Georgia Government Documentation Project

Series E: Black Involvement in Politics

Interview with W.W. Law

November 15-16, 1990

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GEORGIA GOVERNMENT DOCUMENTATION PROJECT

GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

SERIES E: BLACK INVOLVEMENT IN POLITICS

NARRATOR: W. W. LAW

INTERVIEWERS: CLIFFORD KUHN, TIM CRIMMINS

DATES: NOVEMBER 15, 1990; NOVEMBER 16, 1990

LOCATION: BAY STREET DAY'S INN, SAVANNAH, GA

CRIMMINS: We will have a chronological approach to history here; then we will have the second part of the interview that will deal with the modern civil rights movement, getting back to the--

KUHN: People, events, and movements that you were directly involved with and directly knew.

CRIMMINS: So we thought we would spend time this afternoon doing that and, then again, tomorrow morning. So if there are things that occur to you overnight that you would want to bring out, then we can come back and focus on those tomorrow.

LAW: What time are you scheduled tomorrow?

KUHN: At your convenience.

[Brief discussion about schedule for the next day.]

KUHN: You said that you were a native Savannahan. How long has your family been here?

LAW: Since the beginning. We go back to the initial blacks.

KUHN: I would be curious to know what was told to you as a child of the history

of black Savannah.

LAW: Well, we will get to know that.

KUHN: Okay.

LAW: I am a strong believer in the oral-- because that's all I heard, locally. My people came out of the early church here. The church, of course, had annual anniversaries where the most articulate and the person with the greatest pride and memory would always relate the history of the church. I was born in the house with my grandmother, and there would be others who would come who had had slavery experience, and I would want to hear that also. We had a a boarder who was a veteran of the Civil War, so I knew and played with things that he brought back from the War, although it was over sixty years later.

CRIMMINS: Where, in Savannah, was that, Law?

LAW: What's that?

CRIMMINS: That you grew up in--what neighborhood?

LAW: First--I was born 614 Gwinnett. After a year or two--shortly, a year later after the birth of my sister, we moved to a row of houses that had been built by [inaudible] at 33rd Street.

KUHN: What about either of your parents' background or education or influence on you as you were growing up or the influence of others?

LAW: That's a long story because all of the wonderful people, the whole neighborhood, the whole church--all of these people had influences. But I guess we have to start somewhere, and we grew up in my grandmother's house. Her name was Lillabelle Wallace. That was her married name. She had been a Johnson, Sarah Johnson's child; and they had been long time members of the First Bryant Church. They had been part of the church since its early beginning when there was a split in the congregation and the

larger portion moved to the First African site on Franklin Square.

Our people remained in Yamacraw under the leadership of a pure black man whose African lineage was pure, a man named Adam Johnson, and continued the church on the original site. They were very proud of what they called the landmark of the original site of the church. My grandmother was a very strong woman. The men in our family had a tendency to die early in the life of the family. My grandmother was left. My grandfather on the other side was Frank Wallace, who had been born in Hampton County, South Carolina. He came into the city as a baker. My grandmother's family were the Johnsons, and they were the Yamacraw or the local branch of the family, whose roots went deep into the history and the work of the First Bryant Church. My grandfather was a baker, and he baked for what was Neugent Bakery. The Neugent Bakery was located at Bryan Street, right where we are now, just right where we are now. It was down on the block, further down--just across Jefferson and over toward [inaudible]. The bakery was in the basement of the house. The Neugents lived upstairs.

My mother was born--she was the oldest of the children born to Lillabelle Johnson Wallace and to Franklin Wallace, the oldest child to survive. There had been other children but all had died either in childbirth or shortly thereafter. My grandfather had died after the third child. I think my uncle was about three years old when my grandfather died and left my grandmother with three children.

She had been working for the telephone company at that time, perhaps as a custodian and cleanup woman, but she quit that job and went--and came home to take care of the children and to see that they were off to school; so she took in washing and ironing and did the laundry for such people as Charles Ellis, who had charge of one of the--I think it

was Mutual Fertilizer Company--and I also remember the president of the Board of Education--Judge Gordon Sawsee, who had been an early coach of the University of Georgia and was then a lawyer here and the Judge of Ordinary. He lived at the corner of-- The Ellises were at Thirty-fifth Street near Ridge [inaudible] school--across from Ridge -- School. Judge Sawsee lived across the street from Albert Stoddard at the corner of Gaston and Whitaker.

I remember as a small child, pulling a wagon and delivering the laundry, spotlessly clean and fresh shirts, particularly, that my grandmother was noted for--in a basket or a box to the back doors of those homes. My grandmother was a remarkable person. She was said to be "born to the veil" so she had the ability to foretell or to foresee into the future. Her house was visited by many of the people who had known her down through the years and others that she vaguely sometimes refer to as cousins. But she was also visited by white women who had troubles. I remember two or three of them who visited very frequently and I observed my grandmother performing what the fortunetellers and the psychiatrists all now do in various ways. She would be able to console these people and to give advice and to do things of that sort. She was highly devout, a devout Christian, and I can recall many of the practices in her home. One was that she had tremendous power in prayer, and usually there was a prayer band in the church or a missionary society of some sort, and she was the person whose chore it was to offer to pray. She could really bring the spirit, the holy spirit, into any gathering that she was part of. The practice was, in her day, that she would leave her house at 409 West 33rd early and would be down at the Yamacraw Church at sunrise, where the sunrise prayer services took place.

She had a practice of cooking on Saturday and not lighting the stove on Sunday. But I

heard from her--the things that I learned from my grandmother were mainly the folk tales that she would tell us in the evenings. She would entertain when the work in the washtub and the ironing board was not too much. She had a practice every day, at the end of the day, she would read the Bible. And invariably, more times than I could number, it was the 14th chapter of John. I heard her read it so many times that to this day I can about quote from memory the entire chapter.

She would tell us the stories of Brother Rabbit; and by lamplight, she would make the animals, the shadows of the animals with the lamp and sometimes accompany the story with the movement of the animals across the walls of the house, with the shadows. She would teach us many of the games and folk songs of her early childhood--"Frog went a courting and he did ride" and songs of that kind.

The most impressive thing that I remember in growing up in my grandmother's house--she died before I was twelve years old, so that they had to be very lasting impressions--but the first books I saw were books of black history and about black people, even before I went off to school. There was Sims History of the First Colored Church in North America. Booker Washington's Up From Slavery; and I even, as a young lad, remember the sermons, the collected sermons of the great British Evangelist, I believe, named Russell. These books were there.

She and my mother both had a tradition--Well, it is not tradition because I was fifty years old and my fifth grade teacher who lived just three or four doors from our house where I now live, called me there; and we sat on the porch, and she told me--I knew--I had known that my fifth grade teacher had been a neighbor and friend of my grandmother, because Miss Genross [sp?], who was then married and was Mrs. Milledge--Miss Genross lived

just on College Street, just a half block around the corner from around where we had lived on Gwinnett, and they both at that time were members of Bryant Church. Miss Genross, later, after she had gone off to school, became a school teacher. She left the Baptist church and became an Episcopalian. But they had been dear friends in their young days; and she told me fifty years after my birth that she had been present when I was born on January 1st, 1923, and that she was present when I was delivered by a midwife. She said that my grandmother knelt at my birth and prayed that I would one day be a leader of our people. She said that she knew that if Lillabelle was alive today that she would be proud because her prayers were answered.

The house that we lived in on 33rd where my younger sister, the three of us, were born--my younger sister was born about '27--1927 or 1928--it would be '26 or '27--we were then living at 33rd Street in houses built by William & Rostin Latimer. Those houses were just two streets removed from what had been the city limits in 1900. Up until that time, blacks had lived in rental property of four rooms. But the Latimer houses, as well as the houses along 33rd and 31st were the first houses, rental, that had five rooms to them. My grandmother was not able to pay the rent for the house herself, so she always maintained the front room where we did not go, except when company would come or in the evenings when she felt like it, she would play the organ and we would sing church hymns. Then, on the other side was her bedroom at the front and behind it was my mother and father's bedroom; and the three children all stayed in that one room. Across the hall from us was the room of her boarder because it took all of that to make the very small rent at that time.

During my early childhood the boarder was a Abraham Barnett [sp?], who was, at that

time, the secretary for one of the Negro Masonic Lodges and a man who we looked up to because he at least owned real estate. He owned several houses throughout the city, including the houses, I remember, on a high hill at Gwinnett Street, just off Stiles Avenue. He had been in the Revolution--I mean, in the Civil War; and his uniform was in a trunk, along with a sword. He must have been--I don't know if he was a drummer boy or actual soldier. He was probably a drummer boy because there was a drum. There was not enough, really, room--four rooms plus kitchen. We did not have closets and what-have-you so that anything that was stored had to be stored in what we called a chiffarobe, or else it would be pushed in boxes or something underneath the bed. But his big trunk with his sword and paraphernalia was kept underneath the house. And since we, as children, had to play in the yard except on the days that my grandmother hung the white clothes--those days, we had to play on the front stoop and could not leave the porch until evening-- playing in that yard, I would venture underneath the house and would get into Barnett's uniform or play with the drum. I would play with the drum. I would drive around the yard with his gun or his sword. So all of this whetted my appetite for history and for the kinds of involvements with uniform groups, which were all very popular in that day and time. At 33rd Street, we lived just a half a block from West Broad. And West Broad was the route that the funeral processions would take going to Laurel Grove Cemetery.

As a result, during my growing up, during my early childhood, I saw the last of the band funerals and the horse carriage, the horse pulling the wagon with a small enclosure on top of it, glass on the side, with the coffin and draped windows. The twenties of my youth was the heyday of the Negro fraternities and societies. As a result, the Masons would

come in solemn black suits with white aprons. But the most colorful of all the groups, and the largest of all, of course, the Odd Fellows were there, then, there was also the Good Samaritans--but the large group was the Plume Hats of the Knights of Pythias, with the swords, and very colorful and decorative uniforms. The Pythians also had the uniform ranks, which was actually military, group that drilled and precise precision with everything, so they were the real largest of all the groups. But all of these groups would turn out for the funerals of their members.

Because the funerals seemed to give such prestige in the black communities, people who were of means and those who could make the sacrifice maintained memberships in as many of these societies and fraternal organizations as they possibly could. As a result, there were people that when they died, and because they were in so many of these organizations, the businesses along West Broad Street would have to close in order that all the members could turn out. The barber shops would be closed, the shops, everybody would close in order to perform or to appear in procession at these funerals.

My grandmother had visitors, many, and the older people who would come, I would overhear conversations in which characteristically they used to talk about their age. The older people of my day and time, of my youth, did not give you precise dates. They oftentimes did not know when they were born, but they would identify their age by natural phenomena: the night of the great storm, the night the star fell from the sky, or some other natural phenomena would be the way in which they would indicate. And, of course, you could just about calculate what their ages were. Or they would say: 'I was a big-sized girl when' so-and-so--'when the war came' or something of the sort. But I overheard those stories about their early childhood and their slave experience.

During my growing up in my grandmother's house, which meant that it had to be in the twenties because we left her house about '31, the talk most often heard, perhaps, was the failure of the black bank, the Wage Earner Savings that failed during the Depression. It was a bank started by blacks in the city in 1909; and in 1912, they built a building that was designed by one of the most prominent black architects of that time, a man who had finished at the University of Ithaca and was on the campus, and was one of the small group of men who gathered and formed Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity. His name was Bernard Tandy. He was an architect. And he drew the plans for the Wage Earner Savings and Loan Company here in Savannah. The plans were for a bank, a department store, and a hotel. Because of the Depression, they only got the bank up. The rest of the plans were never executed. But a feeling for thrift and for black enterprise was very strong in Savannah. At the same time, I think Pace and a great number of fellows were starting businesses and had some activity going along Auburn Avenue.

We had the same thing taking place with mainly a man by the name of Walter Scott who had been a student at Tuskegee and was in the last class actually taught by Booker Washington. He came back, and he was of free lineage. His father had been a barber for white folk in the old Polaski Hotel, which was the hotel of the planters during the antebellum period. They had acquired some means. And Walter Scott came back from Tuskegee and tried to organize department stores and one thing after another. He had a bank across the street, and when the Depression came, the Wage Earners was forced to close its doors when blacks made immediate demand upon it for withdrawals.

When that happened, the Wage Earners had to retire, had to close their doors, then blacks turned across--turned around and went across the street and made immediate demands on

Scott's bank, which was fairly solvent. But when he had, likewise, a kind of rush, he had to likewise close his doors. He lost the bank, but to his resounding credit, when the Depression was over, he bought the property that had been the Wage Earners Bank and established an insurance company that became a moderately successful insurance, mainly in Georgia, the Guarantee Life Insurance that was later bought by the Atlanta Life Insurance, and in his present merger effort, he bought--the Atlanta Life has bought the Jacksonville Insurance, one further out in Louisiana or someplace there, he bought in Savannah--and one or two, I think, even in the Midwest. But that, basically, is the kind of setting and background that I came up in.

My father was a mechanic, an automobile mechanic, and worked at a garage at the corner of Bryant and Abercorn. And he lost that job when the Depression came. This was a period in Savannah when times got hard and employers were taking jobs that blacks had formerly had and were giving them to whites who needed them. So my father lost his job and was not able to find anything else and later, shortly thereafter, developed a heart condition. [end of tape side A--continued on side B]

[Tape 1, Side B]

LAW: After we moved, about two or three years before my grandmother's death in '38, we had moved to a house further down the street, interestingly enough, the street name changed two blocks from our house and became Bismark. We were living in Bismark Court, number 10; and this was where we had our house. And my mother and father lived there; and my father, after losing his job as a mechanic and unable to find other work, he helped out and drove for a black barber, who was very successful, and worked on his car. But

that was not enough to support himself. He had developed a heart condition, and he was on medication and finally was confined to the bed. My mother tells us that she would carry his pills to him every morning, and that he would hold the pill under his tongue. When she would leave, he would throw it to the left side of the door against the other wall. After his death, she found all the pills that she had fed him. I think he had probably lost his will to live, not seeing any way in which he could support his family.

He was a farm boy. He had come to the city from Dooly County, and his father had a large number of boys, as rural families did then, in order to have more plows in the field. I, later--I did not know any of his people until after his death. He died in '32. My mother then had to go to work to support the three small children of which I was the oldest, nine, a sister, eight, and a sister three years younger; so she had to go to work, and it was rather hard so that she one day was going through his letters and things and she came across a letter that apparently his mother had written him. The only time he-- He ran away from home as a boy. He got tired of working from sun up to sun down in the field. The only time he returned to the farm was at the death of his mother. That was the only time we ever knew him to leave to go back.

Well, she found the letters, and she then communicated with his father and step-mother, and they agreed to have us come to relieve my mother in the summer because she was then working for W. W. Sprig who was the head of the Churee Foundry. And, of course, the Sprigs, the first part of the summer, would always go to Tybee Island for the summer. And it meant that after my mother had cleared away the dinner dishes, she could leave on Thursday on what they called the "half day." So we saw her once a week on Thursday, and the neighbors would watch out for us in the house. She had a friend who we would

go in the day and stay with her, and in the evening we would have to come home. She taught me how to prepare the meals so that I, at the age of nine, would be able to feed my two sisters. Of course, when she found that address and communicated with my father's people, as I recall, he must have had four or five other brothers. I knew of four--Willie, John--there must have been about five boys and two girls, Essie and--I can't think of the other name, two girls. It was a big family.

My mother was happy that they offered to take us for the summer. We went to Dooly County on the train, the Seaboard. We went through such towns as Abbeville, Seaville, and we would end up at Cordele. That was as close as it got. They would meet us in the wagon at Cordele and bring us down to Vienna, past Senator Walter George's house, on to the farm. We would stay there all summer. Of course, it meant that it was no picnic. It meant that we got up at sunrise and went to the field. I learned, that first summer, how to chop cotton, how to shuck corn, pull fodder, shake peanuts, pick cotton, plant potatoes and everything else. When the summer was over, we were then carried back to the train and came home after it because the Sprigs would stay half of the summer at Tybee; and in mid-summer, they would go to the mountains of North Carolina, in Asheville. Their place was at a place called Skyland. So my mother would be away then for half of the summer completely, so we stayed in the house until she found my grandparents. We stayed in the house while she was in Tybee. Then, when they would go up to the mountains, it was then necessary for us to spend the time with a lady named Miss Ida, then, in the evening, we would go home to go to bed to prepare ourselves for school the next morning. But I soon developed responsibility and began to realize that my mother was working too hard and that I had to rush and finish whatever education I could so that

I could sit her down and she would not have to work, so it meant going to school winter and summer after I had finished, of course, during the school year, I maintained my school work with an afternoon job, first with newspapers, then, on the weekends, cleaning yards and raking leaves. I tell people, very interestingly, there were some--many people who would provide work. One of the people I was a yard boy for, Judge Gaston's parents--

KUHN: That's R. W. Gaston, then?

LAW: Yes, that's correct. Then--

CRIMMINS: Which schools did you go to, Law?

LAW: I entered school at the age of six. I first went to Primer because, born in January, when I became six, I could not enter for about six months, almost, because school had opened in September; then, you couldn't enroll again until next September, so if I became six in January, I would have to wait. So she sent me first to a primer. It was at the Catholic School, St. Mary's. I stayed there a little while. I don't know whether she was able to keep me the whole term because my mother then was working for four dollars a week for the Sprigs. That's all they were paying for the house work. And she had to--after the death of my father--she had to rent out half of the four rooms that we had in order that someone would be able to share. And a girlfriend of hers, Miss Emelia McKever, who likewise was in domestic service, took one of the rooms and they shared the rent.

At that time my room was the hallway of the house. They would block off a portion of the hallway, and that's where I slept, on a cot, leading out to the porch. Of course, after Primer, I went to Kiler. There were only three schools on the whole west side for blacks at that time: West Broad, Maple, and Kiler, in the elementary grades. And Kiler had

become--all the schools were on double session, and Kiler had become overcrowded; and the year that I became six, 1929, they completed the Florence Street School. But when they drew the lines, I was at 33rd Street. We were nearer to Florence Street School than we were to Kiler, but the lines came somewhere along there, so I spent my first three years at Kiler. Then, after three years at Kiler, I came to Florence for four, five, and sixth, then went back to Kiler for junior high and senior high.

By that time, they had also brought Beech High from the east side; and they combined them sometime around World War II as Beech-Kiler. But the Kiler School was the first building erected completely for the education of blacks. Up until that time, the City had not built a colored school. From freedom until--, '65 until 1874, they had rented rooms, mainly in the parish house or the Colored Episcopal Church and rooms in the First African and First Bryant Churches and other rooms around. That was basically it, and, of course, George Rainey, who was a descendant of the Wormsole Plantation folk, he gave the Scarborough House and deeded it as a school for persons of African descent; with the proviso that if it ever was not used for the education of blacks that it was to return to his heirs. He likewise began work for the acquiring of the Eastside School which was the old [inaudible] Plantation, and I believe before he completed that real estate transaction, he died; but his wife carried out the intent. So that in the early days, we had the West Broad School and then the East Broad. But they both had been residences. The Maple School had been a church. Then, of course, the Paulson Street School had been a shirt factory. Then, the Anderson School was a large labor hall. But it was not until 1950 that this community got around to build a school for school purposes, for the education of blacks.

KUHN: You were saying something about working for the Gastons before.

LAW: Oh, I was just a yard boy on Saturday. I made some money cleaning up the yard; sometimes there were other things to do.

KUHN: Now, was it in high school that you first encountered the NAACP; or had you had some kind of contact with the NAACP before that time?

LAW: Well, bear in mind that because of the kind of family that I grew up in, where there was a strong sense of community responsibility--I think it had been handed down mainly through our grandmother, but my mother was tremendous inspiration. I saw the kinds of things that she was willing to do. Now, before she went off to domestic service, while my father was alive, because of what he got as a mechanic--it was no great sum--she made all of our clothes, made her own clothes, did sewing for others, and this kind of thing, so that she was able to supplement his income. As a child, I remember the cough medicine and what-have-you that had various kinds of promotionals with it. You could get so many wrappers and do an essay on why you liked so-and-so and win pots and things of that kind. I was impressed because she oftentimes would win these kinds of things that she got as a result of writing. And, likewise, as I reflect back, I know that my earliest toys were somewhat influenced by my grandmother because we were in her house; and she didn't allow my mother to bring in any certain records. My mother had developed some popular records, but she had to play them at somebody else's house. She couldn't play them at my grandmother's house. It was a Christian home, and she would not have any of that. But my mother tells me that when I was a small boy, I wanted a cowboy suit; and I remember the cowboy suit. And she didn't know it, but she bought a suit representing the sorriest cowboy on the screen at that time--"Hoot" Gibson. And my grandmother--Christmas, when I got the cowboy suit--she took the pistols. Well, there I

was. I was a cowboy all right, but I didn't have any pistols. And the earliest toys, though, that I remember, was a blackboard that had a whole set of beads that ran across it, a standing up blackboard that had a set of beads that permitted you to learn to count by moving the beads. Below that were the alphabet that you could use to write on the board, so the games that I learned very early had to do with writing on the blackboard or playing school on the steps, where you would move from the first step to the second grade, the third grade, on up. You remained on second if you missed the piece of broken glass in your hand, or the question asked or what it was.

KUHN: I had asked when you became aware of or interested in the NAACP.

LAW: As results of that, I saw the parades; my grandmother didn't like us to go in the streets. I was a little bit late joining Boy Scouts, but I always had a desire to be a Boy Scout. Then, the World War I veterans were present and they began to form youth groups to assist them with their parades. They organized a Drum and Bugle Corps. I got a bugle, and I was in the Drum and Bugle Corps. I was a Boy Scout and rose in the ranks, and that's a story within itself. Then, along came Dr. Ralph Mark Gilbert, who the NAACP--I had read about the NAACP through the Courier and the Tribune and other black papers.

KUHN: Your family would get the Courier here?

LAW: The Tribune was the major paper among blacks in this town. I even sold the Tribune. I had a route. I've been working since I was ten years old. My mother said when I was ten that she had a birthday, and I wanted to get her a present, so I went out and found some work; and somebody gave me forty cents, and I bought four plates at ten cents each--that's the number of people she had to feed, herself and the three--and to this day, we have two of those plates.

KUHN: Is that right? Who was this man you were just mentioning?

LAW: Dr. Ralph Mark Gilbert was a dramatist, and in the early forties the Colored PTA wanted to raise some money, so they contracted with him to come to the city to put on a religious drama. He came into the city and staged a play. The folk liked him, and they began to interview him. There was a vacancy in the pastorate in the pulpit at First African. And he was called as the pastor of the First African Church.

The NAACP was dormant. It was not active. The NAACP had been formed in 1917 by James Weldon Johnson. He came South; he formed the Atlanta NAACP, the Savannah NAACP, and the Jacksonville--maybe not the Jacksonville, but I know the Tampa--all of these about 1917. When the branch had operated for a while but during the Depression everything kind of folded, closed down because, as I look at it now, when hard times came, blacks at that time were not paying any more in the way of dues than ten or fifteen and twenty cents--and if that kind of money was needed to buy the rice--and rice was no more than ten or fifteen or twenty cents, and you needed eggs, they did not have money to maintain membership in organizations, so that there was a dropping off. But Dr. Gilbert came, and he found that there was no NAACP, and one of the first things as pastor of First Africa, he immediately set forth to revive the NAACP and to revive--there had been a YMCA earlier. It had not remained for long, but we were then entering into World War I--

KUHN: Two--

LAW: World War II. And he realized that the way to do it was to form a USO and serve the soldiers--and get the appeal and support and then have that evolve as a USO-YMCA. Then, after the War, when there was no longer a need to serve soldiers, it would become

the citizens' facility.

KUHN: Where did Dr. Gilbert come from?

LAW: He came--He seemed to have been a native of Indiana--Gary, Indiana; but he came to us from New York. The talk is that Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. had kind of gotten interested in him and had kind of directed the people here to look at this young man. But Dr. Gilbert was probably the most courageous, talented person to have located in Savannah during, perhaps, the twentieth century. And he has not been given his due as a state leader because he was not in Atlanta, just like me and all the rest in the Civil Rights struggle have served their areas just as well--

KUHN: Right, yes--

LAW: And the whole attention is always given to Atlanta. But Dr. Gilbert revived the Savannah NAACP. He then called a state meeting of the existing NAACPs at that time. There was Savannah, Atlanta, Albany, and Columbus. Those were the only NAACPs in Georgia. He called a meeting of those groups, and he formed a state association. He was the first president. He then began, on his own, to ride throughout, county by county, Georgia--and revive and organize where they had not existed before. He is the man who created the whole NAACP structure in Georgia.

KUHN: I know by 1946 there are many, many more chapters than there were in 1940.

LAW: That's correct. He created them all. He created them all. He went as a pastor. When he couldn't go, he would send his wife to speak at mass meetings. As a result, he created a state organization with branches in perhaps as many as fifty-odd branches before he let it go.

KUHN: This is in the mid--early to mid-forties?

LAW: That's correct, yes. Then he found Dr. Brewer and Primus King--

KUHN: In Columbus.

LAW: --trying to do something about the white primary. So Dr. Gilbert took that as a state NAACP project; and it was he who led the fight to break down the white primary in Georgia.

KUHN: Well, tell me what you know about that story. I mean, I know the Primus King case. And I know Dr. Brewer was also from Columbus, right?

LAW: That's correct.

KUHN: And Dr. Brewer helped to put up the money for the case; is that right, to bring the case?

LAW: Well, no. Now, initially, Dr. Brewer is the man who took Primus King-- Primus King was a preacher, I believe, a barber, but not extremely blessed with a whole lot of leadership powers or anything of that sort. But Dr. Brewer was, in turn, a very bold and courageous man. So he took King, and he worked in attempting to establish a case. But the important ingredient that I am making here was that it was Gilbert who gave it state-wide support, and it was these branches who were able to help finance. Dr. Brewer would not have been able to finance the ultimate fruition of a case to bring about the white primary. It was Gilbert who gave it that kind of support and that kind of assurance of success.

KUHN: Had Brewer been active in the Columbus chapter, in the Columbus branch?

LAW: I'm sure. I'm sure. But the leader of the Columbus branch at that time was a man named

W. M. Thomas who was an insurance man, who had an insurance company.

[End of Tape 1, Side B.]

[Continued on Tape 2 Side A]

[Tape 2, Side A]

LAW: Now, Gilbert revived the NAACP in this town and went about the state organizing NAACP branches, and created a state conference, then came also in the city. He organized the YMCA. He initiated an effort to carry out the will of Adeline Grimm, who had built and operated a group of apartments called the Grimm Apartments at the corner of State and Abercorn, just behind Levy Department Store. She left in her will money to be used for the creation of an orphanage for Negro girls. Dr. Gilbert hearing that this bequest had been made, he then began to circularize a letter and to bring people together to see if we could not form a group that would be able to carry out this will so that the bequest would not be lost.

As results of his efforts, he was able to introduce a great number of black women, including the AKAs that resulted in the foundation of an orphanage that we now call the Greenbriar Children's Center. Of course, his real gift was drama. He had been a Morehouse graduate, and he continued to establish a tradition to perform a passion play at Easter time on the Crucifixion of Christ. It was called "Crucifixion." Then, he established another passion play on the birth of Christ, "The Nativity." Then, he created another play based on the prodigal son. But these dramas were important because they exposed young blacks and older blacks to drama and to an activity that even schools had not done very much about. So people came from all of the churches to these rehearsals; and the plays as he would have them, being passion plays, there were as many as a hundred people in the choir, a great number of people in the mob and what-have-you; and they ended up being religious observances on sunrise at Easter or just before Christmas, and what-have-you. And they involved all the churches. And a great number of people

will tell you that their music exposure or their drama exposure--and, of course, he taught elocution, pronunciation, and dramatic expression and gestures--so that was good. He found that there was a real need for political activities, so he created within the NAACP a voter registration committee; and that committee went about meeting with every group: the lodges, the Elks, the Masons, the PTAs--everywhere we could get a speaker, and they would talk about getting people registered to vote. And he built a momentum in voter registration and then realized, once the Primus King Case was won, that it was necessary to form a political organization. So he then created the Citizen's Democratic Club of Savannah, and served as that president for a while and then turned it over to John. No, he did not serve as president. He, again, was a very broad kind of person. He did not feel that because he was a preacher or because of his NAACP leadership -- He designated the man that had been the voter registration chairman of the NAACP, John McGlockton. He became the president of the Citizen's Democratic Club. [Brief pause.]

KUHN: You just mentioned McGlockton, who I gather also was the same individual who brought a suit against the tax commissioner who had been resisting voter registration drives?

LAW: Well, McGlockton, in his role as chairman of the Voter Registration Committee-- He was self-employed; he ran the grocery store at the corner of Bolton and West Broad, a grocery store; and he lived in the back of the store with his wife and two daughters, so that when he was not in the store, his wife could sit there and operate it, so that his business did not have to close whenever it was necessary for him to be at the courthouse, whenever we had a group of people who were being registered, he could be on the scene. Once the

white primary, we won the primary case--

KUHN: The Primus King case--

LAW: --And the white primary was no more, as one would expect, the resistance was in placing blacks on those voters lists. We had a registrar, the person was a man named Cable [sp?]--'Kab'l' [pronouncing]--and he and his crowd, those days you had to answer the twenty questions satisfactorily. And, of course, there were two windows, one for the white registration and one for the blacks. Oftentimes there was one person doing the registering, so they would work at the white window. And you would just stand there and stand there until there were no more white folks to register or else they just would be so embarrassed that they would come over and make an effort to get you registered. Committees from the Board of Registration Committee would meet with Cable in an effort to get him to improve the condition and to get a softening of his attitude. We would go down with people, and we would stand and stand. Of course, they would do everything possible to discourage. Of course, the other way was to do everything they could to just put enough on to give an indication, some semblance of an indication that that's the only number that are qualified and the others were not qualified. But it really became a resistance effort because -- I heard you talk about what happened on the voting -- we had the hurdle first to even get on the rolls, and they were not enthusiastic about registering blacks. And they used every means that they could. I had been a member of the NAACP before there was a youth group. The year that Dr. Gilbert formed the NAACP, re-formed the adult group, I joined; then, in 1942, a year or two later, he had Ella Baker come to the city, who was then the director of branches and youth work. She came to the city, and the principal at the Kiler--Beech-Kiler--was Martin G. Haynes, who

was very supportive. And we were able to organize the Youth Council right there in the high school. And it became a badge of honor, and practically every student in the school joined. At that time, when Ella left, we were recognized as being the largest Youth Council in the country.

KUHN: Right.

LAW: We had practically every student in the school. There is that historic picture of the whole student body in front of the school with Ella Baker, Dr. Gilbert, and the teachers who were the youth advisors, were all in the group. That happened, and our Youth Council took an interest in voter registration because Ellis Arnall reduced the age to eighteen--

KUHN: Right, after the University of Georgia situation--

LAW: So that we began to encourage in the school young people to register and to vote. Then, the Youth Council took on itself--mainly Clifford Hardwick III, who is now a member of City Council, and myself--we had a method of going downtown and working the square in front of the courthouse. We would see people come through the square on other business. We would say: 'Are you registered to vote? Why don't you walk over here, and take a minute to register to vote?'

But it wasn't easy. Cable did not desire to see any increase in the black registrants, so he used every resistant method that he possibly could.

CRIMMINS: Did he use violence?

LAW: How's that?

CRIMMINS: Did he use violence?

LAW: Didn't have to. The law at that time still required you to answer the twenty questions to his satisfaction; and that's where the rub came. He didn't have to use violence because

there was the simple thing of intimidating you. Poor blacks--many of the people that we had seen had never had any relationship, in spite of--I read these stories now about what white folk did--but the vast majority of blacks in this town had very little relationship with whites other than the collector, the rent collectors who came, or the insurance man. There was never a case where they had to go and stand up before a white person or something--maybe one or two people that they worked for, and those relationships, in many cases, ended up being very cordial because--fairly cordial because those white folks soon realized they had to depend on these people that they were in constant contact with.

KUHN: But never in a situation like going up before Cable--

LAW: No, no. They were hostile because-- You didn't have to use violence. If you called a black man a 'nigger,' that was as demeaning and as hurtful as anything, because we had long been trained and taught that anybody could be a 'nigger.' It is a low person, and it could be white, black, or anything else. But when you went before the twenty questions and realize that the guy who is asking the questions has to look on the page in order to get the answer himself; and he is already registered and is administering the test--

KUHN: Right.

LAW: We then, as applied when I became president in 1950, we were still in the same struggle. We then had a second registrar who was a bit of a four-flusher. Cable had already been removed, but it still wasn't easy because many of the blacks that we were registering could write their names but they were not sophisticated enough to know who was president, or vice president of the United States. A whole lot of people would have difficulty now recalling who is vice president, even if they knew about Bush. Then, who

is the Secretary of State for Georgia; how many counties are there in Georgia; and what is the county seat, and all kinds of irrelevant questions that had nothing to do with your voting for the mayor or for the governor of the state. But these questions were there. So in 1950, we started a school in the various churches. We had the questions printed, and we would hold sessions in the churches. This is the year that I became president. Then, we would drill the people on the answers to the questions. Then, when they felt strong enough, we would then take them to register and to vote.

But, without a doubt, the work was vigorous and a large number of people developed the interest in registering and then finally in voting.

KUHN: I would be curious to talk about both the '46 campaign and the '50 campaign in more detail, in terms of strategies, tactics, organizational structure--how you overcame these hurdles you are talking about.

LAW: Well, you must realize that Savannah was under one man domination.

KUHN: Kennedy?

LAW: No, no, no. This was Johnny Bouhan. He was the boss of the machine. It was the Irish control, and he was boss. And he had named all the mayors of the town from Tom Gamble, I know, Thomas Gamble on. And the way he maintained control was if he gave you a job with the City, then you had to be responsible for voting all of your family members and what-have-you, so that they remained in control. There was hardly any resistance up until the forming of the Jaycees. The Jaycees came in on the scene, young white boys, who began to advocate city management government. Finally, the idea took. And it was John Kennedy who was the city management candidate. He was the first mayor who was willing to hire a city manager and not be the figurehead and run the city

with Johnny Bouhan behind manipulating.

KUHN: Now, what was the Citizen's Progressive League that comes in right around that time?

LAW: That's the political arm that grew up out of the Kennedy--They ran a slate against the Bouhan machine, and with the help of these young Jaycees who wanted to seek city government--I mean, city management--they supported the Kennedy ticket; and blacks who were for kicking out the old rascals, and the Kennedys having promised that they would form a Negro Advisory Committee. It was not possible then to run a black on their slate; but they ran a whole slate of people who, with a few exceptions, were decent and did not mind coming into the black community to campaign and to dialogue with blacks. And they agreed to an agenda that was mainly formulated in the mind of Dr. Ralph Mark Gilbert, and that was that there would be an advisory committee that would begin to have them understand what things they needed to address to benefit blacks. And there was also the agreement that they would hire black policemen.

KUHN: I was going to get to that now.

LAW: As results of that, they carried--Kennedy went in and carried out most of the campaign pledges, including that working out through the methods that Dr. Gilbert would lay for screening the Gilbert committee, the Citizens Democratic Club and the NAACP all screened the black candidates. And when they got the number that was agreed upon, they presented that to the administration; and, in secret, the training took place.

There was no announcement, and on the day that the black policemen had finished their training and were to take to the streets, I was the president of the Youth Council. This was '47, and a citizens meeting was held in what was then the 4-Ss, which was a local

service organization developed to--operated to serve the black soldiers during World War II. After the War, that building was taken over by the City as a recreational center. And on the day that the mass meeting was held in the gymnasium of the 4-Ss, the policemen, who nobody knew had been trained--other than Dr. Gilbert and the Citizens Democratic Committee--they were all marched into the building; and the news then broke on the citizens.

KUHN: Were you there that day?

LAW: Oh, I spoke! I told you I was president of the Youth Council, and I was a part of the--I was the youngest member of the Citizens Advisory Committee, being a young buck, the committee met and when the Freedom Train came through Savannah--

KUHN: 1948.

LAW: Right, in '48. They created separate lines; and, as leader of the Youth Group, I objected. I told them that it did not appear to me that if you are going to see the documents of the Emancipation and the Independence, the Declaration of Independence, and this kind of thing, that you would need to approach it in separate lines. The Advisory Committee, for peace sake, and because they could not get the Kennedys to agree that there would be no white and black lines, I went to the press with my statement and resigned from the Committee. But I was the youngest speaker on the day that the policemen came into the city, yes.

KUHN: So they continued to hold the separate lines for the Freedom Train?

LAW: Oh, yes. Oh, sure.

KUHN: I am going to back up just a minute here--

LAW: And I objected to the fact that blacks, the police, were not allowed to arrest white folks.

KUHN: White people, that's correct.

LAW: I now realize that being young, inexperienced, and brash, that's the only way now that it could have happened; and it wasn't a bad idea because, in time, all of that changed. Being young, I was not willing to wait.

CRIMMINS: Was that reported in the newspapers?

LAW: What is that?

CRIMMINS: Your remarks?

LAW: At the resigning at the Freedom Train question, yes. Very definitely, it was.

CRIMMINS: How about the police--

LAW: No, because there was no reporter, you see? We spoke and the citizens even-- Nobody, white, black--other than the people who came to the mass meeting--knew. And the reporters, white reporters at that time, were not covering black events.

KUHN: So this was all done on the Q-T with Mayor Kennedy and Reverend Gilbert?

LAW: That's correct. That's correct.

KUHN: Basically--

LAW: And with the Citizens Democrat Club.

KUHN: Who was the chief of police and what role did he play?

LAW: He had to do what he was told to do--

KUHN: --what the mayor said?

LAW: Yes.

KUHN: And was there a chair of the Police Committee on City Council or anything?

LAW: Oh, yes. Well, they were all in agreement, you see.

KUHN: They were on the slate together, you were saying.

LAW: Because, as I told you before, in order to support the Kennedys, there were certain things that we exacted in exchange for that support. So all these men knew that this was coming, and it had to be worked out.

KUHN: So these two movements, as it were, the black voter registration movement and the white reform city management--

LAW: That's correct--

KUHN: --kind of dovetailed--

LAW: There is no question about that.

KUHN: --in the Kennedy campaign?

LAW: It all represented the liberals at that time. But it was not a-- It was a fragile relationship because Johnny Bouhan and his group were still there. They had not been completely broken. They still were in control, for example, of the courthouse, the County, you see, and that type of thing.

CRIMMINS: Was that the first time in Savannah that blacks had been able to make--get effective response from city government?

LAW: Oh, no. Oh, no; not at all.

CRIMMINS: What were some earlier--?

LAW: The earliest relationship that I know-- when blacks have the time to sit around like you men are and to really begin to write the story, Savannah, up until the forties, was more liberal than Atlanta. Atlanta was a cracker town, and even at the beginning of the fifties, blacks attempting to move out of the Atlanta black ghettos met hostile resistance.

KUHN: Right. There were bombings.

LAW: That's correct. All that kind of thing never occurred here, never occurred here. Altogether, it was a different atmosphere altogether. And in the early days, we had the Atlanta riots. There was nothing comparable in this town. All right, but the early political situation was one in which Saul Johnson--

KUHN: Right, the editor--

LAW: Right, the editor of the Savannah Tribune, was able to exact from the white community certain concessions. For example, it was not until shortly after the turn of the century that the streetcars in Savannah were segregated. And each time that question would come up, the blacks would be able to take their political clout and said: Oh, no. Do away with that. And in the 1870s and in the late 1880s, and in --

KUHN: In 1891--

LAW: In 1891, each time, they were able to set aside the moves to segregate the streetcars.

KUHN: I would just be curious-- As a boy, did you ever hear of those boycotts, of the streetcars? As a kid, was that passed down to your generation?

LAW: No, no. But I do know people, just as Dubois rode a bicycle--

KUHN: Rather than--

LAW: Rather than to ride-- There were blacks that I knew, one in particular, a Green out of Brownville, who never rode the car from then on in and would walk to church and to work and others of that sort.

KUHN: Who would never place themselves in second class--

LAW: That's correct. That's correct--

KUHN: --kind of situation.

LAW: Very definitely. And, of course, in Savannah, we also know that during my youth, there were mulatto teachers who taught me in school, Sophrania [sp?] Tompkin, for example, never sat in the black section; but because she was fair complexioned, she always sat in the white section, and when blacks would get on the car, she would look out the window so that nobody would speak to her and she could be identified or detected.

KUHN: One of the things you are talking about which is, of course, also true in Atlanta, drew such figures as C. L. Harper as the role of educators at the high school level, visa-a-vie support of organization--

LAW: That's correct. The principal here was that kind of guy, and I was the youth leader in high school; and he was very, very supportive of me. For example, when Jackie Robinson came, and they refused him -- to allow him to play that first year, with the Dodgers, they refused to allow him to play in Grayson Stadium. And Grayson, General Grayson, W. L. Grayson, who had been a part of the political power that had created the segregation of the streetcars--

KUHN: Right; at the turn of the century.

LAW: That's correct. He still was here, and it was he who said: 'If you allow that nigger player to play in the field, take my name down off the stadium.' Well, we protested in high school, that refusal. My principal allowed me to hold a mass meeting during school time. We marched from the school and held a mass meeting on West Broad, in the biggest church on West Broad, the Everson Philip AME Church. We held a mass meeting, protesting, at that early date. That was something that many principals, even in later years, would not have tolerated or permitted.

CRIMMINS: You were in high school then?

LAW: Oh, yes.

[End of Tape 2, Side A.]

[Continued onto Side B]

[Tape 2 Side B]

KUHN: So that was in the early forties. What was the response of the white authorities to that mass meeting about Jackie Robinson?

LAW: I don't really know. I don't really know what that response was because, again, I still say, I still say that I read writers all the time and they talk about their awareness. But except for that mean police who rolled down into the black community, most of the time you had very little idea of what the white community was or anything else. Those blacks who worked among them and came back to you. They were able to report certain things.

KUHN: I just thought in the case of a mass meeting, whether there had been any kind of official response or anything.

LAW: The papers might-- No, there was no official response.

KUHN: I saw some reference to a bus demonstration led by Savannah State students in 1944, sitting in the front of the bus. Do you have any recollection of that?

LAW: I don't recall that. I don't recall that.

I do know this. I do know this: it does not appear to me that there was any great amount of student actions that was not condoned by the school administration. Now, when I went to Georgia State, we had begun then to do--

CRIMMINS: Savannah State?

LAW: No, no.

KUHN: Georgia Industrial--

LAW: It was Georgia State. Georgia State, which name did not change until '54. Then, when I went to Georgia State, it was only that small group of us who had been a part of the NAACP Youth Council.

KUHN: Who came out of the high schools together and--

LAW: --Who would challenge the president--Most of the students who were at Georgia State were rule orientated, and they would not have done anything that would have caused them to be expelled and be sent back home.

KUHN: Now, in Atlanta in the war years, if you read the records of the transit company, you find numerous episodes of soldiers, in particular black soldiers, testing--sitting down in front of the trolleys and the buses. Is there anything like that going on in Savannah during those years?

LAW: Well, it didn't have to. You must realize that mostly the buses, by and large, there was a great preponderance of blacks in the population. Most buses were predominately black buses, except maybe for Abercorn or something like that. The whites who would get on would make certain that they would hug the area in and around the driver, so that there was no real rub until you got a vacancy. Since blacks, by and large, were not going to the suburbs, there usually were seats for them on most buses, except where the bus stopped--

KUHN: Let me follow this up about the veterans and the soldiers. I was curious to know what role they played in the voter registration drive, the black veterans, the World War II veterans?

LAW: I don't really know, as such, they were--Savannah has always been a NAACP led city; so they would have been absorbed in--I went off to the War and returned, so they would be

absorbed in the NAACP leadership of that day and time.

KUHN: Had Mine and Mill come in in the forties yet, or did they come in a little later?

LAW: They were here, and they supported very very closely the leadership of the NAACP. Mine, Mills and Smelter Workers worked with me when I became president in '50; and I did most of my office work in the Mine, Mills, and Smelter. We had no office. We did it in the Smelter workers office. They made their mimeograph machines and all those kinds of things available to us.

KUHN: In Savannah, Mine Mill was the lumber--

LAW: No. It was a group from out of Birmingham.

KUHN: I know the group. They were the iron ore men.

LAW: What was that?

KUHN: They were in the iron business in Birmingham.

LAW: Oh yes, yes.

KUHN: But here, where did they organize in Savannah?

LAW: They would have been--

KUHN: What places were organized or did Mine Mill try to--

LAW: There were fertilizers and what-have-you--

KUHN: I was just trying to get a sense of the different people who took part, the different players.

LAW: Oh, yes.

KUHN: So you are saying, basically, that the NAACP maintained control of the--

LAW: Dr. Gilbert was such an overwhelming, charismatic leader. There was nobody in Georgia

who could fill a pulpit and mesmerize--he was an orator of the first order, a powerful kind of person. And because he was selfless, the only thing, other than his church, the only thing that he ever headed was the state NAACP, that worked close with A. T. Walden, who was the Democratic party leader, with J. W. Dobbs, who was the Republican party leader, with C. L. Harper, who had the Georgia Teachers and Educational Association, and this kind of thing, so that there was no rivalry. And all of the resources were put together. We didn't have the kind of thing--and, of course, there was very little leadership that had the freedom to be open.

For example, during the forties, and after the NAACP came under attack, first with the Birmingham case where Ruby Hurley refused to give up the membership list and John Calhoun refusing to give up the Atlanta list, that we then had to take people who had been teachers and what-have-you and had been good supporters on our membership list, who then became very fearful and would no longer hold leadership offices. Up until that scare, the secretary was a teacher. The Youth Council advisor was a teacher. Several of the vice presidents were teachers. When these people were all threatened, it then meant that we had to change our whole modus operandi. Colley Wimbly, who was a popular West Broad Street businessman and who had a poolroom where many of the teachers shot pool, he then would go--and he had been the person who had been very, one of the people who had been very active in the black community for doing the soliciting for Community Chest and for the Heart Fund and the Cancer Drive. He would likewise go right back into those schools and do the soliciting for the NAACP. As a result, he was the sole person who could still get that teacher involvement and support.

KUHN: He was independent.

LAW: That's correct, and because he was also

KUHN: --doing these other things.

LAW: --these other things, and they had full confidence in him.

KUHN: We were going to interview Calhoun the week that he died.

LAW: Okay.

KUHN: So maybe at some point I might want to talk a bit more about his role in the state Republican party and his role in the NAACP and that whole episode of the records and so forth because I don't think that has been really fleshed out. And, again, Calhoun died the week before we were going to interview him. What do you know about that whole story?

LAW: [Inaudible]

KUHN: Okay, we will--

LAW: That's fairly well documented in the black papers and in the Constitution, and I was not always privileged to get those papers in this area. But my association with the Atlanta NAACP goes back, because C. L. Harper was president during a great portion of the preparation for the social change. Then, after him, came John Calhoun.

CRIMMINS: You talked earlier about giving a speech as the head of the NAACP Youth Council, and I was wondering was that your first big speech?

LAW: No, not necessarily. We developed a small group of speakers along about that time, during my youth days, because we had several methods-- Our Youth Council in the thirties would not have been solely the kind of activist kind of group that you see now. A great of deal of time, a great deal more time, was spent in developing leadership, developing knowledge. We spent quite a bit of time reading and dealing with the history,

the founding of the NAACP, and the philosophy of Booker Washington and the philosophy of Dubois. All of our youth members would have been able to articulate this information. You can't do it now, a group of young people--they wouldn't. But we knew the abolition movement. We knew who the abolitionists had been.

We had a practice, those of us who were the leaders, there was a church in our general area that did not have such a large and active congregation. In that day and time, churches did not lock their doors; and we would get permission from their church leadership that on certain days that we could come in and practice. John Clifford Hardwick III, Walter J. Leonard, who later became president of Fisk University, and myself, we would all go into the empty church; and one would take the podium and would begin speaking; and the others would sit in the rear and would be critical and would holler out: 'Louder!' or something of the sort.

Whenever Dr. Gilbert was bringing a distinguished speaker, whether it would be Gloster Current, Ella Baker, Thurgood Marshall, Walter White, all of the leaders of the NAACP at a mass meeting, we would always go to him. I now see how we probably were just a bit of a headache and a pain in his side because we would always go and insist on a portion of participation in the program as Youth Council members. Invariably, most of the time, he would have to give over to us the honor of introducing the speaker, so that our members got that kind of speaking. This gentleman has wonderful voice resonance and articulation, but so many people that I reach, professors in the classroom, just really do not articulate. They speak in conversational terms, and we don't because we long ago

started speaking from the pit of our stomach and that happened. But our Youth Council very soon began to push the radio stations in this town. And that became a program of theirs. They had no disk jockeys so that we began to press them for black disk jockeys. A fellow who later became famous in New York, Dr. Jive, was a member of our Youth Council and was our first person to break the ice here. This was Tommy Smalls. In later years, he opened Small's Paradise up in Harlem, but he was a part of our Youth Council, Tommy Smalls, at Savannah here; and when we got WDAR to take on a disk jockey, he was that person. And he went on after gaining experience here, he went on to New York and became a very popular disk jockey. He finally got caught up in the --

KUHN: Payola.

LAW: That's correct.

KUHN: Whatever happened to Clifford Hardwick III?

LAW: He is here a member of City Council now.

KUHN: Okay. How closely and in what way would you work with Reverend Gilbert, you, the members of the Youth Council, the leaders of the Youth Council?

LAW: Let me just also tell you that that same Youth Council created early-- They got the radio stations to give them public service time very early, and they got fifteen minutes on Sunday afternoon, either after church or sometime about that; and we created a series of programs that highlighted blacks who had made history. We had a Youth Council group that was a singing group, and they would come on with a Negro spiritual. Then, there would be a speaker who would talk about the life of Jackie Robinson, W.E.B. DuBois, James Weldon Johnson, or somebody else who was chosen. Then, they would go off with another spiritual.

CRIMMINS: Would you do that?

LAW: What is that?

CRIMMINS: Would you talk on Jackie Robinson and W.E.B. DuBois or--

LAW: We would take various Youth Council members--

CRIMMINS: You, personally. You would pass it around, but I was wondering if you did, as well?

LAW: I don't recall, necessarily, I might have been the emcee, the person that brought it on and off; but it has always been my thing to involve people so that there were kids who we would work with on a speech, and they would be glad to be on the radio and this kind of thing.

KUHN: Sure.

LAW: We used it because the awareness and the involvement of young people during that period was greater and Hi-Y, YMCA, Boy Scouts and social clubs, and all of these kinds of things.

KUHN: So you tapped into that--

LAW: Oh, yes.

KUHN: --activity, and energies, and organizations--

LAW: Yes.

KUHN: It sounds like Reverend Gilbert, along, obviously, with Ella Baker, was also unusually participatory in terms of involving the youth and getting--

LAW: We had no problems there, but the person who was greatest among the young people involvement was a man who had been my scoutmaster. He was the first secretary of the NAACP under Dr. Gilbert. He was the kind of person that whenever we would be gathering; for example, I do recall when we were gathering to protest and to raise sand

about double sessions, about not having an auditorium, because in my high school days, that's why we had to come all the way down and march from the school down to the big church, because there was no auditorium in the school. We would have had to pull an outdoor rally. If we wanted to really sit down, we would have to come up on West Broad and come to one of the churches. There was the concern on our part of not having auditoriums so there could be meetings or things like this, and one thing after another. But the leaders oftentimes would have their own timetable, and sometimes they would be on committees that would be working things out.

Young people in that day and time were not privileged to always be in on those meetings. For example, I was present as a youth at the formation of the state NAACP in Dr. Gilbert's office, but they would not allow me to come in because I was not an adult. I was still there at that formation and eavesdropped at the door at the whole time they were creating it. I was just that interested. I was not allowed in, but I stayed at the door and listened as to how they went about forming the NAACP.

KUHN: How did they? How did they?

LAW: I mean, it is a matter of parliamentary procedure and all of that kind of thing, but they formed it. If they had been liberal enough to accept a teenager, I would have been one of the founders.

KUHN: What other kinds of ways did either Dr. Gilbert or some of these other adult figures, older figures, help and influence and guide you?

LAW: As I indicated, John Delaware, who had been my scoutmaster, and was the secretary of the NAACP, was perhaps the most active man in the entire community. He was chairman of the board of deacons at First African. He was chairman of the board of the

Savannah Boys Club. He was the district chairman of the colored--of the Negro Boy Scout district. He was the deputy, district deputy, for the Elks. He was a member of the board of the YMCA, the Charity Hospital, and so many other things. He was the chairman of the social committee for the Waldorf Social Club that had the responsibility of going each month to the juvenile home, to the juvenile farm where they kept the boys, and perform a program.

He kind of took me under his wing. I assisted him in many of those things. I did the signs for the Elks parades whenever he had to perform the parades. He got the materials, and I did the signs. Whenever he wanted to do an interesting program, he would sometimes ask me to arrange a program which would be of interest to the boys at the juvenile home. As soon as I became of age, he saw that I was on the YMCA board--one thing after another.

During our youth days, when there would be other youth leaders who would be saying: 'Accept this. No we can't kick against the thing.' Or: 'You young people keep quiet.' He would always be the person who we would be meeting in our Youth Council meetings struggling with what we were going to do. He would also be the kind of person who would always say: 'Do whatever you think you ought to do.' He was always supportive in that respect. He was never one to counsel us not to act. There were others who later became great supporters of mine in adult life who did not always take kindly to what we were doing.

For example, we began to publish, in the Youth Council, a newspaper that we would distribute around the school. When the black policemen were brought on, I wrote an editorial in the paper that we published, calling Dr. Gilbert and the others--in spite of the

fact that I admired them, and I knew that they were the best we had--my editorial ended up calling them half-loaf leaders because they did not insist on the full rights for black officers. However, if they had, Savannah would not have been the first city in Georgia with police and probably the first in the whole Southeast to--

KUHN: Miami and Savannah are the first.

LAW: That's correct, and we would not have been, if they weren't willing to at least make some concession.

KUHN: Right.

LAW: In my inexperience and hot blood, I didn't see that.

KUHN: Are there copies of that newsletter extant?

LAW: There are, but they are packed away. I'm sure we still have them.

KUHN: I know that there were other demands. You mentioned the police as one of the areas that--

LAW: Hire turnkeys at the jail.

KUHN: Right.

LAW: Hiring a woman matron for black women in the jail. Hiring, for the first time, the black recreational supervisors, things of that sort.

KUHN: I know there was also paved streets and streetlights as well, housing issues. There was also the hiring of a black deputy to help the solicitor general, too. I don't know if you recall that.

LAW: That was done. That probably was Robert Spencer.

KUHN: I also saw, going back to your--I think it is the same person, Cable--

LAW: John Cable.

KUHN: There was some issue where he forced black residents to pay unlawful property taxes.

LAW: Oh, he was a rascal. He did everything possible.

CRIMMINS: He was a minion of the political machine?

LAW: Yes, he was left over from the Bouhan machine because the machine still had control of the county offices and the courthouse came under the County. You had Kennedy who had control and blacks who were principally in the City, who had gotten a liberal government at City Hall; but it did not affect, in any measure, the County structure.

KUHN: Right, do you remember the first time--Do you remember when you registered to vote?

LAW: Oh, sure.

KUHN: What do you remember?

LAW: We conducted registrations in the high school, and our teachers would allow us to take kids from the school to register.

KUHN: Did you personally have any trouble when you went down to the courthouse?

LAW: Oh, no.

KUHN: With Cable or the twenty questions?

LAW: No.

KUHN: Were you going to--At what point did you go to Georgia State?

LAW: I went two years before being called into the military and returned after the military.

CRIMMINS: Where did you do your military service?

LAW: I was inducted in Fort Benning; and I asked for frontline duty as an infantry soldier. But

they assigned me to the quartermaster, as was typical. I ended up in basic training at Keesler Field in Mississippi and was selected from a group to come over to Atlanta University to take army administration. After that course, I was assigned--I went from Fort Benning to Atlanta. That's how it would have had to have been, probably. Keesler Field was where I took basic. I think I'm right. I became a part of a group at Keesler that came into an aviation battalion--aviation legionnaires.

KUHN: Hold on just a second. (Changing tape)

[End of Tape 2, Side B.]

[Transcript continues from Tape 3]

[TAPE 3, Side A]

LAW: The air force was then a part of the army, and they had this engineering group. We trained at Keesler how to lay down these maps that create instant landing aprons for airplanes. I was part of that, and I took it on myself while in the unit, when the elections came up, to get permission at formations to urge the soldiers to write home for absentee ballots and this kind of thing, and to vote. That's as much as we could do at that time.

KUHN: But you had already been involved in these--

LAW: Oh, yes, I served at--went from Keesler, I think, up to Coffeyville, Kansas, to an airbase there, stayed a short while. But I haven't thought about this much so I don't remember in what sequence it came. But I was assigned to a unit intended to go overseas, and I was to be the sergeant major. But I ran into difficulty with my commander, company commander. I was at that time the first sergeant for the company. I believe that he was a Mississippi white man, but we were being assigned chores on the base of picking up match stems and cigarette butts. And I objected and was called before my commander, and we had a discussion on leadership. Again, I was young; I told him that I felt that a leader, a proper leader, would be a person who could inspire his people into formation, and this was not inspirational work and that a leader was not a person who just necessarily ordered people to do but a person who could inspire and create a willingness and a desire on the part of the people to be a part of whatever the leader is leading off into.

After the discussion, he found a way to transfer me out because I did not go with the proceedings. It was a blessing in disguise because many of the men I was associated with--very few of them, I have seen since. I rather feel that the unit--that some--we were

in a training center. We trained people for these aviation units at first, and many of them we never heard of again; and I am sure that they, in going across the waters, ran into torpedoes, some of them, and were lost and that kind of thing. But the unit that I was supposed to go with, I did not go.

KUHN: So you came back--

LAW: And was assigned to Hunter Field. And when they brought me to Hunter Field, they couldn't--because of my spec--my MOS--they had nothing for me to do, and they just assigned me down to a motor pool and a little office of my own where each day I would move the papers from one side of the desk to the other. Finally, the government decided that anyone who had been in the service for twenty-one months, they would not be assigned overseas, because they were expecting the war to end, and they would be returning home. So I remained at Hunter. There was no place for me to go. I came home every evening, so it gave me a chance to resume my community activities before the war was over.

KUHN: Going back and forth from the base to -

LAW: Yes, I would walk from the base home.

CRIMMINS: Did you go back to Georgia State?

LAW: Oh, yes, because by then, I was entitled to the GI bill. I took advantage of the GI Bill of Rights and it wasn't necessary then for me to leave school in the summer in order to work, so I finished up. I finished in three years rather than four.

KUHN: I saw there was a boycott of classes at Savannah State in 1947. I saw reference to that.

LAW: Most of the student demonstrations that I knew about in the forties were "gut revolts." It

was because of poor food in the dormitories. This happened everywhere.

KUHN: [Laughing.] Okay. All right. So you come back after graduation, and do you get on with the Postal Service or is that--

LAW: That was after graduation.

KUHN: After graduation. In 1950, you are elected the president of the chapter, and I gather Hosea Williams is your vice president?

LAW: No, no.

KUHN: No?

LAW: No, Hosea didn't come on until much later--much, much later. After graduating, it is real interesting how I made it through school even before going off to the army. I had been the Youth Council leader. We now had another president, but I was still very much involved in boy scouting, so during my lunch break, I was--after school--We were very poor but still trying to make it and do what we can to help our mother, so that when I went to Georgia State, I would have to walk from home all the way to Gwinnett and Habersham in order to ride the streetcar on one fare. I did not have enough to ride downtown and then go around. So I would trot, early in the morning, over to Gwinnett and Habersham at the point where I could get to the school on one fare. Then we would ride back from the college, and I would get off at Gwinnett. I would then trot to the job. And at that time, I worked in the shower room of the white YMCA at the corner of Boulevard and Charlton; and I would take care of the sweat jerseys and the baskets of people, mainly who played handball. That was the big thing with the businessmen. They would leave their businesses--some of them basketball--but mainly handball. And they would come back with these sweaty clothes, and I would put them into their cubbyholes.

I developed a scheme that I would have to use the restroom--couldn't use anything upstairs--had to go way down in the basement where the blacks who worked, the cleaning crew, they used a restroom, a toilet way down in the basement, so I would have to leave the shower room to go there. I devised a method, an excuse, of going to the bathroom. I would sneak out the back door and run over to the First African Church and conduct a portion of the scout meeting and then leave somebody in charge to do the games; then I would run back to the Y and resume my work. There would be baskets all stacked up there from men who had left while they were thinking I am in the basement to use the restroom.

After I went to the service and came back, it was not necessary to do that. But I finished the school, and the only course that was, in my estimation, academically strong, was the science. And I took biology and minored in the social studies. I really felt that I did not need to study history because I could read and I really--in my social studies, it was a bit disgusting because I found out because of my NAACP activities and attending conventions and all of the conferences, I knew far more about many things than the people who merely had a textbook knowledge of the subject. Lobbying, for example: during our youth days in NAACP, in April, during our spring break, we would always go to Washington to lobby for the lowering, nationally, of the youth age and other things that we were interested in, so that it was not necessary for me to major--It would have been a waste of time to just concentrate there. I took biology because it was a laboratory course, and it had a pretty good teacher who had fought to get some halfway decent equipment and that type of thing. It was the strongest course provided.

But when I finished school, there was nobody who would hire me because of my NAACP

activities. There was only one school that offered me a job. Down at Woodbine, they were getting ready to open, and they had no science teacher. I refused the offer because it meant leaving the city, and I insist that there was work to be done here. And there was more freedom to assert one's self, so I did not leave. I went from June until December before I was called as a temporary worker at Christmas at the Post Office and remained--because of the people who took the exam, I was one of the two top people on the exam.

KUHN: You mentioned before the Citizens Democratic Clubs that Reverend Gilbert had helped set up.

LAW: He was the founder--not helped set up--he was the founder.

KUHN: He was the founder.

LAW: He initiated all of those things.

KUHN: That spread to the Georgia Association of Citizens Democratic Clubs, did it not?

LAW: That was A. T. Walden.

KUHN: But does that come out of the same--

LAW: It was the affiliate; it would be an affiliate, yes.

CRIMMINS: Are there biographical materials on Gilbert, papers or--

LAW: Very little. Very little. He wrote--financed himself, and much of his material was done on the very cheapest paper possible. The care was not given to it; and heat and disintegration on those papers--a lot of it is gone.

KUHN: But some of it has been preserved?

LAW: I doubt it. I doubt it.

KUHN: That's one thing that I try to do in my work, is try to find--We know that

these organizations exist, the Citizens Democratic Clubs, and so forth--exist. Then, I try to find where there might be people who have records or papers so that these documents can be preserved. I think it is tremendously important to keep extant the records of such organizations that existed in this state at that time. There is very little written record of them today. Now, there is some in the Walden papers and just a few other places. In terms of fleshing out the biographical information about Reverend Gilbert, what other kinds of things can you provide about both before he came to Savannah and later on in his life?

LAW: That's a future project that we hope to get to in '91.

KUHN: Okay.

LAW: We want to do a major project on Ralph Mark Gilbert because, as I said before, he is a pivotal character. He is really a giant and ought not to be ignored. But history--the contemporary thing--for example, I myself am very, very unhappy that Atlanta has allowed the Martin King situation to eclipse all of the other people who had made contributions in the forty years prior to his coming on the scene.

KUHN: What kind of contact did you have with Colonel Walden or John Wesley Dobbs?

LAW: Dobbs for a while, when I was president of the state conference, Dobbs for a while was vice president.

KUHN: When did you become president of the state conference?

LAW: I held it for--I would have to check it. I would have to check it. I was the third, the third state president. After Dr. Gilbert, a Dr. William Madison Boyd, who had been a teacher first--

KUHN: From Milledgeville?

LAW: No, he had first been a teacher at Fort Valley and then went from Fort Valley to Atlanta University; and he died young. But he was the second president, and I was vice president under him. He must have died from leukemia or cancer, and in the midst of his term, he died. And I succeeded him as president and then was elected for twelve years thereafter. And at one point needing good support for the cases that were attempting to get--desegregation cases into the court--John Wesley Dobbs had been extremely valuable in working with the Masonic order in supporting the research that Thurgood Marshall needed in preparing the cases for the Supreme Court--in what we were doing in voter registration--eventually, John Wesley Dobbs came in as our vice president, a very strong willed man and not willing to listen to a young pipsqueak like myself. It meant that after a year or two with me trying, as president, he only served for a short while as vice president. But A. T. Walden, the colonel, worked along with me in everything that I attempted to do.

KUHN: This is a question that I've had is what kind of contact and communication there was between different black communities in the state of Georgia at that time.

LAW: Well, as we said before, the state conference was the thing. The rural people from all over would come. There would be sessions. Walden would speak. People would come from the national staff. At that time, we would give these people the various kinds of know-how that they would need. Those of us who were in the state would travel to these communities whenever they wanted an inspirational speaker or somebody to come in and advise them on certain local problems.

KUHN: Apparently some of these chapters were formed against great odds--

LAW: No question about it.

KUHN: I think Terrell County--

LAW: There's no question about it. There, again, one of the great souls. There was never a greater man in all of Georgia than D.U. Pullum, who served as the president. And this is why many of us are really sad and really get a little bit agitated about sitting down with people like yourself because we've got work to do ourselves. Pullum ought not to be forgotten.

KUHN: Tell me about the--

LAW: It was Terrell County, "Terrible Terrell."

KUHN: "Terrible Terrell."

LAW: The man maintained the NAACP in that community even when he was the only person who would dare let it be known that he was an NAACP member. He would have to-- whenever it was necessary to go before the board to speak out on school conditions or anything like that, he would make that trip, and alone, with tears in his eyes, and full up with all of the pain and what-have-you that he was feeling about the injustices done to his people. He would make those trips. He would [inaudible] of the white folk.

On one occasion that I personally know about when riding from town back to his farm -- he was one of the biggest farmers in the county -- a group of whites waylaid him, and he was not a young man -- and dragged him out and whipped him. It did not deter him. He still washed himself up, and the next week, he would be back on the case again.

The blacks who would meet him in town were afraid to even be seen talking with him on the streets. They would walk by him on Saturdays when they would come to town. As they would pass each other, they would push the NAACP money in his hands and not

break their steps and keep on walking.

But he kept an NAACP presence in that state and would come--sometimes, he would only get to the meetings on the last day, but he retained the contact, and as results of his perseverance, his son is now Superintendent of Schools in Terrell County.

KUHN: Where did Pullum get his wherewithal to and his courage to--

LAW: He was a wealthy farmer. I just told you. It was one of the largest farms in the entire county.

KUHN: --which doesn't automatically translate into that kind of drive and determination.

LAW: Obviously, obviously, obviously. But you must understand that-- Very frankly, he was a black who need not have recognized his black blood. He had blond hair and blue eyes. To some extent, he knew that he was kin to some of the whites of that county, this kind of thing--but a man of great courage.

KUHN: When you think about other--sort of the key grass roots black community leaders across the state who have not been recognized, who else comes to mind?

LAW: Oh, there were many, many.

KUHN: What about in the Greene County or in the Hancock County area, in that part of the state?

LAW: Cuthbert would have been a place where there was a great deal of courage. The Boyds, I believe, of Milledgeville. There was a undertaker, a fellow--a funeral director up around Monroe, Georgia, who just rode the roads up along that way and kept the people's spirits high and kept something going.

KUHN: Were you in the state at the time of the Monroe lynchings?

LAW: Oh, yes.

KUHN: You were in the state?

LAW: I know about Lyons. I know all of it. I was in the state at all times except for the two and half years that I was in the military; and much to my pride, my mother maintained my membership in the NAACP during the two and half years that I was away. It is that kind of thing that I have respect for her because in our family, our sense of pride and of duty was not superficial. We did what we felt we ought to have done. I joined the branch on the fort. There was a youth group. We grew up in a home where there was a sense of church, where there was a sense of racial advancement and pride. I knew all of the reports that came through the Tribune. It was a real fine paper in my youth days. It was a black paper and equal to many. It is the oldest continuously operating black paper in the country at that time.

CRIMMINS: Were there stories from Savannah that were fed to it?

KUHN: He is talking about the Savannah paper.

CRIMMINS: Oh, the Savannah Tribune.

KUHN: The Savannah Tribune, yes. It started in the 1870s.

LAW: In 1878.

KUHN: Right. I just do really think it is important to document the people who did stick their necks out in these different communities.

LAW: Obviously, obviously; but, again, it is a whole research project that I would need to do, a whole research project; and you just can't do everything.

KUHN: Sure.

LAW: But we know them.

KUHN: The Griffin area?

LAW: Oh, yes, the last one I remember there was Shropshire, Reverend Shropshire.

KUHN: What about Touchstone?

LAW: That was an agricultural man. The agricultural people, with few exceptions, were just moderate. They were basically of the Booker Washington persuasion.

KUHN: What was the case in--?

LAW: We did have good leadership in Dublin, Albany--beginning with the Presbyterian preacher there. We had some good leadership in Macon. Augusta all the way. There was a man from Detwilder--No, Detroville, I believe--old time leaders. They came down as far as Winder--That was, I think, a retired agricultural leader, a man named Detwilder.

KUHN: In Winder.

LAW: With some effort, we begin to think of them. But they were just periods--no more--because most of the leadership, most of the leadership--it was courageous leadership throughout Georgia at that time was middle-aged--middle-aged. So when you came to the middle fifties, they began to die out. But the leadership was middle-aged.

KUHN: Did the state chapter get involved in the case of--the Rosa Lee Ingram case in Schley County?

LAW: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

KUHN: What recollections do you have about that?

LAW: They probably provided the lawyers and went about the state trying to get support for it because in Georgia--and this was true even in the King days--the NAACP is the only black group that had a network and tentacles that went out into rural areas and into community leaders. The King movement was basically a preacher movement, and they

led from the pulpit. But the people who had had the voter registration committees and Citizens improvement groups and what-have-you, were the NAACP leadership in the various little communities. As results, it was only the NAACP that could call a state meeting and get somebody from a community where Echols, and Baxley, where they had to come out at night. Nobody could do anything in Terrell, you see. But the student movement and the King movement was mainly Albany under C.B. Albany, Atlanta, and I guess one or two others--but that was mainly Georgia, right there.

CRIMMINS: Did King come here to Savannah?

LAW: Only on two occasions. This was an NAACP town. I didn't need it. We didn't need it.

KUHN: Okay.

LAW: That's another story.

KUHN: Brunswick was an NAACP town, too?

LAW: Indeed, under Rev. Hope.

KUHN: Reverend Hope is quite a figure. I have heard him.

LAW: J. C. Hope.

KUHN: I heard him last year when he came back to town.

LAW: That's correct.

KUHN: And I've talked with Geneva Lyde--

LAW: That's correct.

KUHN: --there as well.

LAW: She's been with him down through the years.

CRIMMINS: So here the preachers were steadfast supporters of the NAACP?

LAW: Not steadfast. You see, you have to watch on adjectives. Many preachers were made to-

- There were a whole lot of conservatives, and many of the preachers who followed King did it because they wanted to be in the company of another big preacher, or they were caught up in the mesmerizing of the pulpit or something of the sort. But, here, many of these lay people had to make particularly conservative preachers become supportive. When we started the movement, the kids were arrested on Broughton Street in the Levy Store on March 16, 1960. We wanted to call a mass meeting for that Sunday, which was three or four days later. The only church where we were really welcome was the Bolton Street Baptist Church, which did not begin to accommodate the crowds of people who were aroused and wanted to be a part of the meeting.

[Tape 3, Side A ends]

[Tape 3, Side B]

LAW: We had church bombings all over Mississippi and Alabama at one place after another. Many of the preachers of big churches would say: 'I don't want my church bombed.' And there were some of the larger congregations, the preacher was saying: 'The church has no business in this. This is not saving souls'--and all of that kind of thing.

KUHN: I know Herman Lodge has said that when the Burke County Civic Improvement Association started organizing that they found it easier to organize in the AME Church than in the Baptist Church. Do you have any sense of that one way or the other?

LAW: No, no, no. I had an advantage here in view of the fact that I had been a part of almost every phase that had been part of the community. I had likewise been the NAACP leader then for about ten to eleven years. I had been a youth leader before that.

Many of the people who are now adults had come by me in school and had given me their membership and what-have-you. And I have never been bashful, so I don't mind telling a rascal if he is a son of a--S.O.B.--if he has skirted his responsibility to himself and to his race or anything else of the sort, so that many of the preachers knew me, and when they didn't, there were people in their memberships. The preacher at the Fremont [sp?] Temple Church, one of the largest churches in the community, black congregations here, refused to ever invite me to hold one of the mass meetings at his church.

We had women who, one of the women in my NAACP, headed the Women's Auxiliary, was a strong giver in her church. Well, she had the women to begin to withhold their money from the collection plate. Finally, when they spoke to him in most uncertain terms, he began to tell them: 'Tell Brother Law to come on over here. I'd like for him to hold one of his meetings here.'

KUHN: They hit where it hurts.

LAW: Right. Then, we began to meet, and no church was big enough. People began to come and come. Many of these big churches that had never had a crowd of that sort would even overfill their balconies. Then they began to see what could happen and to take the pride. They began to occupy the platform with me.

KUHN: This is 1960, you are talking about--

LAW: Yes.

KUHN: Spring of '60. How and by whom did the sit-ins, the lunch counter demonstrations, the Levy's demonstrations begin here in Savannah?

LAW: Hosea Williams was working for the Department of Agriculture here as a chemist.

KUHN: Right.

LAW: A biology chemist. And he had taken no interest in civic or civil rights up until that time. But he came to us about problems. Well, no, I ran into him on the corner of Gaston and West Broad in the heart of the black community. I was coming from an NAACP meeting at the First African Church. I was walking home. And, in some kind of way, we got to know each other. He found out that I was the head of NAACP and he came and wanted to help. It was very active so when he came in, he was immediately-- because we never had all of the officers and all of the workers that we needed, he became an officer. And when the young people in the very early--

KUHN: '60--

LAW: --came and said that they wanted to sit in at the lunch counters, we had two groups: our Youth Council and then we had a group of students at the college and then a group in West Savannah, which was really the first group to approach us. I told them that I would support them as head of NAACP in the sit-ins, if they would submit themselves to training in non-violence. I designated, of all people, Hosea Williams, to do the training. And the meetings were held on the third floor of the YMCA.

After he had carried them through all of the drills and training, finally, in March, middle March--I say that I was satisfied-- I had given them every kind of pass they could possibly have in order to see whether or not they really had interest or whether it was just spur of the moment because I have no interest in people who just want to be a fly in the pan because, likewise, I knew that the effort in Savannah would not be an easy one and it would take some sticking to. So the West Savannah group, which was the group, the

largest of the group and really ready to go, all boys, I gave an extra assignment for one of the little fellows in the group, a fellow named Arthur Samuels, who was the shyest of them all but who liked to draw. And I gave him the assignment of going to each of the department stores and drawing a floor plan as to where the exits were and where the counters were because we knew that as soon as they got into the store, things were going to close down. What we wanted to do was to have easy access into the store and to be at the counter before they looked up and saw anything.

Finally, on March 16th, we told them that they were ready and gathered in the basement of the First African Church and set out under the various young people who had evolved as the leaders. The groups went to various lunch counters; and we had very little thought of the white community, very little contact in the white community. We were so busy doing our own thing that we had lost sight of the fact that March 16th was St. Patrick's Day.

KUHN: The day before St. Patrick's Day--right.

LAW: It was St. Patrick's Day.

KUHN: Yeah.

LAW: It was St. Patrick's Day.

CRIMMINS: That was the seventeenth.

KUHN: At any rate, it was right there.

LAW: I think, on that day, I think on that particular year, it must have been St. Patrick's Day because there were more people downtown than any day of the year--young people--at the lunch counters in all of the McCrory's, Kresge's everywhere--were immediately shut down. It was only at Levy's in the Azalea Room, where the manager of the store had

been a displaced Jew who had been forced out of Germany--he had no compulsions about arresting the young people who sat in at the lunch counters at the Azalea Room. There were three young people. Their names were Ernest Roberson, who now lives in Atlanta; JoAnn Tyson, and Carolyn Quillian, who is now Carolyn Coldwin, and is on the regional staff--one of our regional staff members for NAACP--they were arrested. And the arrests at the Levy store triggered the entire movement because when all of the others were just allowed to sit there, they refused to serve anybody, white or black, they just closed down. On that Sunday, we called a mass meeting at the Bolton Street Baptist Church, and in the midst of the mass meeting, there were young men who were part of the military here who became very active in the movement at that time. I announced to the people that only Levy Department Store had had the unkindness or the temerity to arrest and to throw our young people in jail. With that, people started throwing in their charge cards and down to the front of the church.

The most active person was a young man out of Hunter Field. He came with big shopping baskets. And he took the responsibility -- at that meeting, we agreed that there would be a boycott, that no longer would we shop at the Levy Store. He gathered up all of the charge cards, and the next morning, led by this young man who was a soldier out at Hunter, we went to a -- a group went to the Levy Store and dumped all of the charge cards at the front door and did not go back into that store anymore.

KUHN: That was the first day, you are talking about, right after the demonstrations that happened?

LAW: The demonstrations were on the 16th. Some two or three days later, we held the mass meeting--

KUHN: So it is that quickly?

LAW: --to protest the arrests in Levy Store. When the protest meeting started, the fervor was such that the people said: 'Well, I will never go back there again,' so they began to throw their charge cards down to the pulpit. We gathered them all. Everybody gave up charge cards, so the soldier, who made himself very active, he had the big baskets and took the responsibility of going to Levy the next morning and dumping the charge cards in front of the door.

CRIMMINS: How long did it take Levy to respond?

LAW: There was no response. Their response was to gather up the charges -- because we stayed off Broughton Street for a year and a half. We then immediately instituted picketing of the street. We made picket signs. We sent pickets into the street. The City, in very short order, outlawed the picketing except two to a block. That made picketing very hazardous because the rednecks came into the town attempting to bolster the withdrawal of patronage that blacks had given. It meant that the two lone picketers on any one street were exposed to all the heckling and spitting on and the crowding of the streets.

They continuously crowded the streets. I remember the last picketings on the streets on Saturday was almost impossible. The whites would gather into the sidewalks. I was called from the NAACP office. At Kresge's Store, the picketer had been forced from the sidewalk completely by white folk who were crowding the sidewalks. The picketer maintaining the line faithfully was then picketing almost in front, I mean in the middle of

Broughton Street, in front of the store. There was no place for him--her--he or she--to walk in front. I came, and I rescued the picketer by taking the sign. At that particular moment, we just withdrew from the street.

Kresge's was a real tough spot because the kids then went to sitting in at the lunch counters all along the street each day, almost just as harassment to close down the counters and that type of thing. On one occasion, a young man by the name of McMillan--It must have been James--He was sitting at the lunch counter, and a big white hefty fellow came along and struck him with his fist on the jaw and broke his jaw--perhaps the most violent thing that we had with the entire sit-ins.

KUHN: And the mass meetings were continuing every night?

LAW: No, the mass meetings were mainly on Sunday. We held them religiously Sunday afternoon at four for some three years. That's how we kept the community together because the newspapers, when they found out that they were helping our effort by reporting our activities, they stopped reporting anything. They did not report the arrests. They would report murders and other kinds of things, but they would never report the number of blacks arrested. They would never report anything about our picketing. They would report nothing about the effect of the boycott. They did nothing, and we had to communicate solely through the black newspapers and the mass meetings.

The mass meetings were so well-attended that we could tell the people Sunday afternoon what would be our strategy or our plans or instructions for the rest of the week, and they would carry them out faithfully until we'd come back to another mass meeting. There, again, I would instruct them and exalt them in fiery speeches as to what we would do. The people were very faithful, and, finally, the City passed an ordinance that caused us to

have to-- It prohibited us from picketing because we were effective. They prohibited us from picketing at all. The merchants had brought pressure on the City for that because they thought that if they would withdraw the pickets that blacks would return to the stores.

But, we then devised two other means for maintaining the pickets. The people who once carried the signs would still walk the streets, and they became what we called the "silent picketers." And they would walk by somebody, and if they would find a person who didn't get the word, say: 'We are not going in the store.' The person would turn around and keep on going. Then, there were -- the telephone book-- We had a committee of women under the leadership of Mercedes Wright, who is now in Atlanta, Mercedes Arnold, I believe it is. But she was formerly the wife of the -- the man who headed the student movement in Atlanta?

KUHN: Lonnie King?

LAW: Lonnie King. She was Mercedes King. She took a group of women, and they took a phone book and the city directory. And they pulled out every telephone holder who was black and made a telephone book of every black holder. And we created a committee headed by Miss Virginia Mack. She had spent some two years at Spelman, but she was a native, again, of the low country. She came from Swissland, a black community right outside of Hardyville. She had a great deal of pride. She had spent some time in New York, had a great deal of pride, and she had come back here to nurse a sister who was bed-ridden, who was married to Marion Washington, who had operated a very successful black grocery store in Yamacraw. She couldn't come to all of the meetings we were holding, but she knew a lot of women that she talked with at home

while nursing her sister. They'd talk on the phone. So all of these women who she had been talking with and who were similarly situated, who had remained at home, either because they were taking care of the elderly or they are housewives--they made up a committee of women who were at home, housewives, by and large. And when we would hold the mass meeting on Sunday and had received reports from people and determined what we had to do the next week, we would give those instructions to Miss Mack. And she would communicate with all of the women who were holding directories. And one woman would call all of the people in the "A" section, and "B"--and that's how the word would get around the City. And blacks would know not to go into the stores or whatever else we were doing.

You see, the story--I don't care what anybody says--this was a community effort. And I have a great deal more pride in what took place here than some great Messiah marching in and getting people to march down the streets with them and the like. Our voter registration effort during the fifties--I failed to say: Hosea Williams' role in the NAACP first was in voter registration. He was the chairman of what we call the "Crusade for Voters." That was the registration arm of the NAACP. And, of course, he, in the early sixties, got the impression he wanted to use the King method, and got the impression that the rest of us were moving too slow and all of this kind of thing; and he, as results of constant disagreement, he took his committee, "The Crusade for Voters" out of the NAACP and carried it into the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

They began to operate with the marches. We, in the NAACP had marches, but they were never the large marches that the Crusade for Voters carried because, by and large, we were, to some extent, being supported by people -- I must confess that the Crusade for

Voters and the marches, by and large, were people who were students, who were unemployed or had plenty of time on their hands--

CRIMMINS: Professors?

LAW: What professors?

CRIMMINS: Had plenty of time on their hands?

LAW: No--We were grass roots, the working people, the labor people, the professionals--all of these people who were not necessarily willing to expose themselves to any blackjacking on the part of police and that kind of thing, but who, likewise, understood what we were saying, that the key to the Savannah effort was going to be to withhold our political patronage from anybody who was not in keeping with and in support of our agenda and was not willing to make change and that we were going to withhold our monies from the cash registers and to bring these merchants to their knees until the City Hall was willing to sit down and negotiate the social changes. The pastor of the Congregational Church here was Rev. Oliver Wendell Holmes, one of the Holmes brothers of Atlanta.

KUHN: Right. One of the Hamilton Holmes--

LAW: Well, he was an uncle.

KUHN: Uncle--right.

LAW: But he had also been part of the men, one of the men who had challenged the Atlanta Golf Course.

KUHN: Right.

LAW: That's correct. And had been a part of the case of opening up the golf course. He was the pastor of the Congregational Church and was a part of the committee; and we

gave him our demands, and it was he who delivered to the white officials the original demands on the part of the black community. He left the community the first year, so sometime in the hustle of things--and died not too many years thereafter.

KUHN: Right. He went to work for Francis Pauley, if I am correct.

LAW: But he died not too long after, so that we lost whatever records he had. That was his chore and responsibility. He had been a part of that committee of [inaudible] and was very, very sensitive to change.

CRIMMINS: How did you arrange to get shoes and clothing and other goods for people during the boycott?

LAW: Mainly, blacks began to realize that they were buying too much and that they could do without. So some years, people would say: 'We are not going to buy anything this year. We are going to use what we already had.' We likewise began to encourage people to make their clothing. We got people to sew. We caused two or three people to go into business in the black community. The Harden brothers opened a shoe store. One or two people opened dress shops. People then began to try to answer the need with one or two shops. But, basically, I was able to get people to withhold and to make do. For example, they knew me; and I--from 1960 until now, I have not been back into a store to buy a suit of clothes. They likewise knew that I had been president ten, eleven years. I did not own a car. I did not even own a home and this kind of thing. They realized that I was not hungry, that my own desires were very moderate, and they trust me. Generally, what I say they were willing to follow. I had given thought to the whole struggle, and I

know this community. I know what it needed and what the people would follow.

This was not a college led struggle because the first young people who came from the college to participate in the City had been advised by many of the teachers on campus that 'this is a state school, you all have got no business--you could hurt the school--don't follow that fellow W. W. Law,' you see. So, it was not--To this day, I have great great respect for the professionals who stayed at my side, because, as I say, it was a grass roots movement that was striking at the jugular vein of this town.

The Chamber of Commerce never did involve itself, never did. The mayor of this town had to eventually, because the mayor happened to have been the leading Episcopal layman of this area; and he was able to get his bishop to involve himself. That, in a sense, was a godsend because the powers that be in the white community is either Catholic, or mainly Episcopal, in this community--the bankers are basically episcopal. Those who are not would be Catholics. So Bishop Onwell of the Episcopal Church was able to bring the Catholic bishop, who did not, I think, openly show his hand, but he assigned one of the monsignors, full time, to be a liaison and to work.

The Committee soon became known as Monsignor Toomy's Committee. That established the dialogue. The Committee of 100 was created by the Episcopal bishop at the behest of Mayor McClain, who, as all of you know, probably has the largest legal firm in the town now, again, a long, old time Savannah family.

[End of Tape 3, Side B.]

[Interview continues on Tape 4, Side A]

[Tape 4, Side A - Interview continues]

LAW: The people were extremely loyal. The mass meetings spread the word. Then, I had people who were coming in from the outlying areas who were supportive, women who were riding over for the Sunday mass meetings. They enjoyed the singing and the speeches. They would carry the word back to Hardeeville and to Ridgeland. Charles Bowles came up from Richmond Hill. He'd get the message and would carry it back, so these outlying areas that normally would have given us a problem on Saturdays, coming in to town to shop. They began to find other places and would not come to Savannah to shop. So that tightened and strengthened the boycott.

We had, and I say God bless them, a few people, and I am not sure whether they were local folk or people who had come to town. But there was a cheap goods store, Yacaman and Yacaman on West Broad near the Visitor's Center. Two or three people had gone in, just had to get a sale, I guess. When they came out with their goods, some of these ruffians, young fellows, saw them: 'Don't you know there's a boycott!' They grabbed the packages and tore them up right there in the streets. And the word got around: 'Don't go in Yacaman, they'll'--They were not my people, but I got credit for it--They'd say: 'The NAACP will tear up your bags.' So that those who didn't respond otherwise, with fear, they got in line.

The boycott held about a year a half. Finally, it got so bad, stores were closing. One store, I think Chatham Furniture Store, began to advertise that they were going to have a back door sale in the evening, feeling that people who were afraid or ashamed to come in the front door would come in the back door. Well, that didn't work.

We made our demands. There were stores that were taking the delivery boy or the janitor or the messenger and putting them up in the store and saying that he was a salesman, and we knew better. So nothing would break the boycott.

KUHN: So the boycott had shifted from serving people to sales?

LAW: The demands that Oliver Wendell Holmes carried to the city was never one for just the desegregation of the lunch counters. A year and a half later, when we desegregate, we desegregated the restrooms, the water fountains, the lunch counters, the having black women addressed as Miss--with courtesy titles. We insisted on the hiring of clerks and not just on upper floors but in positions of exposure on the first floor as well, ringing cash registers; all of these things were a part of the demands that we made before we returned to the stores.

Of course, when we desegregated--and we desegregated before the public law--in Savannah. We desegregated the restaurants, the theaters, the stores, every facility agreed to, at that time, to come and--what happened--to let down their barriers. And what happened was that the Committee of 100 that had been created under Bishop Onwell selected a smaller group made up of--and these are the real heroes of the--Hosea Williams and all of that crowd were in jail--and we had a blind judge here, Judge Mullins, who literally threw the key away and did not ever want to let Hosea out. But there was not enough activity, and he went on and carried with him two or three of the young people who had followed him out of our Youth Council into the Crusade for Voters -- Van Clark and Big Lester, who he had picked up and had known from the corner of Gaston and West Broad, where I had picked up Hosea. He picked up Big Lester from the same corner. They, as well as Willie Bolden, who is now in Atlanta -- all

of them were part of the Crusade for Voters, but they went on with King. So it was left to us to maintain the boycott and to wield the black vote into a block. And it worked real well.

The Committee of 100, I started to say, had about five white people that they designated to negotiate with the black community for them. The finest gentleman in the group, without a doubt, the most articulate, was A. Pratt Adams Jr., who headed the firm of Adams--one of the oldest law firms here. But he has his clients--the Wise Theater, the C&S Bank, and a great number of the big boys because he later became chairman of the board of C&S Bank when they had a transition -- they had a failure of the funding or the housing investment and what-have-you under Van Landingham. They lost a great deal of money, so there had to be a reorganization. And A. Pratt Adams, the attorney here, became the chairman for a short while. He was one of the five on the committee, a totally decent, native son, whose heart was thoroughly in the right place.

The next person was Malcom Bell, Jr., who at that time was president of the Savannah Bank and Trust Company, the oldest bank in the community, and who likewise was leading--he, and I think, Adams both were leading laymen in the Episcopal church, the oldest church in the diocese, where the blue bloods and the money was. Then, there was Sam, Samuel Adler, Jr., who had headed Leopold Adler Department Store, again, who had married Andre Costilany's [sp?] wife, and wanted to really impress her, I think, and wanted to kind of straighten the town out so that she would be happy living here, but who took great pride in the role that he played for the rest of his life. He talked about the courageous role that he played representing the Jewish community.

Then, there was the other person, a member of the committee, came from the merchants

and had been the manager of Levy Department Store where the arrests had taken place. That, basically, was the committee, and it may have included the manager of the Manger Hotel.

KUHN: Manger Hotel of the chain?

LAW: Yes, because that's where the meetings were all held. They were not held at City Hall. They were held at the Manger.

CRIMMINS: Who represented the black community?

LAW: Me. I was the spokesman. The committee, the white committee would talk with nobody but me.

CRIMMINS: So, there was just you and then these five white folks?

LAW: I carried with me a committee made up of Judge Eugene Gadsden. He was not a judge then, but he had headed the voter registration arm of the NAACP. We would have had the leader of the boycott, which would have been Mrs. Mercedes Wright and Curtis Cooper. That basically was the committee. We did not deal with a large committee because the strategy always was to talk with them, then to come back and weigh the deliberations, so that we would always say that we would have to go back and report to our group and this kind of thing, at the next meeting. But, after one or two meetings, you get enough of a feel as to the drift that I could speak with authority and say: Well, whenever you do this, we'll accept it--or whenever you do that. Or if you will now agree to this or that, we will accept it. I, eventually, after one or two meetings, evolved to the role where I had to--where our vibes and our working together was such that I knew how everybody else felt; and they had enough confidence in how I articulated the protest that I could make the final decisions.

KUHN: So, tell me about how those negotiations proceeded then.

LAW: We finally agreed, as earlier indicated, to desegregate everything. The reason we could was because we were dealing with the people who had control and were the advisors to all of the entities that we were dealing with. The banks, by and large, Adams could deal with that. Beyond that, in the Committee of 100, apparently the leader of the Committee of 100 was the resident manager for Union-Camp. Lynch had that leadership role. They had maneuvered and made him the chairman of the Committee of 100.

I will never forget that once Adams got the Wise Theater people to desegregate and the restaurants and the merchants fall in line and everything was ready to go, on the first evening, we began with the theaters. The next day it was to be the restaurants. Interestingly enough, I was young and game in that day and time, we assigned to the youth group members the theaters. They had the responsibility of testing the desegregation of the lunch counters. But we took adults to the restaurants, and I, myself, insisted on testing the Morrison's Cafeteria and one or two of the others. But on the night that--Everything went smooth.

The night that we desegregated the theaters, the Klan got win that the desegregation was to take place. And they came down to Broughton Street with all of their regalia and began to march in front of the theaters, hoping to intimidate the young blacks who were to come. Because of the situation, Pratt Adams immediately called Mr. Lynch of Union-Camp and had him come down to Broughton Street. When Mr. Lynch got out of his car and started walking out to the street, all of the Klan members must have been Union-Camp employees, picked up their robes and disappeared and have not been seen on Broughton Street since.

KUHN: That's a great story.

LAW: Lynch coming is hear--is second hand for me. I got that from Pratt Adams, you see, who is now dead. But that's the story as I understand it. I was directing, that evening, the whole operation from the NAACP office, making the assignments and sending people out and all that type of thing, so I did not see that with my own eyes.

KUHN: Have you ever heard any evidence that the national chain of Manger put pressure on the local people to desegregate?

LAW: No. It could have been because as I indicated, they were a great--because it had to be worked out some kind of way because the Chamber of Commerce in this town was almost completely dormant. It had no role of leadership whatsoever. They were just willing to see Broughton Street die. Even to this day, it is not really [inaudible].

KUHN: So the theaters came first and then the restaurants?

LAW: The next day, the lunch counters, the whole thing.

KUHN: And with what kinds of consequences?

LAW: We even had--There were none. Except that somebody downtown who felt unkindly towards blacks eating at the counter, went among the homeless, some of the day workers, and found some of the nastiest, dirtiest blacks they could find, and gave them money to go in to eat at the lunch counter at Walgreen's or something like that, in an effort to really have something negative, to say: 'See the kind of people you will have to sit by?' But that was concocted, and, pretty soon, I think everybody was able to see through that.

KUHN: The desegregation actually occurred what month of 1961? March--September?

LAW: I thought it was September. It occurred at the time that the beaches--because we did the whole thing, the hotels, the beach. We desegregated the motels, everything. As I recall, my two roles were to eat first at Morrison's and then around on Broughton Street at Anton's. Then, I wonder why I am still alive because Anton's, I do know that they never did take kindly toward blacks, and I would--because you could walk right off Broughton Street, I frequently ate there. I am sure that they must have spit in the food that I ate and all other kinds of things.

KUHN: So you were the first one to eat at Anton's?

LAW: I ate there regularly for a good, long while, because, again, I say, the manager was never kindly towards us. He was an old restaurant owner, and he never took kindly.

[Inaudible short Q&A]

LAW: Then, it was also my duty to test the beach. I slept all night in the motel belonging to the mayor of Tybee at that time. Then, when no incident occurred, it was all right to tell other blacks to go on ahead and go.

CRIMMINS: Was this covered in the newspapers?

LAW: I doubt it.

KUHN: What went through your mind when you would spend the night in Tybee in the motel or go be the first black at Anton's or whatever?

LAW: Nothing.

KUHN: But within a very short period of this time, somehow you got fired from your job?

LAW: Oh, yes.

KUHN: I know that the representative for--

LAW: Hagen.

KUHN: Hagen--Elliot Hagen.

LAW: Elliot Hagen campaigned among the White Citizen's Council and came to Savannah and spoke to the White Citizen's Council.

KUHN: Was he from the first district?

LAW: Oh, yes, he was from Screven County, Sylvania. And he came into the city and among the whites here and told them that--the newspaper reported his speech before the White Citizens' Council--and promised them that if he was elected to Congress, that his first order of business was to get the job of that black agitator who was walking around here on government money creating trouble. And he kept his promise. He was elected in the general election, succeeding a man who died, whose name slips me. I know there's a group of houses just beyond [inaudible] Street is named for him. When he got to Washington, he maneuvered himself onto the Post Office Committee of the House and then got the cooperation of the Postmaster and everybody--

KUHN: Day was the name of the Postmaster, right?

LAW: That would have been during the Kennedy Administration--Day. But he got the cooperation of all of these people begin to put a trail on me--someone on my tail to follow me and to record all of my actions, everywhere I went and what I did, and what-have-you. In that day and time, I was delivering my route as every other carrier did. We would leave the district on lunch hour and go ahead and do what we had to do and come back to the district after lunch and continue to deliver the mail. But they followed me and clocked me everywhere I went.

CRIMMINS: Did you know they were following you?

LAW: No, no--when I went to the office at noon to check on what had transpired and to give instructions for what was to take place the rest of the day, they took all of this down; and they finally made a case. As a young man, I had had an attitude--as all of you see, I've always had a bladder condition. I don't hold my water but so long. I was carrying the mail in the vicinity of Memorial Hospital. There was a lower middle class white subdivision on two streets--Winston, I believe. I've forgotten the name of the other street. But I rode the bicycle out from the post office and was delivering mail, and I got to a point where I needed to use the restroom. All of the service station restrooms had white and colored; and I resented using segregated restrooms, so I did not. I passed up a service station and was trying to finish a street, a street just before you get to Memorial Hospital. Memorial had just been built, and I had discovered that there were one or two restrooms there that had not been designated, had no sign on them, so I was trying to get to Memorial to use their restroom, where I would not have had to succumb to the indignation of having to use a colored restroom. And I got almost to the end of the block, and I had to urinate. So I stepped behind a hedge or bush, on a lawn, to shield myself from the street, behind the bush; and I urinated. This woman, a middle aged woman, who, I guess feels even a black letter carrier is a burglar, she watched all of my movements, and when she saw me standing side of the house behind the bush, she waited until I left, then, she left her house and came out and saw that there was a wet spot there. And she took upon herself to call the Post Office and stated that I had urinated on the ground. So, then, the supervisor who, again, was happy to get something on me, because he didn't want me as an employee also and perhaps had already been contacted by Hagen--they made a case of it the next day. And when I started delivering the mail, they came

out on the district and arrested me, carried me to jail, and made a case.

This was the body of information that they used to dismiss me from the service. The story was picked up by the first black, a fellow by the name of Louie Latel [sp?] -- he had been the first black to be certified as a member of the press corps, the White House Press Corps. He wrote a column at that time in the Courier, a syndicated column in the black press. And he broke the story of my being fired in Savannah. It carried all around. It developed support for me in that dismissal.

We were lucky to have the NAACP Washington Bureau headed by a very able lobbyist, Clarence Mitchell, Jr. He knew me personally because I had been a member of the national board for some twelve or thirteen years by then. I had been the first youth national chairman. I had been national chairman in '48 of the Youth Division and had presided over the '49 conference of Youth.

The young people, after my tenure as national youth chairman, had developed a campaign, a national campaign, to have me become the first member of the national board from the youth program, a person of age 25 or less. They succeeded in January 1950 to win for me a place on the board. It was a three-year term, and after that, I was supposed to rotate off and hopefully another youth would be elected to the board. But in the meantime, at the end of the three years, the president of the CIO died, who was a member of the national board.

KUHN: Philip Murray.

LAW: Philip Murray. And they elected me on my own right to fill the Philip Murray vacancy. So I went on in '50 as a youth, but in '53 I was elected to fill the vacancy created by the death of Philip Murray. I remained on the board for more than thirty

years. I was a member of the board when Dr. Gilbert retired as president. He said he had so many things to do, and it was then physically impossible for him to do all of the things. He created a committee, and earlier, I think he was impressed with my being named to the national board. He sent out a committee composed of Dr. J. W. Jamison, Jr., Raleigh A. Bryant, Sr., and then, I think the third person must have been Austin Williams. But he instructed them to interview me and to see whether the young man would accept -- It was Dr. Gilbert's recommendation that I would be faithful and would not allow the NAACP to die. They came, and I accepted, so I was unanimously elected. I remained president for twenty-six years and had opposition only one year in twenty-six years, when, at the beginning of the protest movement, what we called the NAACP Freedom Fund struggle in Savannah in 1960, the role of the NAACP moved to a new high since all of the white community looked to whoever was in the seat as head of the NAACP [end of Tape 4 Side A--continued onto Tape 4 Side B. Transcript continues on next page.]

[Tape 4, Side B]

LAW: And the black community that was local likewise realized the power so that we had a black doctor, Dr. Carr Rankin Jordan, who had been treasurer of the NAACP -- he began to articulate the feeling that I was just a postal worker, didn't even own my own home or had no automobile, had no title before his name, was not Professor, Reverend, Doctor, or anything of that sort, and that the black community needed a more representative person to be their spokesman before the downtown white power structure. So he spent hundreds and hundreds of dollars advertising in the newspaper, putting out handbills, and, on election day, hiring workers and poll watchers and every kind of thing. When the election was held, I never made a speech. However, the rank and file took care of the situation. I don't think that he got a vote for each dollar that he spent. I'm not sure.

KUHN: Were you president of the state chapter at the time of Brown v. Board?

LAW: How's that?

KUHN: --at the time of Brown v. Board of Education in 1954, were you president of the state chapter?

LAW: I don't remember exactly--

KUHN: Certainly, you were president of the local chapter.

LAW: Oh, yes. I don't remember what years I was president but it spanned a large portion of the fifties and a portion, an early portion, of the sixties.

KUHN: I noted that very soon after the Supreme Court case, there was a petition in Savannah for immediate--

LAW: Indeed.

KUHN: --desegregation of the schools.

LAW: Indeed, and, of course, we got nowhere because school boards hid behind state law. It is real interesting how they tend to forsake the fact that we are all citizens of the United States first, but they took the position that state laws prevented them from doing anything. We had a long struggle because we finally went into court. The chairman of the education committee--I had no children in school--but the chairman of the education committee did, Rev. L. Scottsdale, Jr. And the secretary of the NAACP did.

All of the petitioners for the desegregation of the schools were basically initially members of the NAACP board because we had to make certain that they were people who could not be gotten too economically. The newspaper published their names so that if they were employed by any whites, this would be a signal for them to fire them. So we had to take black barbers, a black preacher, a black secretary for a black real estate firm, and people of that stripe, who were the original petitioners.

KUHN: The petition then led to a suit, right?

LAW: Oh, yes.

KUHN: And I notice, I see you quoted in 1959 vowing that at least one student will plan to be enrolled in a white school that fall, the fall of '59.

LAW: That had to do with the Armstrong State College. The colleges moved very, very slowly. The truth of the matter is that we won integration at the law schools, state law schools and this kind of thing, even before we had Brown versus Board of Education, but it still did not move Georgia because all of our public facilities were saying that state law does not permit, state law does not permit. So it was not until we had a great demonstration, and it shows you what happens with college students. And it also shows

that I assessed the strength. You see, one of the reasons that I was able to lead and to pretty well formulate a program for bringing about desegregation in this town is because I am native, I had lived nowhere else. I knew the town. I had no desire to be a star, and if we had had the star role, we would have completely lost because the economics in the city is of such that a star would have been for pushing too fast and for feeding his own ego with certain dramatic action that would not necessarily bring about results.

But, in my young days, in all of my reading in history, I had been fascinated with Civil War history. And I realized that even in the freedom struggle, the protest struggle, it had to be done in the same way that an army would move. And there had to be a certain amount of strength within the ranks and that there would be some falling off of certain people but that there had to be others who would keep you on the field and keep you in the battle.

As results, we took a page from the Bible and Gideon's Army when we stripped down the petitioners in the school board situation initially to those members of the board who had been with us during most of the fifties and who were thoroughly committed and we knew could not be intimidated. But it was a long struggle because we could not get into court immediately. We had to repeatedly exhaust all of our petitioning mechanisms with the school board. It was only after getting clear cut answers from them and indicating to the satisfaction of our lawyers, which at this time evolved from A. T. Walden to Donald Hollowell that we began to -- Hollowell became the "Ink Fund" lawyer.

KUHN: Right.

LAW: We had no one here in Savannah who would even work with us, would begin to work with us. It was only by following their guidelines that we finally got a suit, got a

case filed. It had to be filed in the district, the south Atlantic district, and one of the oldest and most conservative of all the federal judges was Judge Frank Scarlett of Brunswick, who had no intentions of ever ruling on desegregation. He took the case and just let it sit there year after year after year. Finally, after some wearing of impatience and between the Ink Fund and Hollowell's office, we finally got a hearing. And when Judge Scarlett did rule in the early sixties--we had been in his court, I guess, a matter of eight or ten years. When he finally did rule, he agreed to desegregate in Savannah, using the worst desegregation plan that he possibly could come up with, and that is, first, the twelfth grade, then the eleventh and twelfth.

KUHN: One grade at a time, right.

LAW: Then finally on down until we got to the first grade. Well, what we were then faced with was that even some of our youth council members and some of our parents who supported desegregation had children who had developed school loyalties--

KUHN: Right.

LAW: And had looked forward to leaving school that year or the following year with a diploma from that school. We were only able to get something like nineteen young people who were willing to cross and --

KUHN: Transfer.

LAW: --and transfer. But with nineteen in three white--predominately white--in three white high schools, with Savannah High having the largest high school enrollment in the City, and being the largest high school, it meant that the nine, eight or nine students who would be segregated there weren't even a fly in a bowl of soup. But when the classes changed classes, they were completely at the mercy of the racist kids. Parents who had

pushed their kids up to create mischief for the blacks, White Citizens Council and other types of hate groups who had gotten among students and had pushed them up. White students would go upstairs and would drop down various kinds of items on black kids who were getting ready to start up steps or something of the sort. But they were at their greatest peril during the changing of classes and after school.

We, at the outset, the NAACP education committee would have to agree to have the kids gather at the NAACP office in the morning before school. Persons like the Reverend Frederick Douglas Jidon would pray with them. And adults would drive the students to the school and see them at least into the door, then would be at the school to pick them up at the end of the school day. Initially, that kind of thing was necessary.

CRIMMINS: Had the county schools desegregated by this time?

LAW: They followed. No, not before then.

KUHN: I've talked with some of their counterparts in the Atlanta schools, the first students; and they tell about things about not being invited to the Honors Society and only finding out in the yearbook that you had actually been a member of the Honors Society because nobody ever told you in the school year, and things of this type.

This was '62 in Savannah? Is that correct?

LAW: I'm not sure, either '62 or '63.

CRIMMINS: Law, you were saying earlier that Clarence Mitchell had put together--

LAW: -- a team to defend me, and he directed the effort to have me reinstated in the Postal Service. He got the cooperation of the National Alliance of Postal Employees, which was the black organization of postal employees. He developed a defense for me that showed that many of the things that I had been charged with, I had never been

instructed on; and it was on that basis that I was reinstated.

CRIMMINS: How long did that take?

LAW: Six months.

KUHN: That long?

LAW: Six months.

CRIMMINS: Were you given back pay?

LAW: Yes, everything was restored, seniority and all. The six months gave me a chance to work full time for the NAACP without pay--without pay, but I was able to work full time. They were supposed to be stopping me from my NAACP work.

KUHN: Right, little did they know.

LAW: They were giving me more time.

KUHN: In a sense, I would almost like to ask a question about your efforts in historical preservation. How--I would be curious to know, in your mind, what are the continuities and connections between the NAACP, the work that you and others in the community have done, that we have been talking about in the forties, fifties, and sixties, with the work at the Beach Institute?

KUHN: One of the things that the whole time that I was president of NAACP that I emphasized black pride and awareness of the historic past. When we began the protest movement in the sixties, the mass meetings were based on the singing of the spirituals, of the island blacks in particular. People would come forth with the songs that they had remembered as children, and I would especially select the songs that were indigenous to this area. Many of those songs were based on water: "Stand the storm, it won't be long, we're anchor by and by," oh, the kinds of things like "We shall not be moved, like a tree

planted by the water." We'd sing things of that sort.

The whole effort from its outset was tailored and geared toward localizing and tying in the islands and Savannah, because Savannah was made up of large, large numbers of people who came from the islands and had relatives back on those islands. That, and then we would hold, periodically, particularly in November, lectures in history.

We did some history projects, some preservation projects, while I was head of NAACP. We restored the graves in Laurel Grove of the oldest leaders among blacks in Georgia. We restored the graves of Andrew Bryant, Andrew Marshall, Henry Cunningham, and we made that area an area that would be protected, so that there was the interest within NAACP for preservation because I had carried it on. And we had already met in places--we would hold certain meetings in Scarbrough House, the First African, the First Bryant Church. All of these lend themselves to history awareness.

While I was president of NAACP, we had created a memorial tablet to the leadership after the death of Dr. Ralph Mark Gilbert, and we held a program in the First African Church commemorating his contribution to Savannah and unveiled in the church a memorial tablet to his memory. That tablet is there. So all along there has always been the identity and people knew because, as I indicated, from my youth days, we had always had a history emphasis.

I personally believe that there has to be if there is going to be a valid civil rights struggle, there has to be, likewise, an awareness on whose shoulders we stand as we struggle at this particular moment. There are many, many people, both white and black, who gave their lives and who died with their blood, sweat, and tears in order to bring about the creation, first, of the Emancipation and then the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments, then, finally,

the great number of cases that were carried to the Supreme Court, first by NAACP lawyers like Springard--what was--Joel's brother--

KUHN: Arthur Springard.

LAW: Arthur Springard, Morfield Story, all of the early people, and then Charles Houston, and, then, finally Thurgood Marshall and the whole body of lawyers. But there was even Clarence Darrow in the historic NAACP case, the Sweat case-

KUHN: Sweat v. Painter.

LAW: That's right, an NAACP case that attempted to protect the right of a black to own a home. With all of this in mind, we tried to keep people aware and to realize ourselves that we were standing on everything that had gone on before.

CRIMMINS: What was the first preservation project?

LAW: It was the grave project that I indicated, restoring the graves. After I retired as head of the NAACP in '76, on one occasion, I was doing a program at the Scarbrough House in which we were calling attention to the fact that the Scarbrough House had been longer a black school than it had been the residence of the Scarbroughs or anybody else. We were doing that program, and the president of the local branch, my successor, sidled up to me and said -- I was doing that as the chairman of the NAACP committee on history. He pointed out to me: 'You are no longer president. I am president, and I will have to say about what our program is.'

It also occurred about the time that Alex Haley came out with his very popular book Roots, and people were creating a greater awareness on their own roots and the need for tracing their family line. We had no black history or preservation group city-wide. I decided that we needed to form a group that would permit us to assist people who

had an interest in doing research in family history, and I decided that we would not allow Carter G. Woodson's revered and very valuable early organization to die, so we formed a unit in '77 of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. And we named it the Savannah-Yamacraw Branch. It was chartered in September of '77. And, already, sometime earlier while head of NAACP, the local Spelman Club had asked me to do a tour on a visit that Dr. Donald Stewart was going to make, the president of Spelman was going to make to their chapter. They wanted to--since he had never been here before--they wanted to expose him to a tour of the rich black history of this community. So I created a tour and conducted it. It was well-received, and I think there must have been other requests for it. So, I was then doing a tour.

I had formed the local Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. We called that meeting in the Green-Meldon House, as being the place where Sherman held his headquarters at the end of his march to the sea. It has proved itself very popular because many, many blacks--hardly any blacks had ever been in the house that had been Sherman's headquarters. And I had likewise indicated that nobody forming an organization in 1977 ought to be forming an all-white organization or an all-black organization, that although it was the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History, that we welcomed all persons who were interested in studying Afro-American Life and History, so about as many whites showed up for the meeting as blacks. I rather believe that we met in the main room at the Green-Meldon House. It was an overflow crowd. We had hundreds of people who crowded into the Green-Meldon House for a lecture. The first meeting, we held a lecture by -- what was the senior history teacher who is now retired at Georgia Southern? Sanders was his understudy and he now

heads History there.

KUHN: That's right.

LAW: But I can't remember, at the moment, what his name was. But he had done study on Liberty County blacks and Dorchester Academy, so that was the speech. And it created quite a bit of interest, and we organized the association. So then we had a group that would begin to meet periodically in the basement of the library, Carnegie Library, and to study black history, particularly genealogy and some low-country--Gullah dialect was another theme. And I began to do the tour, and I became aware that many of the homes of people who were buried in Laurel Grove Cemeterym that nobody was giving any attention to these historic properties in the City, and that whites were about to take over what had been the area where many of their homes still stand and that the older black neighborhoods had all been demolished and that the town had given no care to black historic properties and had replaced the black historic neighborhoods with low-rent housing.

So in areas where housing, in some cases, were older than any of the houses that were being preserved in the historic district, particularly in the Old Fort area, some block or two from the river, were houses that had design qualities. Luckily, we now have in the archives of the museum, pictures of all of the houses that were taken in the early fifties.

KUHN: Hold on just a second

[End of Tape 4, Side B]

[Interview continues on Tape 5, Side A]

[Tape 5, Side A]

KUHN: Pictures taken in the fifties?

LAW: In the area that is now [inaudible] Village and [inaudible] Russell [?] Homes. That was a predominately black neighborhood, and some of the houses there dated all the way back to--I'm certain--the early eighteenth century. They were peaked roofs, houses with roofs that were twice as peaked, as deep in the peak, as the house was itself, which showed that they had to have been early wooden shingle houses that had extremely high peaked roof in order that water would not settle and would roll off the wooden shingles and this type thing. Many of them were in such poor repair that they tend to--the metal seam roof had long disintegrated, and, again, you could see underneath the metal seam, the wooden shingles. But they were very fine houses that were of early vintage. And I plan to, when time permits and I can obtain a grant to actually mount an exhibit of early black homes that no longer exist, that fell to make way for low-rent housing projects. We do have many of those kinds of pictures.

But realizing that we had lost our two oldest black neighborhoods, Yamacraw and the Old Fort, I immediately began to go into the area, and I identified two or three people who lived in the area, who were young and who were likewise -- We held a meeting at Beach Institute, a workshop, on historical preservation. We got a small grant from the Council for the Humanities, the Georgia Council for the Humanities, and we held a workshop. We were able to identify some other people who had some interest. We then went on and created what we then called, in '78, the Beach Institute Historic Neighborhood. And that neighborhood association began to try to interest blacks to come back into the area and to claim some portion of the neighborhood and to get the city to

work with what was then twenty-five percent of the ownership in the neighborhood was black home owners.

While we were trying to put together a neighborhood association, the white speculators were moving into the area and were buying up the property because it was desired that blacks would be pushed out and that young whites and whites who were not able to buy--had not enough funds to buy in what were then historic neighborhoods -- would be able to get into this cheaper area where blacks lived. So we went into the area. We formed a neighborhood association, and we began to try to resist the displacement of the blacks in that area.

I became the founding president for the neighborhood organization, as I had also been the founding president for the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. And about the time that we were trying to get really going and develop some mechanisms for presenting proposals that would enable us to begin, under the leadership of Jessie Wiles, who was a black professional, who had been employed in the City Housing -- He was the City Housing Director and had left the city and had developed his own building concern, consulting concern. We got a grant from Liz Lyons, the state preservation director, to hire him to do a study of the neighborhood. And a study was made of the Beach neighborhood, the Beach Institute Neighborhood, and published.

About that time, Mills Lane, who had some years previously had called me to his office as head of the NAACP and had explained to me that he had finished with the Washington Square development, where you know he acquired all of the houses and did all of the renovation out of his--restoration out of his personal monies--that he desired to do something further out in an area where he had purchased houses. And he wanted to call it

the Gingerbread Village, and he wanted me to give him the plan in the area that he had bought, substandard houses, highly deteriorated, and blacks were living in all of the houses, along Whitfield Square, and along Price Street, and the adjoining streets of Gordon, Gaston, all along that area, that is now--as results of mostly of his renovation--is predominately white.

KUHN: This is the man who died just in the last couple of years?

LAW: That's correct, the retired president--chairman--

KUHN: --of C&S--

LAW: Yes.

KUHN: I didn't know which generation you were talking about.

LAW: Well, he was "Junior."

KUHN: Right.

LAW: Then, he asked if I would give him a plan whereby he could sensitively restore. In talking with him, I told him that it was my desire that he restore without displacing and that he would restore and allow blacks who were presently living on the property pay rent to buy and having a portion of their rent apply to the acquisition cost in becoming homeowners. And I likewise identified one or two shops in the area, and he likewise realized that there ought to be service. So the two of us together designated a place to shop--there would be the Laundromat. I indicated there ought to be a place where the elderly, particularly the women, could come and do sewing, just a kind of meeting--a small house where they could gather for meetings and that type of thing.

He bought most of--about all the plan and asked that I create a committee from the NAACP that would assist his people in managing the property. There was in the

membership of the NAACP, a young woman who might have been a board member at that time. I don't know. I know she was active in the NAACP, who was one of the project managers who knew housing and knew management. She was Olive DeLoach. There was a very bright young man who had finished Knox College in Tennessee, and I believe at that time was either heading the Central Services Department for the City or he had gone to work for the telephone company. Well, they were the two key people, and there were several others named to the committee. But they would meet periodically with the two women who worked in Mr. Lane's office, and they devised a plan of monthly visitation to the homes of all the blacks who were living in the newly renovated properties.

The blacks who came into the properties developed an unusual sense of pride, and they kept their homes spotless, and to an extent Mills Lane's project, along Price Street, became a showplace. When he finished the restoration, because we had had a hand in it, we called a mass meeting at the Congressional Church very close to where the finished homes were and blacks were living on their properties. We had a public meeting, and we explained the project. Then, we invited the people to accompany us for a tour of the homes that Mr. Lane had restored and that were being lived in by blacks to show how well the homes were kept. And in the middle of the block there was an old man who had been a retired longshoreman and who must have been a ship sailor even before that. He could have even been an old-time World War I soldier, but he was spit and polish. His house--the floors shined. There was not a speck of dust anywhere, and he took great pride in having people come and tour the new home that he had been allowed in his old age to live in.

Leopold Adler II came to the mass meeting. He and I had met a year or two previously at a visit to the home of J. Waddus Waring on Calhoun Square. And I had entered into it very hostile and allowed Mr. Adler to know that I blamed him, who was then one of the leaders of the downtown restoration during the tour, his tenure as president of Historic Savannah, that many blacks had lived in many of the homes that were now restored and were white properties and that some of the properties blacks had lived in basements and whites upstairs. In others, whites had lived in carriage houses, but no care had been given to have blacks become a part of any of the downtown restoration, even the houses that had been black owned, as a rule, were torn down and became a part of the gardens for the bigger white houses that were allowed to remain in the historic district.

KUHN: Right. Right.

LAW: I was very unkind to him, and I took the occasion of--I think Mr. Waring must have invited me to the house in order that he could invite Mr. Adler to meet me. It was not--I did not mince words, and I blamed him for some of the displacement of blacks in the historic district. Mr. Adler, to this day, does not accept blame. And he takes the view that these houses were vacant, even if the last residents were blacks, that they were vacant at the time that Historic Savannah took them over.

But I know the plan well, that what had been done throughout the area, they would not have been vacant if the previous owners had not allowed roofs to leak and plumbing to go bad and the blacks were forced out so that the properties could be sold in order to become a part of the historic development. So I did not excuse him. After I made all of this admiration at the mass meeting at the Congregational Church over the work of Mills Lane Jr. in restoring and preserving homes without disgracing blacks, I think the project

must have entailed some twenty-five units, Mr. Adler accompanied me on the tour of the homes and was impressed.

To this day, I believe that he got his idea for the larger project of the Victorian area from that meeting, the fact that he always felt a certain jealousy I appreciated because he had definitely outstripped anything that Mills Lane did in the way of restoring houses and preserving the black residences, but I do know that Mr. Lane--I mean, Mr. Adler studied the Pittsburgh Plan and devised a plan of his own, and came back, and, again, asked me if I would join him in his Victorian Project as head of NAACP. I did not choose to go. I took the role of NAACP as being a full time responsibility, but I told him, as I told Mr. Lane, that I would be glad to suggest people for his board who I felt would be supportive of his efforts. I initially indicated to him blacks that I would suggest that he would invite to make up that initial board.

CRIMMINS: Did he take those appointments?

LAW: Oh, yes. He has been extremely supportive on practically every move that I have made since the time that we came to know each other personally. Because Mills Lane Jr., after getting all the tax benefits from the property, which meant about eight years, we came into the seventies with him having gotten all the tax write-offs that he could, he decided to unload the property. I think it might have been a time, also, when dividends from C&S had been somewhat damaged by some bad investments in housing developments and that kind of thing, lending and that kind of thing.

When he proposed to unload the property, "For Sale" signs went up on all of the twenty-five units that blacks lived in. And, in a day's time, young whites who wanted to own historic property had signed commitments, sales contracts, for practically half of the

properties. It must have been sometime in the middle of the week. As president of the Neighborhood Association, I realized that there was going to be wholesale displacement, so we immediately got in touch with the young man who was handling sales for Mr. Lane. This was probably the second day of the sales, and we asked him to approach Mr. Lane. We had already wired him and had asked him to withdraw the selling of the property, but we heard nothing from him. He did not directly answer our telegrams. We made contact with the realtor who was handling this property. The young man was a very decent guy. His offices were located at Richard Drive and Draydon. We told him that we had reason to want--it must have been Thursday--to have the Neighborhood Association buy the properties instead of the whites who would result in displacement because we would manage the properties and allow people to live there. Luckily, we had a very sympathetic man who was heading Historic Savannah in the person of John Allen, who, as I understand, had come to Savannah from Atlanta. But he was very very sensitive. When we gave him the message, he agreed to contact all of the people who had sales contracts when he heard our predicament, and see if those people would be willing to sign over their contracts to us in order that there would be no displacement. We came back on the next day, and he told us that he had to have--this must have been the end of the week, and the banks, on Friday, we were meeting at the end of the work day. We had to have the binders by Monday morning. I then immediately communicated with Leopold Adler II, with Senator Al Scott and with several other people who had been a part of the neighborhood board: Mrs. Sadie Steele, a black woman--retired schoolteacher, Mrs. Abby Jordan, who was on the faculty at the state college in charge of the reading program, Miss Shirley Carson, a white woman who had

retired as the director of the Juliette Gordon Lowe National Birthplace.

Each of these people agreed to loan me a thousand dollars. Al Scott, as I recall, must have been treasurer of the Afro-American Association. Leopold Adler, when he found out, what it was that I wanted, he immediately pledged a thousand dollars of his own money. He got a thousand dollars from his mother and step-father, and he got--I think he put up a thousand dollars from his Victorian rehabilitation program and later got Albert Stoddard to take that thousand--to make good that thousand. But he was leaving town, so he admittedly did that hurriedly and gave me three thousand, so that I put up a thousand. Then, I was able to get other friends. And, when Monday morning came, I had the ten thousand to take to the realtor to buy out the people who said that if I had the money by Monday morning, they would sign over their options to me. Then, it was necessary for me to go to the City to see whether or not we could get them to lend us enough money to make a purchase because the banks--none of them were sympathetic and would, under the conditions, loan the Association the money needed to make the purchase.

After talking with the City Manager and pressing upon him the urgency of immediate action, he assisted--and the Assistant City Manager was a black guy whose name was Marte, who later, when Jackson became mayor, went to Atlanta and worked in Jackson's Administration. He has gone from there, and I am not sure whether he is not back. Somebody told me where he is now, but he was a pretty forthright black in city planning, while others were prone to give us the runaround, particularly white staff members in the City. He literally read the "Riot Act" on them and told them to bring them a workable plan that would make it possible for this neighborhood organization to get the money from the City and to become the owners and managers of that property so as not to cause

displacement. So that deal came through.

Lane did not want to deal with the City. He would have preferred dealing with a bank; nevertheless, the plan went through, and we were able to prevent the displacement.

KUHN: That is quite a story.

CRIMMINS: The effort to get the King-Tisdell Cottage and the Beach Institute going--

LAW: That was an early effort we established in '78. The neighborhood association, then, in '80, there was a move on to what was called the "Wheaton Street Project" to demolish a black neighborhood, again--I had earlier already gone in as NAACP president and had talked with the people to: 'Keep your property. To fix up your neighborhood. To organize--Not to leave your area.' But the City and the housing people while I would be at work, they would be going around and talking with people and would offer prices that could not be ignored.

People began to see that they could get a better home, at the price offered, on a street that had paving and services that the City had not provided in the off-Wheaton Street streets. With that in mind, particularly the young people, had no sense of place. They would immediately want to go in the houses that whites were relinquishing: Hamilton Court, 37th Street, beyond the railroad track, the five--six hundred block, seven--five--six, mainly. All generally in the area where whites were realizing that blacks were upon them, and they were willing to give ground.

When that happened, the older blacks who looked to me and had bought property, retired schoolteachers, other kinds of people who had planned to spend their last days in a house that they owned in that neighborhood, these people wanted to stay; but the leadership of the Neighborhood Association was in young people's hands. And we could not stem the

tide, so that the area was taken, the Wheaton Street area.

We made a holler that the City had no business to provide--to propose the clearance project, but that they ought to be restoring the houses because those houses had historic significance, just as the houses in the inner city of the downtown historic district.

Nobody paid any attention, but the story was read by Dr. Elizabeth Lyons in the Historic Preservation Office.

[Tape 5, Side A ends here.]

[Interview continues on Tape 5, Side B]

[Tape 5, Side B]

LAW: She sent persons from her office down to survey the neighborhood that I hollered about. I had pointed out that the Callon House was there. He had been the man who had started the Savannah Boy's Club for black youth, immediately after World War I, that Dr. Smith's House was there, and that he and his wife were early supporters of the rejuvenation of the NAACP in 1917--the founding of the NAACP in 1917, and that some of the early picnics on the part of the membership of the NAACP were to ride out to the Smith House on Wheaton Street, and they would hold summer outings there. The house has significance. His wife had been the first black woman to be licensed as a pharmacist in Georgia sometime around the turn of the century and might well have been the first woman, period, to have been licensed in Georgia as a pharmacist. And I pointed out things of that kind, including the architecture of the area. So when the people from Dr. Lyons office made the survey, they concluded, in a very modest way, even they were not up to what is now considered to be historically significant property--but at least they would say that there were six very fine Victorian houses along Wheaton Street and a Victorian cottage on Ott Street that ought to--that had architectural significance and ought to be saved. They forwarded that report to HUD in Washington. HUD then began to require the City to save the seven properties in order that they would be approved, the money would be approved, for the project that was then designated as the Edgar C. Blackshare Homes.

When the City realized that it could not get the money simply to sign this agreement with HUD, they signed the agreement that they would save the houses, but with all of the other houses being vacated throughout the area and being vandalized by people who wanted

wonderful mantles, spindles for stairways and other kinds of things--doors and all of these things were being taken out of houses--the City's security for the area was very, very poor, so that these vandals, the people who were getting fine things that they could sell at antique shops and what-have-you didn't know the difference between the seven significant properties and the rest of the properties, so that they began to walk away with the features on the seven significant properties.

When I saw the kind of vandalism that was taking place in the neighborhood, I began--I moved a cot into a house. There was no electricity after they bought the properties. There was no electricity in the neighborhood. And I brought a lamp over to the house and a cot. And I would sleep in the house at night and let people see that there was a lamp burning and that I was going in and out of the house, so that while all of the other houses were seriously vandalized, I was able to protect the one house that we now call King-Tisdell Cottage.

However, on one day when I was at work and came after work over to the house, I found that the vandals had struck and had taken one of the posts and several of the spindles from the porch. Realizing that I was not able to stay there all of the time and protect the house even in daylight--I was spending the nights there and just a portion of the day after work--I got hold of Mr. Jessie Wiles who had the construction business and was then going into rehabilitating black properties. He had bought a house himself at the corner of Huntingdon and Habersham and had done it over as well as a second house that he was using for rental. So I knew that he could get hold of--he was doing rehabilitation throughout the historic district--that he could get hold of a carpenter. So I instructed him to get hold of a carpenter and gave him instructions to completely dismantle all of the

features on the house, which included taking down the porch, the banisters and all, and hauling them into my house garage, to the garage of my house. Then, we placed them under lock and key until we could get a plan for the restoration of the property.

But, in the meantime, the first person who had shown an interest in preserving the properties along Wheaton Street was John Hayes, who at that time was Executive Director of Historic Savannah, a very decent man who spent quite a bit of time working with me and was extremely supportive in trying to help me with the saving of the Beach Institute neighborhood. It was he who first learned of the houses being available. And he carried me over to look at all of the properties. And, immediately on looking at them, I realized that while I would like to have one of the big Victorian houses along Wheaton Street, he likewise wanted Historic Savannah to take interest in some of the properties on Wheaton Street. I immediately told him that I would like to acquire the Ott Street House because we could move that into the Beach neighborhood and use it as a headquarters for the black historic society, The Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History. And he supported me and made available the architectural historian that they had on staff, to draw up the plans. He did everything that their in-house capacity provided--could provide. The fellow who did the plans for the preserving of the property was a young man named Spitzmiller. He later left historic Savannah and went to Atlanta and was working in a firm there. But he was an exceptionally fine architectural historian. He could draw plans and had a wonderful sense of preservation. He worked very very close with us, spending many, many hours.

We then devised a plan. I went to Senator Al Scott, who was then a member of the House of Representatives and had been one of the two people that I had asked to conduct

the membership drive when we created--got ready to create a wider membership. I asked Representative Scott and I asked a young lawyer, James Pannell, who most recently ran for lieutenant governor, if they would head, as co-chairmen, a membership drive for the Association. They did, and that membership drive gave us some funds. The cooperation from Historic Savannah gave us the plans. Then, we asked Representative Scott if he would go to the governor, who was George Busbee at that time, and ask the governor to give us funds from his discretionary funds to move the building out of the endangered area because it was not compatible in the low-rent housing project with anything there and that since we were trying to rejuvenate the Beach neighborhood, we wanted to move the cottage into the neighborhood so as to give a strong statement that we did not intend to leave the neighborhood, that we were going to create a black headquarters for the black history society and a museum for black history in the neighborhood, with the hope that we could stave off the speculators. And we brought Jesse Wiles in after the plan to work even more fully with the neighborhood to try to get some properties under our control.

When we approached the governor, we needed sixteen thousand dollars to do the moving from Ott Street to Huntingdon between East Broad and Price. The governor only agreed to do eight thousand to any one representative. So then Representative Scott asked Representative Arthur Jinlap--again, Jr.--who represented the downtown area, if he would join in a request to the governor. And, as a result of that request, the governor gave us sixteen thousand dollars.

We then contracted with a mover, who then contracted with the telephone company, the electric company, and we had to bring the house--We couldn't bring it through Gwinnett

Street because of the overhead. We had to bring it through Bolton Street, moving the lines as they came along--and Park and Tree; because they had to cut certain tree branches in order that we get the house through to the present site. The City was under a mandate to restore it, either way it was. And we held them to it, even in the new area. The restoration would have taken eighty-five thousand. It was a very small cottage but very picturesque.

The state preservation office, again, has come a long ways. Whenever I have talked with preservationists, I have found--I realize that the early people I was talking with had been working in an elite society, and as the years have rolled on, they have become more sensitive. We were being told by the State Preservation Office that we could not put a basement in the house because then it would not be on a scale with the rest of the houses. And I had to emphatically tell them that there is no such thing as scale in what is always a black community, that we would throughout the community have a two-story house next to a cottage and a group of row houses, rental property, next to ownership, and all of this kind of thing. They came, very reluctant, to a position because I am insistent.

Most of the problems that I dealt with in this town, I had known them over all of the fifty or sixty-odd years that I had been here when I got ready to deal with the problem. The neighborhood that we were calling the Beach Institute Neighborhood, my first newspaper route, I carried the Tribune as a small lad of twelve in the neighborhood, so I knew the residents there. I had gone to school in junior high and college, at junior high and senior high with people who had lived there. I had visited their home as a boy. I had gone to

meetings at Louis Rivers' house around in Gaston and Bowing[?] at a little organization that he called the YACB's in which it was supposed to be a youth organization to deal with community problems, so the neighborhood, I knew.

Likewise, I told the state preservation people emphatically that cottages of that sort had had basements in them throughout the historic area, that every cottage on Oglethorpe and everywhere else was first a ground house, that as the family had needed additional room, the house was raised and the cottage dropped under it. I likewise told them that there was no fear on my part about the digging at this area because that particular site, the Fair Lawn Plantation site, which is proper--the largest portion of the ground from Fair Lawn Plantation is now included in the Beach neighborhood. That plantation was established on what was then considered to be the highest ground or the highest point in the City because, during the American Revolution, the royal governor, Governor Wright, had a plantation in that area, and the British troops, when they blockaded the harbor and wanted to bombard the town, they used the plantation site of the royal governor for focusing on the community. So from that historical reference, I knew that if a basement could be dug anywhere else in this town, it could be dug there. So upon my insistence, and likewise indicating that the building was of no use to us from a community standpoint unless we had one room that was large enough to hold community meetings--so, reluctantly, we got approval to drop a basement. And that brought the cost of rehabilitating the property from eighty-five thousand to a hundred and five.

It did not relieve--it did not completely restore the property. The house was restored. And if you look at an early picture, the grounds were completely open, there was no yard. There was no garden, and it left the basement--While we had a basement, it was

incomplete. It was unfinished. There were big concrete columns there which took up a great deal of the space and did not leave you much room to gather anybody in that basement and to try to hold a meeting, so that we took the property. The lot was secured by Historic Savannah, purchased from Prom and Kay and deeded to the Association for Study for Afro-American Life and History. They purchased it for about fifty-five hundred and deeded it to the Association.

Then, the City finished the building and walked away and deeded that to the Association. We then began to hold fundraisers. We brought the Sea Island Singers, Bessie Jones and the Sea Island Singers--to the First African Church for an admission fare, and we raised a few thousand dollars. We brought down a black piano teacher who was the sister of the famous black composer, George Walker. We brought her for a piano concert which again was held at the First African Church. And we raised a few more thousand dollars. We did programs of that kind.

To finish the basement where we took out the concrete block posts and we put in iron posts that could be smaller and gave an equal amount of strength. The concrete block posts had to be the full size of the block in order to give any kind of strength. So we took out the posts. We put covering on the floors, and we painted the walls. We likewise put the -- I believe we had to put blinds on the cottage. I know we had to put the picket fence in and planted a garden. And, of course, we enclosed the property with an appropriate fence. Then, we began to furnish the house with historic artifacts and made it a museum.

In '81 or shortly thereafter--We occupied the house in '81, and a few years later, we applied to the Secretary of State for a tax-exempt organization and created the King-Tisdell Cottage Foundation Incorporated. Judge Charles Michaels, who at that time was

a practicing lawyer and was later appointed to fill a vacancy on the state court, he did legal work for us and succeeded in getting a charter, the tax-exempt status for us. We then were able to raise monies a little easier because people would then be able to donate and get some tax -- even our memberships; they probably got some portion of it recognized for tax purposes.

Likewise, the other gifts that would come to us, we could acknowledge and give people tax--the benefits of the tax write-offs. But the house became a museum and became an impressive one. The Georgia Trust for Historic Preservation, as results of a young man who was active in Historic Savannah, a young lawyer by the name of Gilbert, nominated the King-Tisdell as being an outstanding preservation project. And the Trust sent down an examining committee, an investigative committee headed by Dr. Phinizy--of the University of Georgia.

KUHN: Spalding.

LAW: Phinizy Spalding--Dr. Phinizy. The low country -- we have a custom of calling white folk by their first name, but we add the courtesy titles, which they did not add when addressing us. Again, it is a southern custom. It was "Dr. Phinizy" or "Dr. John" -- Phinizy Spalding came and looked the project over and went back. That year, we were one of several recipients as outstanding preservation, an honor that was shared, I think, by the King-Tisdell, Historic Savannah, through the tremendous contributions, particularly made by Spitzmiller, the architectural historian, and the City of Savannah. It was the first project to be so honored by the Trust in Historic Savannah. The next year, they honored, I think the Georgia Bank project at the corner of York and Bull. Then, the following year, I believe, they honored the College of Art and Design--the Savannah

College of Art and Design. I believe those are the only three awards given by the Trust in the historic district.

KUHN: I think it is probably not a bad time to break, in part because I have almost run out of tape.

LAW: What time is it?

KUHN: It is 6:25.

[Brief discussion--Mr. Law expresses need to get to dinner with his mother. Interview of 11/15/90 concluded at this point.]

[TAPE 6, Side A]

KUHN: I was interested in how the voter campaign of 1946 actually was organized, the mechanism. In Atlanta, I know they had block captains and ward captains and this kind of thing. When you registered 19,000 people in 1946, what was the mechanism of organization?

LAW: As I remember the old community, there were already--from an NAACP standpoint and even before, because when NAACP under Dr. Gilbert got ready to build itself, they took the community leaders, and in each community, they began to hold community meetings using the existing structure, so that in West Savannah, Moe Jackson was the president of the West Savannah community. In Woodville, Peter Jackson. In Sandfly, I remember a Reverend Scott, and I imagine at some other time later on, others, but mainly Rev. Scott. In East Savannah was Adam Morrell, Thunderbolt, somebody else. Thad Harris in Pinpoint. But in all of these communities, there was a natural leader, and the people would hold community meetings.

In Savannah, the NAACP and, then later, the Citizen's Democratic Club, all worked through the existing community leaders. There was also the churches and the preachers. That basically represented the kind of ground root or grass roots structure that evolved itself into -- PTAs in some cases were likewise very active.

In other words, there were people who had already evolved in the community as the leaders and had the confidence of and had followship; and these people were, by and large, the nucleus. They were offering you an opportunity to come into their areas. You would speak. People would become motivated, and they would then become workers. Then, they would join in the effort. There's is no question about that Savannah people were literally waiting for a chance to participate. Their streets were unpaved. There was a lack of -- I think that, to a large extent, there were people who remembered, as I did, the machine. The Bouhan machine, when I was a lad, built itself during the Depression by taking away City jobs, public jobs, from blacks and giving it to whites. Such lowly tasks as sweeping the streets and gathering the garbage, blacks were fired and whites were placed in their place. So blacks realized that they were paying taxes and that the City was literally being run without them.

The only black I recall when we began to vote at that time, to register to vote--the only black who probably voted--who worked for the City--was a black messenger at the City Hall or a black custodian, the man who ran the errands and, perhaps, had the responsibility of running the flag up. Nobody else in City Hall were black.

The practice at the police court on Monday morning was one of: 'Nigger, get back.' I recall in the late twenties and early thirties, that was the practice. During Judge Swatch, John Swatch--He never had anything to say to a black person but "nigger." Then, there

was Mercer Jordan, who was the Recorder who had suffered a--I don't know whether it was throat cancer or what, but he spoke through a horn. Blacks had whispered among themselves was that the reason he was so hard on black people was because his wife had run off with a black man and went North, and he never forgave black people for that; but he was extremely brutal: 'Nigger, get back.' Every other word he uttered was "nigger." So with those kinds of things, there was a great, great desire for change. The newspaper periodically would allow a black writer to--once a week, put in a "colored column." But blacks were totally excluded from everything. The police would come down into the black community and likewise--most of them came only to collect from little concessionaires that were selling illegal--either moonshine or the numbers, "boleda."

KUHN: I was going to ask you about "boleda" because wasn't that a very big part of the machine?

LAW: --the Bouhan machine. That was the thing that they would feed offof. The two or three black saloon owners and, again, the Irish had control. There was the fellow--well as I know him, his name slips me--but he had as his main Negro a fellow named Kelly--Kelly Bryant.

The Irish at that time lived mainly in the area of Lot Street, Hall, Montgomery--all up in there. When they gave that area over to blacks, the numbers man moved out to 40th and Jefferson. But the house that he lived in on Lot, he turned it over to the head black who was running the numbers for him.

KUHN: This was Kelly--

LAW: Kelly Bryant. He lived on Lot Street, and he had his heyday during the forties and early fifties while Bouhan was in vogue. They had all the boleda runners. Their

boys were his boys--Kelly boys were the big folks in the black community. All along West Broad Street, they were some of the finest dressers, sports cars--big livers. But early in the morning, they could be seen making their rounds and selling the five and ten cent numbers, lucky numbers.

Then, in the evening after the number was called, then they would go after the women. But it was on this kind of a background that the effort to obtain the vote and to make change--one of the things that blacks as results of voting, I can recall, there were no decent places to vote in the black community. I remember a place in the garage of the Monroe Funeral Home on West Broad Street, the service station at Gwinnett and West Broad--Lester Johnson's place--then another garage, a little small garage, not large as this room--just large enough for one automobile, was used as a voting place at 37th and West Broad.

It was at the 37th and West Broad voting place that the most dramatic of all the voter slowdowns occurred. Well, because the blacks--the trials and tribulations of blacks, first in registering to vote was one thing because you would be ignored. If they decided to give you a chance, it wasn't really a chance. It was a very hostile and very difficult kind of situation to satisfy the registrar. White people, just as a matter of course, would be standing right next to you in another line. They would register without any difficulty and go on. But the whole idea was you were black and therefore subhuman and not capable of performing the tasks of citizenship.

KUHN: Now, this slowdown after registration took place, if you could describe what happened.

LAW: There, again, it was horrible because most elections took place during warm

weather.

KUHN: July was the primary at that time.

LAW: All right, they took place during warm weather. The sun would be beating down sometimes as much as a hundred degrees. And the places where blacks voted, with few exceptions, were all outdoors. So it meant that only one or two people could stand inside the voting place, and all of the others had to stand out on the streets. And there were long lines because they had made no provisions for the 19,000. Prior to that, there were only, say, a handful of two or three thousand blacks. Now, they were being required to vote in the same places that formerly had the capacity for only two or three hundred people. Thousands of blacks were being handled, again, by white registrars--white poll workers, I meant--white poll watchers, who, again had no interest in seeing that the black vote came through because they knew, to a large extent, the black vote was for change. The people who had control of the voting up until that time had all been people who were satisfied with things as they were because they were benefiting from it and were not willing to allow too many new voters to enter the situation who would have views different from their own.

KUHN: Poll watchers were connected with the administration?

LAW: Oh, yes. They were part of the "in" crowd. They named the poll watchers. It was only after we began to participate that we began to demand that our own people assist with the registering to vote. That was one of the things that didn't come easy. But, eventually, we were able to get the registrar to leave the courthouse and to come to churches and to other places to register. It did not come all of a sudden, but over a period of time, we liberalized it to that extent. We then began to create a kind of two-party

system, even within the Democratic Party. And the crowd that blacks supported soon became amenable to allowing us--and we did, during the sixties, we began to name our own poll workers and to do all of the other things that would make and create a situation where we then got access to the voters' list and began to really work, not as outsiders, but in a very scientific and systematic manner. That had not been the case up until that time.

KUHN: Were you present at 37th and Broad at the time of that--

LAW: It is probably the election that Mingledorff ran for chairman, as I recall, Lee Mingledorff ran for chairman. And it was the first effort on the part of John Rozakis to seek elective office. He was running for the county commission. Mingledorff had a terrible attitude. He was really mean. His people were landowners, literally plantation owners up the road, I think, between here and Screven County, or someplace close by. He ran--The blacks were so set on getting him out of office, defeating him and all that crowd. It rained while they were standing in the lines. And the lines would begin at 37th Lane on West Broad, move to 37th Street and then south or west on 37th Street all the way to Burris. There would be, perhaps, as many as two, three, four--and even in excess of that, people in the lines, people still stood in the lines, would not move. The sun came out, and it rained again. Then, night came and seven o'clock came, and because of the capacity, one voting machine with all of these people waiting to vote, they were still there. Of course, it is true that they refused to leave the line, and they just stood there and stood until they were allowed to vote. And it was not until, I guess, way to midnight before anybody began to get any idea of what the results of the election had been.

KUHN: Was this the forties or was this after that?

LAW: The Mingledorff election had to be twenty-two to twenty-five years ago, but in all

of it, blacks would not be deterred. The man that Dr. Gilbert had the good sense to turn the Crusade for Voters--I mean, the Democratic Club over to was John McGlockton. He was a kind of soft-spoken person, but nevertheless a very persistent man. He had beaten the bushes. He had gone--No group was too small, no group too large for him to speak to and to plead with to register to vote.

I am certain--I was not close to him. I was in and out of this place. He was somewhat of a private person, but I am certain that in view of the fact that he had served on grand juries and this kind of thing, he at least knew some of the courthouse crowd and was able to serve as kind of a moderating person--

KUHN: A facilitator.

LAW: Yes, and to finally, even grudgingly, get some attention when others could not get attention. But it was never easy for blacks to vote during the forties nor the fifties because there were never enough machines or enough voting places; and because they had to pay, apparently, to rent the place where the voting took place, again, they were not interested in dealing with blacks, so there were very few locations that they would even contract for. As results, the black voting places, with few exceptions, were very undesirable. You would almost have to crawl over trashcans, and that type of thing, to get to some of the voting places, but one voting machine.

They never gave enough capacity for the increased voting, then, with the inclement weather and hot summers, rain, it made no difference, they kept the lines to register and they kept the lines to vote--all because, to a large extent, they wanted to see change in the leadership of that community, of that time, had an agenda. Because when the Kennedy Administration came in, we elected a new Recorder, who was Emmanuel Lewis, who

was Jewish and he had grown up among blacks.

Emmanual Lewis grew up at the corner of West Broad and Oak, upstairs over the store that his people operated, so he knew blacks all his life, all of his life. And blacks--I think many of them knew him, and I think, too, that they had some respect for him as a lawyer and as a Jew. During his young days--later, I think he became embittered--but during his young days, he was a decent person. And a radical thing happened when--he promised, in running for office that he would discontinue the derogatory manner in which blacks were treated in the Court and that he would do away with "nigger," and that everybody would be addressed with respect.

This was a radical thing to happen. And at that time, he also instituted the broadcasting of the trials of the police court on Monday mornings on a local radio station that carried the court on that morning, so blacks all over the city would be able to hear Judge Emmanuel Lewis as he would dress down a lawyer who would come in and say: "Judge, this nigger was so-and-so" And he would rap him down and make him be respectful--or "Here comes this boy"--Blacks immediately got the chance--even those who were not before the court and did not go to the court, got a chance to see that there was a change and that there were people in government that were insisting that they be respectful.

KUHN: That is a radical departure, also a very creative kind of thing to do, for whatever reason. I have two names here who I would like to know more about--a Mr. T. J. Hopkins, do you remember him?

LAW: Most certainly.

KUHN: I had him in some sort of connection with the NAACP. Is that correct?

LAW: Not in its later days. In its young days, very early days, when the NAACP--In its

early days, it was principally elitist. That is, the select people, the people who were educated and the like--And he was one of the early presidents, but I did not get any evidence that he did anything significant while president. I'm not sure. It appears that the movement died under his leadership or soon thereafter. It was not very-- He was not persistent.

I think, as I know Mr. Hopkins, he was fairly well-respected. He's a native Savannahian. We all lived initially--I was born on Gwinnett Street, and they lived across the street. He went off to Howard and had a degree in engineering and came back to Savannah with a reserve commission as well, went and served in World War II and came out as a colonel. And he was one of the initial men -- he was very active in forming the American Legion--the Colored American Legion. He was the first black American Legion commander in Georgia, Post 500, named for William P. Jordan, one of the Savannahians to fall in World War II.

William P. Jordan was the brother, as I recall, of Dr. Howard Jordan, who served in the chancellor's office for the Board of Regents, a former president of Savannah State College. They both were -- they all came out of Beaufort, but they had spent some of their young life here in Savannah.

Colonel Hopkins was also, sometime between World War--after coming back from Howard, he was part of another group. He always had political ambitions. They tried to create a black Democratic Club, very early, before the white primary was done away with. He was active in that group.

KUHN: What was that called? Do you remember?

LAW: It was some kind of Democratic club.

KUHN: I have some organization, the Five C's?

LAW: He was the -- It was the Four C's; wasn't it?

KUHN: Okay, the Colored Citizens Committee of Chatham County

LAW: He was active in that. That was made up mainly of the blacks--it didn't, again, last too long. It was made up mainly of the blacks who lived in the 500 block of what we call the "four hundreds"--the 500 block of East Henry. They were the real estate, the doctors, the undertakers, all of the top blacks of means, Anderson Street, they were in the 5-C's. They were a group, as I recall it, that attempted to deal with the Bouhan machine. They were just a very small black vote, but through the patronage given them, they would try to deliver the black vote for the Bouhan machine, so much so that out of the 5-C's came -- if I had to -- the few things they accomplished, I think, they were given some crumbs, when they asked for a colored swimming pool. And a mud hole was built in some low land just south of 37th Street, and just in front of the cemetery. It had concrete sides, made square, a swimming hole, a mud bottom. That swimming pool, it seems to me, the main person in the 5-C's at that time had to be a lawyer, James J. G. Lemon. It seems that the pool was somewhat of a political payoff because Mr. Lemon was given management of the pool. It seems that he could collect fees and pocket them. That was his payoff for the service to the Bouhan machine.

KUHN: I have seen elsewhere in Mr. Haynes Walton's book, an account of a memory you have from a boy seeing black politicians getting paid off or something like that, during the Depression years, black politicians sort of getting their payoffs from the white politicians or the white machines; is there something like that?

LAW: When we came down West Broad Street, if you had mentioned this earlier, I

would have shown you one or two neon crosses in front of black churches that were put there shortly after blacks began to vote in large numbers by a fellow named Butterworth--Butter-something--but he was a neon sign man here in the City. And he ran for some political office. And he would make the rounds of the black churches and meetings and held meetings, and every church that agreed to give him support; he would award them by erecting a neon cross in front of the church, this type of thing. I do recall a meeting at Thankful Baptist Church. The preacher there at that church--Thankful Church at that time was occupying a building that had formerly been St. Augustine's Episcopal Mission, and that meeting I actually almost found it revolting that Butter--I can't remember--Edenfield or Butterfield, I can't remember exactly what his name was because after a time he fell out of the picture. The business was gone and the neon sign business was no longer, but I did see him being allowed to hold political meetings there, I saw the preacher have the money pushed in his hands.

KUHN: Hold on [tape changed to Side B. Transcript continues.]

[Tape 6, Side B]

CRIMMINS: Were you involved at all in getting the first black elected to office in Savannah, and when would that have been?

LAW: Blacks could not run for office and win anything. By the way by the late fifties, the Citizens Democratic Organization had just about petered out. In the middle fifties, under my leadership, the NAACP began to lay an agenda and to build strength. And in '59, we had decided that we were going to be able, for the first time, we were going to acquire an office, a telephone, and then began to desegregate. And we developed a plan that we would attack the library first because it is small and it represented a key to the integration of schools, the access of books, that we would attack the library to be segregated because we felt that we had that capacity at that moment, and that we would then pick up the momentum as results of that attack; then we would attack another segregation practice until we had moved about and completely desegregated the town. Just about the time that we got ready to launch our attack against segregation, the late fifties and early sixties, beginning with 1960, the young people came with the requests for the sit-ins, so that meant that the momentum that we were going to have to orchestrate and build was placed at our feet almost all at once. So then we just began to strike out at everything. Now, with that in mind, elections were all city-wide or county-wide. We did not have the voting power, city-wide, to elect a black.

There were one or two blacks who insisted on running; I was never enthusiastic about this, because my theory has always been that it is important when we lead people that we lead them into something that is attainable. I don't really believe that you strengthen

people if they are already in a failing situation and then you lead them to a bigger failure, I think you hurt them, you harm them. They begin to doubt themselves, so you have got to give them a victory. Then, after that, -- a victory or two -- there is a maturity. And they can win or lose. They can say: 'Well, I lost this one, but I won one yesterday, and I'll win again tomorrow.' But to get them in a situation where they have never won, then, you lead them and build their hopes; then they don't win then -- So I was never enthusiastic about those blacks who wanted to adventure in city-wide elections because we do know that in spite of all, there are many whites who will smile in your face, but when they get in the voting booth, all of the fears of black domination or anything else seem to come to the fore, and very few of them will vote their convictions.

There are other kinds of pressures and other kinds of reasons, and, as a result, no blacks were elected. The Rev. preacher at Ashbury Methodist Church ran and lost. I believe Sam Williams ran for something and lost. There were several. But finally, we sat down, in the early sixties, with a group of young fellows who wanted to -- It might have been '62 -- '61, but they came to us and asked for our votes. And we told them that in exchange for the vote, we would need a commitment that when they got to the legislature, they would introduce a bill that would district the city and county so that blacks would be able to be elected to some offices. They agreed. They said: "Vote for us, and we will introduce the bill."

The first two candidates that we supported forgot their pledge, so two years later, when they came up for election, we met with another two and they agreed to make the same pledge, so we voted the first two out and voted in the second two.

KUHN: Who were who? Was that Boles Ford and Roy Jackson?

LAW: No, no. These were members to the state legislature because we had to create the districts. And this is an NAACP contribution that every black officer in this area owes it to the NAACP for creating that possibility. No black has ever won a city-wide election except Judge Gadsden who ran for Superior Court and Boles Ford and succeeding blacks who ran on the Roussakis ticket.

KUHN: I see.

LAW: They ran as a ticket. But other than that, the bias, the prejudice has always prevailed; and whites in no case have ever supported a black in substantial numbers. Then, there would be some who would say in the recent election of Roy Allen to the Senate that that is not so. But, again, the district is predominately black.

KUHN: Who were these first two state legislators succeeded by the second--

LAW: We'd have to look up the record.

CRIMMINS: When did the redistricting take place?

LAW: We'd have to look it up, somewhere around '63 or '64 because whenever it occurred, that's when Bobby Hill went to the legislature.

CRIMMINS: Okay.

KUHN: It's right around that time, '63 or '64.

LAW: That's correct.

KUHN: There was congressional and legislative reapportionment.

LAW: That's correct. We then went to the legislature.

KUHN: It was ordered by the Courts.

CRIMMINS: How about City Council? Did you do the same thing in City Council, in city government?

LAW: The district. The legislature created district elections for us: the city, county, state -- everything.

KUHN: This was before the Voting Rights Act of '65.

LAW: Correct.

KUHN: After the Voting Rights Act, it goes to the Justice Department?

LAW: That's right, but we were never under that because the NAACP developed a modus operandi in '60 that held us in good stead in all of this period of social change, and that is that blacks who came weekly to the mass meeting looked to us to tell them who the candidates were. So it was then necessary for us before each election to print a sample ballot indicating who the NAACP recommends for each office. And the sample was an NAACP sample ballot. And blacks in this community would not vote on election day except if they had that ballot as a guide.

KUHN: So you are saying that the mass meetings were a form of keeping elected officials accountable, too.

LAW: Oh, yes, there's no question. It did everything. It did everything. We used it for every purpose that we needed to use it for.

CRIMMINS: Did you invite black--white politicians to speak at these meetings?

LAW: They were done in what we called the Political Advisory Committee. Judge Gadsden headed--You see, after the Crusade for Voters went with--

KUHN: Hosea?

LAW: --The Southern Christian Leadership Conference, it was necessary for us to create another voting and registering arm, so we then created the Political Advisory Council. And that was made up of people, again, from all stratas, all communities, all walks of

life, and Judge Gadsden was the chairman. It was called the NAACP Political Advisory Council, and before election there would be a meeting held. All people aspiring for office would come and would appear before the group for examination. They would speak. They would be asked questions, and they would be examined. And after hearing them all, in secret, the group would then vote as to what persons would get the group's endorsement. The white politicians were kept out. The press was kept out.

We had a procedure that we would not produce the ballot, our advisory ballot that would guide blacks on the next day, until the night before election. And we had one white lawyer who tried to get smart on one election because he could not get the endorsement. He hired people and printed a ballot similar to ours with his name on it and sent his people through the black community after dark to pick up our ballots and to replace them with his ballots. It was soon discovered, and his deed did not get a chance to materialize. But from then on, his name was "Mud." And to this day, I don't care a thing for him.

But we developed a procedure, and we were using the same people, some of the people who were going to be in the polls the next day. The community leaders would come to the headquarters and get their supply and go back and would cover, door to door, all of the people in their neighborhood. But we would not put the ballot out until after the newspaper had closed down, had printed its Monday morning issue--the election was generally Tuesday--so the Tuesday issue or the Thursday issue if it is a November election or something. But it would be after midnight before our ballot would hit the street because we did not want the press to get our ballot and rush it into the papers and say: "This is where the black community is going." Because if it did, our endorsement of a white candidate would be to no avail because then, again, there would be a backlash

and he would be hurt.

There was also operating a sophisticated method of block voting. Whichever way the black community went, that's the way the election went, except for that awful period of when Nixon, Goldwater were out there hollering--hard on crime and police and all of this kind of thing. But the block vote served the blacks of this community to good avail.

KUHN: Could you describe the atmosphere of the mass meetings? I think people today have very little understanding of the ambience, the atmosphere, what went on, what it felt like to be in those mass meetings.

LAW: Number one, just as you notice, wherever we've gone, I've known the people. There were very few blacks who were coming to the meeting that I did not know. I knew their background. I knew those who had come from the islands, and I knew those who had come from up the road as far as Sylvania or Millen, Statesboro; and we had to draw on the heritage and the experiences that they had come from, the rural churches, their knowledge of the soil and all of that kind of thing. So the meetings began with hymn singing, with spirituals.

We sang a few of the old hymns of the church. "Our Father, I stretch my hands to thee, no other help I know"--something of that sort. But it was mainly the free leader response method that is found in the spirituals. Then we would call on some good deacon to pray. Then, after the prayer, the speaker generally would base his talk on the happenings of the week previously and would conclude with our resolutions and what direction we would be taking, whether it would be to hold fast or to do some specific something--to go out and register to vote or to give in order that a lawyer could be retained or whatever it was. Then, oftentimes those people who had been beaten or thrown into jail, they would be the

stars of the meeting. They would come forth, even before the speaker, and would be introduced. They would have something to say about their experience. Then would be the speaker, the collection. All the people would get up and come and lay whatever they had to give. And there would be more singing.

KUHN: How would you describe the atmosphere, the energy?

LAW: Well, it was terrific. There's no question about it. You had people that would be rushing; some who had gone to church that morning would go home for dinner. Others would not go home, and they would be rushing to get to the mass meeting in order to get a seat, because many people had to stand during the entire two hours and sometimes even longer. We would begin at four and sometimes even night would come before the meeting was over. The people would be rushing. You could tell them. You would see them dashing through the streets. You would know they were on the way to the mass meeting. Some of them would be in their place as much as thirty minutes, or even longer, before the start of the meeting, in order to have a seat.

KUHN: I wanted to go back a bit in time to flesh out a little bit more about Reverend Gilbert because I really do feel that he is, from all accounts, a real pivotal--perhaps the pivotal person in the modern movement in Savannah.

LAW: There's no question, not only Savannah, throughout Georgia, I keep telling you, because of the network of branches that he created and the following through and making successful the primary--the Primus King case, because all of this--in spite of what we say about marches and what-have-you--the beginning of the movement was the breaking up of the white primary in Georgia. Up until then, the primary was a private club for white folks, and a black man could not even influence any kind of politician. Those who would

listen to him did it by sufferance only. The whole situation as I remember voting, Blacks could only vote. We sat around and waited for Wendell Wilkie's election, voted every two to four years. That was the only kind of involvement that we had. As a young man, I voted for Wilkie and after that, Roosevelt, but the reason that we voted for Wilkie was there--all of the black political leadership of my youth who had had any kind of involvement in politics had had it as part of the Black and & Tan Republicans--

KUHN: Republicans, sure.

LAW: There were Tumor--L.B. Tumor, Benjamin S. Adams, and all that crowd of men who had--Mamie George Williams--Mrs. Mamie George Williams--and all of that crowd of men and women who had for twenty years and thirty years and forty years before had been struggling to influence at least whatever Republican patronage that was to be handled in Georgia from the-

KUHN: Republican Administration--

LAW: From the Hoover days on.

KUHN: McKinley--

LAW: But there were hardly any people from the McKinley days that were still living and active.

KUHN: Tumor was, wasn't he? Louis Tumor? L. B. Tumor?

LAW: That was his father.

KUHN: Oh, okay.

LAW: They had the same name.

CRIMMINS: You described yesterday the involvement of Reverend Gilbert in the early forties--

KUHN: That's what he was just talking about--I would like to--

LAW: It was Gilbert who led blacks into the future. Up until then, as I indicated, the only credible leadership of any real consequence was the Republican wing. And it was Gilbert who created the mass Democratic support. He created the whole kind of machinery on this end, linked up with A.T. Walden and the other men throughout the state. And they laid the under girthing for all of the present-day fruitations which we are now getting, the mayors, the councilmen and the like.

KUHN: Did you ever go around with Gilbert to these other communities?

LAW: Oh, yes, I went to many. The meetings were generally on Saturday, on Saturday because, again, in many of the rural places, the leader was a preacher. Sometimes it was the professor and other times, a long time big landowner and that kind of thing. I went to many.

KUHN: The process was first to identify local leadership and establish a chapter, second to have those chapters raise money for the defense of Primus King.

LAW: All of that happened. All of that happened. There were other things that they did. There were other things that they did. I realize that you have mainly the political interests, but there were other things that they did.

KUHN: Such as?

LAW: There was always--there was always a need to try to defend the hide and the head of some black man. There were many defense funds for a black who had been brutalized and beaten or something else, arrested for a trumped up charge. They took cases of that kind. There was always in the early days, the insistence and the creation of committees to insist that the county and the board provide equal education, equal access to education,

on the part of blacks. They did the "Separate but Equal." This was the way we did a whole lot in petitioning and pushing and forcing and trying. Dr. Gilbert led the fight in Georgia for the equalization of teacher's pay. Black teachers got less than white teachers. He was the person who fought for and led that fight for the equalization of teacher pay.

KUHN: I think Mr. Harper was involved with that, too?

LAW: Oh, sure, he was. They were contemporaries.

KUHN: And even MLK, Senior, was, I think, in local--

LAW: Oh, come, come--

KUHN: No?

LAW: M.L. King, Senior--Borders much more so--Borders much more so--who, again, had been a preacher. To a large extent, Daddy King came into maturity with the involvement of his son and this kind of thing. He was somewhat of a minor--The men, the preachers--Sam Williams--Reverend Sam Williams, Friendship Church, Morehouse College--

KUHN: Okay. Okay.

LAW: These, you are talking about the giants. Sam Williams did more to school and to motivate that young group of boys and girls around Atlanta who later went to--He was a philosopher, and he was that kind of guy who could challenge and motivate. Oh, there were so many.

KUHN: Let's talk about some of the giants. Let's talk about Colonel Walden--names, as you said, that have sort of gone out of consciousness. Let's talk about Colonel Walden as an organizer, as a man.

LAW: More so than just an organizer, he was available. Blacks, whenever they needed

somebody, he had the legal training and was not afraid--looked like--he had bulldog appearances; and he was just as tough as he looked, you see--soft-spoken but who would lay the legal questions. He was just out there at a time when a lawyer who would take the pleadings of a black who had been wronged in the courts of Georgia was just something that none of us here could imagine. It was true even in Hollowell's time, but even more so in Colonel Walden's time because all of us know that as we gained political power, we likewise got better treatment in the courts. Many, many blacks in many, many cases did not realize until after they began voting how their votes could change the attitudes of courts. The areas where blacks caught the greatest amount of hell were also the areas where they had the lowest amount of voters.

KUHN: Then, these chapters--again, back to the politics--these chapters would give a few dollars here, a few dollars there, whatever they could, you are saying, for, say, to support the Primus King through the courts.

LAW: Oh, rallies were held. Dr. Gilbert would speak everywhere. You are talking about Martin King now, but in his day, the folk would come from all around to hear Ralph Mark Gilbert. That's all they called him. It wasn't ever "Doctor" or all that type of thing. It was "Ralph Mark Gilbert." He was great.

KUHN: Hold on just a second.

[End of Tape 6 Side B]

[Transcript continues on Tape 7, Side A]

[Tape 7, Side A--Transcript Continues]

LAW: But Benjamin May has never been given credit because he, too, was one of the most sought after public speakers, particularly during the first twenty--well, all of the years that he was at Morehouse. He travelled throughout the state at graduation time in particular, with baccalaureate and commencement addresses. He was a great inspirational speaker. I am certain that nothing had a greater impression on Martin King, Junior, than those chapel talks that Buck Benny made. It was Buck Benny who first talked about non-violence. Then, of course, he went off and Martin became exposed to the pacifist organizations of Byron Russter and others.

But Dr. May was and Gilbert was probably, too, and John Wesley Dobbs. They were the three most sought-after black speakers of that day and time: Ralph Mark Gilbert, John Wesley Dobbs, and Benjamin Elisha May. Those were the most sought after speakers.

KUHN: Describe, if you could, Ralph Mark Gilbert's style of presentation, delivery?

LAW: He was green slab Bernard, an orator of the first water. Because he was a dramatist, his memory was phenomenal. As for recalling, I can recall that he would wax eloquent. He would start 'at the beginning of the present crisis'--'once to every man and nation comes the moment to decide'--and reel it all off to the end.

CRIMMINS: Did he finish his career here in Savannah?

LAW: Yes, he is buried here.

CRIMMINS: When did he die?

LAW: I would have to check.

KUHN: In the fifties sometime.

LAW: It was in the fifties.

CRIMMINS: So he continued his leadership role throughout his career here or did it taper off?

LAW: No, he held the leading church in this community.

CRIMMINS: Up until he died?

LAW: Oh, yes. There's no question about it. There were people who would leave their church services if they knew that he was going to do a sermon. He would have people in his congregation from every other congregation in town on Sunday morning. And young people, many of them would leave their churches and join his church--a terrific draw, a terrific drawing force, a man of unlimited energy who just literally worked himself to death because he was involved in every aspect, the cultural life, the political life, the religious life, the educational life. It makes no difference. He just literally worked himself to death. Then, of course, he was an evangelist, you see, so he travelled and spoke all over, and then came back to fill his own pulpit.

KUHN: I assume in Indiana he had been a leading figure in the NAACP there, is that—

LAW: I am not going to assume anything.

KUHN: Do you know much of his life before Savannah?

LAW: No, that's why I am not assuming.

KUHN: Okay.

LAW: But he was well-trained, as I indicated, he was at Morehouse. At the time that he and many others went to Morehouse, Morehouse was an incubator for producing pulpiteers and black leaders, great inspirational souls. It did that, and he had come from

that particular background.

CRIMMINS: Did he ever speak of DuBois. Had DuBois been there when he was a student?

LAW: DuBois was never at Morehouse.

CRIMMINS: He was at A.U.

LAW: He was already--DuBois came back. He came back.

KUHN: '34 to '44.

CRIMMINS: He was there until 1913.

KUHN: 1906, wasn't it, and then came back '34 to '44.

LAW: That's correct. That's correct.

KUHN: Dr. Gilbert or Ralph Mark Gilbert comes to Savannah, and I gather that almost immediately you realize that this is a different kind of individual, in a sense, that this is somebody truly unique. How long did it take before he made his presence made in the town?

LAW: Well, if you will check your tapes, you will find that I said that he was introduced to the community when the PTA, the Colored PTA invited him to do a drama, to do a play, in order to raise money for a purpose. They fell in love with him then. Then, the church called him back for the trial sermon, and it was just love at first sight, that kind of thing. But I have been told by the Reverend John Q. Adams, who is now 97 that Dr. Gilbert was not doing very well in New York. He was in Harlem, kind of halfway down on his hoofs and that Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. was interested in seeing that he was placed in a role where he could branch out and do the things that he was capable of doing. According to Rev. Adams, it was Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. who kind of urged

this community to take--or the church to take Dr. Gilbert.

KUHN: Right. I don't know if you have thought anymore since yesterday of other giants across the state or brave individuals such as Mr. Pullum in Terrell County, or whether over the last twenty-four hours other people have come to mind that you think really warrant that kind of recognition today?

LAW: Well, I knew them all over the country. I knew them all over the country.

KUHN: I have one or two other names from the forties, then we might do some other more general things. These are white individuals in that '46 era--Malberry Smith? Malberry Smith?

LAW: Um-hm [indicating affirmative].

KUHN: Do you remember what he did? Or Frank Spencer is another name. I didn't know what role they played or what involvement they had. I saw their names came up at that time--maybe with the CPL, the Citizens Progressive League.

LAW: Smith would have only appeared at some particular episode, but Captain Frank W. Spencer, an old line Savannah family, again, like Malcolm McLain, and he was third generation river pilot. His father and his grandfather before him had all been river pilots. Captain Spencer said that he was indifferent to race, just as Malcolm Bell will tell you when his attitude changed about race, but Frank Spencer was a seaman, and he was out at sea; and he was on a ship that was passing around the Cape, that southern tip, of the globe. And he said a storm came up and his ship was in great danger and was tossed against the waves; and it took every man to brace and to do his duty. And he said courageously he saw the valor of white men and black men all struggling with the ship to keep from going under. He said that at that moment, he developed a respect for black

people.

He came back here, and from then on, he was never the same. No white church, he felt, was honest in its religious profession. They were all white so he was disassociated or refused to associate with any white congregation and joined the Community Church in New York. It had an open--I think John Holt might have been pastor at that time, a very liberal and forward-thinking person, head of the NAACP board in the early days. Captain Spencer joined the Community Church [inaudible]. He married; I think his second wife was from Minnesota. She, likewise, must have introduced him to Hubert Humphrey. He and Hubert Humphrey remained very close and dear friends for the rest of Hubert Humphrey's life.

Captain Spencer was a very unique kind of person. He ran--He was the manager of the Atlantic Towing Company. This was a towing company that was owned by the richest blacks--no, the richest whites in the community: Robert W. Groves and all that bunch who had interests in the towing company. They had a monopoly. They took care of the business for every ship that came to the port, and he was the manager.

He became wealthy in that position himself. But he was a fair man, and as results, he gave everybody, white and black, a fair shake in the employment on board all the tugboats. Even very early in his operation, in a period long before anybody else would think of doing it, he promoted black men to be pilots of the tugboats or captains of the tugboats and that kind of thing. He joined with Dr. Gilbert as soon as he came to town and was one of Dr. Gilbert's strongest friends and supporters. He was one of those people who provided the financial support and the kind of things that Dr. Gilbert needed, and they were allies in many things, particularly Captain Spencer was interested in doing

something about the very poor educational facilities provided to blacks in this community.

Before blacks could get on the board--I think the board must have been first an appointed board--He was instrumental in getting himself named and could very easily do so, I would imagine. Why they did it, I don't know, because they knew his views, but, nevertheless, he was associated with Robert W. Groves. The sugar refinery people in the community owed Captain Spencer a debt because he was a tremendously fine river pilot, and he became what they called Pilot of the Port, the chief pilot. He held that position for a long time, but back in the twenties, B.O. Spragg and his associates came to Savannah and were looking around for a place to locate the Savannah--a sugar refinery. And Frank Spencer--at that time no boat ever navigated the river beyond the docks right here at the city. But they saw a site up at Port Wentworth that would have made a good industrial site and Captain Spencer assured them that he knew the channel well enough that he could bring a sugar boat, a Louisiana sugar boat, all the way from the Tybee bar up to Port Wentworth and dock it. Because he maneuvered that [astronomical?] feat, because nobody had ever taken a ship beyond the docks here in the city, he did that and literally saved the town because the resin and naval store thing was about to peter out and there had been nothing.

He saved the town because he gave it a new industry and by opening up that river channel, he made it possible for all of the industries, from Union Camp on, the sugar refinery on down to Union Camp, to locate in Savannah, so that it was quite obvious that the powers that be knew that he was a valuable person and that he had saved their hides and made it possible for them to make fortunes.

But he was an independent man--short; he was very small, hardly more than five feet one but tough as nails, and he remained an old salt all of his life. He worked with Dr. Gilbert and he got himself named to the Board of Education, and he constantly fought for black teachers, black schools, black children--for the eighteen years he served on the board, he would constantly make motions to equalize--this was in the forties and fifties--to equalize the white and black schools. And the motion would die all eighteen years for the want of a second.

Then, after we succeeded in getting the schools integrated, he was then in his nineties. He ran for the school board and served another term so he could likewise serve the cause of equal opportunity.

KUHN: He was in his nineties.

LAW: He was the first white life member of the NAACP in this town, and he openly supported black causes. He gave funds and was very supportive of the founding of everything Dr. Gilbert was a part of; and many times he was there pushing and advocating things that others seemed not to have been--even blacks--seemed not to be interested in. He called me over to his house on one or two occasions. He served on the pilot commission. That is the group responsible for passing on boys who want, at an early age, to prepare themselves to be river pilots, a special course of training. It was his desire all through part of his life that blacks would eventually find their way into the stream and would become river pilots because they are some of the best paying jobs. They generally make in excess of a hundred thousand dollars a year, bringing and carrying ships out. It was his desire and he worked with me; and we succeeded in getting a black named to the Pilot Commission, who was Captain Stevens and about the only

black at that time, in keeping with tradition, that could have served because up until that time--now, they take people who do not directly have a river interest, but at that time, they looked solely to people who had a knowledge of the river and the like.

But we had not, thus far, been able to identify black families whose children and parents who were all geared in the seventh and eighth grade that they wanted to gear their--channel their training in that direction. There is a lot of training, and they have to start real early. If a person waited until after high school, it is too late.

KUHN: Tim, I think you had some final questions.

CRIMMINS: We talked about giving an overview of African-American history in Savannah. We could do it in a week or a day. We are thinking maybe of having an outline that we could have on the transcript to present to you; then, we might use that for future sessions when we follow through.

I thought we might just spend ten minutes sort of setting up how that might--

KUHN: Or how the last fifty years relate to the longer history of Savannah, and what is the connection between the Savannah of your lifetime and the black Savannah that goes back to 1733?

LAW: Savannah has always been, for blacks, a kind of unique experience. There are some of us who felt that the resistance here was not as openly hostile as it was elsewhere in Georgia and many times elsewhere in the South, that there was a certain laid back, a certain lackadaisicalness, a certain amount of complacency that exists that might not have been good because the old folk here will always tell you that they never had any problems about sitting in the squares. Most of the things were open. The so called old--the old folk used to speak of the old whites who had money as the "blue bloods."

These people never really felt threatened by blacks, and many of them had had very close black relationships. Some of them had been raised by black women and, in many cases, felt warmer toward the nurse, sometimes the cook, or the maid, than they did their own mother because of the kind of care, the kind of wisdom, the kind of discipline that black women exerted in those homes, in the early homes of the white blue bloods--many of those blacks had been in the service of their family for long, long periods of time and kind of felt as though they owned the place. Those families accepted them as family. As results, these people used their relationship with their white folk to build churches. Some of the blacks who were related to the whites in this community by blood ended up getting favorable consideration sometimes in setting up or being set up in business, others in teaching positions when they became available--so much so that in my youth, the vast majority of the teachers throughout my school years were mulatto and not dark-skinned blacks.

But, at the outset, there were many reasons why whites were not--the class of white people were different in the vast areas beyond the city because Georgia, originally, was a kind of backwood--wooded area. Savannah and Augusta, for a long time, were the only two cultural centers, and the expression "peckerwood" comes from the very rough-hewed, independent but wilderness backwood white that made up the large portion of the growing population outside of the two river towns.

In many cases, they were people not in the class and planter rice culture of the tidewater and as results blacks in the tidewater, because of the lucrativeness in the early days of the rice culture, blacks were brought in in far greater numbers than the whites really felt comfortable with. Along the coast of Georgia, blacks began to exceed the white

population. Early during the existence of blacks here, they were running away, moving out into wilderness areas like Tybee. Up along the river, they established [inaudible] camps. There was always a threat that blacks would become violent. Many of the planters, in order to maintain the balance, realized that they had to be kind and somewhat benevolent in order to exist. As results, the blacks along the coast, in many cases, were left to their own devices.

There were several situations where blacks resorted to violence. And compromises were made in order not to foment any greater violence. But the large number of blacks along the coast created a certain atmosphere and a certain balance of power in order to keep white control. They were not the majority in numbers. As results, they had to establish a relationship with the majority in numbers which were blacks, in order that they could coexist and that the whites could profit by the presence of the blacks and continue to communicate with and to operate with the mills of the north and the dealers and the business people of England.

Savannah likewise, very early, it became a town because being a seaport town, early in our architecture, early in our operation, northerners came into the city for one reason after another, some for business. The first builder brought into the town was a northerner who insisted on receiving blacks at his front door, and he created some consternation in the town and was finally forced out.

But there were quite a few northerners, and the rice culture, a great number of the dealers were Englishmen; and, of course, the English brought their ways. So that being a seaport

town, it was not the typical southern town, although the various slave codes were adopted. The evidence is quite clear that they were not harshly enforced. And rightly so because we do know where there were one or two confrontations and the better judgment of the whites was not to push the matter too far, and blacks coming either from Africa or from the West Indies, there were many of them who were pretty, pretty militant but who desired no white contact but merely to be left alone on the islands among themselves, so much so that when freedom came, there was Tunis Campbell, who immediately seized upon the idea and attempted to create at St. Catherine and Endarin, a black republic. There was a black village on Little Tybee--Arkwright Village or Arkwright Community. And, all along the Georgia coast there was a black community, Burris, just eleven miles out of Savannah, where, when the land was not divided as was promised, the blacks flagged it. The militia, the white militia, had to be sent in; and they hauled off hundreds of blacks into the local jails here. [End of tape 7, Side A]

Continuation of Interview to Conclusion--Tape 7, Side B

LAW: But they operated their own town eleven miles outside the city at Burris. It was all this kind of independence that existed. The study of the free blacks during the antebellum period, to see as early as the 1790s, wealthy blacks were arising on the scene here in Savannah and to realize that Andrew Bryant, in his early church, one of the first things that he had done was to arrange for--one of the early things that he did was to arrange for the purchase of a free black from an estate in Augusta and brought Francis here to work among the members of this church and to teach reading and writing. That was in 1790, so that many, many unusual things occurred. And the presence of Jonathan Bryant at Brampton [?] Plantation permitting, in the 1780s, free religious expression on the part of blacks on his plantation, unthought of anywhere else in the South, anywhere else. They were worshipping without the presence of a white person to watch to make sure that there was no misbehavior or insurrection, that here in Savannah, the first blacks to freely worship among themselves under their own leadership occurred here. And all of these kinds of many uniquenesses is the reason that I have established the museum and the heritage trail, and we are now going into a cultural center, where we need to place here in this area a true interpretation as to what--not only the negative aspects of what it meant to be black in this area, but what all the positive aspects of being black in this area was all about.

KUHN: Thank you very much.

[Whereupon, interview on this date is concluded.]