Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewees: James Miller, Carolyn Miller

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Interviewer: Emilye Crosby

Videographer: John Bishop

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Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

EMILYE CROSBY: All right. So, this is Emilye Crosby on December 4, 2015, and I'm here with Mr. James Miller, Ms. Carolyn Miller at Mississippi Cultural Crossroads in Port Gibson, Mississippi. We're here with the Civil Rights History Project, which is co-sponsored by the Library of Congress, and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture. And with us are John Bishop and Guha Shankar. Good morning. Thank you for joining us.

CAROLYN MILLER: Good morning.

JAMES MILLER: Good morning, good doctor.

EC: Could you tell us about when and where you were born and growing up? One of you can start and then--.

CM: Well, I was born actually at Alcorn State University now, but I was born in the Infirmary at Alcorn A&M College then, back in 1953. Because back during the '50s and before, there were only midwives. My mother was having a difficult pregnancy. And my grandmother, who was an educator in the community, she had a little pull and she was able to get my Mom down to the infirmary. So I was born there. I was the only one in my family actually born in the hospital, so to speak, or with a professional medical person.

EC: Did your brothers and sisters have--.

CM: They had midwives. They were all born by midwives. Yeah. I was the first, though. I gave her a little trouble.

EC: That was the only time.

CM: Yeah. The only time. Yes.

JM: Yeah. In terms of midwives, Ms. Disney was the premier midwife in this community.

EC: What was her name?

JM: Ms. Jessie.

CM: Jessie.

JM: Jessie. Yeah.

CM: Jessie Disney.

JM: Jessie Disney. Yeah. I think she's the one, she brought me here.

EC: Is that her claim to fame?

JM: Yeah, yeah.

CM: Yes.

JM: Her and my mother was close, Ms. Disney, that's all. But she was a beautiful midwife. So that's the way you say--. I didn't know her personally.

CM: Right. Unplanned. Wow. Yeah. But she, Ms. Disney, probably everybody in the '50s, she was the one.

EC: So she delivered a lot of--.

CM: Oh, yeah.

JM: A lot of babies.

CM: Yeah. A lot of babies.

EC: Did she just deliver babies for black families or did any white families go to her?

CM: I'm not sure about that, but I bet you--. I'm sure she probably did.

EC: Yeah.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Yeah. Poor black fam--and the poor white families. Probably there was some of them. Yeah. But I was born here in 1949, and I was, my Dad was a sharecropper, all right? And with that, I don't rank up with some of that earlier, okay? I was born out that way. And it was--growing up in the [19]50s in Port Gibson, Mississippi, I was just running around carefree. I felt happy as a little kid growing up here, right? Then all of a sudden things changed. I don't know. It was like the civil rights movement showed up and so you had something to focus on that was different. And because of the way society was structured; white folks had everything, black folks didn't have nothing. Running around in a lot of cases, living a servitude kind of existence, trying to support their families. So it was crazy, crazy. It was a crazy

existence. There were some crazy relationships between black folks and white folks. I don't think you talked about it a lot, right? There was a lot of perversity, obvious racism going on too, right? But poor blacks and poor whites, in a lot of cases, built coalitions in the community. They supported each other and supported each other's families. I think that was kind of like behind the scenes kind of thing. You know, one-on-one kind of relationships, not no group dynamics, but still separate and apart.

EC: Can you give an example of how that might have worked, either with people or just an example of what it would have been like, how that would work?

JM: Well, like my old man, right? Okay. Mr. Dan, the sheriff in the community, right? McCay. My father was a World War II veteran and so he saw a lot of stuff when he went over on [5:00] the European Theater. And when he came back home, he talked a little bit about it. So it kind of opened up our eyes to stuff, right? So for some reason or other, Pop was always moved. You know, he was always--half over laughing and going on and stuff. So him and Mr. Dan had a pretty cordial relationship. He would help Pop from time to time, and give him little monies and stuff, besides paying him. I remember one instance in particular when I was at Alcorn and they were one of the Howard--. I was going to get to school, right? Well, I got a little fellowship, but I still needed some money. Mr. Dan gave Pop the money. Then Pop came to me and said, "Hey, look, boy. Mr. Dan gave me this." Then, when that happened, the movement came. So you got some dynamics going on between Pop and me and Dan.

EC: I was just thinking.

JM: You see what I'm saying? I mean, those kind of things, right? But Pop never scolded me. He never said, "Boy, don't be in the movement." He never said that.

I know Mr. Dan called Pop in numerous times about me running around here throwing bricks and stuff, marching, and doing other kind of stuff in the movement. Because those kind of relationships some black men had with other white men of authority in the community, right? It was a paternal kind of relationship.

CM: Yeah.

JM: But there was a little bit of respect there, too. You know what I'm saying?

EC: Mm-hmm.

EC: So you were just talking about how, when you were ready to go to Alcorn, Dan McCay, who was the sheriff, gave your Dad some money to help you go to Alcorn because they had a working relationship and a sort of--. And at the same time, you're in the movement, and McCay's trying to control you in the movement.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. I think it says, too, you know, in a roundabout kind of way, too, is that black men back in the time, in order to try to support their families, had to jump through a lot of different kind of hoops and stuff. And make a lot of psychological trade-offs, okay? What? Of manhood, compromising a lot on their manhood and stuff, right? In order to provide for their family. I think Pop was a good example of that.

And that's one of those--. The only other one I would mention really quickly is Mott Headley did the same thing, ditto. Because Pop worked for him, too. Mott Headley was one of the supervisors and leaders in the community. Pop had that kind of relationship with a lot of powerful white men in this community back in the day. Yeah. A lot of them didn't work--. I'll explain the situation. I think, too, it had to do with class in the community. Because see, Pop was not--what's the right word? He wasn't of bourgeois set, you know? He was like a salt-of-the-earth kind of person. A sharecropper.

Then you had the educators in the community, black educators. And at that time, business leaders, too. Because we had thriving black businesses in the community. So there was a middle class, a thriving black middle class that existed in the community, that Pop and white folks for the most part interacted with.

EC: Do you think their interactions with that sort of elite class--like the teachers, the ministers, the business--. Is that going to be a different relationship from the one that they had with somebody like your father, who they know primarily because he works for them, right? They can rely on him as a worker?

JM: I think the relationship between the middle class and whites at that time was hypocritical. They were trading off each other. They were stroking each other's egos to a large degree. But I think the relationship between, say, Pop and some of the powerful white folks that he dealt with, I think it was more honest. Honestly, you know. It was like, okay, well--. And it was just--there was a human interaction. It was paternalistic, for sure, but I think it was more genuine.

EC: So they make the connect--. Well, I remember interviewing Mr. Mott Headley. He talked about actually being out in the fields with the people that were working on his land. So that they actually have a chance to interact with each other outside of--. Okay, I'm trying to--I'm a black educator and I'm trying to get money for the school, so I'm going to tell you what you want me to say, kind of thing.

JM: But they had their hands in everything. That's what I'm saying. They were the school board members. They were like merchants. They ran the banks. You see what I'm saying? They were elected officials. It was all interwoven.

EC: You're talking about the black leadership.

JM: Yeah. The leadership.

EC: Sorry. The white leadership.

JM: No. The white leadership. Yeah. The white leadership. So that's why when the blacks and the locals, like George and them, put on the boycott. Their argument was, "Why are you boycotting the merchants? The merchants ain't got nothing to do with the fact that black folk can't vote." Which is bullshit. Because they're all [10:00] one in the same. The same people who were running City Hall, and over here in the courthouse, was the same people who run the school board, who ran the businesses.

CM: Yeah.

JM: You know what I'm saying?

CM: Yeah.

EC: So that's the boycott that started in [19]66.

JM: Yeah.

CM: Mm-hmm.

EC: And it was a whole list of demands that--.

JM: Oh.

EC: Some of the merchants said, "We got nothing to do with this. Why are you boycotting us?"

CM: Yeah. That's exactly what they said.

JM: Human demands.

CM: Yeah.

JM: It wasn't nothing outrageous. Mister and Misses. We come and we shop in the businesses. Put somebody here to work, like me. You know?

EC: When you say "Mister and Misses," what are you talking about?

JM: Mister and Misses whoever their last name is, their first name. Mister and Misses. You know, when you address me--.

CM: When we went in the store, it was, "boy," "girl."

JM: Yeah.

CM: As opposed to calling you by your name.

JM: Ain't doing it.

CM: Or referring to kids working--. The white kids working in the store would refer to my grandmother, for example, as "girl," as opposed to Mrs. Turnipseed. So it was just, you know, respect.

JM: A basic lack of respect.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Yeah.

EC: So can you both tell me a little bit more about your childhood growing up? You mentioned that you felt like really free, carefree as a kid. So did you both grow up in the country?

CM: Yeah. I grew up in Hermanville. And my growing up was a little bit different from James', because I guess my family was considered a bourgeois as he said. My grandmother was a schoolteacher. And my Dad was in the Army. So he was a Korean veteran. And because my Mom and Dad were young, my grandmother decided, well, Dad was being transferred to different bases. She decided, "Well, you guys are not going to take Carol with you. She will stay here because she's got to go to school." Like

there wouldn't be schools other places, but anyway. I ended up living with my grandparents. My Dad's parents raised me.

And my grandmother was a schoolteacher in Hermanville for many years. And my grandfather was a big farmer. He had his own--. We had about three- or four-hundred acres of land. He had workers on the property, you know, black people. So they had a sort of different relationship, I guess, to the relationship like what James was explaining. Because they were educated and had money, they were treated a little bit different than maybe Pops was, my father-in-law was. I think it was respect, but not mutual respect. Respect for the fact that they did have an education. My grandfather, actually, he did not go to college, but he made it on his own. So, and he acquired all of this just from hard work.

My growing up was a little bit different because I don't--everything we needed was on the farm. We ate from there. We ate everything from there. The only time we came into town to buy from the stores was to get furniture. Or sometimes, sometimes we bought staples like meal and things like that. But I had an uncle who was right the down road who actually had his own mill. So we didn't have to do that very much, very often.

Neighbors were like a mile from you. Or two miles. So it wasn't like everybody was right there together. So we played right there on our farm. But once we got--. So I'd never had any interaction with any white children. Actually, the only time I saw any was on the school bus, going through by the house.

EC: Did you think about the fact that they were going to a different school?

CM: At the time, no. Because I didn't--I had no sense of what was going on, because I was kind of sheltered. But my grandmother always taught me that I was just as

good as anybody else, and that I didn't have to worry about that. A lot of people talk--I'm referred to as sort of [15:00] as a bitch, because I have--. [Laughter] I'm very self-confident so I don't worry about what other people think about me.

And growing up, I had a lot of responsibility as the oldest. And my grandfather always told me that, "You're the oldest. You're going to acquire all of this stuff once we're dead and gone," which didn't work out that way because of other reasons. But they expected a lot of me, and I tried to live up to that.

I never actually played with any white kids, anybody other than family or some of the people who worked for my grandfather, their children. And when I went to Hermanville School. I went to Hermanville from first through sixth grade, because we didn't have kindergarten back then. Then we'd have to come to Port Gibson to go to middle school. And that's when things started to happen here in the county. The civil rights movement began. That was that year when we moved, when I started riding the bus to Port Gibson to school. Then my Dad and Mom separated. And my Dad moved to Port Gibson. So that's how I got involved.

EC: Did either of your parents try to register to vote when you were young, before the movement started, or talk about voting?

JM: No. Well, my parents didn't. Mom then was just--. My mother was not a radical, so to speak. She was kind of laid back and always trying to make peace, get people to get along and that kind of shit. But she never discouraged us from not being radicals. There was three of us, right? Don, me, and Lois. But she always--. Things just don't happen in a vacuum. That's what I'm trying to say here, right? Because the

experiences that happen within our little family, right? Okay. My uncle. I'm going to hook it up in a minute, okay?

My uncle, who was World War I veteran, all right? Uncle David came back, man. He and my grandmama, they used to talk about France, and the world, and that kind of stuff. So I was sitting there, a little kid. I'm listening to this shit, right? I'm saying--. What am I? Seven? Eight? I'm listening to this, right. And like I said. I'm just carefree, ignorant, just running around, just happy, in a segregated society, right? Don't even got no little idea of how I fit in this. Separate or equal. Okay?

CM: Right.

JM: And Uncle David would talk about world kind of stuff, right? Shit I never heard of. It was like Star Wars shit, right? Then Pop, he goes. Pop comes back, right? He talks about world things, stuff that change our--. And you got to understand. Here is a man who had never left home, who probably hadn't travelled a hundred miles in any direction all of his life. All of a sudden, now, he's on the European Theater. He had a profound experience.

CM: Yeah.

JM: You know? Then get back here, right? And be faced with this hypocrisy, you know? Get a bus in Alabama, trying to get back to Mississippi, coming back--or New York or wherever, right? You might not make it because--. And you got--. And you're black. Put a uniform on. Just fought Hitler. And this foolishness, right? And you might not be able to get back home in the United States. I think that part of what the white psyche didn't understand or didn't appreciate is that if you're going to live in a

democracy, okay? And that's what this is. How can you say that I'm not supposed to participate in it?

EC: Mmm.

CM: Yeah.

JM: You know? This is hypocrisy. And it's worse, okay? And that's what the movement was doing. The movement was pointing out America's hypocrisy. Them brothers and sisters who went out, and came back, and brought knowledge and stuff, empowered us over a long period of time. It empowered us. And by them empowering us, man, it took our psyche to another level.

EC: Did you think about that at the time? Did they talk about it that way? Or is this you putting it together--. [20:00]

JM: Oh, no, no.

EC: When you were a bit older?

JM: I was a-- But what I'm saying is that it was something in the back of the psyche that was there that you remember. I guess as you get older, stuff starts to trigger your recall.

CM: Things--. Yeah.

EC: Well, I was actually thinking about that when you started talking, where both of you had parents who were fathers that served in the military.

JM: Yeah.

CM: Yeah.

EC: That took them away from home.

CM: Yeah. We often talk about that because my dad--.

JM: The profound implications of that.

CM: Yeah. Daddy fought on the front lines and was shell-shocked. And when he came back, he couldn't get any kind of services that he needed. And we struggled with him with schizophrenia, and just all kinds of medical issues until he died. When did Dad die? About eight years ago.

JM: Yeah.

CM: I didn't get as much about what he did there because he kept it inside. And we didn't know what was going on with him. My grandmother didn't know what was happening with him, because he couldn't talk about it. But as James was saying, as I got older, I realized that here you took a man from a small community like Claiborne County, and take him way over in Asia. He was shooting at people. He don't even know who they are, why he's shooting them, any of this. Then bring him back to the United States and he's treated like he's a second-class citizen, or not even human. So he shut down. And it was very hard on the family for a long time.

Dad was on meds until he died. And went through some extreme situations just right here in the county. And just to talk a little bit about how whites did help in some sense. Allen Burrell.

JM: Yeah. Allen did.

CM: When Dad got older and it was obvious that somebody had to take care of him, well, being the oldest and it had always been taught, "Well, it's your responsibility." I took on Dad because Mom and Dad was divorced. My mom never not helped me when I needed it with him. But he was more responsive to me for some reason. And whenever he would go off his meds or just would drink, and get into an episode, it was all kind of

red tape to try to get him over the VA. Well, Allen Burrell, I would call Allen, "Please help me. I need some--." He'd make a phone call somewhere. I don't know to who, but the sheriff would come and we would have to restrain--. It was very heartbreaking, but to keep him from hurting himself or hurting someone else. We did that at least what? Three or four times?

JM: Mmm. You see, I that's the humanity I think that Carol's talking about that's so often missing, man. I think so often not understood in communities and stuff, right? It aint that people don't have differences or agreements about this, that, and the other, man. That happens. That's human nature, right? But what Allen did was an act of humanity. He didn't have to do that. I'm just saying.

EC: And what was his position in the county at the time that allowed him to do that?

CM: He was just an attorney here.

JM: He was a prominent attorney. He was a prominent--.

CM: He was an attorney of--.

JM: Attorney for the board.

CM: He was kind of--attorney for the board.

JM: A board supervisor. Yeah.

CM: Board supervisor. But I can't even remember how I even developed a relationship where I felt I could go to him and ask him to help. I just did and he did.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Which is the same kind of thing. All this kind of hope ties up, right? I'm just saying, like when Pop went to Dan. And with Ma, okay? And got a little piece of money, got a little help to support his family. I mean, Allen did the same thing.

CM: Yeah.

EC: Your said your dad's a Korean war veteran. Do you know if the unit where he served [25:00] was integrated or not? Did he ever talk about that?

CM: He didn't.

EC: Yeah.

CM: He didn't.

EC: I believe that--. I think they integrated some during that war, so I just wondered if he mentioned that one way or the other. Were your grandparents--did they ever register to vote or try before the movement? Do you know?

CM: Probably not Daddy trying it, but I'm sure my grandmother did. Her brother, Everett Jennings, he was one of the first people to run for elected office here.

JM: Mm-hmm. Yeah. He--yeah.

CM: He ran for school board. Lester Commission.

JM: Lester Commission. Lester Commission. Yeah. Lester Commission.

CM: So that side of my family was active in trying be--.

EC: What was your school like in Hermanville?

CM: Oh, obviously it was all black. The principal was F.A. White, Sr. And my grandmother was a second-grade teacher. It was just six teachers because there was first through six. Everybody there was from the community. All the teachers lived right there

in the community, in the Hermanville area. I think we had one teacher that came from Port Gibson to teach there.

EC: You want to take a break?

JM: I moved [but I'm sorry?].

Male 1: Oh, that's okay.

JM: Okay.

CM: The classroom sizes were thirty of us probably in the classroom. We didn't have hot lunches. We didn't have a cafeteria. We had to bring lunch to school with us. They brought us milk. It was a milkman used to come and bring just white milk. We didn't have a choice of milk, which was good for us. Just thinking about that now, it's funny. The milkman brought milk, and whatever you had for your lunch. There were many children who did not have food. My grandmother, because she had a lot, she fed many kids. Every day she would bring enough food, because she knew who was going to need something. She wasn't the only teacher, but because I lived with her, and I knew how she was about the community, and about kids. She took care of all of her children, her brother's children, one of her brother's. Sam Jennings, he had twelve kids and their Mom died early. So she helped raise them. Everybody called her Ms. Turnipseed. But she was Lula B. Turnipseed, was her name. Lula B. Jennings-Turnipseed was her name. She was well-known in the community, and well loved, because of her good nature and her eagerness to help people. She always wanted to help others who were less fortunate.

The school was--it was a community. Everybody got along. Everybody took care of each other. And if there was one bad apple, that one bad apple was made an example

of, and everybody else fell into line. So we didn't have to have any school suspension at all, the kind of things that we do today.

JM: Time out.

CM: Time out, go in the corner, all that kind of thing. All you had to do was get the biggest bully in the school and they got it. And everyone else got it without the pain. So, yeah. But you know, back then we didn't know that we weren't getting everything that the white kids were getting until--. I do remember wondering why our books were so raggedy all the time. And every once in a while you might get ten new books. And everybody wanted those new ones. [30:00] In some classrooms, it will always be certain kids got those new books. But even getting a new book, it was probably the oldest edition of whatever it was we got. I'm sure over here in Port Gibson, at Port Gibson School, at the white school, they had something even newer than what we got. But everybody was expected to do the right thing. We were all taught to love each other and look after each other, and to respect one another.

JM: Yeah.

CM: Okay? We were raised up in the classroom just like you would be at home. And if you got in trouble at school, you had got in trouble at home. But that never happened, because like I said, it was just one person got it. I remember one kid who got it good, and boy, I don't want that.

JM: Okay. Could I echo that, Carol's so right. I mean, okay. I was not the easiest kid to get along with in school. I was always in shit. Always. And Moms would come over there and bake cakes and pies and shit, and bring it to the principal, right?

You know. [Laughter] Got to keep my kids out of trouble and stuff, right? I remember once this story. Ms. Rachel, Kimberly's mom.

CM: Rachel Wilson.

JM: Ms. Rachel Wilson, Kimberly's mom, right? Okay. She was a beautiful teacher, man. I was in her room. A bad little sucker. I remember Rachel telling a story how she came out. Pop was plowing the fields. She came out and told Dad on me, right? How foolish I was, all the foolishness I was doing and stuff. Then she said Pop stopped the mule, told her, said, "Look. How many hours do you have him?" She said, "I got him," oh, whatever. So he said, "Well, when you got him, you do what you need to do to make him do what he's supposed to do. And when I got him, I'll do what I need to do. Giddup, mule." Right? Rachel always tells that story. She said, "And what Pop was saying was basically right." "Look, you're the teacher. Do your job. I got your back. All right? He ain't going to be acting a fool in class. If he does, then beat his little ass." Nobody you know we don't say--. But I get the point is that people were so close, man. The families were so close, right? And this is an all-black system back in the--.

CM: Oh, yeah.

JM: You know? Wasn't no white folks in there, okay? Taking care of the business.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Taking care of the business, right? Educating kids, right? Separate, unequal. Okay? But at the same time, at the same time, all these dynamics were going on. Over here, across the street, they got the best of everything.

CM: Yeah.

JM: You know? All of the modern stuff, right? And we know it's good, but we can't get to it. I think the slippage--and I'm going to make this a quick piece, right--is that all the good stuff we had, once we did integrate, right? We dropped it for all of their stuff, which we assumed was the best.

CM: Yeah.

JM: You know? So we integrated at the expense of our culture and our heritage.

CM: That's so right.

JM: And assimilated. Totally assimilated. In a lot of cases, right? Okay, I don't know if--. I'm sitting here. To me, true integration is about, okay, a little bit of your stuff, and a little bit of my stuff. Good stuff. Good stuff. Good stuff. Good stuff.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Bad stuff, out. Both sides.

CM: Yeah.

JM: All right? Getting along, right? And integrate that, and that's what America's about. Okay? All cultures. We all got some issues, right? But let's come to the table with the best practices from each culture, and make the community a better place. But that's, I think, all the civil rights movement was saying. Now, we made some blunders along the way, obviously, right? But those are growing pains, I think. I know the rich history of Addison High School, okay? A rich history.

CM: Yeah.

JM: A rich history, man. A rich history. I mean, beautiful educators. The Reeves. Old man Reeves and them, right. The Martins, right? Okay. You know, the

Shaeffers. I'm just going to name some of the families. Great educators was in this system, running the system. Mr. Dodds and Ms. Hoses and all of them folks. Those people just come to mind. There were a lot of others.

CM: Yeah.

JM: So my premise is this, is that we have always been strong education, the black community, right? They always [35:00] saw that. Like Malcolm said, "Our passport to the future." I know them old folk. Mom and Pop and them. They always told that to us, how important education was. Something happened.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Something happened along the way. And you know, the ball was dropped somewhere by somebody. It need to be picked up. Okay.

EC: So did you believe them about education? Did you take it to heart what they said?

JM: No. Not at first. No. No. Young and foolish and ignorant. Then again, all of the stuff that they diagnose now that kids have when they'll be growing up in school, when that stuff--. And everybody had some stuff that was going on with them. With me, right? I didn't get all that I was supposed to get. I know I didn't. I missed a lot in education. And a lot of it had to do with probably my attitude, and the foolishness I was doing, and all that. But, you know, I stumbled out okay. [Laughter] Now, my brother and my sisters, right? They're still all right, okay? I guess they learned from my mistakes. [Laughter] But to God be glory, right? I'm saying we're all, that it is about helping each other.

CM: Yeah.

JM: I guess is what I'm trying to say, you know? And that was produced as a good community, right? I mean, look. We're all here on the planet together. Why can't we just get along?

CM: Yeah.

JM: We do. That's what Allen was trying to do. That's what he said. I mean, I'm serious, man. I keep quoting that. I mean, he was a good human being. Was he perfect? No. Ain't none of us perfect, but he was a good human being. He could meet you on common ground. He was key when I came back here, man, and was trying to make a contribution as the county administrator to the community, right? Allen was a key point in all of that, in helping me. You know when the--.

CM: I remember the day--.

JM: Oh, okay.

CM: I remember the day they finally, because it was going through all these changes about hiring James. He would have two of the supervisors, was in his corner one day. The next day, it was three. But they kept putting the vote off.

EC: Is this the first time or the second time?

CM and JM: The second time.

JM: The second time. Yeah.

EC: And this is when he's applied for the county administrator position.

CM: Yes.

EC: And was this like 19--.

CM: Had to be nine--. This was ninety--. Second. In the late '90s.

EC: Okay.

CM: I was teaching at the A.W. Watson, at the elementary school. I was coming through town and Allen was--. I stopped at the bank, at Port Gibson Bank. And Allen's office was right next to the bank. I got out of the car, and was headed inside the bank, and Allen was coming. He happened to be coming out of the building, out of his building. He, "Carolyn, Carolyn." I said, "Yes. Hey, Allen. How you doing?" He said, "We got us a county administrator today!" He was just so excited about it. I said, "Oh, great." I'm sure he genuinely wanted to work with James, and wanted to help make the community be better. He was happy to have somebody that probably he could hold an intelligent conversation. I guess, too, I'm sure that had a lot to do with it, but--.

JM: But it was mutual. I'm saying, you know--we have to--oh, I've got the--.

CM: Yeah.

JM: All right. Those people who get elected to public office, right? I think is one of the mistakes that we made, too, man.

CM: Oh, yeah.

JM: Is that just because you're black and you run for public office, and you get elected, it don't mean you're going to act in the best interest of black folks, or white folks, all right? Old folk, young folk, poor folk. You're going to act in the best interest of your own self, which is classic Machiavellian bullshit.

I'm saying, and so, you got to hold these suckers accountable. I think that's the lesson that's being learned, too, right? And you got to forge alliances and relationships. They are built on trust. They're built on mutual respect for each other, right? It will come and go. All right? I mean, ain't nobody--. We don't live in a dictatorship. We live in a democracy, right? And it means that everybody brings a little something to the

table. You stood up, and you hopefully--. [40:00] You get some kind of consistency with it, and it takes form. And if small communities are the laboratories of democracy--. That's what they say, right? If small communities are the laboratories of democracy, we, here, Port Gibson, Claiborne County--and I'll say this. We should be a shining example of what the civil rights movement was about. We should be a shining example of communities working toward the common good, and the greatest good being done for the greatest number.

CM: Yeah.

JM: And we dropped the ball.

EC: Yeah. I want to come back--.

JM: I know. I'm sorry. I know I digress--.

EC: No, I mean, that's important.

Male 1: Hold on for a sec. I'm going to--.

EC: But can you all tell me what--. So we're located at Cultural Crossroads. And one of the buildings is at the corner of Main or Market and Fair Street. And can you tell us what Fair Street was like when you were growing up?

CM: Boy, that was like going--.

JM: I mean, it was like a carnival. [Laughter]

CM: It was. On the weekends, now. During the week it was just normal.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CM: But Saturday, whenever my granddad would say, "Carol, get ready. We're going to town." Oh, boy. I got excited, because you wanted to ride down Fair Street, because you saw all kinds of people on the streets hanging out. Music blasting

from the different businesses because of the juke joints. And little grocery stores, little shops. And people just would be out mingling. You could be, it seems back then, it seemed like we were there all day just--. And it was a festival every Saturday. It was fun.

JM: Yeah. The thriving black businesses all up and down the street. I mean, doing businesses, man. And like the corridor, right? I mean, back in the day, you know, in the '50s and early '60s and stuff. You know, Fats Domino, and Albert King. All of them just come up through here. Danny's, to be down to Danny's, man. On the corner down there, there was a two-story building. Ms. Laura Kitting's[?]. Remember her?

CM: Yeah.

JM: Ms. Laura Kittings [?] had a cafe there. My grandma and me used to work downstairs as a cook. And upstairs they had rooms and stuff. And Ms. King was like--she was like half white, high yeller. They called them yellow-boned back in the day, right? But a beautiful personality, right? And across the street was Danny's Café, Danny's Playhouse. They called it--. Then it was a playhouse.

CM: No. The playhouse was--.

JM: The house was across--.

CM: Was across--.

JM: Eighteen.

CM: Yeah. It was eighteen.

JM: Yeah.

CM: But this was just Danny's little restaurant.

JM: Was Danny's number two, right? [Laughter] That's basically what it was. Then Ms. Bird had her little place there.

CM: Yeah. A fish market.

JM: Yeah. The fish market.

CM: You get live fish.

JM: The only white--. Check this out. The only white business on "Nigger Street" was the fish market, which was owned by Mr. Gladule.

CM: Yeah.

JM: That was the only--. And that was the only white business on the--.

CM: On that street.

JM: On Nigger Street.

EC: Do you know how he landed on that street? Did whites come to his place or was it all black business?

JM: He had--. He had this little Cajun kind of personality, you know. Yeah. He had that kind of personality, right? And check this out.

CM: Everybody bought fish from him.

JM: No, everybody did. Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh, yeah. They came, yeah.

EC: So white people come--.

JM: It was like--.

EC: --get the fish?

CM: They probably came through the week.

EC: Uh-huh.

CM: See? Because through the week--.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

CM: It was quiet. You could come to town and go to--. You rarely see anybody.

EC: I have heard that from some of the whites, that they never would come on Fair Street on the weekends.

JM: Oh, no. Oh, no, no, no.

CM: Oh, Lord.

JM: No, no. No, no.

CM: It was full. I mean, you could hardly walk on the sidewalk.

JM: Which is another issue about perception. You see what I'm saying? In racism.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Okay. Now, okay? There could not have been a more profound experience by any human being who walked down Fair Street.

EC: How many blocks was Fair Street?

JM: Around one block.

CM: One block!

EC: I just want--. Not everybody knows what downtown Port Gibson--.

JM: Oh, one block. One block.

CM: One block.

JM: One block.

CM: One whole block.

JM: One block, two sides. [Laughter]

CM: And it would be literally full.

JM: Full.

CM: I mean, full. Both sides of the street.

JM: People would hang out the rafters, man. I mean--.

CM: Children.

JM: Yeah.

CM: Old people.

JM: Yeah. B.B. King blasting out of the juke joints and stuff. Right, okay. Bobby Bland and all them. John Lee Hooker, man. I mean, Muddy Waters. Shit. It was a downhome fest.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Okay? Catfish frying.

CM: Oh, yeah.

JM: Okay? Chicken frying. Okay? And Falstaff's beer. Oh, chitlins. Falstaff's beer.

CM: Chitlins cooking. [45:00]

JM: Yeah. Yeah. Jack's. You know. Bud was coming on, right, but they were drinking like Falstaff's, man. Jack's beer, right? I remember that. Miller High Life.

CM: Country Club.

JM: And Country Club. Colt 45. [Laughter]

EC: Miller High Life. You thought that was your beer.

JM: Oh, Miller High Life.

CM: Oh, he still thinks that.

JM: Yeah, shit. I thought I owned the company, right? [Laughter]

CM: He should have stock in it as much as he drank.

JM: Look it. It was a thriving community, man. Thriving community.

CM: And you weren't--. We weren't afraid, but we knew not to go outside that border. We didn't come, what is the street?

JM: Fair Street.

CM: Main Street. You knew to turn around at the corner of Main and Fair.

EC: So you didn't go up in the white part of town.

CM: No.

JM: I got a Main Street story. I, can I say it now?

EC: Yeah, yeah. Let's hear your Main Street story.

JM: Okay. I told you I was always into shit, right? Always doing stupid stuff, and trying to be the class Richard Pryor. So I'm coming down--. And we're supposed to be uppity because I'm hanging out with my grandmother at the cafe. I must have been what? Seven, eight, seven, eight, something like that. Anyway. So we're hanging out there at Daddy's little shanty and won't be on Fair Street. Same as down here. "Yes, man. Yes, man." I sneak out the place. I come up here on Fair Street, because it was like Christmas.

CM: You mean on Main Street.

JM: I mean on Main Street. But it was Christmas. It was Christmas, right. So all the lights--.

CM: Decorated, yeah.

JM: Decorated, you know. It was just lit up, man. So I wanted to see what the hell was going on up there, right? So I'm up there, and I'm coming, running down. And this is on the second block up here. I'm running down the street, right? And looking all around and stuff. I run into this little white girl, right? And, man. Damn. But I hit the little girl, all right? It was an accident. She fell, right? She had her Daddy, and her Mama, and her little sister were with her. The Daddy was a classic, six-foot something. Big old dude, man. Like 250, 300 pounds, right?

CM: Well, he'd look that way probably.

JM: Nah. Uh-unh. No. This guy was the classic redneck. I'm telling you.

CM: Oh, that I can believe.

JM: No. He met all the stereotypes. I'm sorry. His wife was the plat--. The little girl. And when I knocked that little kid girl down, man, then something--. He grabbed me. He said, "Nigger." I said, "Shit. I'm dead." I said, I was crying. I was crying. I was crying, right? He said, "Don't you ever, little nigger, jump into, step into our, bump into my daughter again, hear?" And threw me back down on the concrete, right? Well, man. I'm pissing on myself and shit, right? So I run my little ass back down to where I was supposed to be. I was in my own--. I went in the back and laid down. He said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "Nothing." I just sat there, man. I never told nobody that shit. That shit scared the hell out of me. I just knew I was dead. I mean, aka Emmett Till.

EC: I didn't know we came so close to losing you.

JM: But I never told nobody that story, man. But that kind of thing sticks in your psyche. And you don't remember, and you don't never forget that. You know the

kind of experience, right? I could have lost my life because I bumped into a little white girl.

EC: Yeah.

JM: By accident.

CM: Because you wanted to see the Christmas lights.

JM: Because I wanted to see a Christmas tree.

EC: And why wouldn't you?

JM: In the--.

EC: Who doesn't want to see Christmas trees?

JM: No. See, Allen Motor Company was right over here, right? All this wasn't here. There was a big car dealership--.

CM: Car dealership.

JM: Over there. There was a, there was one black café, Mr. Cain's where the pavilion is, later on. But the point is, on both sides of the streets, people were parked, right? They were--. It would be like a showcase of cars from all ki--. I mean, and the bourgeoisie of the black community, right? Okay. Now, how they would show it out, right? So their wealth and they would come park their cars up on Mayfield if you could get a parking--. Like over here in front of Sherman Furniture Company, some place like that? There was JC Penney Store, no, not JC Penney. What was it? Five and dime store right next to that. So they would park the cars there, right? And let the windows down, and all of family would sit in the car. So when you walked down the street, you would see the couple, three--every once in a while, bourgeois blacks, okay? Downtown Port Gibson in their fine cars and shit, right? You'd be like, "Goddamn. Damn. I want to be

like when..." [Laughter] "That's a bad ride, that one." And it was stuff to do, but you shouldn't lose your life.

EC: Yeah. For an accident, running into a little kid.

JM: Because you want to see the lights.

EC: Yeah.

JM: Because you want to be around folks, be around excitement and stuff, right? You shouldn't [50:00] lose your life. And that's what I said. The irony, the twist to all of this is that--. Like Trayvon Martin, you shouldn't be--. If you walk down to the store to get some skittles and walk back to the house to your own neighborhood, or your own house, you shouldn't be dead.

CM: Yeah.

JM: I mean, it was always sort of--. You see the parallels. Fifty years later, we're still doing the same shit.

CM: Yeah.

JM: I rest my case. I mean, it's crazy. It's insanity.

EC: Yeah.

JM: You know, and you can multiply that. The latest one is just--. Chicago. Sixteen shots. Running away from the person. They weren't doing. Running away from him. [Laughs] That's all. But I'm just saying. So we got some issues. We got some stuff to do, man. So when those rare moments in history put black--. I know it's my pet peeve. I'm going--. But in those rare moments in history when black leaders--when history puts black leadership in positions of authority, and they are so ignorant and so

arrogant, not to try to cultivate what's in the best interest of the whole community, right? They are doing everybody who sacrificed in the civil rights movement a--.

CM: Disservice.

JM: A slap in the face. It's a slap in the face.

CM: Yes.

JM: That's what I'm saying, okay? These suckers need to be held accountable. That's what I'm telling you. I know we say that it's a matter of democracy, but these are--. I'm going to suggest this, is that these civil rights organizations and stuff, right? These watchdogs really, all right? They have to be as vigilant on incompetent, corrupt, black leadership, just like they were with the Kluckers, and corrupt whites--.

CM: No.

JM: When they were in position of authority. What's the difference?

EC: Yeah, I--.

JM: ( )

EC: I know there's people that say there's a lot of organizing to put people in office, but not to organizing to hold people accountable--.

CM: Right.

JM: Yes, yes. That's my point. That's my point. That's my point.

EC: Well, can you all tell me when you first--. Actually, before the boycott movement, outside of Port Gibson, like the Montgomery bus boycott--. Or did you hear about Emmett Till? Or Martin Luther King before the movement came here?

CM: Oh, yeah. Yeah. We did.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I remember the Emmett Till stuff. I was a kid. I remember some old folks talking about it, him getting killed. I mean, that was the thing, the Till killing, man. It was, it just--. It had like a ripple effect. And even as a little kid I understood that. I guess I understood it, but I understood that everywhere I went around the black community people were talking about it.

CM: Yeah. I think that's when I became conscious of--more conscious of--or more fearful of not being somewhere that I wasn't accepted for who I was. Being fearful for if I was outside of my family, who I knew would take care of me. I would be worried about that. I started to, well, all these people--. I started to learn about being afraid.

EC: Mm-hmm.

JM: Yeah. You weren't so carefree no more.

CM: No.

JM: It wasn't so--. I mean, you weren't so carefree no more.

CM: It became--.

JM: It changed.

CM: The killing of Dr. King, I just--. Oh God. I remember the day it happened. We were in school and they made an announcement. And every--. The whole--. You couldn't hear anything. I don't know why, but the whole sky just was dark. I was scared to get on the bus coming--just after in Port Gibson. I had to be--go back to Hermanville. I was scared to get on the bus because I'm thinking, "Are they going to come kill all black people? They killed Dr. King. Are they going to kill everybody? Are they going to kill us all?" So I was scared to go--even scared to leave the house to go to school the next day. It's a hard, it's hard to explain being that young

and things happening around you that you have no control over, that you have not caused. And you are being targeted [55:00] because of your skin color. I know you know these people. Why do you want to hurt me? I never done anything to these people. Why do they want, and why am I so different? What is it about me that I don't--I'm not supposed to be here?

JM: As I reflect back on it, I mean, this is piggybacking. That Emmett Till killing was the first time that my mama and my grandmother had the conversation that our people had with their males that are black about ways, what you should and should not do, where you should and should not be. I mean, matter of fact, there's my grandmother, [were friends of Jackson?]. She said, "James, look. You see what they did to Emmett Till?" You'd see it in Jet Magazine, see? Because Jet, the big picture was in the Jet. So it--. Anyway, every black person reads Jet. You know what I'm saying. Come on.

CM: Even if it was the old one.

JM: Yeah. Then what they can't read, look at the pictures. So that's why Jet was so good. So they were so good at communicating in the black community because they knew their market. They knew their target market, right? And oh, and those pictures are everything. You know the old saying, "A picture's worth a thousand words"? That was just philosophy. And when they did that--. I think it was philosophy because Emmitt Till pictures. I mean, come on, man. That--. Ooh. The mother. The courage that she had to do what she did, right? To say, "Okay. Look. Yeah. Y'all are going to take the picture of my son, put it up there? Because what them suckers did was wrong. I want the world to know." I'm saying the courage that they--. See, these are the

untold stories, man, of folks that was in the movement that brought us to where we are. I know I'm being--I'm getting old and I'm being repetitious, right? But that's why I'm going back to these suckers who are in positions of authority, right? And being accountable. Okay? When people do that--.

I mean, right here in Port Gibson, right? I mean, our local man, Jesse, old man Jesse. You know, always get people out of ja--.

CM: Jesse Jones.

JM: Yeah.

CM: Jesse Jones.

JM: Mr. Jesse Jones. He was one of the older blacks in the community who had a little land still, right? He would get people out of jail like that.

CM: He was bailing people out.

JM: Bailed them out. Just like that.

CM: He was providing money to get--.

EC: And this was in the movement?

CM: Yeah.

EC: He was one of the first people to register.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Yeah.

CM: He was.

JM: Yeah. That's what I'm saying. I'm saying that these are the kind of people who shape communities, who make communities good, and what have you. So

the question that's always so poignant with me, right? Where is that leadership now? Where is it? What happened? Did they all go to Mars or what? What the hell?

EC: What did you think when your Mom and grandmother talked to you?

JM: I really didn't take it serious. I'll tell you again. When you are like twelve, or thirteen, fourteen years old, man, eight or nine--.

EC: So you must have been about seven--.

JM: Oh, now about seven. Yeah.

EC: Kind of little.

JM: Yeah. You hear and you know this. And you know fundamentally in your mind, you ain't stupid, that you ain't supposed to be hanging out with white folk. But I will say this, though. It kind of brought it home because one night I was walking home. We stayed up late in Port Gibson, I'm walking home across the bridge here. These were the little CHA kids. They were throwing up mess, too, in the community. That's another untold story. Because CHA was a mixture of the little bad kids of the upper white crust, who couldn't go to public schools and stuff, or a private school. So they'd send that little bus up here to the military academy, try to get them right.

EC: So at that time, CHA was a private--.

JM: Oh, yeah. Oh.

EC: Boys' school?

JM: Yeah. Yes, yes, yes. Them little suckers used to ride around through the community, because at that time they had cars and stuff. I mean, they were little, rich white boys, right? I was going across the bridge one night, from football practice, and, "Hey, nigger." They threw eggs on my ass, right? I got shot. Shit. [Laughing] Then I

grabbed them and it was fucking eggs, right? I said, "Lord, thank you Jesus." [Laughter] I was about to call in the dogs and piss on the fire. Goddamn. Them white folks had killed me. I was so glad it was eggs. I didn't know what to do. [1:00:00] But it hit me there, sort of right there. Boom. Damn. Sorry about that.

EC: So what's your first memory of the movement here in Port Gibson?

JM: That's a good question.

JM: Sixty-seven years old, all right? And a lot of this stuff, man, I had forgotten. When you talk, when you ask questions, I don't know. You have that magic, girl.

CM: And when you get older--.

JM: Yeah. I guess you start--.

CM: You start--. It's just something like it's all going back.

JM: Yeah. Like a film. Yeah. Going back, good stuff. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. He came back to shoot me. I said, "Damn, boy, I'm dead." You know?

EC: So do you remember when you first heard about the local movement or--.

JM: Oh.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Oh, yeah. Okay. I guess--.

CM: The situation with Dusty?

JM: Yeah, but--.

CM: Probably before that.

JM: The meetings. The meetings.

CM: Yeah, going to the--.

JM: They had an AME Church.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Yeah.

CM: The NAACP meetings.

JM: Yeah.

EC: So did you find out about it from other kids? From your family? From seeing people get together?

CM: Family.

JM: Oh, no.

CM: My grandmother for me. Mama Celie. My mother's mother was very active in the local NAACP. She would, "Y'all want to go to the meetings?" We would walk from--. Because by this time, Mom and Dad had totally separated and I'm with my Mom's side of the family. So we're out on five forty seven. We would walk to town.

EC: That's a long walk.

CM: Yeah. We'd walk to town. Somebody usually would bring us back home, but we would walk.

EC: How long a walk is that?

CM: Pffwew.

JM: It was seven, eight miles

CM: Yeah.

JM: At least.

EC: So you would walk with Mama Celie.

CM: We would walk with Mama Celie to the meetings. That's where I started.

EC: What do you remember about the meetings?

CM: At the time, it was just an outing in the beginning. And as I got older and started actually doing things within the youth chapter--. I was involved in helping register people to vote. Going out canvassing, and helping with voters here because I was consider one of the brighter kids. Even though I was--.

JM: You were too bright for here, though.

CM: Just about eleven.

EC: I was going to say. The movement really starts here in about 1966. So you would have been about thirteen?

CM: Yeah.

EC: Twelve, thirteen, fourteen?

CM: Yeah. Well, I was--.

JM: But you were--

CM: I was double promoted two times, so I was way ahead of my peers. And because of the way I had been raised with my Dad's parents, I always taught to be responsible and take on challenges. So my grandmother saw the same thing, my other grandmother. And, "Come on, Carol. Let's go to the meetings." So that's how I got involved. They trained us how to go and canvass, and how to register people. And that's how I'd really gotten involved.

EC: Would you canvas in town or would they carry you out in the country?

CM: We did town, country.

EC: All over.

CM: Yeah.

EC: You said they trained you. Who were you working with?

CM: We worked with--.

JM: Okay. Yeah. George--. We had a grant on the Board of Education project, but George and them was the--.

CM: George Walker.

JM: George Walker. He was the point person. He was the guy that was getting everything together.

CM: He was our leader.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

CM: For the youth chapter.

JM: Yeah. For the youth chapter.

EC: And that's George Henry Walker?

CM: Yes.

EC: And that's the youth chapter of the NAACP?

CM: Mm-hmm.

JM: Yeah, yeah. George was. He was like premiere organizer. He really was. Then when dudes like Rudy and them. I mean, Rudy sharpened George's skills in my humble opinion. Because he was like a mentor. Because Rudy was an old organizer from way back, you know, Chicago and stuff, right? Hanging out with Evers. But he was a Korean vet, too, I believe. I always say he had a world perspective on stuff, Rudy did. I think what he did--. I don't know this for a fact, but I'm sure that there must have been conversations [1:05:00] between George and those other guys that George hung out with. Like with James Earl and all of them guys, right? Because they were all part of the same group basically, George and Rudy and them. And with their experiences, too. See

what I'm saying? Because all of these guys were basically veterans. That's where I'm trying to go with this. There's this whole cadre of veterans that is like a timeline from World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, all the way through. For lack of--I can't say the word--militarized. Became militant. Okay? I say they brought that energy back to their communities.

EC: So they had training in--.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Like with Deacons.

CM: And a new strategy.

JM: Yeah. That's what what-you-call-it was doing with the Deacons, right? They had weapons training. I remember them guys with guns and stuff, right?

EC: So tell us about what you remember of the Deacons.

JM: Well, I didn't get to hang with them, because I was too young. But what I remember is that they kept the peace. They didn't put up with no foolishness. They were sort of like the Black Panthers, if you would.

EC: I think--.

JM: Come on. Take this out. I'll tell you, the most I can tell you is that, can you imagine twenty-five or thirty black men at that particular point in time in history walking around with guns in Port Gibson, Mississippi?

CM: Well, when black--.

JM: You can't imagine that shit today.

CM: When the black--.

JM: With this no-carry gun shit they're talking about now? Okay? You want to stop this shit? Go get twenty-five black men, [Laughter] give them AK-47s, and let them walk down the street. I bet you--.

CM: The laws'll change.

JM: The laws'll change. Nope. We won't do it no more. We're going to do something else.

EC: Well, in fact, that is actually what happened in Port Gibson. Do you remember that? Did you know about that little movement?

JM: Unh-unh. What?

EC: So when Rudy, and George Henry, and Julius Warner were organizing the Deacons and they were carrying the weapons, Dan McCay came to them was wanting to de-escalate.

JM: Okay.

EC: Said basically the City Council was going to do a law that you couldn't carry a gun in public.

JM: Wow.

EC: They were like, "Well, we're not the ones that started it."

CM: Yeah.

EC: And Dan said--.

JM: I didn't know that.

EC: He was going to make everybody put the guns away. So Rudy said, "Well, we'll give it a try."

JM: Damn.

EC: And that was the story--.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Okay. Okay.

EC: But so, yeah. What was it like as kids to see these black men carrying guns in the community?

CM: I felt protected.

JM: As a black man, I felt good. I can tell you. I mean, these guys were like superheroes.

CM: Yeah.

JM: I ain't never seen no shit like this. They had the black hats on. They'd ride around. It was like the mafia stuff, little stereotype, the Godfather kind of stuff, you know? I'm going to tell you a story about the little Reverend that they beat, that they whooped, right? See, they didn't beat with baseball bats. It was psychological, but it was dehumanizing, too, the way they would do, right? During their preaching they told you, "Don't break the boycott." "Hey, Reverend." What was his name? Damn it. I can't think of his name.

EC: Emerson Davis?

JM: No, it wasn't Emerson.

EC: No, older Reverend?

JM: The Reverend. They beat his butt. What was it? I can't think of it. He was a little chump, fat kind of guy, right? Dark-skinned. I don't think he was--.

CM: That man had no good understanding.

JM: Yeah. That's what I was going to say. I don't think the elevator went all the way to the top, either, right? But you know what I'm talking about, right? So you know I ain't lying. So this is back here on Nigger Street, Fair Street. He done went in the store about two or three times, right? So they says, "Look. We're going to get that sucker tonight."

CM: ( )

JM: Well, I don't know anyway. "We're going to get him tonight." So it was—I can tell you this, everybody did, it was Julius. [Laughs] Okay. And George and them. And Pluty, okay? And who else was in there?

EC: Pluty, his name was Whitney?

JM: Whitney. Yeah. Whitney. One other of them. I can't think of their name. So grabbed him down there in the alley down there. Then a big old limb. It was like a switch, right? They took him back in that alley behind King's Shoe Shop, pulled his clothes down and shit, right? And tore that ass up. Tore that ass up. He come out there hooping and hollering with his pants down. And we already told you how crowded Fair Street be, and this was like on the weekend. This was like a Saturday night or something. Man, look. That dude ain't never broke the boycott no more.

CM: Nobody else broke it.

JM: Nobody else.

EC: So did you see [1:10:00] that?

JM: I saw that. I saw that. I saw that with my own eyes. My grandmother's cafe was right across the street. There was a little alley. Well, across from my grandma's cafe was King's Shoe Shop. But at that time it was like a two-story building. And it

burned down. The present one that's there now is the one that was there now. But back then it was like two stories. You had to walk up. You remember that?

CM: Yeah.

JM: Okay. There was a little alley there. And that's where they took him, in between the alley, between the alley of King's Shoe Shop and Fair Street. There was a little alley there. They threw him up in there and tore his ass up. He come out there ripping and running--.

JM: [Laughing] I mean, now how you forget? How you not remember that? I mean, I must have laughed about that shit for about ten to fifteen years. But it was standard laugh in the movement.

CM: Well, yeah. Everybody heard about.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

CM: In the black community.

JM: In the black community. Right.

EC: It wasn't like Reverend White?

JM: I can't--. What the hell was that man?

EC: I'll figure it out during the break.

JM: Okay.

EC: We'll come back to it. And you say breaking the boycott, so give us the context for the boycott and what was going on. So what was the boycott?

JM: The boycott was put on the white folks who were the merchants because they were the same people who were the politicians.

CM: Yeah.

EC: And what was the whole thing about breaking the boycott? How did that work? What was the setup in town?

JM: You couldn't go in the store.

CM: Yeah. You couldn't go in the store. Not buy anything. Black people stay out of the stores. Don't purchase anything from any white merchants. The Deacons had people watching. You might not have seen the Deacons, but the Deacons could see you.

JM: They had a paper that they put out with everybody's name on it. They circulated it through the community so everybody knew.

CM: Yeah. If your name was on that list, probably you're going to get a visit from the Deacons.

JM: ( )

CM: Yeah.

EC: How big a factor was that in keeping people out of the stores?

JM: I think that it was a true factor, but I think for the most part people didn't break it.

CM: Yeah, people were--.

JM: Everybody was tuned into the times. I mean, people's eyes were wide open. They saw the atrocities that were happening there. Come on. We got King killed. We got the Kennedy boys, right? We got Medgar. The Freedom Summer always going on.

CM: Always going on at that time.

JM: Yeah. So people ain't ignorant. They see shit. It just don't add up.

CM: The majority of the people were going to honor the boycott, anyway. That was for the hard heads, okay. We're not playing. We're serious about this. And we don't need no Toms.

JM: Then back to what Carol was saying earlier about by the bully. You put that sucker in check, everybody just fall in line.

CM: No.

EC: I know you were a little ahead in school of Carolyn, right?

JM: A little bit.

CM: A few years.

EC: A little bit. She was catching up with you fast and furious. [Laughter] She just about beat you out. So you remember some of those early meetings that you've told me about.

JM: Oh, yeah.

EC: What are the--.

JM: Okay. What it means. Okay. One in particular is how Rudy Shields was a master organizer in terms of--I mean, I had to love to watch him, man. Obviously now in hindsight, I have more appreciation for it. Not much so then. I just thought he was a bad dude. But how he developed leaderships. Now, there was a big meeting down here, and people went down there, and so and so. A lot of discussion was going on about what the problems were, and what needed to be done, and blase, blase, and blase and blase.

EC: Is this the meeting at the AME--

JM: Yeah. AME Church. And Calvin Williams is one of the people that was at the meeting. Now, Calvin Williams is also part of the bourgeois class, right? We

talked about it earlier. He was a big-time security officer, maybe the chief or something, down at All Corps.

CM: He was the chief at All Corps. He ran for chair.

JM: Sure. He ran for sheriff. Right. Which is another whole story, right, but yeah. So he was down at the meeting, and a lot of other black men. And mostly they were of the bourgeois class. They were like, well, working class. So people like, let's say Lewis Montgomery, who worked for the city. They were there. Buster Bob, [1:15:00] who worked at Allen Motor Company. Them kind of people were there. So as people were talking, everybody would say words. And Rudy would throw stuff out there, right? Say, "What do y'all think about this?" "What do we want to do about this?" Somebody would respond. Calvin would start to respond, Calvin Williams. Then Rudy threw one, but I don't remember what the question was, but it kind of like did that to Rudy, right? Calvin's response did. It kind of knocked him back. And Rudy pause for a minute. "Hey, you come on up here." And from that point on, man, that dude was our leader in this community. I saw that with my own eyes, man, materialize. But I'm saying he was elevated to another level within the civil rights movement. Now, whether or not it was genuine, I don't know. Time would tell. Whether it proved history, but speak to that, right? Was he sincere or not. But he was the first one to run for sheriff in the county.

EC: He ran--

JM: He should have won.

EC: --in [19]67 in that first election after the Voting Rights Act and the voter registration drive. So Rudy Shields. Who was Rudy Shields? Can you describe him for people that wouldn't have any idea who he is?

JM: Someone that you would not--. If you saw him walking down the street, you wouldn't--. I mean, he would have kept your attention. He could blend in like a chameleon. He always came humble from what I can remember.

CM: Well, he came from where?

JM: I think his home was Yazoo City, if I'm not mistaken. I think he's originally from Yazoo City by way of Chicago, because he had some people in Chicago, too.

EC: I think he settled in Yazoo after.

JM: Yeah. After all this.

EC: I think he's from Ohio, and then Chicago, and then here.

JM: But I never understood a lot about his history, about where he came from and all that. Just the interaction when he came here. But he always seemed to be somebody who was very bright, seemed to be committed to the community. I saw examples of that. He wasn't the kind of person, like some I saw, who came who totally was about their self ( ). What could I do for me? How can I capitalize on this personally?

CM: Very genuine.

JM: He was very genuine. Yeah. He was genuine. I never saw that. Not that we all should die a pauper, but I think he died a pauper, man. Basically, right? His ass had a lot of bad breaks I guess in life in the end. It didn't end up, you know--. For all

good men, don't get your reward. But be that as it may, to answer your question, I think he was a godsend for this community. He really changed, I think, the political trajectory of this community by the organizing skills that he brought, and how he empowered other people who lived here. He got shit done by doing it through other people, and empowering.

CM: Through the local people.

JM: Yeah. Through the local people. And empowering the local people, which I always thought was a beautiful model for community development. If everybody is sharing in the wealth of the community, then there seems to be less friction. There's less racial tension. So if I'm white or I'm black and I'm living in a community that's profitable, right? If I don't want to be with a certain somebody, I ain't got to do it. I go to Paris. Or go to Europe. Or go to Africa or whatever, right? You got those kind of options. But the ideal thing would be utopia, right? We'd all get along and sing--what's that little song? Kumbala or what is it?

EC: Kumbayah.

JM: Kumbayah or something. Yeah, right. But I guess as you get older, man--. I'm concerned about racism, but I really don't have a lot of time to spend on it. You know what I'm saying? The few years I got left. I'm about trying to build some bridges. And if you don't want to build them, that's cool. Go your way. That's cool. Just leave me alone.

EC: So that meeting. I think that meeting was one of the first meetings right after Rudy started organizing in the community. How did whites respond when Rudy

Shields and then Charles Everest followed behind Rudy, and they were working in Claiborne? How did the white community respond to that?

CM: They considered them agitators [1:20:00] coming in, stirring up trouble between the blacks and the whites.

JM: But you know what was unique about this place, about Mississippi, in relationship to that? I mean, the whites here, the Kluckers, they put them in check. They went another way. That White Citizen Council stuff.

CM: Oh, yeah.

JM: You know what I'm saying? They took the Ku Klux Klan model out of the street in terms of Bull Connors and all of that, right? I think they learned something from what had happened. Some whites did. Now, here, look y'all. The position is right that we're taking, but we got to clean up our act. It can't be one-on-one confrontations. We have got to figure out how we make the institutions put these um in check. You see what I'm saying? So what they started doing, they started infiltrating bulwarks, the Democratic Party, Republican Party, whatever. They took them over at the precinct level and organized it. These lawyers, right? Again, back to Allen. Good human being. These lawyers in these different communities, right? They started doing all kinds of little stuff, like--. How do you think Addison High School got built? Addison High School got built because they didn't want no black folk coming over to Port Gibson High School. The little man. The Drake, he was one of the agitators in that. I ain't got no documented evidence, Emilye. Okay, but, it was genuinely a point of conversation among them buggers I was hanging out, listening to, that that's what went down. Old man Drake was very instrumental behind the scenes doing some things, manipulating some things and

shit like--. Mosswood?] Country Club, case in point. You see what I'm saying? These were the comprises, okay? So we'll just have to get a new school.

CM: Yeah.

EC: And Addison happened in [19]59?

JM: Fifty, yeah, I believe it was.

CM: Yeah. [19]59.

JM: So that's a brown, right?

EC: Yeah.

JM: So that's what I'm saying. And that was the one strategy that was put in place. But my point is, the white folks--. It depends on where you were in the state. But here, I think the response was more institutionalized, as opposed to one-on-one racism. You know what I'm saying?

EC: Yeah. Can you tell me about the Human Relations Committee and the Biracial Committee?

CM: Is that the one Reverend Spencer--.

JM: Yeah. Again, if you had asked me that question twenty years ago, I would have had a--. But as you get older, you kind of reflect on stuff. And you mellow and stuff hopefully. It was the bourgeois sect. It was a sect of black folks that white folks had picked. That's what I'm saying. They became more sophisticated in terms of trying to keep separate but equal in place. So we're going to pick us some hand-picked niggers, right? And we're going to put one, two over there. We'll try to do them to the right. They'll follow them in there, right? Make it look good. I think Reverend Spencer was a man that was caught up in change. He couldn't figure out what side of the fence he

wanted to be on. And a lot of blacks of the bourgeois class ended up like this. And white folk played along with it, and it was to their advantage. It's unfortunate, but that's the way it was. I didn't make it like that. [Laughs]

EC: So that meeting at the AME Church, I think my understanding from talking to people is that there was sort of a showdown that night, that the Human Relations Committee was trying to encourage the black community to do one thing. And Rudy Shields was there representing the NAACP, and Charles Evers, and trying to advocate another route. And you must have been like a high school student.

JM: I was. Yeah. I remember the incident, but obviously I don't remember all the dynamics and behind the scene, and what was going on. But I remember what you're talking about. I remember it, man. But here again, reflecting on it back now. Now, okay? It was obvious there were three competing interests in the room at that time. And Evers, man. That dude. [Laughs] But you can say what you want about Evers. [1:25:00] Charles Evers. I have a great deal of respect for Charles Evers. I honestly do. You know why? Because he told you what he was.

CM: Yeah.

EC: And what would he say he was?

JM: A pimp.

CM: A pimp.

JM: He said that. He said it. He wrote it. He said, "Look. I'm a gangster." Out of Chicago. I don't think like my brother. My brother ain't me. I'm me. Here again, some quarters, you say that, people look at you like you're crazy. Well, I didn't say it. He said it. Read a book. So now, as that relates to what was happening here in

Claiborne County. Then that meeting you mentioned. That's what I'm saying. You see, the sophistication that was at play. The White Citizen Council in there, right? Them big-time lawyers. Because at this point, this racism stuff goes all the way up to the state level. So these people talking to Evers--obviously, I think. I think history will bear me out. Had different conversations going on between Evers and them people. Had to be about this is how it works down in Port Gibson and how we deal with that. Because it was the premier case in the country for this whole issue of whether or not blacks have the right to use economic sanctions against those who are oppressing them.

EC: And you're talking here about the Claiborne Hardware case?

JM: Yes.

CM: Yeah.

EC: So that was filed by the white merchants in [19]69 to try to stop the boycott, and put the NAACP out of business.

JM: Out of business. Out of business. And ( ).

CM: I think that was--. When you guys were talking about--when you were asking the question about the meeting at the church. I think the discussion was something about that boycott.

EC: There might have been another one, because there was one meeting that was in late [19]65.

CM: Oh, okay.

EC: And it was--. My understanding was the Biracial Committee, whites founded a Biracial Committee--.

CM: Yeah.

EC: The black section was the Human Relations Committee, and they were trying to keep Evers and NAACP out of Claiborne County.

JM: Yeah.

EC: So did you ever see Rudy Shields in action?

JM: The only time I saw him after--. Well, action. The most profound thing for me was that time when Emerson Davis had the gun and was going to shoot him. He walked up to him and took the gun out of his hand. The one other confrontation around him was the guy that had the furniture store. Those are the two times I really saw him.

EC: Can you describe those incidents for people that don't know?

JM: Well, I mean, the whites here had-- obviously, had to geek mister Davis up, man, to kill Shields. He had a gun. They say it was white boy's going to get him. That's what they say. I don't know. But I do know this. I know Rudy, he had a gun. I know what the gun looked like, all right. The sucker didn't go off. I guess he thought Shields would kill him or he wouldn't do it. I don't know. But the gun didn't go off. And Shields walked up to him right there on the street, man. Rudy and a lot of Deacon guys were standing around, right? Because it just happened out of nothing. And it something that led up to it. I don't know what the confrontation--where that happened prior to it, because I was down here, and it happened right down here I believe it was. Right, if I'm not mistaken, on that corner there ( ). Yeah. I believe that's where the confrontation took place. Anyway. He walked up to him, Rudy did, walked up to old man Davis, man, and took the gun out of his hand. Then they arrested him and took him off. There wasn't nothing done to him.

EC: And Davis was white or black?

JM: Davis was white.

CM: He was black. He was a black man.

JM: Davis was a black man. Yeah. Well, what we like to refer to a Tom in the community. I mean, you know. Whites. But he went that way. The other guy was the guy that owned the furniture store. I forget--.

EC: James Jones?

JM: Jones, yeah. Jones, yeah. Yeah. Jones, yeah. That guy had a funeral home round that way. Okay. Yeah. He had a funeral home. He walked up to him, said something to him. I don't know what it was. Another face-to-face, one-on-one kind of confrontation Rudy had with him. I remember that taking place. Yeah. Those were the only two times I saw him in action.

EC: What was that like for you as a young person to see that happen?

JM: You got to understand. When you live in a community all your life and you see black men talking to white men like that.

CM: As an equal.

JM: As an equal. Up in their face, man. [1:30:00] That's--no. Mm-mmm. Then confrontational. You know? That shit? That sticks in your psyche. It gives you a little balls. [Laughs] Maybe I can do that, too. But see, you got to take it in historical context, right? You know, in the time. Do you know what I'm saying? You know what I'm saying. Okay. And at that time in history, man, that kind of behavior on black folks was just unheard of. I mean, the consequence was death.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Okay. Now, you could do it, but you're going to be dead. Yeah.

EC: Do you have any memories of Rudy?

CM: No. Just, I remember him up talking in meetings and things. Yeah.

EC: Can you all describe mass meetings, what they were like, for people who never had the good fortune to be part of one?

JM: Let me say thing about Rudy, man, that I just want to say it. I want to make it part of the record. I really honestly hope, man, that history records the contribution that Rudy made to the struggle. I'm serious. I mean, unsung hero. Unsung hero. Okay.

CM: The mass meetings were exactly that. Mass meetings.

JM: Mass.

CM: There would be people. When we started going to First Baptist Church, that church was the biggest church in the community at the time, black community. And it would be full. Outside the church, people would be standing outside trying to get in. They had the windows up and stuff where people could hear, because nobody had loudspeakers and--.

JM: And Deacons outside, guarding.

CM: Yeah. Deacons standing around guarding to make sure everybody was safe.

JM: Them freedom songs coming out of the rafters. You could hear them. Man, shit. Rosa Lee Wells, man. I hear that little sister right now. Whooping and hollering. Her and Dolly. Old Jessie.

CM: Jessie Howard.

JM: Jessie Howard. I mean, they were singing their hearts out. Vera Groves, man. I'm just saying. It was like sweet honey in the rocks. It was profound. It really was. It was a time that--. I am so glad that I lived in revolutionary times. [Laughs] I'm here to tell you. I would not give nothing to have lived--. We lived in some revolutionary times, man.

CM: Yeah.

JM: And that's where I met my wife.

EC: In a mass meeting?

JM: At the movement.

EC: Yeah.

JM: In the movement. At the mass meetings. I mean, it was a perfect for little guys to go and meet girls, because all the good-looking girls were at the meetings.

CM: So that's why you went.

JM: What?

CM: Go on.

EC: He's not the only one who went to the meeting to meet somebody.

[Laughter]

JM: I'm just saying. You know. But yeah. I mean, whooping and hollering, right? Singing. Always smiling sister. They had a little TWA. She had a little Teenie Weenie Afro. She didn't have a big Angela Davis afro. Was a teenie weenie. [Laughs] Like the one she's got now.

CM: Oh, hush. Yeah.

JM: But a little skinny thing, too, right? Weigh about what? Seventy-five pounds? But we was fighters. We were comrades in the movement. Yeah. For a long time.

EC: ( ) voter registration and--.

CM: Mm-hmm.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, running the mimeograph machine, right? You know, typing and stuff.

CM: Whatever they needed us to do.

JM: Doing envelopes and stuff. Canvassing. Breaking the ice. Talk to the little old ladies and stuff. Going out canvassing and trying to get people registered to vote. Yeah.

EC: I know you already mentioned George Henry Walker. Who were some of the people in the community that you saw as leaders? Can you describe some of them and what they were like?

CM: Well, back in the day, remember, Thelma--.

JM: There was Thelma. Yeah.

CM: --was considered--. Thelma Crowder-Wells. She was considered a leader. Ms. Mose Ella Carpenter.

JM: Oh, yeah.

CM: She had her own business. She was considered one of the big-time leaders in the community. Very active in NAACP. And was a mentor to the youth chapter.

JM: Ms. [Margaret Lee Leads?].

CM: Yeah.

JM: She was a support to the movement.

CM: Yeah. And Ms. Margaret--.

JM: And Mr. [Clyde. Mr. Clyde Harvey?].

CM: Yeah. Ms. Marguerite--.

JM: Thompson.

CM: Thompson. [1:35:00]

JM: Thompson. Yeah.

CM: Thompson ( ).

JM: Obviously, yeah. Right.

EC: What was Mr. Nate like?

JM: One of the good bourgeois.

EC: Yeah? Ms. Thompson.

CM: Yeah.

EC: Yeah.

JM: Yeah.

CM: What was Mrs.--.

EC: Mr. Nate Jones?

CM: Yeah. Mr. Nate like?

JM: What was Nate like? Cool. Cool. Calm. Collect. I mean, he was the epitome of no nonsense, no foolishness. Just straightforward. Hard--.

CM: But he never raised his voice that I can remember. I never--.

JM: Never talked about anybody.

CM: But he was always the--.

JM: The voice of reason.

CM: Yeah. The voice of reason and the consciousness of the room when something was going on.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

CM: If it looked like it was getting a little bit ready, without raising his voice, he could calm the room.

JM: It's so right Nate used to say that, right? I remember him doing just that. I don't know. It was Mr. Matt and Mr. Williams. Yeah. Check this out. We were about to head out down by--. This was after that [19]75 election, the one I was telling you about where Williams ran and he lost, and everybody thought he should have won. Okay. Now I don't know what happened, right? But they said, and they being Mr. Matt and them. That Calvin. Okay? And that's why he lost the election. They ain't got to him and gave him money, right? All right. So Mr. Matt, he takes a little nip every now and then, them old dudes. I was fortunate to be around sometime when they'd be nipping and shit, right? Try to steal me a little one, too. And it got a little testy there. And it was Jones. He just happened in this setting at that time, right? And Matt, they were going at it, him and Calvin. They were going at it, right? Got kind of testy there for a minute and shit. But Jones was, "Hey." "Calvin" What'd he call him there? "Matt. Y'all stop that, man. Y'all stop that." And they both shut up.

CM: Yeah.

JM: And it was like they were about--. Well, they weren't about to go to fight, but it was a little bit out of order. You know what I'm saying.

EC: ( )

JM: I think--yeah. Here's what I think. I think the conversation had something to do with that lecture.

EC: That incident was an election where people thought that Calvin Williams was kind of a shoe-in, but that maybe he had thrown the election.

JM: Exactly. Exactly.

CM: That he had taken money.

JM: He had taken money.

CM: Right.

JM: That would be the thing, but I don't know. Oh, we don't know. You see, that's the other piece of the untold story. See, it might have been influence of that institutional piece I was talking about earlier. Not individual Kluckers going to the polls, you know, stopping blacks from going to vote, but by our folks collectively by way of institutions. The bankers, the prominent whites in the community, right? We could keep the sheriff spot. They're going to get all these other, but we can buy the sheriff spot. That might be where I'm going. I don't know.

EC: I want to talk about the election soon and some of what you already know on that, but did you participate in the demonstrations out at Alcorn in early 1966 when Charles Evers was leading protests out there?

JM: Yeah. Didn't we all? Everybody went down there. Everybody went out there. We're talking all these police officers, right? Highway patrol, okay. There were like bayonets in there. It was like Kent State as I reflect back. It was like a Kent State situation with National Guard. They had surrounded the whole place, the whole campus, man. We were all in the back. Everybody was trying to get on campus. They were

determined not to let anybody get on campus. So it was a standoff for what? A couple of days.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Maybe a couple, three days, a standoff. They were gathering down at Patton's store. Evers was coming to give a fine speech. He always made those speeches at night. As I reflect on it, I don't think he never made any of those speeches in the daytime. It was always in late evening. He'd get them fired up, man. [Laughs] And you know, boy, when they broke that picket line and went across that fence? Man. I just knew somebody--. I just knew there was going to be a whole bunch of dead people, right? But right off nobody got killed. Nobody even got seriously hurt. They were dragging people--literally, man [1:40:00]--out of the woods.

CM: Mm-hmm.

EC: Who was dragging?

JM: The highway patrolmen, the cops from the different, surrounding areas, counties.

CM: Jefferson.

JM: Like Jefferson County and Warren County, because all the--it was a massive police presence.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Okay? Both highway patrol and local yokels. They were all there, right? But Dan was there with his full force. But I remember, and I told you story, when I jumped the fence, right? I ran right past Dan. Dan could have killed me that day. He chose not to. He tripped me. He stuck his foot out and tripped me, and I fell, and I look

over and like that stuff in old Vietnam, fall and roll, fall and roll. [Laughter] I fell, rolled, got my ass back up and boom. It was scary.

EC: You told me you used to bait the highway patrol.

JM: Oh, yeah. We did some low-down dirty stuff, man. We really did. I mean, we did when we were young and ignorant. We did not know any better. We just stand up to the highway patrol man and we used to talk about their mamas, and their wives, and their children and shit. Say all kind of derogatory, nasty shit. [Laughter] We were closer to them than--. Like me and Carol right here. We'd be that close. We'd be that close, talking crap, man. And this guy got a--I don't know if it was M-60s they were carrying, with a bayonet on the end of it, right? Standing like this, right. And all outright gear on, okay? I'm standing there and I ain't got shit on. I'm dressed like I'm dressed now, talking shit. I say, "You're stupid," when I think about that. You were stupid. You were stupid, man. You were stupid. Young and stupid. Young and stupid.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Mm-mmm.

EC: Were you there when they used the teargas?

JM: I was there, but I didn't get affected by it. But I remember it. Yeah.

CM: That was the only time I was down there, but we were in the car with my Mom. Yeah. Mama took us. Wow. I forgot about that. Mama took us. They weren't letting anybody in. You couldn't get in and by the time they started doing the teargas, we got away from there. We left. So that was my interaction with it. Very limited. Yeah.

EC: I know you said earlier you would walk with your grandmother, Mama Celie, to the mass meetings. I know you've told me about her.

JM: Mama Celie.

EC: Can you all describe her? What kind of role she played? What kind of person she was?

CM: She was Mama Celie to everybody in the county, even before the movement. But Mama Celie could have been one of the black hat boys.

JM: She was a big woman. [Laughter]

CM: She could have been one of the Deacons that you felt protected. Not just me. Any kid. If they were with Mama Celie, they knew. She was a big woman.

JM: ( )

CM: Yeah. [Laughing] She carried a gun--. [Laughter] But she was quiet. She was one of those quiet soldiers. I mean, she did things behind the scenes that a lot of people didn't know about. She probably did hurt some people that I don't know about. She always made sure that we were safe. What were you going to say?

JM: No. See? She was the stabilizing force in all of the foolishness that was going on around, internally, within the move--as it relates to the children, moreso than anything else. She just made sure that all the children were safe. She was one of the premier people in the Head Start Program, when they first came to the community, right? I'm just saying. For obvious reasons. The woman has, what? Seventeen children. You know? So she was like the paternalistic mother of the movement.

CM: Yeah.

JM: All due respect to Ms. Thelma, Ms. Thelma had what a couple children? I'm just saying. Ms. Thelma was kind of different. You know what I'm saying? Mama Celie was--you could go over to her and hug her.

CM: Yeah. You could be with her.

JM: Yeah. Yeah.

CM: And you could talk to her about anything.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EC: She told me when I interviewed her about owing one of the Ellis' something on account?

CM: Mm-hmm.

JM: Oh, yeah.

EC: That Ms. Ellis would try to get her to come in the store and pay, and she would make Ms. Ellis come to the door to take the money because she wasn't going to break the boycott.

CM: Exactly. She was something now. She'd stand her ground, now. Yeah. [1:45:00] Oh, I can see that happening easily. Yeah. She was smarter than the white people probably thought she was, okay? She had wily ways. She knew how to get things done.

EC: You mentioned those relationships between blacks and whites that don't necessarily fit the mold that people think, and then you know, how did the movement impact those kind of relationships? Do you have a sense of that?

JM: Hmm. That's an excellent question, Carol. I think to try to answer that question--. That has profound coincidences. That's the way it is. You got to know, I mean, the impact of slave--. This goes all the way back to slavery. I'm saying these relationships were relationships that were put in place as a result of slavery, which was free labor to a class that became the most powerful on the planet. That labor produced a

class of people who were probably the most richest on the planet, at that given point of time in history, okay? Because of cotton or whatever, right? And for them who were at the top, in control, it was beautiful. Things were hunky-dory. But the folks who were producing the wealth, they were getting screwed. All right? So now what happens here? Right? All the dynamics are changing. What's being put on the board now is that these relationships have got to change. We cannot go on relating to each other the same way we did a hundred years ago, or even fifty years ago, right? I mean, the relationship of me and Allen I think is a good example, okay? Allen had the option, man, of saying, "Look, I want it to be the old way. I don't want a change." He had that option, okay? No progress would have been made. The little progress you see that was made that we talk about with Cultural Crossroads and all this, and how we're waiting to get Patty some money to do some of the things that she was doing. And do this downtown improvement things that's still here, that's now literally falling apart. Okay? Were the results of people sitting saying, "We're going to change the order. And we're going to change the relationships. We're not going to treat each other the same way."

Now that's changing. And it's bad, it's almost sad that there are certain segments of people who don't want to change. I think that's part of what's wrong with this community, right? Whites just left. They abandoned the community, right? Okay. Then so now what you got left here, because we didn't do like they did in South Africa.

We did not do race reconciliation. We did not sit down and say, "We made some serious mistakes here on both sides, if that be the case. Let's talk about it. And let's figure out now what do we need to do to try to move this community forward if we want it to be the kind of place that we all can live in? Say the school system is strong. My kid

can go in and he can graduate, he or she. If he has the potential, then he can go to Harvard, and he can go to Howard."

We got a healthcare system in place in this community that's producing good-quality healthcare for the people who live here. Carol's Mama, who's eighty-two years old, right? If she wants the good healthcare service, she's got access to that. And we're going to do everything that we can in this community to make sure that that happens.

A little child that is born here ought to have the same kind of rights and privileges to reach his or her potential, just like somebody who's born in the Hamptons. Now, somehow or another, we dropped the ball. I'm back to that, right? And it forged into that kind of relationship. The thing that we talked about earlier, I mean, community. The people here have to buy into what kind of community that they want to have. And what you ask is complicated. It's complicated. The dynamics are--economics dynamics are at play. Because some folks, if they got to give up something, they're going to lose something. They don't want to do that because they're happy. They don't feel the pain of the person that's suffering. There's no empathy, okay?

So I hope the relationships change, all right? I have seen examples of it. Again, I say Allen. I've seen examples of it. I'll even references Gage, man, Robert Gage, [1:50:00] right, as opposed to, say, his father. When I was the County Administrator here, we were able to sit down and have--. Show you how the mindset is, right? The first time I went to talk to him as the County Administrator--Gage, right? I sit down, I say, "Well, you know, my father could not come and sit down and talk to your father like I'm able to come and sit down and talk to you." He got up, a fist, offended. Why? Because he was not listening to what I was saying, right? He said, "No, no, no, no. Your Daddy

could come here and get some money any time he wanted to." I said, "That's not what I'm talking about." I said, "What I'm talking about here, Robert, is this, man. You ain't hearing what I'm saying. I have the ability to come to sit down with you to talk about public policy, how we try to reshape this community and make it a good place. My father couldn't sit down with your father and talk about no public policy."

EC: He's the--.

JM: Banker.

EC: He's a man of the bank.

JM: Yeah.

EC: And like the fourth in his family.

JM: The fourth in his family. Yeah.

EC: The president of the--.

CM: Right.

JM: Yeah.

EC: Four generations of Robert Gages?

CM: Yeah.

JM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. So I guess I left four generations of the Gage's family, right? The fact that somebody within that will sit down with a sharecropper's son and have a conversation, some would say is progress. But he still had the option of not doing anything if he didn't want to do it. He said, "I don't have no problems with y'all doing that." I tried to answer your question. I don't know if I did, right? But relationships have to change. They have to grow. They have to evolve. If they don't, we all go by way of the dinosaur.

EC: Were you working for--. Hmm?

Male 1: Could you say something more about the possibility of the truth in a reconciliation?

EC: Can we do that later?

Male 1: Okay.

EC: Thanks. Because it comes up very much in the context of Cultural Crossroads, and the programs, and all that. The interactions between the community and the programs. I think when we talked before that you mentioned that George Henry and some others had you all trying to go to some of the white churches one time? Do you remember that?

CM: Oh, yeah.

EC: Can you talk about that?

CM: I remember that like yesterday.

JM: [Laughs]

CM: I must have been what? Fifteen. And we went to Church Street. It was the one where actually we met, my dear, at the King Shoe Shop. One Sunday morning at the specified time that we all meet up, and get in our orderly lines, and be peaceful, and go to church. So went down on Church Street. We went South. We went on the South side and then we crossed the street, come over, come back up North. But we went to the Catholic Church where they opened the doors. We left the Catholic Church and proceeded on down to--.

JM: With the finger.

CM: The church with the finger.

JM: Yeah. Presbyterian, wasn't it?

CM: Yeah. And that's where all the big-shot whites were members. So the closer we get, we see these men outside of the church with guns. I'm thinking, "Oh, Jesus." You know? And Joyce told us to look straight ahead. Don't say anything. Keep walking. But we were going to attempt to go in the church. So we stopped there and George had dialogue with the people standing there with the guns.

JM: The Deacons.

CM: And Mom's standing there. I recognized--.

EC: But she's talking about white folks with guns.

CM: Yeah.

JM: The Deacons for the church. That's the way of the world.

CM: That church.

EC: Sorry. I was thinking Deacons--.

JM: No. The Deacons of the church. That's the way it goes.

CM: The Deacons of that church. So I'm looking at these white men and I recognized one of them in particular. Well, two of them, because they were both Hudsons. And James Hudson, who owned Piggly Wiggly. The times that I had seen him in the store, you know, it wasn't, at his store we didn't have any kind of intimate relationship or had an intimate conversation. He was polite, [1:55:00] I would say. And I'm saying, "This man's got a gun. I can't belief this. He's got a gun." George started talking to him and he, "You're not coming in here. You're not going to come here. Go and worship your own God." I'm going, "Oh, God." He said, "Go and worship your God. Go to your own church." You know? So George, we went on. And that whole

time--. I didn't think it was but one. What is he saying? I never knew of any other God but one. I was raised with one God. So I'm confused. What is he talking about? What other God is there? Then just to be fifteen years old, you got about twelve men standing out there with guns. None of us had anything. And all of us were--.

JM: Sunday's best dress.

CM: Twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fif--. Nobody was over eighteen but George. Well what? You're going to kill the kids because they wanted to come inside your church? I remember the first time I went in that church. I went to Allen's wife's funeral, and the whole time I was in there, I was in there thinking about that. Now, the one time I get in here, I'm coming to somebody's funeral, and I'm thinking, "Hmm." I look around. I don't know what it was he was trying to keep me from seeing in here. I mean, it's a church.

JM: Yeah, the confrontation. The confrontation, it wasn't the Presbyterian Church. It was the other one, Emilye. It wasn't the one with the finger. It was the other one.

CM: The one next to it?

EC: Methodist church?

JM: Yeah. Joan Beesley and them's church. That one. Okay. But you don't know it. Okay.

CM: ( ).

JM: Yeah. I can't remember the name of the church.

CM: It was one of those big ones.

EC: They've got a Baptist Church, too, over there. Was it--.

JM: Now, see, we hit all of them.

CM: We went to all of them.

JM: We went to all of them.

CM: But they had people, but this church, these people had guns.

JM: Yeah.

CM: There was people out front of all of them except the Catholic Church. That's the only.

EC: That church was the only one you didn't get in.

JM: Yeah.

CM: Yeah.

EC: And this particular one is the one with--.

CM: The one with the people with the guns. There was about ten or twelve of them standing there with guns.

JM: Yeah. It was scary.

CM: For about twenty kids. And George.

JM: But it comes full circle. It comes full circle, right? I'm just saying. Go back to Charleston. It comes full circle.

CM: Yeah.

JM: I mean, it's foolishness, man. God. A human being. I mean, what are you going to do? Shoot children down like dogs because they want to come to church? These are grown men. These are the deacons of the church. Then they go right back in and finish service.

CM: Yeah. Yeah. And expect you to come to their store.

EC: Right.

JM: Right.

CM: Okay. And purchase from them.

JM: These are the same people.

CM: These are the same people.

JM: The same people.

EC: Something like that will reinforce the boycott.

CM: Oh, Lord. It did.

JM: Oh, it did.

CM: It did for me. I was just fifteen then. Once the boycott was lifted I did not go in Piggly Wiggly for that reason. I recognized him and said, "Oh, my God. You won't get a dime of mine."

EC: So at a certain point, you go from being one of the young people to organizing in your own right. So can you describe sort of how you became an organizer and what you were trying to accomplish?

JM: Okay. All right. Let's see. Okay. After Mr. Ross got elected in [19]67, a lot of us men sat around and we were just talking about what was the next step. Obviously, Mr. Roberts kept saying that he needed some help. He was the only black on the board, okay? He said, "Y'all send me two more. Just send me two more. I can get things done."

EC: And that's the board of supervisors--.

JM: Which consists of five people. Right.

EC: He kind of runs the county.

JM: Right. It's the board of supervisors, the governmental policy of the county. They formulate public policy for the county, right? So some of us sat down, man, and started talking about, "Well, okay. Where's the power?" See, you have to understand. We never even knew about politics and how it worked, and where the power lies, right? For a long time, because of the people like sheriffs, and right, [2:00:00] who were always profiled, we thought that was the power in a lot of cases, right? We thought people like the chancellor clerks was power. Obviously, the voter register was the power, personal power, right? So while all of this is going on, right? It's like smoke and mirrors, right? Behind the scenes, you've got the supervisors, really who are the policymakers for the community. They run the county. They set policy. That's where the power is, right? Okay. And it wasn't the tax assessors, assistant collectors, okay? [Laughing]

So after we kind of figured that out, we started leading up to the [19]75? No, it was [19]60. Was it [19]60? The [19]71 elections, [19]71 elections, okay? In [19]71, we know about how we're going to put a strategy together for it. So we start talking about Delta Ministry. There was Bob and them, and Jesse Morris, people like that. And a little sister by the name of Barbara Phillips. Okay? I was talking with her. She came into the mix, right? She brought some dynamics to the mix.

So how did Mr. Matt win? All right. Matt won out there in District 1. How can we duplicate that in one of the districts? So this whole thing about gerrymandering and how the lines are drawn, we didn't understand that at the local level, okay? But other folks did. There was a lot of folks said, "Well, this is what's happening. You got to redraw the lines." So when the sisters came up, the powers to be, made it right. So this

county was reapportioned. So then there was some districts that we could win. So District 2, boom. All right? Then District 4. All right? So Mr. Aikerson and Mr. Burrell? Out in 4, all right? They came to the board.

But how do we do voter turnout? What's the key? We have to go canvas in the districts, find out how many votes the candidate got the last time. How many do we need to beat that? What was the voter turnout in the primary, in the general election? We did research on past elections and seen how the voter pattern was, right? And this stuff was foreign stuff to the locals, man, the folk. I was working with the young bloods, right? I like to think of them as the modern-day--. What's the little youth that are running down the streets? Black Lives Matter kind of scenario.

So Joyce and them, they had a political machine in place by the way of the NAACP. They would vet the candidates. There was a process there to go through, right? You just didn't up and run, because you'd feel like you woke up one morning, and all of a sudden you've been crowned with all the wisdom, and knowledge, and understanding, and therefore you ought to be sheriff. No. It don't work like that. We're going to have a process in place, right? There was a process in place in NAACP, and George and them, they'd vet the candidates. And we young bloods, we went out and did the voter registration, did the canvassing, did the voter turnout. How many votes we need to turn out to get the people elected? Campaign material, got it distributed for the candidates that NAACP would support, because they had a political order.

CM: We picked up people.

JM: Yeah. We picked up. Right.

CM: Bring people to the polls to vote.

JM: Yeah. Yeah. Then who controlled the political machinery. Of course, the Democratic Party at that time was controlled by whites, right? So at the precinct level, what do you got to do to gain control of the party? You can have people running for office. And you can have good candidates running for office, right? And you can turn out the votes. If they steal the election, you're right back where you started from, all right? So put that in place and took that on, okay?

So we're ripe. We're ready now. So the [19]71 elections come around, right? We get two more on the board. Doss gets elected. Julia Jones and all of them. That's [19]71. I don't know who all they were, but it was a nice group of people who got elected.

EC: So I think in [19]67, which was the first one, there were like seven candidates. Matt Ross is board of supervisors, and Mrs. Collins is--.

JM: Chancery clerk. Yeah.

EC: So those were two of the more powerful people elected statewide in the county. Then [19]71, I know it was more, and I know Ms. Jones--.

JM: Ms. Jones.

EC: As circuit clerk.

JM: Yeah. Ms. Jones and Doss, I think. Jones, Doss, obviously. I can't think--.

EC: I can't remember whether anybody was elected to the board of supervisors in addition to Matt Ross or not, until [19]75.

CM: No. Because Mr. Ross was on there a long time [2:05:00] before.

JM: Right. Because we split those two election cycles going for the bullshit, going for the glamour positions.

CM: Yeah.

JM: And didn't really understand that [19]75 election.

EC: I'm going to get to that, but having said that, when Evan Doss was elected tax assessor, can you talk about the re-assessment? Because that was really important.

JM: Property re-assessment?

EC: Yeah.

JM: Yeah. Okay. Yeah. See, I'm going to set a point here about Doss. I think it needs to be said, too. Evan, when he got elected, right? What Evan had behind him was that whole youthful generation. They supported him, man. That's what I was going to say. And at that time, that first year, that first cycle for him was what brought about that new awareness about how politics worked by the younger generation. You see what I'm saying? Okay. So that's why Carol and all of them came into the mix, right? So Carol worked for him for a while. I was working in there. Duvall and all of us came into the mix. James. And we were working for Doss. So Doss was producing out of his office young revolutionaries that were going out making serious political change.

EC: And if I remember right, he was barely old enough to be qualified to run for office. So it's this real youth movement.

CM: Oh, yeah.

JM: Oh, yeah. Yeah. He was the youngest tax assessor in history of the state, you know, and the first to be elected since reconstruction. Yeah. So they were all youthful, youthful people, early twenties. What? Twenty-four, twenty-five maybe at the

most, right? And that set in chain a whole dynamics with all of the other support, outside support, the Delta Ministry support and that kind of stuff. Technical assistance that one would need to understand this stuff, right? The access to lawyers and what have you for to file suits for reapportionments and all that kind of crap. So what happened, it changed the dynamics. And in [19]75, boom. We got a majority. And that's when all hell broke loose. But at the same time, Grand Gulf was coming on line.

EC: Grand Gulf is the--.

JM: Nuclear power plant. Right.

EC: How did that change the dynamics?

JM: From one aspect, the community had something that no other community had when black folks took over political. They had an economic base. We had a budget prior to Grand Gulf of about two point five, maybe three million dollars than ran the county. All the county services and stuff were for that many. After Grand Gulf came, it shot up from two to ten million dollars. And this was even before all the foolishness was going on about taking away the Grand Gulf monies, right? We had a steady tax stream coming in of around ten million dollars a year. So it changed the dynamics.

It changed the profile of locally-elected officials because salaries for supervisors were based upon the assessed valuation of the county. The assessed valuation of the county, by way of largest economic development picture ever to take place in the State of Mississippi at that time, was the Grand Gulf Nuclear Power Plant. It shot up the assessment of the county, okay?

So a supervisor who was making twelve thousand dollars a year now makes forty-thousand dollars a year. See, but every year it gradually went up and up because the

assessment went up and up, okay? And it capped out around fifty-thousand dollars a year for a supervisor, who the year before made twelve. So that creates another whole dynamics in terms of people wanting to run for public office, whether it's from the heart or not. For a lot of folks it was about the pocketbook.

EC: Now there's a just huge incentive.

JM: Yes.

CM: Yeah.

JM: Yes, yes. Then, to add insult to injury, as a result of that, and infighting among leadership in the county, it gave the quote-unquote, "racist," if you will, state legislators, who they were, the impetus they needed to take away the money. Because their position was it's too money going into this predominantly black community, and they don't know how to spend it. So therefore, we need to take some of it away from them.

EC: How would they put that publicly? How would they say that in public? I mean, they're going to try to avoid having it be about race because that might stop them. But so how would they put it publicly in order to justify, or try to justify--. Because there's no precedent for that, [2:10:00] right? There's no precedent for taking utility taxes.

JM: Mm-mmm. It was a classic move again, out of the remnants of what I considered to be the conservative part of the Ku Klux Klan that was dressed up in three-piece suits marching through the state legislature. And all these other counties who got money, right? They were big counties. Hinds County got a piece of the action. Wayne

County got a piece of the action. And all of the other counties that MP&L serves in that service area got a piece of the action.

CM: And that's what they used.

JM: And that's what they used.

CM: To answer your question. That's what they used for saying, "Well, all these other counties--"

JM: Need it, too.

CM: "--are recipients of services from MP&L." So that's how they put it out, that that was their justification for taking the monies away from Claiborne County.

EC: Even though they don't do that for other utilities.

CM: Right. We don't buy it. They still were setting a precedent, but that was the PC--.

EC: Rationale.

CM: Yeah.

EC: The public version of what was going on.

CM: Yeah. We serve these--. They're paying into the system, as well, so this is why we're taking the money.

JM: Now, the counterargument's going to be, again, the hypocrisy and bullshit, right? The county that has this coal-powered plant over here. I forget the name of the county. It's in Mississippi, right? The only difference between that plant and Grand Gulf is that one is coal-powered and one is nuclear-powered.

EC: And probably one is a black community--.

JM: And one is a white community. This one's a predominantly black community. That is a predominantly white community. Now, let's see how history speaks to what happened over there, because these same questions have been raised, okay? This is the only county in the continent of the United States, I think, that had its local taxing authority taken away from it. Every other county in this country that you go in, right? Whatever entity comes through that county, that local government has the right to tax it. This is the only exception. Only exception, okay? Now, did local leadership do a lot of foolish things that allowed racist people to move to do that? Yes. But it was wrong. We had the right to enjoy the fruits of what was in our community, given that we were taking the risks of this power plant being located here.

EC: So when did you decide that you wanted to have the credentials that you needed to be county planner? And what were you trying to accomplish?

JM: Well, I guess, again, I don't know why I assumed that if you go and get some credentials from some place, and then you come back to your community, that somehow other people will view you differently. I was naive to believe that. I really was, yeah. And if you're sincere and you really want to do something good, man, go make yourself qualified to be able to do it. So you go back to school and you get the degree in regional planning. Now that I got that degree and I come back to Port Gibson, if I say something, they'll listen to me now. No. They won't. They don't care. So that was the reason for going there, right?

And again, back to the basics that we talked about earlier about education. It was always the premise in the black community, right, that education. You had to get education if you expected to move ahead and to make a contribution. You had to be

educated. So we come back. The community is dying. I mean, all of this downtown area over here was a vacant lot, as you know. Downtown buildings all boarded up. Infrastructure falling apart in this whole community. Cultural Crossroads standing here, trying to stay up freight, above the water. It was a chaotic condition. It was a chaotic condition.

And as a result of the boycott, and what came out of the ’70s and ’80s of the boycott, the boycott has destroyed a whole bunch of businesses. The community was just at its lowest. So how do we try to come back? [2:15:00]

You keep the alliances with the folks that you grew up with, right? So I’m often over there with Patty talking noise, right? I’m going to coach my little boy too. And Patty always talking about, you know, “Man, we got to get all this as soon as possible.” I said, “Patty, I know. I don’t know what we’re going to do.” So I’d say, “I’m inside now. Maybe I can do something.”

And we had many discussions about how to bring the community back. And to make a long story short, I think basically what we came to the table with--and Patty can speak to it--is how do we infuse the cultural, the arts, the cultural depository here locally, which is Cultural Crossroads, right? How do we infuse that into downtown redevelopment, right? How do we marry the public and the private sector with state monies? Hopefully we get a bond issue to put up some money to bring back the downtown area.

Then we threw the race piece into it, right? The race reconciliation piece, right? I said, “Yes, Patty.” I said, “We have got to figure out a way. I mean, white folk and black folk got to sit down and say, ‘Look.’” She say, “I agree.” I say, “Well, can we do

it through the arts?" I don't know. I think maybe that day got together and talked. You and whatever. But the end result was that there were a lot of projects that we did. The plays. Carol was in one of them. And it was wicked.

CM: Mm-hmm.

EC: So you want to talk about that after we get everybody, get the others in here?

JM: Oh, I'm sorry.

EC: So what are the things that you would want people to know about the things that you try to do as county planner, about what you hope to be accomplished? So there's a movement. You get black folks the right to vote and you organize to get people elected. What are you hoping is going to be accomplished, and sort of what's your assessment of where we are?

JM: What I hope is going to be accomplished is that the greatest good will be done for the greatest number. I keep saying that. I know I'm being repetitious, but that's what I hope we'll accomplish. If we were able to stabilize the community--. There were so many dynamics happening at one time. It's hard to explain that to somebody who wasn't back there in that day. I'm telling you. When Grand Gulf came to this community, it changed the whole dynamics of the community. I mean, there was so much money flowing through this place, but it was just flowing. It wasn't taking roots nowhere.

There was no businesses being created. There were no institutions in place. They were taking the money and leveraging the money, and reinvesting it back into the community, right? There were no businesses being developed, no jobs created. The

school system was falling apart. People were moving. Even our best and our brightest were moving, leaving, and not coming back. There was a brain drain. So the middle class, that's essential to any given community, stabilizes communities. Our middle class was just dying out, both black and white. And what we had left was a void. You had the very poor and the very rich. Nothing really in between as a buffer. And it was a recipe for disaster.

Now, how do you change that? How do you reverse that? Part of what we thought was that if we just could get black folks and white folks talking, and interacting with each other, maybe that would break down some stereotypes and find some common ground. And for a minute that happened. We was effecting a lot of stuff, right? I mean, the ventures we did with the festivals. The Blues and Cruise Festival is a classic example of that. I mean, if somehow or another, that could have stayed in place, it would have been one of the premier festivals in this part of the state. But no. I know it would have been. It couldn't help but have been. I mean, you ask Patty. I mean, the people that came through this community, man. We must have had what? Thirty, twenty-five, thirty-thousand people on motorcycles coming through here. They stayed here for a whole day, and half of the night. Some stayed over, rode through the community, had a festival. You don't know who owned the motorcycles, but they do. It showcases [2:20:00] your community, right? Okay. So, I know. Yeah.

EC: So shall we take a break? You want to go see Mom and Dad?

CM: Yeah.

JM: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Female 1: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

END OF INTERVIEW

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