulah Baptist Institutional Church.

P: One of the most prominent _____ churches in Tampa.

L: Exactly. 128 years old, this year. Its founding is history.

P: How did you get recruited, not simply Beulah, I am going to ask you how you came to Tampa from Georgia. But how in the world did you make that transition from being an academic, teaching at Morehouse College, to going into the world of the ministry. Those are pretty different.

L: They are different, but I had a little pastoral background. The battle going on in me was whether or not to remain in the college setting and become a full professor eventually, or whether to leave the academic world and you could not say that you are not involved with academics in pastoring because you still need to study and equip yourself properly and of course I had that equipment. I was in somewhat of a dilemma about that. **Dr. Mays** who was then president of Morehouse College, when I informed him of the call to become pastor. The Tabernacle Baptist Church in Augusta said no, I do not think that you ought to do that, the city into which you are going or you are contemplating, there is a social lag there. It is not a progressive kind of city, the church although very historic, is not what it used to be. It has a tremendous name, a huge building, but you need to be in a setting like Atlanta where all the universities center and Dr. Border said no, what you need to do is go on and give people in that community, granted their may be a social lag, and maybe the people are not as politically-minded and conscious as they are in Atlanta, and so all the more reason for going because they need the kind of leadership that you can provide.

P: So he favored you going?

L: Yes, this was Dr.Borders, now.

P: The first one who told you not to go was?

L: Dr.Mays was anti.

P: Dr.Mays was once again the head of Morehouse college. Dr Borders was?

L: The pastor of Wheat Street Church and also on the faculty at Morehouse College.

P: He said go.

L: Yes, because he said that the Lord has prepared you for leadership. I do not deny that you could do well here at the college and you may ascend and become college president or dean or something of that nature, but I think that your place is in the pulpit to share that knowledge with the people of that community if there is a social lag there. I did not disagree with Dr. Mays in that regard, all the more reason for going with your background, you can help them. You can help their church. What he said proved to be, eventually, true. I did have that opportunity for nine years and was involved in a number of civic things in that community.

P: Briefly, what sort of civic things were you involved in before you came here?

L: The NAACP, not as its president, but as one of the spokesmen. As a result of my involvement, teachers in that community, who were, when I arrived there, not receiving equal pay and they had not equal pay when I left, however, their salary improved and increased tremendously.

P: Did they file a lawsuit?

L: No, they did not have to because at that time somebody else had filed a lawsuit.

[End of side **A1**]

L: The most outstanding black church in the Augusta community was the Churchman County.

P: How did you get that. I mean that is quite an assignment?

L: It was and I have to say again it was providential. To be very truthful, I am trying to put it all together, a friend of my father's was pastoring in Augusta when that church became vacant. I asked my father if the man knew that I was in the ministry if I might not be interesting in taking a church. Well I was not, not at that moment. That gets us back to Reverend Borders and his advice. So the church invited me to come down a few Sundays and just speak to them. That idea, not even dreaming that they would extend the call and subsequently they did extend the call. I remained on the faculty for Morehouse for a little while through the summer.

P: Even though you were in Augusta?

L: Yes, I was commuting. I was in Augusta on Sunday and back in Atlanta on Sunday evening. Ready for class on Monday morning.

P: Were you married to your wife at this time?

L: No, I was single. Footloose and fancy-free as the saying goes. I was not married. I got married in Augusta, I guess it was about 1947 that I got married. She was a schoolteacher and a musician in Augusta, she taught senior high and music, a graduate of **Paine** College in Augusta, Georgia.

P: When you came to Tampa, did your wife teach as well here?

L: Yes, she taught here until she retired. She taught music.

P: Do you know at what school?

L: Edison, and there is one other school. Two schools.

P: That is Edison Junior High, I believe?

L: No, it was Edison Elementary School and there was one other. The name I do not recall.

P: How did you then come to Tampa from Augusta, Georgia?

L: Almost the same way. I did not tell you, of course, that we had a segregated police department in Augusta. I became deeply involved in the fight to get representation. It was just as it was in Tampa, we were successful, but the police would only arrest the black people when they were able to arrest white people.

P: These were the black police?

L: The white police officers.

[Break in interview]

P: I just turned the tape recorder back on. I was last asking you about how you came to Tampa from Augusta?

L: That is almost repetition from my going to Morehouse College to teach and the Tabernacle Church. Each instance there was a recommendation from an acquaintance of my dad's, with the exception of Morehouse College that was a recommendation that came from one of my previous professors. In this instance, that is referring to my coming to Tampa, which I had no dream of ever doing, never coming to Florida, not ever. Their was, in Miami, a friend of my dad's by

the name of **Edward T. Graham** who had been involved in Urban League work in New York and had been a professional football player and during his time in New York, Ed met my dad and they became very close friends. So when Beulah Baptist Church became vacant, Ed did not know me personally. He knew my dad, and in talking my name surfaced and my father said maybe my son will go down to Florida and maybe just preach and maybe he might like it. All of this was done without consulting me.

P: As fathers will often do.

L: Yes. Then I got this invitation in 1955 to come to preach at Beulah Baptist Church, indicating that they were searching for a pastor. I came down and I preached and they said well, you will hear from us.

P: So, you were interested then in possibly coming down and teaching here?

L: I would have to say yes. It seemed to have possibilities. I did not make up my mind. As I was about to say, they were talking also with a former schoolmate of mine who was pastoring in New Jersey, he was going to move from the North to the South and he was interested in doing that. I had not even considered that.

P: So you ministers are a bunch of vagabonds almost? Traveling across the country from place to place?

L: Yes, from town to town, place to place, meandering, wandering and so on, until you find, perhaps, the little niche where you will fit permanently. I came down, as I said, and preached. My experience, as I had preached at other churches that were vacant, that when the deacon said to you, you will hear from us, you never took that seriously, because they say that all the time and you never hear from them again. So I did not take it seriously, just with a grain of salt and forgot about it. Other offers came subsequently and I had those to toy around with. Anyway, about September or October of that year, 1955, I got a letter from this church written by the chairman of Deacons indicating to me that they had a church meeting and were extending me a call to become their minister. That was surprising and shocking and they wanted to know when I would come down to talk with them. So I indicated that perhaps some time in November, and I did. We held a meeting, it turned out to be a little stormy because there were some things that I was advancing in terms of what I thought that the church ought to be doing.

P: Like what, do you remember some of the details?

L: Yes, moving their old sanctuary or rebuilding. You would have had to have seen it to understand why I said that. Plus the fact that the city was experiencing some downtown expansion, parking was almost negligible, there was very little

parking. No parking lot for the church. They had maybe a lot some 100 feet long and approximately 25 or 30 feet wide. So you can imagine the number of cars that could get on that lot. All the other parking that had to be done on the street and the city was moving them to an off-street parking lot. There was no room for expansion and the church's program, as I looked at it, no social outreach. Of course, I was, at the time, more socially active than I am now in terms of trying to break down the barriers. Then internal things in the church, such as an accountant to take care of the books and setting up a system. A youth program, which they did not have. Recreational opportunities for children and then stressing, education. They were interested, but going beyond just a high school level. those are the things that I presented.

P: Going beyond the high school level?

L: Many of them were not. Although we had in the church, but the program had no program as such to encourage youngsters to move on from high school into college. For many of them, high school was the end. That does not mean to say that everybody in the church felt like that, but there was no specific program such as we have today to encourage people to continue. Then real estate. they were not interested in real estate, so to speak. I said, well, this is not sufficient in attaining more property. You cannot expand unless you get the property.

P: As a result of this stormy meeting, did you have second thoughts or were you able to iron it out?

L: Yes, I immediately said, you do not need me, you need somebody else. However, the congregation, those individuals who were objecting did not represent the majority, just a small minority. Really behind that, the hidden agenda and the hidden motive was their feeling that I would become the individual who would have the power and whatever I said would be approved by the congregation. During the interim between the death of their pastor and the call to me, the deacons became the moving power and the force and so here we have now, a power struggle developing. It did go on for a while after I came, but eventually the congregation rose up and said, we are not going to have that. We have the leadership that we want and we are looking forward to making progress and said you folks will have to get in-line with the program. That goes on in churches today unfortunately. It is not relegated to black churches only, you find it all across the whole spectrum of religion in America.

P: Despite this power tension between you and the deacons, you decided to come anyway?

L: Yes, because the majority of the people voted and said that you are the person we want.

P: Was this before you had actually come to the meeting that they had already voted?

L: They had a special meeting to determine and I said to them that I accept your call with these provisos here. These are the things. they had nothing to do, really, with money. there were some things that I should have said in terms of the fringe benefits, such as retirement, insurance, etc. Which I did not, and I regret that I did not, however, I will be able to manage anyway after retirement. In that particular time, I saw a situation, I saw potential. I did not see this where we are now, it was in the back of my mind.

P: You hope for something like this.

L: Yes, I had a dream that something like this would happen and it did.

P: It sure did.

L: And many other things occurred.

P: When you were down here in Tampa for that meeting, did you speak before the congregation, as well?

L: Yes, I did.

P: So you had that meeting with the deacons, there was a little bit of tension.

L: There was a little hiatus.

P: The you went and spoke before the congregation and they voted that they wanted you.

L: Yes, that is right. That was during the week. I remained over until Sunday and preached at the congregation. Then I went back to Augusta and I had to resign from _____. I still had time, however, to decide whether I wanted to make to move or not and during the interim, prior to my actual moving here, a number of Florida ministers and some people in Augusta talked with me and they felt that it was a good move. **Reverend Graham** who had done the recommending...

P: The fellow from Miami who knew your dad.

L: Yes, said that it is an opportunity of your life, take it.

P: And it was.

L: It was. You are exactly right. I have to say today that it was providential. Being a religious person, I would have to say that God directed me, even though there

were others, and He speaks through others, and those experiences prior to were experiences preparing me for my ministry here in Tampa. Getting ready. Even the teaching step at Morehouse and those nine years in Augusta, all preparatory experiences for this which will end as far as my actual passage is concerned, perhaps around December or January.

P: So you are planning to retire?

L: Yes I am.

P: After how many years would it have been then?

L: 37 years here.

P: Do you know who will succeed you?

L: Not at this moment. We are just getting ready to put certain things in place. We do have the criteria, it is part of our constitution, but organizing, what you call a pastoral search committee, and I am having some fun there because so many people want to be a part of it and you cannot have a big committee, because it gets bulky and unyielding. I would have too many differences of opinion, so it has to be a small committee.

P: I assume you are going to be on the committee yourself?

L: If they ask me to serve, I will do so, other than that, I will not.

P: Do you still plan to be active here?

L: No, I will live in Tampa. I will not participate as far as any official acts may be concerned. Only if the minister who comes in makes the request.

P: Why is that, are you just sensitive?

L: I think that if he is pastor, he should be given a free hand to move in whatever direction the spirit of God guides and leads him. What is being talked about, currently, is that I remain as senior pastor and bring in someone to work under me. Preach when I feel like it and go on with other things.

P: Are you entertaining that at all?

L: I do not know and as I think about it and contemplate it, It could work, but as I look at it, were I a younger man, I would want to feel that I had the authority to go ahead and pastor. I have had my education, and that is a part of the criteria, I have some experience to put my own ideas into practice without having to ask

somebody, other than his counseling with the deacon board and the trustees. That is the way I feel about it.

P: So you are in Tampa, it is 1956, you have just given your first sermon on the first day of 1956. When you came here you indicated before that when you had moved from Atlanta to Augusta, that you found that Augusta was lagging. How did you find the Tampa scene in terms of civil rights, was it lagging behind Atlanta and was it lagging behind Augusta?

L: It was lagging behind Atlanta, of course, but not behind Augusta. You had a similar situation.

P: Similar to Augusta?

L: That is correct.

P: How would you describe it.

L: In segregation. There was segregated school, segregated lunch counters, segregated hospital, segregated buses, everything, restaurants. In fact, there were restaurants in which black people did not go. They did not enter, only as maids, or busboys, or waiters and that was it. Segregated beach. There was no beach in Augusta, but they had parks and they were segregated and so were the parks here and the beaches. So you had a similar kind of thing. Education, certainly was not equal, you had instances where the white high schools would send their used football uniforms to the two black high schools. Library books which had been used, the same thing. Fully equipped laboratories for Biology, science laboratories. So you had a similar situation. Of course, you did have segregated schools in Atlanta to be fair you had that, but you had people who were more actively participating in politics in Atlanta then you have here. You had a University Center there that was more of a cultural kind of environment. They had an educational more cultural environment and more politically-minded than the people here.

P: Some of the older newspaper articles that I showed you indicates, you came here in 1956.

L: That is correct.

P: And shortly thereafter you were considered one of the leaders of the black community. There are a lot of ministers here in Tampa and there were a lot of ministers back then, there were a lot of prominent businessmen and doctors and attorneys, not a lot of attorneys, but a couple of attorneys.

L: There were just three attorneys.

P: **Rodriguez, Fordham, and Jackson.** How did you become considered a leader of the black community so quickly?

L: I suppose it was my outspokenness. I did not believe in segregation. I did not like the manner, or the way in which people were being treated, so I spoke about it.

P: Where?

L: In my church or wherever I went. I talked about those kind of things. There were meetings to which I went.

P: What sort of organizations did you join?

L: NAACP, primarily, The Baptist Ministers Conference and then we organized the Ministerial Alliance composed of other denominations.

P: Including some white ministers?

L: None at that time.

P: Did you invite white ministers though?

L: Yes, but you know that was a no-no even though we all, religious individuals, we are all the leaders of people. It would appear that the ministers who certainly were acquainted with the Bible and the teachings of Jesus Christ, which were certainly not counted in segregation or prejudice, things of that nature, they worked ____ many of they opposed this in their congregations and many of them believed, as their members believed, they came out of the same background and they had that same philosophy separate, the races had no reason to get together. They could not see and even today in 1993, there are some that are still over there in that conservative side. So being outspoken and I would not ride a bus, I would not put my hand in the window at Woolworth's or any of those stores to eat a hamburger.

P: You would not patronize them at all?

L: Not at all, none.

P: Did you make it known that you would not patronize them?

L: Absolutely.

P: Would you encourage other people not to patronize them?

- L: That is what I did. Not even to buy automobiles from those agencies that did not have toilet facilities for blacks and where there were no black automobile salesmen, and there were none. If you wanted to work for an automobile dealership here, you would bring the person in and they give you what they would call the bird-dog fee, maybe 25 or 50 dollars. As far as any commission above that, you could forget it. That is the way it was. The only thing you could do at the telephone company is to be a maid or a janitor, at the banks the same thing until we got Community Federal Savings and Loan.
- P: Until you got what?
- L: Community Federal Savings and Loan Association, a black financial institution. But first it was in Hillsborough County in Tampa.
- P: When was this?
- L: We got that one 23 years ago.
- P: That would have been 1970.
- L: About that, yes. It came at the tail-end of our civil rights demonstrations and the bars were let down.
- P: Is that organization still around?
- L: No, unfortunately, that is a different story. What happened to that has happened to many white institutions where the manager of the bank, unfortunately, did some things that were illegal and we lost eight million dollars in six months. He is doing 35 years in federal prison.
- P: You probably knew him personally?
- L: I had met him about two years prior to the demise of the organization.
- P: What was his name, incidentally? Do you remember the name of this gentleman who fleeced the bank?
- L: **Leonard Garrett**. He was not by himself, there were three others involved with him by the names of **Joe Coppola**, a fellow by the name of **Bazzouli** and one other, I cannot remember his name.
- P: To go back to the 1950s, when you came here. You indicated that you did not have a lot of support from white churches.
- L: No.

- P: How did you find the other black leaders, were they pretty progressive or were they somewhat accommodating or a little bit of both?
- L: They were accommodated. I guess there were reasons for so doing. They were not outspoken, I guess it was a matter of survival in their business. They had acclaimed a relationship with white people, quasi-social and business and so on. They did not want to rock the boat. it was the status-quo. So they did not participate in what we were doing and what happened, happened as a result of the young people, the teenagers. You should have the name **LaFayette** mentioned there, and there were others.
- P: **Barnard LaFayette** is who you are referring to.
- L: Yes, he is now president of the American Baptist Theological School in Nashville. Well-trained, well-educated. So you had young people and what had happened in North Carolina and what was happening in Alabama. These things soon spoke to people in other areas.
- P: Are you referring to the sit-ins?
- L: Yes.
- P: Did you find the black community after Little Rock in 1957 and the Montgomery bus boycott in the late 1950s, did you find the black community here in Tamps more radicalized, more impatient?
- L: I would say that only the young people. I would have to assume that in the minds, the hearts and the souls of the older black people there was a desire. There was a hope for things to change. I do not think that they, even though they seem to have accepted ____ was going on, I cannot say and do not believe that they appreciated or enjoyed the position in which they found themselves. The young people are more **persiferous**, more outspoken. I guess many of the older people thought that they had more to lose than the young people. It was surprising to me that so many of them permitted their children to become involved, they themselves did not but they permitted their children to become involved and that is strange because it would appear that they would be more protective of their children, but they did not prevent the hands of their children from becoming involved, and it was the children who were my followers.
- P: When you say your followers and you talk about them becoming involved, are you referring to the sit-in movement in Tampa in the early 1960s?
- L: Absolutely, yes. They were the ones who exercised courage and who fought for that freedom.

- P: A quick note about **C. Blythe Andrews**, the editor of the black newspaper, The Florida Sentinel. I have read some of his articles and columns and he seemed to be somewhat critical of the white structure.
- L: You mean currently or back then?
- P: Back in the 1950s.
- L: That was the father.
- P: The father, yes.
- L: He had that newspaper and he did quite a bit through the paper. he was critical, not radically so, but he was and he was supported because he eventually became as one of the outstanding blacks in the community, a member of our committee.
- P: What committee is that?
- L: That is the Commission of Community Relations, that was the official name, that was bi-racial.
- P: What was it called?
- L: Commission of Community Relations.
- P: Was this formed after the Brown decision or do you know when it was formed?
- L: Yes, during the sit-in demonstrations here in Tampa.
- P: It was formed in the 1960s, not the 1950s?
- L: Right. It was an outgrowth of what was going on.
- P: When you came and, you were active in the NAACP, you were active in the civil rights movement, you did not have a lot of support from the white churches?
- L: No.
- P: Did you have support from, or did you have any opposition from other black churches and ministers of other denominations who did not like this young up-start coming in here and becoming so prominent?
- L: You have to say that some of that they taught

- P: Could I ask you to repeat that answer about opposition from black ministers?
- L: Nothing overt or deliberate attempt to sidetrack what we were doing, but no participation on their part. No active participation. They felt that a minister had no right to be involved in those kinds of things.
- P: They are, after all, secular activities.
- L: That is right, and I considered it a part of my responsibility as a minister to look out for my people. If you were experiencing a denial of our rights and our freedom, that the minister who was a fierce person in the community, who did not have to rely on the white community directly, who was supported by his people, was the person to become involved. To me the gospel had a social aspect and anything that had to do with the life, the livelihood of people, the minister had a responsibility to become involved in that. other than that, I do not see how he could preach a full, true gospel with people in bondage and in slavery.
- P: Were you a member of the Progressive Voter's League?
- L: No.
- P: Were you a member of the Democratic party here?
- L: Yes, I was a Democrat.
- P: Was there any sort of auxiliary black Democratic group at that time?
- L: Maybe quasi. I did not even bother too much with it because I knew where they were and where they were coming from, and they would not have been in favor of what we were doing.
- P: How about some of Tampa's mayors, I believe in the late 1950s, Mayor **Nick Nucio** was around?
- L: Yes, it was under Mayor Nucio that the Commission of Community Relations became a part of city government.
- P: Are you sure that was not under **Julian Lane**?
- L: Nucio, under him then, later Lane came. Lane succeeded Nucio and Lane was not a bad mayor, although, he was opposed to anything of this nature and it took him by surprise.
- P: When you say anything of this nature, what are you referring to?

L: That is associating with black people. He knew black people, but not in an intimate manner, only from the point of view of the master or the boss worker or employee.

P: Did you meet and get to know any of these mayors?

L: Yes, I came to know Nuccio quite well and Lane, even better. Actually, Lane and I became pretty close friends.

P: Mayor Nuccio was in the late 1950s.

L: Yes, a good mayor. He knew how to play politics.

P: Did he do anything for the black community that you can think of?

L: Not really, in terms of changing anything, he was not anti-black. He put in sidewalks and benches, but nothing to point to say that he brought about any affective change in the political climate or the social climate.

P: Lane on the other hand, was mayor during the early 1960s, when the sit-ins began.

L: Right. that took him by surprise. He did not even contemplate being confronted with this kind of situation and I guess it shocked him somewhat, but he learned how to accommodate and learned how to deal with it. I remember a group of us went to his office one day, unannounced and he was just knocked off his feet surprised, but he was not discourteous. He accepted us. Nuccio would have accepted us, but prior to Nuccio...

P: **Hixson**, I think?

L: Yes, I did not know him, but from what I have been told, that you would have to sit out in the hallway. You could not go into the mayor's office if you were black.

P: That is Mayor **Curtiss Hixson**?

L: That is correct.

P: With Lane, when you said that you surprised him with a group of people, this probably would have been in 1960, right?

L: Right, in the 1960s, yes.

P: But would it be the year 1960, because I think that was the year of the sit-ins?

L: Right, it would have to be that year and if not it would have to be late in 1959, but 1960 would be more likely of a year.

P: Tell me about the sit-ins. I know that when the four students sat in at a lunch counter in Greensborough, North Carolina, in 1960, that spread throughout the country.

L: It did.

P: And it spread to Tampa and some of the articles I have show that it came to Tampa in 1960, as well.

L: Right.

P: Can you tell me about that because you are listed in the newspaper articles as one of the spokesmen and leaders of this?

L: Right. What happened in Alabama and North Carolina triggered that movement across the country, came to Tampa, the young people were interested in trying to do something. They needed leadership, but had no adult, even NAACP members. I think there was a bit of fear on the part of people. There was going to be violence and there could have been very easily, but there again, Mayor Lane put his foot down and said that there would be no violence. We were not unprotected. All due respect to him, whether or not he believed in what we were doing, I do not think he did at first although I cannot look into his heart or his mind but I do not think he necessarily did. He did not deny us the right to peacefully protest, so we had police protection all along. Our place of organization was in Saint Paul's _____ Church in Harrison Street. Every evening or afternoon, after school, the young people would meet me there. We would have prayer and we organized and I would say to them, now this is going to be an orderly protest. You will carry no knives or anything that resembles a weapon.

P: In terms of the leadership, this was at St.Paul's, was the St.Paul's minister at the time, helping out as well.

L: We were permitted to meet there, but he was not involved.

P: He was not involved. How about **Bob Saunders**, was he helping out at all?

L: _____ was his secretary, but Bob was not actually out there with me. He was present not too far away. But as for actually leading the kids, he was not participating in that.

P: How about another civil rights leader, perhaps a little later, **Bob Gilder**?

L: That was much later.

P: That was much later, okay. Was there anyone helping you with these kids?

L: Only the Lord.

P: How many kids were there?

L: I cannot recall now, maybe pretty close to 100 kids.

P: Mainly high schoolers?

L: Mostly. A few from junior high and one or two elementary, but most of them were high school youngsters, a few of them are around today. They are scattered all across this country. They were the ones who carried the baton. There were there and they were very obedient, they were very mannerable. The reaction on the part of the workers in these stores was unbelievable. The profanity and the hate. You could just feel it.

P: What stores here in Tampa, did you do this?

L: **Grant's**, Woolworth's, Newberry's, those were the downtown stores.

P: They eventually...

L: Capitulated, all of them.

P: Was there were behind the scenes negotiations?

L: Yes, subsequently. The Downtown Merchants Association headed by _____ **Armstrong**, with the Commission of Community Relations, was years apart. We met in the boardroom of their old exchange national bank. The merchants came in because business was off. People were afraid to come downtown because they thought perhaps a riot might take place and they did not want to be injured. Part of the capitulation resulted from the loss of income, because it had an economic impact. Merchants came to hear what we were saying and we talked about what we desired and what we wanted. At that initial meeting, they did not respond to our request. I became very frustrated and said that I would not go to another meeting. It was then that **Mr. Bob Thomas**, who was a member of our commission said no, Reverend, do not leave, they are listening to what you have to say and it will turn out alright. The next meeting, they came prepared to act and at that time we decided our strategy, how we would go about it. So we decided that we would pick couples from the black community and we would talk with them about approaching a situation, about tipping those kind of things. In

the meantime, the merchants talked with their employees about their behavior, attitudes and so forth. There was not one bad incident.

P: It was done quietly?

L: Very quietly, no gloating. No announcements in newspapers, was one of the things. Very quietly almost inconspicuously. Black would appear, they would be served, they would leave their tips and that was it. So that was the beginning, because then it expanded over into other areas.

P: Like?

L: Bus transportation.

P: Was busing segregated still at that time?

L: Same bus company that owned the bus company in Alabama, owned the bus company here in Tampa. It was a firm out of Chicago. We did not have to boycott the bus company. The plans were to do that, but we did not have to and what we were asking for was black bus drivers in the black community. They went a step further and said they will drive anywhere in the community and they did that. Some of the old bus drivers, most of them have passed away now, lived right across and still is but mentally he would not recall too much of that. There could be one other for whom I have lost track. There were five initially and no one bothered them.

P: They drove through where?

L: The entire community.

P: So before there was no bus service in the black community?

L: There was bus service, but all white drivers.

P: I see.

L: Now you have black bus drivers that drive all over the city and county.

P: So you negotiated with the bus company to get these black bus drivers?

L: Yes, they just came and offered. They did not want to go through what they had gone through in Alabama. They did not want to go through what the merchants downtown went through.

P: So they came and offered?

L: Yes sir.

P: To who, to you or to the NAACP?

L: To Mr. Saunders and I, we were representatives of the NAACP.

P: Were you the local head of the NAACP at this time?

L: Of the state.

P: So you were the head of the state NAACP, and this was in 1960-61.

L: Right.

P: How did you become the state head of the NAACP?

L: I do not know. I guess that is a result of being so outspoken.

P: During this time of the sit-ins, were the newspapers supportive in their editorials?

L: I do not really recall now and I will have to go to the morgue at Tampa Tribune, you may do some research in there. I would not say they were and I would not say they were not.

P: Did you have any white support for what you were doing?

L: Only the Commission of Community Relations, maybe one or two like the late, **Fred Wolf**.

P: Who is he?

L: He was a merchant downtown at Wolf Brothers establishment. One of the higher-priced clothing establishments for men in Tampa, one of the most outstanding. There might have been white people who were sympathetic, but we could not tell it at that time. I am sure there were but they were not overtly active, maybe behind the scenes they were talking.

P: How about the Urban League:

L: The Urban League stayed out of those kind of things, because its support came, much of it, from the white community. The Urban League was not anti-, but they could not actively participate.

P: How about the Ministerial Alliance?

- L: They were not out there. As I indicated before, the ministers thought that I was crazy and radical, but as time passed, they became more and more cooperative.
- P: How about the **John's Committee**. Did you have any experience with the John's Committee?
- L: Not really, Bob Saunders would know more about the John's Committee. My only experience as far as the state level was concerned is when we ordered to turn over all lists and names of NAACP members, which I refused to do. I was cited for contempt of court.
- P: You were cited?
- L: Yes.
- P: You were not arrested or anything?
- L: No. I walked out of the court. The reason for walking out is that I had a meeting in St. Petersburg that I needed to attend and the court was being held in Tallahassee. I refused to present any documents from the NAACP. The subpoena asked for all documents, etc. including names. I sent those to the home office, so they were not even in Florida and I went to Tallahassee empty-handed. I asked the judge to be excused and he refused. I walked out, took a plane and came on back to keep my appointment.
- P: You just walked right out of the court?
- L: Walked out of the courthouse.
- P: Did you get negative press for that?
- L: I do not even recall what the newspapers said. The judge did not bother me. Strangely enough, I cannot explain that. he did not send out a pick-up order or a bench warrant or anything. What I assumed was that some people who were white must have spoken to him or said something to him.
- P: So that was your brush with the John's Committee? This was a state judge in Tallahassee?
- L: A state judge in Tallahassee. His name was Judge Rudd as I recall. I think he still is, but that was not the John's Committee. Bob can fill you in on that particular thing.
- P: But it was the state trying to subpoena the records of the NAACP?

- L: Yes. the John's Committee might have been involved in that.
- P: Moving further on in the sixties, just a quick question about the sit-ins. Most of these people, you said, were young folks.
- L: Yes.
- P: Did they belong to the Youth Chapter of the NAACP?
- L: Exactly. Most of them, some of them did not.
- P: Was there a CORE chapter here or anything like that?
- L: Yes, there was a chapter.
- P: Of what?
- L: A youth chapter of the NAACP.
- P: How about of CORE (The Congress On Racial Equality)?
- L: They could not get in. No one seemed to be interested. In St. Petersburg, they did have a Congress On Racial Equality. Then SELC. But at that particular time, NAACP was the main organization in the thrust for freedom here in Tampa.
- P: Did any parents come up to you and criticize you and say I do not want my kids doing this?
- L: Not one, fortunately. They might have had some doubts, might have been a bit dubious, but they did not. Deep in their hearts, they knew it was right and I am sure that they prayed for their children. The very fact that they permitted their children to participate, suggests to me that they were in favor and as I said, there was no violence.
- P: Were there any arrests?
- L: Another group that we call a **sprinter group**, came involved in something at the Greyhound Bus Station, but they were not connected with the NAACP.
- P: Those were not really sit-ins, those were more like freedom rides though, right?
- L: They might have been. They were trying to stage a sit-in. they were Tampan's, but they were the only ones. We had no arrests. not one of the youngsters was bothered. now, the only person who they tried to intimidate was me.
- P: Who is they?

L: I would have to say the bigoted white. they never really showed their hands, that I could put my hands on a fellow and say he or she, but we know that they were there. Let me give you an instance. One morning, it was a Saturday morning, I do not recall the month, I was downtown at one of the stores and of course I moved from store to store. I had lieutenants, youngsters, who were left in charge of this lunch counter, this lunch counter and this lunch counter. So, I moved from store to store to oversee what was going on. this particular morning, there was a fellow following me. I did not even know that he was doing that. He had on a coat which was kind of strange that time of the year to have on a long coat, like a rain coat or a trench coat. As I moved around the store, he would move around. As I exited the store, I heard someone say, just a minute. I turned and he was not talking to me, he was speaking to this white fellow, a police officer and they had been observing you. He got a baseball bat under that coat and what he was trying to do is get close enough to me to use that bat. Whether or not they arrested him, I do not know. But the police said to me later on, you need to go home, we will take care of them, we will watch out for the kids.

P: So the police were not hostile, the official police force?

L: No, the mayor had given them his word.

P: I am sorry, he had given them his word?

L: That is right, because there was to be no violence.

P: So given the student's word, when you say them.

L: No, given the police. they were there to protect us.

P: I see.

L: They had their word and they did that. I must say that whether they liked it or not, they did it. Also the mayor went a step further. He saw to it that I got protection. Our church then was located downtown and old lights surrounded the church at night and I would park my car in the parking lot. Police officers came to check the car to see that it had not been wired. I was told not to leave the building without first of all, calling the police station when I was ready to leave. So I could have that protection. I got that. The other thing that occurred was shooting into my home. One night during the sit-in demonstrations, shots were fired into the master bedroom.

P: Bullets?

L: Bullets. 45-Caliber slugs. Three shots were fired. Again you would have to assume that they were out to silence me because I was the spokesman.

P: Did you have kids at the time in the house?

L: My sons?

P: Yes.

L: Yes, my wife and children and a guest from Philadelphia. I had just walked through the hall. It was about 3 o'clock in the morning.

P: This was in 1960, I assume?

L: Yes, about that. During the sit-in demonstrations. that is in the papers somewhere in the morgue.

P: Were you scared, were you frightened?

L: Angry. I was not scared I was just angry.

P: You had heard of more.

L: Yes.

P: How about frightened? How about you wife, was she frightened?

L: Yes, I called my dad in New York and he came down first thing and he said, you have got to get out of this place, you cannot stay here. I said to him, no, I am not going anywhere. I am not running.

P: Did you carry a gun with you at all?

L: Yes.

P: In your house, or on you in person?

L: I had it for a while in my car. then I made the decision that I did not need that.

P: So you took it home?

L: I left it in the house. When that shooting occurred that night and the police came in, I had gotten all these rifles and shot guns that I owned. I still own them, but I only use them for recreation, hunting and so forth or target shooting. then another night, we had a threat and the person said he represents the Klan and he was coming out and so I got all the stuff out and called the police department and got all this stuff out here. They said you have an arsenal out here Reverend. I said yes. They said, do you know how to use it? I said, oh, yes, I know how to use it. Then another thing happened, brother, fellows in the community, as you

would ordinarily think were trifling, no-good, bums, fellows who were looking for hand-outs. They got together, organized and decided that they would be my protectors. So they were all around the house. They said when you go to bed, you and your family, just put a coffee urn out there for us and they surrounded the place.

P: How long did they do this for?

L: Maybe about two weeks.

P: This was shortly after the attempt.

L: That is right.

P: The shots into your home?

L: That is right. So they said, let them come back, we will be waiting and they were. We never had that again, so that spoke well for them. The other incidence was out at the beach, on the ____-Campbell Causeway. A group of us had gone out there that day to swim.

P: Was this an all-negro beach at that time, or was it not integrated?

L: It was non-integrated.

P: So there were segregated beaches still?

L: Yes, sir. We went out there and shortly thereafter a chuckload of whites. When I say chuckload of whites, I mean that, that is not a figurative statement. A chuckload of white fellows came out to that beach and there were white women of course on the beach and children and so forth and they were cursing us, all kinds of foul words. The fellows on the truck were armed with lead pipes and galvanized pipes, sawed about two-foot lengths. The purpose was to beat the niggers and run them off the beach. About five minutes after they arrived and before they could get themselves together, police were there and somebody had informed the mayor and those policemen were there and we were not molested. The only thing that happened is that we were cursed by one or two of the white women. We did not know that white women could be so un-ladylike.

P: So these were white women too, also cursing at you?

L: Yes.

P: Had you crashed this white beach then?

L: Yes.

P: O.K., because this was a segregated beach and so you had crashed this beach and so they were coming?

L: That is right.

P: Did you stay there, since you were not forced off?

L: For a few minutes and then we left. We had succeeded in doing what we started out to do and that was the end of that. We went on.

P: Do you remember when that was?

L: It was in the 1960s. I do not remember the exact day or date.

P: Early 1960s, mid 1960s, late 1960s?

L: Early.

[Break in tape]

P: I just turned it back on, I think it is working now. I was asking you before about black power and black militancy. We saw it in Chicago, in New York, in Washington towards the end of the 1960s. Did we also see it in Tampa?

L: NO, we did not. There were some young people who were interested in the **Brown Carmichael** movement and felt that we were moving too slowly. They had become more radical and even using force and even using force in order to get what we were seeking. My son was one who thought that we were accommodating too much to the white power structure. Our reputing was that that was not the way to go about achieving any permanent solution to our problem, buy violence was not the answer. That is certainly the philosophy of Martin Luther King. It is far better to go slower and maybe longer, but certainly, more lasting, more durable. So it did not come to Tampa, there was a semblance of it in St. Petersburg, but not in Tampa.

[End of side **A2**]

L: I heard about a young man who is allegedly involved in a theft.

P: The Chamber's boy?

L: The Chamber's boy and down around that project just a little bit removed from the downtown commercial area of Tampa, there is a public housing project.

Chambers and some others lived in that particular area. Chambers' was allegedly involved in stealing. He and perhaps one or two other youngsters. Chambers ran from the police that sought to apprehend him and started to climb a wire fence and in the process of climbing that fence, he was shot in the back.

P: Do you remember what you were doing when you heard about the riot?

L: I might have been over at the old church in the office working. That brought about a sense of anger on the part of the blacks in that community that erupted into a riot.

P: Three days, I believe.

L: Yes, and it was only in that area of the community, Central Avenue, which was the main black street near downtown. Many, many black businesses were located on that street and a few old family grocery stores owned by Hispanics or Italians.

P: Were a lot of these black businesses...

L: They all were destroyed, burned, looted, all confined to that area. Very little of it spilled over into any other areas. A little bit in **Ybor City**, but just a minimal, but in that area it was just destruction.

P: Did you try to stop it?

L: No, that is where **Jim Hammond** came in and **Bob Gilder** and they pleaded with the fellows and out of that group came what was known as the White Hats. Some of the fellows who were participated in the actual burning and so forth were recruited and they became the leaders who were conversant with others in their group and they were able to bring about a calmness.

P: They were like deputized?

L: Right and they wore white hats, actually.

P: Given to them by the city?

L: That is right and they did an excellent job.

P: So it was a little bit of psychology used to make them feel important.

L: That was it.

P: In 1974, you were elected to the Hillsborough County School Board, and thus became the first elected black official in the history of Hillsborough County. There are a few questions I have about your race. Who were you running against to begin with?

L: There were three whites running. Their names are long since forgotten.

P: Were you endorsed by the newspapers?

L: Yes, peculiarly enough, I had obtained name identification, had become well-known by all sections of the community. How I came to offer one of the school board members who was running for the Senate, her name was **Pat Frank**.

P: The state senate?

L: Yes, she came to see me and she suggested that I ought to or should run for the school board. There should be some black representation.

P: Really, Pat Frank did that?

L: Yes, she did that. So I thought about it and I talked to a few people and they thought it was a good idea and so we began to organize and set-up campaign headquarters and so forth to qualify and went around the community. We had pretty good support and I was surprised by people in the outlying communities. Heretofore a black would not feel safe in going out into those areas talking about running for a public office.

P: Where was your district?

L: District 5, which included everything south of Columbus Drive, including all the way to Davis Island.

P: Was this the majority black district.

L: No, the majority of the district was white.

P: So you had to get white support?

L: I had white support. We had about 8,000 black votes and about 30,000 whites.

P: 8,000 black votes and 30,000 white votes. So you could not have won it without white votes?

L: Not hardly.

P: You were able to get these white votes?

L: Yes, strangely enough. It is amazing even today, that a change was taking place in the community, the attitude of people that one could not have told it just looking, but it was a surprising thing and a great thing for the city of Tampa and the county.

P: Was there a lot of excitement in the black community when this was happening?

L: Yes, there was. Many blacks did not believe it was going to happen, but it did.

P: **La Gazeta**, the Spanish newspaper, **Roland Monteago**, was the editor of it. Did he support you?

L: I had the support of every white paper and certainly the black paper. *The Times*, *The Tribune* and *La Gazeta* and many other little, community papers, plus *The Sentinel*. In fact, I always had the support of *The Sentinel*, whether they believe in my position or not, they supported me.

P: Is there any event from that 1974 race that sticks in your mind? Like when Pat Frank came and spoke to you. I mean, did you expect this, had you even contemplated running?

L: Not at all. I had thought about it maybe some years prior to that, but some blacks said, no, you will never _____. So, I forgot about it and then Miss Frank came and made the suggestion.

P: Did you get a lot of support from the other black churches in the community.

L: I sure did, they supported me.

P: How about financial support from the black community?

L: I got that and quite a bit from the white community.

P: Who was your campaign manager?

L: I do not even recall and that is a part of history and I do not even know if I can say who was the campaign manager. Bob Gilder.

P: Bob Gilder, really?

L: Yes. Bob Gilder.

P: How long did you serve on the school board?

L: Sixteen years on the school board.

P: From 1974 to 1990.

L: 1992, It was last year. I came off in November.

P: So that is more than sixteen years, though, isn't it?

L: It was almost sixteen, I had four terms. So that is sixteen. You may have the wrong year for beginning.

P: Might it have been 1976 then?

L: 1976.

P: Not 1974?

L: Not 1974.

P: So I m going to have to go back and correct all the times I referred to it as 1974.

L: That is right, it is 1976.

P: What special contribution do you think you made to the school board?

L: I do not know specifically, but one of the things that I recall being there when issues were being discussed. So that the black point of view could be expressed. I think that could be considered a contribution that heretofore, there was no black presence and if there was anything that the administration would attempt to do that would be anti-black or anti-minority would not be so easily or readily done because they knew that there was a black presence there that they had to contend with.

P: Perhaps, in the case of busing, they made sure that they had to bus some whites as well as some blacks?

L: That occurred before I got on the board. the busing, not that I agreed with it, but I was not anti-busing, because it gave blacks an opportunity to be exposed to that which they had not been exposed previously and I did not feel that busing was all-bad. It might not have accomplished all that was desired and I thought that perhaps blacks gave away too much. That was my thinking. That it proved more of a burden on blacks, there are to pay for that which they should not have had to pay for in terms of travelling long, long distances and could not go to school in their own neighborhood for the purpose of integration but I think it did serve a good purpose in the long run.

P: At this point, we are fast-approaching the end of the interview and there are just two more areas. One is some areas dealing with class in the black community prior to integration, during the days of segregation and I finally want to quiz you a little bit about some of the people that you knew. You knew a lot of interesting people, **Wilkins, Paul Robeson, Dubois** and so forth, so that is all we have to do.

L: O.K.

P: We are jumping back from the 1970s and today, with your career on the school board, back to the 1950s. During the 1950s, would you say that the black middle class tried to distinguish themselves and set themselves apart from others in the community? That is something which classes tend to do by the very notion of class that they tend to set themselves apart with some sort of identity?

L: That did occur. I guess there was some subtlety there, I just did not associate the haves, as we have indicated before, associated with those who had. I think families that had become outstanding did not necessarily associate with the other part of the community. They might have benefitted, and they did. Where you had black doctors and those people like that and not all of them but were looking down their nose at people. There were some that came out of the community originally, having been poor and so on. But there was that dividing line, nothing that was deliberately drawn, but we just did not associate with those people. What does it say something about family messages associated with nobody but one other family there. I cannot remember that expression, but that is the way it was, they just did not have that association. There were people in the community who were just workers and they had very little and they lived in the houses that we would consider slums and so forth. There were others that moved up and when they moved up they moved out. We have had black flight in Tampa, not just white flight, we have had black flight. There are many blacks in this community that I do not know today, that they do not live in the black community. Recently, I built a very nice home _____. I had a question put to me, why would you build a house like that in this community? My response was that if we ever expect the black community, where black people live in majority, to be able to move up and have that property valued at a higher level than it is currently valued, we have got to put some nice homes in those communities. You say we are over-building, yes. I have had people to come and say thank you and as a result of my house being where it is those around have tried to do better for their yards, they have painted them and cleaned them and so those are the kinds of things that we had ought to do and certainly if you are going to have an appraisal. They talk about comparable values and so to get comparable values, say for a house like mine, you have to go to **Carol Wood**, you would have to go to **Brandon**, where you are talking about 100,000 or 200,000 or 300,000 dollar houses. We should have those kinds of houses in the black

community. There are those of us, who have not moved out, like **Dr. W.W. Andrews**, like **Clarence Wilson**, like the late **Dr. Taylor Bright**, we have remained in the black community and Bob Gilder.

P: Like Andrews?

L: W.W. Andrews.

P: Who is that?

L: That is the brother to the present publisher of The Sentinel.

P: I see. What does he do?

L: He is a surgeon and an excellent and one of the most outstanding in the community.

P: Is he a member of your church as well?

L: Yes, he is a member.

P: He might be a good person to interview perhaps.

L: He might talk to you.

P: What I am trying to focus on is not the black flight that occurred subsequently, even though I think that is very important. I am interested in the way things were just prior to integration, when segregation was still alive in the black community and where blacks could not have the option of moving out to Carol Wood and Brandon. During this time, you seem to believe that there was class division, that there was, as you might say, a line of demarkation, but you say that it is very subtle.

L: I think so. It was not anything. You could say that people are deliberately doing it, yes. It had to be deliberate, but they just did not associate.

P: Were there certain clubs that one group belonged to and another group did not belong to?

L: Yes, I do not remember all of those. There were some people in the community who would organize their own little groups. Little political groups and so forth and those groups got favors from the politicians and that is the extent of it. On the other hand, there were those blacks in the community who frowned on that kind of thing and called those other people that they were looking around for hand-

outs, that kind of thing, they did not approve of that. They would not associate with those individuals. There always was a number of those little things around.

P: How about the **Lily Whites**?

L: That was a fraternal organization, more or less, something like the old burial associations dated way back where Mr. Andrews and prior to him it was **Dr. Reverend Potter** got people together burying and they gave so much for funerals. it was an association of people who would not otherwise have the kind of insurance that would be commensurate with what we need today.

P: It was also a social outlet too?

L: It was a social outlet, because it gave certain people a chance to move up and to head maybe certain lodges. It gave them a feeling of prestige and power. So you are exactly right, it did accomplish something, although some people would not join.

P: Why?

L: They felt that it was just one person's thing.

P: C. Blythe Andrews.

L: That is right, they could not hold. If they were educated and so forth, they felt they could not hold an office, that kind of feeling.

P: I do not understand, could you elaborate? I think I do understand, but I am going to ask you to elaborate on that a little bit.

L: They felt that they could not ever become president, exercise no particular control or influence because they said it was a one man thing. So they did not participate, they would not become a member.

P: I did speak to a **Calvin Bexley** previously, I do not really have this on tape, I do not think. He indicated that a lot of the educated people, even though C. Blythe Andrew was educated and some of the people who were at the very top were educated. He said that a lot of them, professionals, educated people kind of looked down at the Lily Whites.

L: They did, because of the reason that I mentioned that I mentioned that people who members were not what you call, highly educated few. Most of them were just the rank-and-file. What we sometimes refer to as the Indians. Those people were looking certainly for upward mobility. They were looking for prestige, they wanted to belong in other words. So here is something with which they could be

identified. Were they could have certain offices and hold certain positions and express themselves. Although _____ was the person, whatever you say do, that was done. The only other place these people could voice there opinions is in the churches. The Lily Whites gave them an opportunity to be seen. They would have parades, they would have contests and that gave them a chance to be seen. The parades, certainly in public and the contests.

P: What kind of parades, just annual?

L: Annual parades like the Elks and the Shriners or something of that nature.

P: Would this take place on their special days, or special holidays?

L: Their special time when they met. I have forgotten, I think they met in April or whenever or wherever they met. They went from city to city.

P: So it was their own parade, specifically for them. it is not like they were marching in the Columbus Day Parade or anything like that.

L: No, that came later on.

P: So if this was a way for, lets use some of these terms even though we do not mean them in a derogatory way, but a way for lower middle class or lower class people to express themselves. What were some of the ways that middle class people, that professional blacks expressed themselves?

L: Through their fraternities and in their churches. Certain organizations they had.

P: Do you remember any of them?

L: I cannot recall, unfortunately. At their clubs or at their sororities and fraternities and of course, you would know, in order to become a member of a fraternity, you are supposed to be a college graduate. So they had all of these, the Thetas, the Sigmas, the Alphas, the KAs, Kappas, Omegas and all you could name and other fraternities and sororities that identified the so-called elite and these people mostly belonged to those and they had their parties, they had their other clubs where they gave contests for young people and cotillions and those kinds of things.

P: I am sorry.

L: Cotillions, balls where young ladies would be introduced to society.

P: Really?

- L: That is right, and they still have those things across this country. Young black women and it is a formal affair, quite formal. Young men wear tuxedos and the parents spend considerable funds to get evening gowns and so forth, for their daughters.
- P: Are these fraternity and sorority things or this is something else?
- L: Some of them were sponsored by fraternities and some by clubs, community clubs.
- P: Can you remember any of these sorts of...
- L: I cannot right off hand.
- P: Let me ask you this, if I was a young professional with a family moving into Tampa in 1955-56, and I wanted to be middle class and show that I was middle class, are there certain things that I would not do and certain things that I should try to do?
- L: Well, you try to find a church that you could identify with.
- P: Are you saying that churches were somewhat class-oriented?
- L: They could be so-considered. I hate to say it, but this church was considered as the elites in the black community because of its history and the people who were members here.
- P: Yes, you had a lot of prominent members.
- L: Those families that were members here.
- P: Could you name a few of these prominent members?
- L: The Andrews, the Hammonds, the Coles.
- P: The Coles with the barber shop thing?
- L: Yes, they were here. Those were among many other that I cannot even recall.
- P: What is another baptist church that would not be considered quite as accomplished.
- L: I do not want to get into trouble because all of them now have members that are affluent but at that particular time, the others were much smaller. We had First Baptist College Hill, you had Peace baptist, Mt.Zion, New Salem, I hate to classify churches and yet I am aware of the fact that this type of classism has

existed as far as churches are concerned. Certain churches people look up to as being prestigious, and others not so prestigious, unfortunately.

P: There were poor people in this church, though, right?

L: Oh, yes, this was started by poor people.

P: So when you came over and took over this church there were a lot of poor people in the congregation?

L: Indeed so.

P: But if you were rich, and there were poor people in other congregations too, right?

L: Yes.

P: Is it correct to say, though, that if you were rich, though, and educated and Baptist, you would probably want to go here.

L: The tendency, yes, would be. And if you were Methodist, perhaps, St.Paul AME Church.

P: Were there other Methodist churches too?

L: Yes, St. Paul, Alan Temple, they were considered among the the most outstanding **AME** churches in the community?

P: What are some of the other AME churches that existed back then?

L: St.Paul, Alan Temple, **Bethel**, that is about all I can recollect. I would have to go to the directory to point them out.

P: What were considered among the baptist to be the really poor churches?

L: I do not think they necessarily looked at them back then as poor churches, but you had to refer to churches in that manner.

P: I know.

L: Anyway, I know what you are talking about. You have much smaller churches like St.Matthews say in **Sulphur Springs**.

P: That is not it Tampa though?

L: Yes.

P: Sulphur Springs is?

L: Yes, it is part of Tampa.

P: College Hill, would that count as one?

L: What?

P: College Hill?

L: Yes.

P: First Baptist of College Hill.

L: Yes, First Baptist of College Hill. Of course, that is a very lovely church now. It has some pretty nice people.

P: During the 1950s, though, would it have been considered?

L: Not one of the, the, the, but now it would be so considered. It is a pretty difficult and sticky question.

P: I want to play with that a little bit more, but I will move on. So I would perhaps join St. Paul AME Church. How about things like going to pool rooms. Is that something that a respectable...

L: You would not have gone to a pool room.

P: The son of the publisher, you would not see him in a pool room.

L: No, unless he went to get a story for the paper or something of that nature, but you would not.

P: Why?

L: They just felt that was beneath them, hanging around in pool rooms.

P: Why?

L: It goes back to historical. It is what we were taught as children that you just did not hang around pool rooms and saloons if you stood for anything in the community.

P: How about, music lessons and things of that sort, were those things often given to kids?

L: There were public dances.

P: Everyone dance though.

L: Yes. Of course, the sororities and fraternities sponsored and of course you had people like _____ or Armstrong, come into town, that might have brought some of the other folks in who wanted to see and hear those particular bands.

P: Did you go to any of these dances?

L: No, I went to some of the cotillions and some of the affairs sponsored by sororities and fraternities, in many instances to be an MC or just to go and support some of the members of my congregation.

P: I think I need to put another tape in.

[End of side **A2**]

P: All right, I am back on, tell me about the cotillions a little bit?

L: They were very elaborate balls and in the instances tickets were sold and sometimes the queen of the ball was the person who had sold the largest number of tickets or had gotten the largest numbers of ads. It was a financial affair. The proceeds were used for scholarships, which was excellent. They still have those things.

P: Was it expensive?

L: For the parents, yes, to purchase those kinds of evening gowns and the rental of tuxedos for the young men.

P: This occurred in the black community?

L: In the black community.

P: Were they always sponsored by fraternities and sororities?

L: There were one or two private clubs, the names I do not recall. Most were by AKA, Alpha Kappa Alpha, which is a prestigious black feminine sorority.

P: Would these be for high school girls or college girls?

L: High school.

P: So these, technically, were not fraternity and sorority dances?

L: Yes, they were.

P: They were fraternity and sorority dances. But they were for the kids?

L: That is right. And for potential members of those groups.

P: So is it fair to say that if I was the son of **C.Black Andrews**, I would probably go to one of these things?

L: You would.

P: If I was the son of a local janitor for the Tampa Tribune, I probably would not go to one of these things?

L: The possibility exists that you might not have and then it would depend on the kind of esteem in which those people involved held you.

P: Who would give out these tickets?

L: They were not given, it was a paid affair. The sororities and the fraternities themselves. Sometimes these things were sponsored by the Panhellenic Council, this was, as you know, where fraternities and sororities come together and make certain determination of programs and how they are going to work together.

P: I understand the fraternities and sororities were very exclusive when it came to balls and dances, but what you seem to be telling me is that this balls were extended.

L: It might be extended to those persons whose family reputation in the community were good, though they might not have been as far as finances are concerned, the most prestigious or affluent people. That depends on how your family conducted itself and if you were a family that stayed in trouble, kid's always in jail or something like that, you knew you would not get invited, but if you were decent people, trying to do your best, you might be invited. Your daughter might be invited, particularly if that child was doing quite well in school, succeeding. That is what you have to look at. It is a lot of nuances in the community.

P: Unlike the fraternity dances like the Kappas Ball, and so forth, this was not simply for adults, this was for young people.

L: For young people, that is right.

P: Even before they went to college?

L: They are on the verge of going to college. Some of them, of course, never went, but the idea was to encourage them and to help them, and they had sponsors in these groups. You might sponsor your daughter and you would get out and try to see how many tickets you could sell. How many ads you could get and she might not be **AKA**, but they would be looking at her as a member thereof.

P: Did any of your kids go to these things?

L: My son did, the oldest boy, he went.

P: Do you know who sponsored his thing?

L: I saw to it that he was properly dressed and attired.

P: Was it expensive?

L: To rent a tuxedo, no, not really, but certainly to buy the corsage and pay for the woman and that was not expensive, it was something that a father or mother would want to do and even if it called for a sacrifice. You want your child to be associated with what you would consider the best people in the community. Not that I personally look down on anybody. I feel all of them are to be given an opportunity and a chance.

P: Once again, if I, this fictional person moving to Tampa, I would want my daughter or my son to go to these?

L: You would indeed.

P: I, myself, would want to probably go to St. Paul AME church or a similarly situated church like that. I would not go to a pool room and play.

L: No you would not.

P: I would make sure that my son does not go to a pool room and play.

L: That is right, if you want to play pool, you have a table at home.

P: Did a lot of professionals have pool tables at home?

L: Some did as they did include a recreational area in their homes, so that their children could stay home, subsequently they had swimming pools right there at home.

P: Even in the 1950s, people had swimming pools?

- L: A few. Very few. That was a minimal thing, one or two.
- P: **Lee Davis**, was he one?
- L: Lee Davis might have.
- P: How about **Claxton**?
- L: No he did not. He had a fabulous house though.
- P: Did he have a pool table in his house.
- L: I think Claxton did. Bob Gilder could better tell you. Bob owns that house now.
- P: O.K.
- L: That was one of the first prestigious houses in this community and it was quite a thing in its day.
- P: You told me before, why don't you say again. You told me previously that he built this house for prestige.
- L: Exactly.
- P: Why don't you say that again?
- L: In order to be identified as somebody. He was a showman. The older people looked down on people in show business and so forth, but Claxton said that for prestige and things that he did and gave away, was for the very purpose of identifying himself with the others in the community who were called the upeties.
- P: They were called what?
- L: The high-ups or the muck-de-muck, or whatever the expression is. Usually if you had to do it over again, it really did not matter that much. You do not have to do that. You do not have to worry about this one and that one and where he is, just make your contribution.
- P: Of course he said that when he was well respected?
- L: Yes, after the fact and looking back at the years we experience, he said oh, that did not matter.
- P: In addition to trying to send my kids to these ball dances, trying to get invited to them myself, not playing pool, maybe having a pool table in my home, making sure I do not go out there and play pool, making sure my kids do not go out there

and play pool, are there other little things I would do? I probably would not join the Lily Whites, is that correct?

L: You might not.

P: Are there other things I would avoid doing?

L: You might, if you were of my attitude in this position, you would not go to segregated theater, you would not ride the bus. Personally, I preferred walking to riding the bus.

P: Not going to a segregated theater and not riding a bus, is that decision driven by class?

L: I suppose it is not necessarily by class, but I felt that I was too good for that. I did not have to contribute to continuing segregation. That was individual.

P: That is not really class. I am trying to focus a little bit more on class?

L: What are some of the other things I would not do? I cannot think of some of the other things I might not do.

P: You are a little different in that, not only are you a civil rights activist, you are also a minister.

L: Those have some bearing on where I would go.

P: Absolutely.

L: Certainly, public dances and things of that nature, I would not be going.

P: Were these public dances, like for example, when the Kappas had a dance, when these fraternities had a dance for adults.

L: Invitational.

P: Invitational dances. A couple of questions about that. The kind of dances they did, the steps they did, the foxtrot or whatever it may be, would they be different than the dances of people at the Rabbit Foot or other clubs that had dances?

L: Yes, I suppose so. They had what people would refer to as suggestive dances and so forth.

P: I am sorry?

L: Dances that are sexually suggestive.

P: What about that?

L: Those you would not see at say a Kappa or an Alpha dance. Of course today, almost everything goes. But in those days, they were more discreet. You mentioned foxtrot. The closest they got to some of these things was the Charleston and some of the other steps, there were slow-drags, waltzes, things of that nature. Two-steps and Rumble perhaps.

P: They would do those kind of dances. When you emceed they would do those kinds of dances?

L: Yes.

P: If you were ever like to go into the Rabbit's Foot or the Blue Room, would you see those dances too?

L: Maybe some, but it would be really getting down as the kids call it today. You would be getting on down.

P: So even when you went to these functions, invitation only, the whole atmosphere then was even different?

L: Different. I can remember the dances to which I went prior to coming to Tampa, in Atlanta and I did go. We did the Charleston. that was the most way-out thing of the time. I am talking about the 1930s and so forth, but nothing that we see here today.

P: Bear with me a little bit, I am going to turn this off.

[Break in tape]

P: Alright I jogged your memory a little bit, so what I was asking you was about children and who they associated with. Was this sort of class-element there as well?

L: I would have to say so, you just did not associate with certain children. Their mothers and fathers were not church members, they did not have the kind of jobs that we considered. _____, some people were number-runners and writers, gamblers, etc. Some families had bad reputations, were always in trouble. You knew not, even though you were in school. That was the extent of it. You did not go to their homes. They did not come to yours. You were very careful because as the folks used to say, birds of a feather, flock together and sometimes those were your peers, but you would adopt their kind of behavior and you would become more like them. In other words, they were on the wild side, so to speak. Therefore you had to be more sedate, more selective of your company. My

father used to say that **race first honors**. You do not mate better-breds with those that are not. That was the kind of attitude that was prevalent.

P: In the 1950s here in Tampa?

L: Here in Tampa and many other places across the country. Of course, I came to understand that was not the way that I wanted to treat people or look at people, although I might not, but to me they were individuals who needed whatever I had to offer or whatever I had to give and we need to reach down and not look down because if I am going to look down at all, it is to try to raise ____.

P: Of course, as a minister and as someone who had to take his Christianity seriously, other people may slip just a little bit more than you on some of these things. For those who did, talking about the black middle class in Tampa, was language a part of this also? To be accepted into the black middle class would one have to comport himself in a certain way, speak in a certain way?

L: Yes, I feel that that was so that you had to certainly not be vulgar or profane and yet there were many people in the middle class route who, at certain times, would resort to that kind of language to express themselves. That has always been an anomaly with me that I may be educated and so forth and yet, if I am angry or if something occurs that brings about a blight between me and somebody else, that I should have to resort to that kind of language to express my feelings. That has always been something difficult for me to understand.

P: So, Alan Petigny, middle class, socially-conscious person moving into Tampa wanted to run with the Muck-De-Mucks in the black community, besides these things do not go to a pool room, try to go to these dances, try to get my daughter into these different kinds of dances, go to St. Paul AME church, aside from those sorts of things, where would language come in and my parents come in?

L: I guess the way you talk would be one of the things that would be considered. If children do not talk as they ought to talk, spitting **blurbs**, not able to express themselves, you were in school with these kids. You would not associate with them with them because you would adopt or adapt to their way of life or their particular lifestyle.

P: Would the same thing apply to adults?

L: Perhaps, to a degree. Adults felt that they were mature enough to be able to handle those things.

P: Once again, we are almost done, honest. Three more questions and I am going to go to some of the people that you knew and then we will be finished. One question was that in looking at some census data of Tampa in 1950, one finds

that there were far more professional black women than there were professional black men and according to some interviews that I have had with others, people have indicated that more black women were going to college during the 1950s than black men. C. Blythe Andrews, I found an editorial in which he complained about that, the tendency of people to send their daughters to college instead of their sons. My question is, this educational imbalance between the sexes, did it result in many professional women, schoolteachers, nurses marrying less educated men?

L: That has been one of the problems within our ethnic group for many, many years. Black women have always had more of an opportunity and there has been more concentration on educating black young women than young black men. We are paying a price for that now. A premium was placed on educating black women moreso than on educating black men.

P: In the 1950s?

L: In the 1950s and even prior to. Of course since the 1950s, because that has been changing. We are seeing that black men need education as well the idea of black men as heads of families and being able to make a contribution and you had the promotion because black women were better prepared. More black women are in administrative positions in the school system then they had black men. It is a strange phenomenon.

P: The way it played itself out in the black community, did you find a lot of professional black women married to uneducated, unprofessional black men?

L: Yes, they were not comparable in terms of education, however they made their adjustment and that was respect and I think a deep appreciation on the part of many black men for the women. There were some women in those situations, as some people will always do, did not behave as they ought to behave. They belittled their husbands and so forth and that has been to me a very terrible thing, but you had some of that, because they had the education and of course the man is pushed into the background.

P: You, yourself, saw some of this?

L: I saw of that. Id did not like it, some of it still goes on. In fact, there are very few black men who are educated, choosing black women to marry them and as a result today, many of them are not marrying. So the man is beneath them culturally. On the other hand, you had some black _____ without the education, who had made money and they had no serious problems as far as marrying is concerned.

P: Even educated black women. Like Claxton, was he married?

- L: Yes, Claxton was married. I do not think his wife had much more education than he. Claxton would always tell you he had a lot of street education. He learned the hard way and yet he was one of the finest persons that you could have ever talked to, down to earth, real community-conscious. When he ascended and became prestigious and affluent, he was willing to share with the poor people in the community.
- P: To apply this, though, a little bit more to how it played itself out in the black community. At fraternity dances and sorority dances, would you often find, like at sorority dances, a school teacher, perhaps, going to a sorority dance with her husband who might be a non-professional.
- L: Yes, were you married to a husband who did not have the education, you took him. He went. of course, some other fellows fell out of place as far as being able to talk as you and I are talking here today. They felt, somewhat out of place but nobody looked on them with disdain. You were married to so-and-so, so you were accepted because that was your wife and you could become involved.
- P: So you were accepted at these functions?
- L: Yes.
- P: Very often, you might see a doctor married to a school teacher rubbing shoulders with a janitor married to a school teacher?
- L: Yes, very easily.
- P: That could kind of, not do away with class distinctions, but kind of make it a little less clear?
- L: Right. A thing I was talking about some time ago is the Cabots, they spoke to the Lodges and the Lodges only spoke to the Cabots.
- P: You are trying to talk about that...
- L: Yes, that New England thing there. What really happened in some instances, at the outset, black society sort of tried to pattern itself after white society.
- P: Even in Tampa?
- L: I think that early on when I was not here, but some of that rubbed off.
- P: Can you...

L: I cannot in any specific instances, but I knew that was something that went on. That they tried to do the things that white people did.

P: Like with the balls, for example?

L: Yes, to our detriment, there was a lot of things we took from white people that were not right. They were not right for us.

P: Something else that I found, is this the case? Did a lot of middle class black people, did they vacation a lot?

L: Not really, not then. They thought they were not in position financially.

P: Something that I found, looking through the old Sentinel bulletins, is on the Society page a lot of people would mention where they were going to vacation. Going on a luxury liner and so forth.

L: That came later. Early on, that was not so. Only a few people during those days, could say I have been to Europe or France or California. As time passed, many, many more. You had clubs coming together forming _____ money so that you could go on vacations. Groups and so on, you had that developing, but not early, early on. As you look at the Sentinel, progressively, more of that occurs until today, almost anybody can say to you, well, I have been to France, I have been to The Riviera, I have been to Hawaii, I have been to South America, I have been to the Islands, Jamaica, Nassau, these are very close. At first, they went to nearby places, then later on, they moved to farther distances, like Hawaii, California, Europe and so all across Tampa today, you could touch almost the average person and ask, have you been to New York?, oh, yes. Have you been to France?, oh, yes.

P: The last section, and this is going to be brief.

L: Hold on just a moment.

[Break in tape]

P: I turned the tape recorder back on and I am about to ask Reverend Lowry about some of the interesting people that he ran into. I understand that you knew Dubois?

L: Yes, Dr. Dubois was an instructor at Atlanta University during my sojourn at Morehouse College as a student. I first met him in 1935 and he learned that I was from Brooklyn. He also lived in Brooklyn and every extended holiday that we had, I became his chauffeur. I got free trips home driving for him.

P: His car?

L: His car.

P: You would drive it for him?

L: I would drive it for him. I would drive from Atlanta to Brooklyn. In those days there were no facilities such as Howard Johnson's and Holiday Inn that would accommodate blacks, so there was one place in Virginia, we would drive from Atlanta to Virginia, that was the first leg and I have forgotten the house in which we would stop. It may still be there. That is the only place where we could get good, decent accommodations and the next morning early we would drive on into New York, which was a full-day's drive. During those days, Dr. Dubois talked with me about segregation and shared with me many of his ideas and I learned that he had been the _____ involved in NAACP and learned of his debates with Dr. Booker T. Washington. Those were interesting days.

P: Did he seem bitter and hateful of Booker T. Washington?

L: Not at that particular time, of course, perhaps maybe afterwards, in latter years, he might have become, I would call it frustrated because of the slow progress of integration or the letting down the bars. He uses the _____ and things of that nature.

P: You would share a hotel room with him then, right?

L: No we had a separate room.

P: You would drive in the car with him for hours?

L: Yes, hour after hour. He took care of all of the expenses because I had no money, so it was very interesting.

P: So you got to know him pretty well, then?

L: Pretty well.

P: Did you like him?

L: Very much. He was short of stature, had little pointy beard, wore glasses.

P: Did you find him very bright, intellectually?

L: So that I could not even compare with him. He talked to me, not like a very learned person, but on a level that a student could understand. He expressed himself as to his desires, war, America to behave as a democracy and the sacrifices which had been made.

P: Do you remember an instances, any little anecdote, any story, involving the two of you?

L: Unfortunately not.

P: Any conversation, any time he might have gotten angry?

L: Perhaps he was angry. Not to the point of violence, but there was a righteous anger, indignation that a nation that had come the way America had come, could still retain those old, medieval slavery ideas. Those need to be eradicated and black people should have an equal opportunity to hold office, even to be president as far as I am concerned. to be elected to the Senate and to the House and they were barred from these. I think in modern times, **Oscar Depriest** became the first one after a long, long number of years.

P: In Chicago.

L: That is correct. Dr. Dubois talked about those kinds of things, you see and how this country owed so much to black people and had defaulted.

[End of tape]

P: When driving with him, get pulled over by a police officer?

L: Not one time. We had no _____ incidents.

P: How about when you ate with him at a restaurant, did anyone ever come up to him and recognize him?

L: Yes, there were people who saw him and recognized him. When we left that boarding house they always had a lunch prepared and had Coca-Cola and cream soda, things of that nature, baskets.

P: How about a little anecdote or a little personal thing? What did he like to drink?

L: Coca-Cola. I am sure, but I was never with him on any social affairs, but he would perhaps have a cocktail or champagne. I would not call him what you would call an avid, strict religious person. He believed in God, but he was not anti-socializing.

P: Paul Ropeson?

L: That was an interesting meeting with him, I talked with him on a number of occasions during his time on Broadway. he was playing the part of Othello, Shakespeare's Othello.

P: What year was this about?

L: You know I cannot remember and a fellow was talking about that the other night and I cannot remember those years. it had to be in the 1940s.

P: How did you get to meet him then?

L: I do not recall, some friends of mine knew him and we went to see the play and after the play they took me back stage and there I had an opportunity to meet Mr. Robeson. Big man, very resonant voice. So I talked with him and then made an appointment, he said I could come back to see him. So I went back to see him, we talked about his experiences at college. how they did not want him on the football team and how he became a star on that team. The things they did to him and that whet his ideas about civil rights and what he had experienced from the theater world. He was not easily accepted. it took a long time, but I think Paul might have been, you could use the term bitter, more than frustrated in the latter years. The things they did to him. He was more accepted abroad, except in Germany than he was here in America. He could have gone to Hollywood and been a big star but it would not have been in a movie or play, similar to _____, he was the star. I have forgotten the name of who played the part of Iago, similar to the devil in that play. You would know his name if I could call it, I think he is passed-on now. Here is a man who felt that his country had betrayed him and other blacks, who felt that America had not been fair and that black people were getting the short end of that which they deserved, pushed back and held back, segregated and denied their rightful position. He for one would not accept second class citizenship. If you were any black you had to be subjected to that kind of embarrassment because they were brought here they were not _____. They were brought here, they did all of this labor, this back-breaking work, and worked for nothing, they were not paid. Along those lines he moved and in the later years, he was considered a communist and a betrayer which, of course, he was not.

P: He also married a white wife and I know that created a lot of bitterness.

L: Yes, I did not know that for a long time. Many of our people did though. **Marion Anderson** married a white person.

P: Who is this?

L: The late **Marion Anderson**.

P: **Roy Wilkins?**

L: Roy Wilkins was a fighter who became director of the National Association for The Advancement of Colored People. He visited Tampa and many other places. He was just one of those civil rights fighters who were very, very positive, upfront and who was ready to take on anybody or any organization that was anti-black.

P: Did you know him pretty well?

L: Fairly well. Very positive, very forceful, very forthright.

P: Could he be a little irritating?

L: He could be. He would not back up too easily. He was a very forthright individual.

P: Did you like him?

L: Very much. I liked him. As I grew and matured, I began to see what they were about, what they were fighting for and I became certainly indoctrinated and desired to be a part of that.

P: Any memory of a conversation you might have had with him or experience you might have had?

L: No, only about NAACP and his work, but I do not remember anything very specific and encouragement to stay in the fight. Even after this incident here, he encouraged me to stay on board.

P: When they shot at you, in other words?

L: Yes.

P: Did he call you on the phone?

L: Many calls. He called. Thurgood Marshall called.

P: Yes, Thurgood Marshall, that is another one. Did you know him?

L: Yes, I knew Thurgood.

P: How?

L: As a result of his involvement in NAACP cases. His visits to Tampa and then, of course, my visits to New York where he was involved in his civil rights work.

P: Would you visit him when you were up in New York?

L: Yes, I went to the office. It was downtown and on 41st, 42nd, 43rd, somewhere in there between 5th Avenue and 6th Avenue, near the public library. The New York City Library.

P: How did you find Thurgood Marshall?

L: He was real down to earth. Hell hath fury, but deadly serious about knocking down the barriers but Thurgood would unwind and joke and carry-on and he would have his little high-balls and so forth. Not to the extent where he would become inebriated but he just loved to talk about his battles. He was called it war, waging a war against the enemy.

P: A lot of fun to be around then?

L: Oh, my yes. Very down to earth. I met him at Masonic meetings in Georgia where I lived and where he came to attend our grand lodge meetings.

P: So you were a black mason?

L: Yes.

P: Were you a black mason here in Tampa as well?

L: No, I never moved my membership from Georgia. In fact, that is where I am headed next week.

P: For a Masonic meeting?

L: Yes, for the Masonic grand lodge. I am the grand chaplin for the Georgia grand lodge plus all masons of Georgia. So I will be involved for three days speaking to the _____, what we call the craft. About character, about the state of the country, and our involvement in voting and education, trying to encourage the fellows to continue the scholarships that we give and to be examples in the community and to be outspoken in several areas in Georgia and I suppose in some areas in Florida, some black people are very reluctant to be as outspoken as they ought to be and to really express their feelings as they should. They feel a little bit intimidated and some incidences they have to depend in large on white people for employment and income so they do not want to take the chance of losing that and I think that is why some of our people accommodates too much by _____, because they were afraid of losing that economic base that they have.

P: I guess my final question to you is, how would you like to be remembered?

L: Only as one who tried to make things better for his people, for his children,

P: I am sure you have many fine years ahead of you, but where is home for you. Where would you like to be buried?

L: Here in Tampa I have purchased my cemetery plot and I built a home here, so this is where.

P: Georgia is kind of in your blood too, isn't it still?

L: Yes, having been born there, but having been away from Georgia so many years, I have more of an identification with Tampa than with Georgia although I go back from time to time to where my roots are, but I have lived in Tampa longer than I have lived anywhere else, 37 years here. Born in Georgia, I lived in Georgia 14 years and then in New York until about 20 and Boston about five years. So Tampa then is predominantly the place where I have more identification than those others.

P: Do you ever sometimes wonder, what if I had stayed at Morehouse?

L: Often, I have had opportunities to go to Virginia, to Pennsylvania and to California. I wondered about those. You know Robert Frost has a poem about the roads that divide. If I had taken that one that lead the other way, where would I have gone, and I can imagine sometimes. Had I gone to Virginia Union to accept that position as dean, perhaps I might have ended up as president of that university. Had I gone to Pennsylvania.

P: Where in Pennsylvania?

L: Pittsburgh. That would have been an outstanding pulpit there. Would the things that happened to me here have happened in Pittsburgh. Would I have gone to New York, to Brooklyn, to pastor. I had an opportunity. Or had I gone to California, to Los Angeles where I had an opportunity to go, I just wonder what might happen. Sometimes in reminiscing you think about that. As I look at it, in Tampa I became the first black to integrate the public school board. I had a school named after me. The organizer of a financial institution and the first black to receive an honorary degree from the University of South Florida and on it goes.

P: When one thinks of a black leader in the Tampa Bay area, you are the first on the list. The question is if your maker said you cannot be a minister, you cannot have a pulpit, what would you have done?

L: With the attitude that I had in me, I would have still battled and struggled and might have made and the possibility is that I might not have have. I like to think that even though not a minister, I would have so conducted myself and I would have had an opportunity. You may be right, I would not have had the most of a chance. If you want to talk about destiny and those kind of things. Maybe I was destined to be that. Maybe I was the person whether I was a minister or not. I do think that as a minister being thrust out into the public and gaining name-identification and face recognition as the result of T.V. and being on the various committees and boards and being active in different things in the community, that made it easier to be accepted and then not being what you call a radical. Being outspoken, but not biting my tongue but being able still to respect other people and learn how to talk to them without being an Uncle Tom, without accommodating or disagreeing with them but giving them the right to disagree with me. It is not important that I was the first one to come to these prestigious positions. That is not important. To say that I was first. To me it is important when it comes to who has followed me. What doors did my election open for other blacks. To be just one, that is tokenism, but if there are second and thirds and fourths, that is different to me and that is what it was all about. Opening doors so that you could have a black on the city council, a black on the county commission, in the legislature. There should be even more. A black bank where black men and women could be trained and we could demonstrate the fact that we are capable of handling millions of dollars of being honest and although it ended tragically because of the dishonesty of some people, nevertheless it did accomplish some of the goals and that is what it is all about to me. Not just being able to eat at a lunch counter, hot dogs, I could buy them and take care of the hot dogs at home but you are opening doors where blacks could be employed in those places where formerly they had been excluded from upward mobility. The telephone company, Tampa Electric, doors opening. So it was more important that these things happen than for my being number one or for boasting about well I was the first. That is not important, what followed what happened afterwards. If nothing else is remembered, fine. It is not that somebody will recognize me as I walked through these stores 20 years ago. A lot of the youngsters at their jobs to day do not know me nor do they know the other civil rights leaders, but so what, the opportunity for them is there. It would not have been had I or somebody else not become involved to the extent that we aid our lives on the line and my telephone was cut off at night. I could not call out and no body could reach me except those individuals that were trying to intimidate me and threaten, they could. Other than that, it does not matter that I cannot walk the streets without a bodyguard. That was a part of it and that was the price we had to pay should not have had to pay in order for this day to come. This day to dawn. All of that is important and that is history I would even be proud of that. To be a servant of the people. That is the way I sign my name when I give it to the members of my church.

P: How is that?

L: Be your pastor and servant. I feel it was my responsibility to serve, but not only this church or whatever service I can remember give to the community or render I tried to do that. My way of doing it might not be that way somebody else would do it, my approach may be different from theirs, but as I do what I feel God has called me to do it may well be that is why I am not a doctor or a dentist. Certainly I would have had more money in those professions than I have, but that is not important. I can live comfortably. I had an opportunity to educate my children and I have earned the respect of my people and other people and so I feel that my life has been worthwhile and has made an impact on this community and its history can never be written from 1956 on to this day without my name being mentioned somewhere.

P: I want to thank you very much for your time.

L: The pleasure is mine.

[End of the interview.]