Civil Rights History Project


Mildred Bond Roxborough oral history interview

conducted by Julian Bond

in New York, New York, Oct. 29, 2010
FEMALE VOICE: Ms. Roxborough [phonetic], Mr. Bond, I'm recording.

INTERVIEWER: Ready to go?

FEMALE VOICE: Yes, sir.

INTERVIEWER: Ms. Roxborough, you were born into an African American family that was aware of the need to do what was necessary to improve the quality of their daily lives.

Can you share with us how your family made changes in their lives to improve their situation?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, we lived in one of the three counties in the State of Tennessee, in which blacks did not vote. One of the things my parents felt which would be of paramount importance was to get the right to vote. They proceeded to campaign for that purpose by getting other people in the community to join
26 them to go to the county courthouse
27 to register to vote. That was a
28 primary ingredient. This is before
29 01:01:13 they organized a branch of the NACP.
30 Of course, they also felt that the
31 community of blacks in the county--
32 Hayward County was the county in
33 which we lived. The county was
34 Brownsville in which I was born.
35 Of course, they felt that it was
36 important to organize our black
37 citizens because they outnumbered the
38 01:01:42 white citizens about 3 to 1. If they
39 could marshal the black citizens in
40 greater strength, they could change
41 the quality of our lives to some
42 extent by exercising political power.
43 INTERVIEWER: Did you ever hear your
44 parents talk about organizing the
45 first NAACP chapter in Brownsville?
46 Did you ever hear them discuss it?
47 MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes.
48 01:02:05 INTERVIEWER: What did they have to
49 say?
50 MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, they said that
we needed to have people who would be able to withstand the pressures which they anticipated would be applied when they started formally organizing a group together instead of having an individual who would join them on certain occasions. In order to do this, at that time, as I recall, Walter White was executive secretary of the NAACP. I would hear his name frequently, saying we’ve got to get Walter White to authorize a charter for our unit. Then they rode away to get enough information about the number of people who would be required. There was much discussion when I was a youngster. I suppose about this time I was about 7 years of age, having been reading The Crisis because they subscribed to it. I was well aware of what the NAACP was in my own perspective.

INTERVIEWER: You were 9 years old when you first became involved with
NAACP. What led you to be willing to
sell The Crisis, to sell

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Both my parents
would teach us. My mother, there
were three of us, of which I was the
youngest. My mother or my father
virtually every evening before I went
to bed would read poetry, excerpts
from history, and events to my
sisters. I would be sitting on my
mother's lap. Oftentimes, in reading
poetry, she would quote to them
saying that this is a piece by
Langston Hughes, which was published
in The Crisis Magazine. Of course, I
wanted to know what The Crisis was
after having heard her say that so
often. She said, "You'll see it.
It's here on the desk," or wherever.
I would start looking for The Crisis
after hearing my mother mention the
fact that they actually were reading
excerpts from things that appeared
therein. That's how I learned about
INTERVIEWER: How'd you come to sell subscriptions?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, I noticed they had in some ad in the paper indicating that subscriptions were available. I said one day, "Can I write to Roy Wilkins [phonetic]," who was the editor of The Crisis, "and ask him if I can sell The Crisis?" After all, if you're going to have a chapter of the NAACP, then--my language wasn't as it is today, as you can appreciate--they said, "By all means, but you must write the letter yourself." I said I'll do that, so I did.

INTERVIEWER: Did he write back?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: I heard--I don't know if it was from him--saying we will be glad to have you sell The Crisis Magazine. In any event, it was typed, but it had his signature on it and under his name it said editor. I was so proud to get that
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<td>letter from the editor of The Crisis.</td>
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<td>127</td>
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<td>I was beside myself.</td>
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<td>INTERVIEWER: I bet. Can you share</td>
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<td>any details with us about what</td>
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<td>happened to your father as a result</td>
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<td>of his civil rights activities in</td>
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<td>MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, by 1939 the</td>
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<td>branch had been organized. He was</td>
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<td>the president and my mother was</td>
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<td>secretary. During those intervening</td>
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<td>years, my father had been arrested</td>
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<td>and taken to jail a few times, but</td>
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<td>not formally charged. He was usually</td>
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<td>let go. However, one evening he was</td>
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<td>beaten. The sheriff and a deputy--</td>
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<td>anyway, they were law enforcement</td>
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<td>officials--brought him home and</td>
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<td>opened the front door, which wasn't</td>
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<td>locked because in those days you</td>
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<td>didn't lock your door until you went</td>
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<td>to bed at night I think. I was home</td>
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<td>alone. My mother was at a meeting.</td>
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<td>They brought him in and dumped him on</td>
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the couch really. They said, "Take care of your pa. He's been hurt. If he had not had connections, he would be in jail." I was of course frightened. I was about 9 at the time. When my mother came home, I said to her these two men brought them home and they said to me if he did not have connections, he would be in jail. I said what does that mean? She looked at me. She said I guess I should tell you the county coroner of Haywood County--his name was John Severe [phonetic]--was a doctor. She said Dr. Severe probably asked them not to do anything to your father because he's your grandmother's half brother. He was white and of course my grandmother was black. She said that Dr. Severe is widely respected and they tried to be as accommodating to him as they could.

INTERVIEWER: When you were a student at Howard and later Washington Square Campus of NYU in the '50s, you recall
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<td>how you and other students felt about segregation and the lack of civil rights that most African Americans endured?</td>
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<td>MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, I recall that we went to I think it's the Howard Theater in Washington. You weren't welcome in the other theaters as such, except on a segregated basis. We were concerned about that. This was during World War II that I was at Howard. During wartime, we were concerned about our good and welfare as students. Also, why couldn't we go into many of the places, which were still segregated in Washington? There was much discussion about that among us. We probably didn't do very much, but periodically a few of us would undertake to go into a restaurant and be denied entrance. But it never became an issue in the sense of escalating into arrest at that point in time. That was a little early. This was 1943. From</td>
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'43 to '45, I was at Howard.

Of course we were also concerned about our studies. There were a lot of uniformed young men on the campus as a part of the training program that the federal government had at that point in time.

INTERVIEWER: You joined the NAACP on the staff in 1953 right before the Brown decision and a little more than a year and a half before Emmett Till was murdered. Share with us the mood of the NAACP staff and leadership, and tell us about some of the personalities you met.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, I don't want to give you a wandering answer. I started work in the fall of 1953 to do a special project for Gloster Current, director of branches in Baltimore, Maryland, which was one of our largest branches in the country. It also had as its president a Dr. Lily M. Jackson, who was very well known throughout the country because
she was very colorful, a very strong and aggressive NAACP leader well respected in Baltimore, and difficult to please.

Gloster Current at a staff meeting introduced me as a temporary field secretary, and that I was going to Baltimore to do a six-week membership campaign for the Baltimore branch.

Thurgood Marshall, who was sitting a couple of seats away from me laughed loudly and said, "Gloster, why are you doing that to that girl? You should be ashamed of yourself."

I did not know what that meant until I got to Baltimore and found how demanding and difficult it was to work for Ms. Jackson, but I did. We had a membership campaign which ran for six weeks. Her daughter, Juanita Jackson Mitchell, at that time, was a first organizer of the youth program for the national NAACP.

She worked with me and we survived each other. I was baptized in that
particular branch experience and worked. At that point, there was a man who was the president of Parks Sausage, which was an early black corporation which was if not the first of its kind, was one of the first of its kind. One of the great founders was a locally well-known man whose income supposedly was derived from numbers and that type of thing. I became very friendly with those men and was able to get them to support the NAACP. Those were the extremes. Ms. Jackson was a great church leader and these men were on the other side of the spectrum. They came together for the purpose of supporting this common cause.

INTERVIEWER: Would that have been Henry Parks?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, Henry G. Parks. The man was William Adams.

INTERVIEWER: Little Willie.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: He was always very nice to me. I always felt very
Henry Parks. I was quite young then.

INTERVIEWER: Let me take you back to the New York office and the people you met there. Thurgood Marshall, whom you just mentioned a moment ago, obviously you knew of him because you'd been active in the NAACP as a young girl and in later years. What were your impressions of him when you met him?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, first of all, I had to get accustomed to his language. I never heard so many cuss words in my life, which was colorful. Nobody minded. He was a wonderful raconteur. He had a tremendous sense of humor. I said this is Thurgood Marshall?

He was also very effective in getting you to do things and making difficult subjects sound easy. He said we'll be going to Hoxie, Arkansas. He said you'll be able to do that. It'll be a good first experience for you to
get to know the parents there and the
children. It'll be something that
you'll remember for years to come.
Of course, he was right, but it
wasn't pie like he claimed that it
would be. But he was good at getting
people to do things and also
inspiring them. He's an
exceptionally bright man, but it was
all beneath this demeanor of
roughness and semi-crude ness. It's a
manner he affected, and he did well
with making you comfortable with him.
INTERVIEWER: What were your
impressions of Roy Wilkins?
MS. ROXBOROUGH: Very elegant man,
one who was extremely similar,
concerned about the language and its
use, the syntax and sentence
structure. Of course, I learned much
about grammar and composition from
Roy Wilkins, who wrote beautifully.
He also was a very unpretentious
person. He did not want any
ceremony. He rode the subway, which
at that time was 5 cents going and coming to work. He did not want bodyguards or attendants.

He was a purist when it came to commitment to the association. He wanted the staff to dedicate themselves to achieving the goals which were set out for them in terms of their work and to at all times be properly attired and achieve the right demeanor to present the NAACP as a wholesome, serious organization who had intelligent people as its representatives.

INTERVIEWER: Walter White?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Walter White was colorful. He enjoyed people. He embraced people and he enjoyed the social interaction. He also liked the spotlight. Wilkins, on the other hand, did not seek the spotlight. He tolerated it, but Walter White thrived in the spotlight. Also, because of his people skills and his
ability to interact, he was able to get certain information in terms of doing his research. He was very fair. He would be presumed to be Caucasian, unless you would know otherwise. He was successful in going into places like Mississippi, Georgia, and Arkansas and investigating lynchings and other incidents, and coming back without having been assaulted or thrown in jail. He enjoyed that kind of activity and the fact that he could live in these two worlds. It was effective.

INTERVIEWER: A moment ago you mentioned Hoxie, Arkansas, and that took, you into contact with Daisy Bates. What do you recall about Daisy Bates?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Ms. Bates was a very dedicated civil rights worker, but she also had a sense of style. She enjoyed the spotlight as well. She was not ever shy. At that time, the
The governor of Arkansas was Orval Faubus. He was known to be anti-black, a segregationist, and was determined to keep the schools in Arkansas separate. Of course, Daisy Bates on the other hand—this is in the '50s now. This is just before '56. This was 1954, when I first went to Little Rock. Then I went back two or three years after that during this period leading up to the integration of Central High. Daisy was colorful, aggressive, and she didn’t mind the spotlight. She was very talkative. She too was a people person. She was able to get branches and what we call the little people and the simple people, many of whom were very literate to follow and come in to the NAACP. At this point in time, we were focusing on education to get their children, who were students, a better education. She was able to get many of them to become active in the units in the
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401 various cities and towns in Arkansas who had never been active before.

403 INTERVIEWER: A moment ago, when you and I were talking, we mentioned Rosa Parks. What are your memories of

405 Rosa Parks?

407 MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, Ms. Parks was a very charming and gracious lady. I think I said at one point laconic.

410 She was of few words, but when she spoke, you listened to her. She was very kind. In those days, when you traveled as a field secretary as I was, you would stay in the homes of NAACP people in various parts of the country. Usually they were officers of the branch. Once when I first went to Montgomery, I stayed with Ms. Parks. This is before of course she left Alabama. She and her husband both were very pleasant and comfortable people. They were quietly militant. They weren't bombastic. They didn’t make a lot of noise about it. They just would act.
At that point, she was still secretary of the branch. She was very determined that we should do more with our youth. She was focusing at that time a lot in getting the youth in Montgomery to organize and to take certain steps in terms of preparing them to move forward in the integration movement.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember E.D. Nixon, the president of Montgomery Branch, a Pullman car porter.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, I do.

INTERVIEWER: What do you recall about him?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, he was a very dedicated person with a strong commitment to civil rights. He was committed to the NAACP and the way he believed that we had to have an integrated society if we as blacks were to thrive and achieve in this country. He was one of the few voices who would withstand a lot of the pressure in Alabama to take a
stand. He refused to give up the membership roles of the NAACP in Alabama when the Attorney General demanded it. After that period, you may recall, the NAACP was banned from operating in Alabama.

INTERVIEWER: You had been at the NAACP about a year and a half when news comes that this boy, Emmett Till, has been found dead in a river in Mississippi. Do you remember hearing the news about that and what the reaction of the people in the office here were?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes. I remember. It was considered in our office to be a great tragedy because just before then--I'm sorry I can't remember the town--one of our branch presidents had been killed in Mississippi.

INTERVIEWER: Gus Cough [phonetic].

MS. ROXBOROUGH: I think yeah. We were in the throws of that. Because the NAACP was encouraging them to continue the voter education
registration campaign, this brought about his death, the branch presidents. This one child, as he was presumed to be, was killed. It was felt at that point that Mississippi was completely going out of bounds, and that nothing was sacred or safe in the state. The NAACP really had to stay behind its people to help them and to keep them from having to cave in or to become too intimidated to keep the movement going. If the NAACP didn't continue to function, then we would not be able to do anything about an Emmett Till. This was the great concern, whether this would stop the movement.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any interaction with Mamie Bradley, Emmett Till's mother?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes. I arranged a tour, I guess, of NAACP branches for Ms. Bradley to visit. Actually, I accompanied her for some of the time to some of the cities, which we
arranged for her to visit. She was a woman who was very articulate. As she campaigned or visited the units across the country I should say, she grew more militant and more informed, and became more involved. Then of course she started speaking more forcefully and making demand which should be met in terms of acquisition of civil rights and justice for her son. She insisted, for example, on opening the casket when he was funeralized in Chicago, which was quite an experience for one to have to see him lying in the casket and showing the evidences of him having been killed.

INTERVIEWER: Before we began this interview, you and I were talking about Clarence Norris, one of the Scottsboro Boys. Tell that story once again, how you came to know him.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Our office moved to 1790 Broadway, off Columbus Circle. One day this man came into the office
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526 | | and the switchboard operator called
527 | | me to say we have a man here who
528 | | needs help, which often that
529 | 01:24:45 | happened. At that point I was I
530 | | think executive assistant to Roy
531 | | Wilkins or assistant director between
532 | | Mr. Wilkins and Dr. Marcel
533 | | [phonetic]. I went out to see this
534 | | man and it developed his name was
535 | | Clarence Norris.
536 | | INTERVIEWER: Did you recognize him?
537 | | MS. ROXBOROUGH: Not at first, but
538 | | then after he started talking I
539 | | realized
540 | 01:25:12 | that I had seen his pictures, and
541 | | that he was one of the Scottsboro
542 | | Boys. He said--
543 | | INTERVIEWER: [Interposing] He was a
544 | | fugitive, was he not?
545 | | MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, he was. He had
546 | | been for several years, so this was
547 | | not new. We knew this in the NAACP
548 | | that he had escaped.
549 | | INTERVIEWER: But you didn't know
550 | 01:25:30 | where he was and didn't know he'd
walk into the office, did you?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: I didn't have the faintest idea he was in the New York area. This had to be I guess in the late '60s. He said, "I went to the old office years ago," meaning 20 West 40th Street, "and I met the lady who was the office manager. He described her. I said, "Ms. Branch?"

He said yes. He said, "If she's here, she'll help me." I said, "You need help?" He said yes. I called Bobbie Branch and asked her if I could bring him around to her. She said yes. She remembered him. Our officer manager then, as you might recall, Bobbie Branch, embraced people. She was very gregarious. She welcomed him and said, "I'll help you. What do you need?" He needed some money of course. He said his wife, I believe, that first time--I think his wife was ill. She said, "Well, let me see if Mr. Wilkins is here and I'll take you over to meet
“I told her he wasn't there, but Dr. Marcel was. He met Dr. Marcel and they talked. Dr. Marcel was a very thoughtful— [break in video] --if we had provided some further assistance. Willie Norris said, "Yes, I need assistance. I want to clear my name before I die." That's how this relationship again with him was resumed after the NAACP many, many years ago had been instrumental in helping them until a political problem arose where the communist party became involved and the NAACP stepped aside. That was when he was a much younger man, shortly after having been arrested for the rape to begin with.

INTERVIEWER: He escaped and came to New York City, and now he's coming to the NAACP and making a request for assistance for pardon. How did that follow through?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Actually, for money it was his first request. When he
met and talked with John Marcel,

Marcel said we want to see how we can
provide some meaningful assistance
for you, meaning to try to get him
settled into a job and whatever. He
said, "I want to clear my name before
I die." That's really when our
general counsel--not that visit--but
it was arranged to give him some
money and for him to return. When he
returned it was then he talked
without general counsel.

Mr. Wilkins had spoken to Nathaniel
Jones, who was our general counsel at
that point, and asked if you would
join Wilkins when Mr. Norris came
back into the office. From that
point on, Nathaniel Jones became the
person who was exploring how our
legal department could help him. He
assigned one of the bright, young
attorneys, whose name was James
Meyerson [phonetic], to work on the
issue of getting a full pardon for
Willie Norris.
INTERVIEWER: Eventually Meyerson and Wilkins and--

MS. ROXBOROUGH: [Interposing] Jones.

INTERVIEWER: Jones and Norris go to Alabama and secure his pardon.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Meet the governor and the attorney general and get a full pardon from then for Willie.

INTERVIEWER: That's a wonderful, wonderful story.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Following that, the book was written, The Last of the Scottsboro Boys.

INTERVIEWER: Many young people became involved in the NAACP through youth council. For a time you worked as field secretary and director of education. What were your goals for the programs that involved young people?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, first I should say I was never director of education. June Shagaloff was. I was director of a lot of things. I can't remember all of the jobs I had.
Every five years I would transfer to a new job. I was an assistant director to the executive and a director, and then finally director of operations and director of programs, under which education fell at that point. I'm sorry; I forgot the other part of the question.

INTERVIEWER: What were the goals that you worked on that involved young people? What were the programs that you worked on that involved young people?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, the programs which involved young people and which I worked early on were ACT-SO, which is the Academic, Cultural, Scientific Olympics. They subsequently added Afro to the title. That was for the purpose of developing academic excellence and general achievement as far as youth were concerned. It could be in any of 24 fields--arts and science, and literary--in general, and the youth were organized
on a local level according to the
program.

This program was founded by Benjamin
Hooks and Vernon Jarrett, who was a
newspaper reporter from Chicago.

Benjamin became the successor to Roy
Wilkins. We organized units across
the country such similar to youth
units with an advisor for ACT-SO.
The idea was to recruit those who
showed promise locally. They do have
local competitions, then regional
competitions, then national
competitions. The program is still
going strong today. There are some
600 ACT-SO units across the country
which are actively engaged. One here
in metropolitan New York, where we
are at the moment, is the largest one
because there are some 17 branches
who participate.

INTERVIEWER: If you count the local
branch participation, this is
probably the largest African American
talent-based scholarship program in
MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, and the most enduring. Scholarships are given; rewards are given; medals are given at the national convention. We have had such people as I was trying to think of some people who have come through the ACT-SO program. I think there's a young man who was the conductor of a symphony who appears at Lincoln Center, who was an ACT-SO graduate. We have others. I don't want to try to name names because I'll leave out some who--

INTERVIEWER: [Interposing] They're a distinguished group of achievers.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, absolutely.

INTERVIEWER: A moment ago you talked about Roy Wilkins succeeding Walter White. Walter White died.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, he did.

INTERVIEWER: Roy Wilkins was named to succeed him. Do you remember any discussion whether or not Roy Wilkins should have succeeded him or was
there another candidate?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: No, not at that time. Walter White died in 1955 suddenly. He had been ill and on leave. He had a leave of absence, Walter White, and Roy Wilkins had been serving as administrator. In his absence as executive, he took over the duties of executive secretary. When Walter White died while on leave, Roy Wilkins--after the funeral of course---at the next board meeting I believe it was, at the spring board meeting, was named his successor. There had been some earlier discussions prior to this. When Walter White had a leave of absence before, he went around the world I believe a few years before that. There was some discussion then about whether Roy Wilkins would be his successor.

INTERVIEWER: Succeeding Roy Wilkins was Benjamin Hooks.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes.
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<td>INTERVIEWER: Describe him.</td>
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| 752   |          | MS. ROXBOROUGH: He was a Baptist minister, and a dramatic Baptist minister. His oratorical skills were great. He enjoyed demonstrating as he spoke. He inspired our constituents. Whereas Roy Wilkins was an intellectual-type speaker who would lay the facts out in elegant prose, Mr. Hooks demonstrated his speeches frequently by his physical activities at the podium. He used shall I say the gospel approach in terms of inspiring our constituents. He was effective. He got the kind of visceral response which people enjoy during the course of speeches. He could inspire them also not just to respond to him, but to become actively engaged in the work of the NAACP. He kept our constituents committed in the units across the country. He tried to travel as much as he could because they are the connection.
between the national office and the constituents. If they aren't actively engaged in the 50 states across the country, then the NAACP's presence is not being brought to the fore as it should be and to show how forceful it can be. It is the only organization of its kind which has shall I say 1,700 units in the 50 states for some 500 youth and college units.

INTERVIEWER: Why do you think it is that the NAACP's accomplishments and achievements are not as well known as one would think they'd be? After all, the organization's 100 years old plus, and has a remarkable record of achievement and accomplishment. Yet it doesn't seem to be as well known as one would think it would be. Why do you think that is?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: I have no idea except that we as a people don't focus on our history and our heritage. The NAACP was here before
were here at this point. As it has
achieved many accomplishments,
actually, it has affected the order
of life for all of us, whatever color
we are. What is more for our
reaching than the interstate travel
bill, for example, the desegregation
of the public schools or the public
accommodations laws where everybody
could get access to places? What
happens I believe is we forget our
history.

We live in the period and then we
take for granted what there is, and
do not retain it as an achievement
which had been caused by the hard
work of those who came on before us.
We don't really as a people in this
country--not just the black people--
we don't really focus on our own
American history, what has happened
at various periods, and the
gone. We forget. Then we take for
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granted this is my right. It's here now. We don't think about how it was

827 01:38:05
in the past. The NAACP has been

828 01:38:05
actually forgotten a lot of times

829 01:38:05
when it was the only instrument which

830 01:38:05
was able to achieve certain things

831 01:38:20
which we now enjoy. I don't have an

832 01:38:20
answer.

833

INTERVIEWER: I don't either. Let me
mention some organizations, some of
which have come and gone in the span
of the NAACP's history. Give me your
impressions of them. The Southern
Christian Leadership Conference.

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INTERVIEWER: SCLC.

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INTERVIEWER: SCLC.

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INTERVIEWER: SCLC.

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INTERVIEWER: SCLC.

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INTERVIEWER: SCLC.

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INTERVIEWER: SCLC.

840

MS. ROXBOROUGH: SCLC?

841

MS. ROXBOROUGH: SCLC?

842 01:38:41
MS. ROXBOROUGH: My impression?

843
Well, I think the SCLC was an
effective organization in the sense

844
that it brought to the fore in the
minds of the public that the
religious leaders in this country

845
were engaged in and active in terms

846
of passing the word of our civil

847
rights and providing inspiration and
leadership to their congregations throughout the country.

We should be mindful and become engaged in this struggle, and we can do by showing ourselves and lending our voices. SCLC was flexible because its leaders could go from one

01:39:15

community to the other and call together the religious leaders in a given community to provide a voice for a particular cause and a particular action. I think it was helpful in that respect in terms of setting before us actively through the pulpits what it was we needed to do and what we must do.

01:39:31

INTERVIEWER: What about the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, my old organization, SNCC?

01:39:57

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes. Well you know more about that than I do. I certainly think that the sit-ins were extraordinary in the sense that they opened the eyes of the old folks, the adults in the country. This I can do
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<td>876</td>
<td></td>
<td>also, the simple act of walking into</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a café or a 10-cent store as they had</td>
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<td>then, lunch counter and sitting there</td>
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<td>879</td>
<td></td>
<td>and saying I'm not going to move.</td>
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<td>880</td>
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<td>That's something all of us could do.</td>
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<td>881</td>
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<td>The students demonstrated that this</td>
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<td>is something that had not been done,</td>
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<td>883</td>
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<td>and that we're going to do it. They</td>
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<td>did and it was impressive. It</td>
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<td>885</td>
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<td>inspired us as older people to really</td>
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<td>886</td>
<td></td>
<td>go out and demonstrate. If our youth</td>
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<td>887</td>
<td></td>
<td>can do it, our children can do it,</td>
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<td>888</td>
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<td>then why won't we do it?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>INTERVIEWER: What about the Congress</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of Racial Equality, CORE?</td>
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<td>891</td>
<td></td>
<td>MS. ROXBOROUGH: CORE was a little</td>
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<td>892</td>
<td></td>
<td>more intellectual. It had an</td>
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<td>893</td>
<td></td>
<td>excellent</td>
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<td>894</td>
<td>01:40:57</td>
<td>leader in James Farmer, who formally</td>
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<td>895</td>
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<td>worked for the NAACP as our program</td>
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<td>896</td>
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<td>director. Many of these leaders by</td>
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<td>897</td>
<td></td>
<td>the way of the other organizations</td>
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<td>898</td>
<td></td>
<td>had gotten their grounding and their</td>
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<td>899</td>
<td></td>
<td>foundations in the NAACP, such as</td>
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<td>900</td>
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<td>Martin Luther King, Jr. did. His</td>
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Line# Timecode Quote
901 01:41:20 father had been active in the NAACP before him. The CORE was more
902 01:41:29 integrated than the other groups were
903 01:41:38 in terms of racial integration. It appealed to a younger group in
904 01:41:48 general, students and young adults, and they were concerned about
905 01:42:08 demonstrating in black and white the acquisition of the goals they wanted
906 01:42:17 to achieve. They had certainly an impact—I believe CORE did—in terms
907 01:42:26 of encouraging non-blacks to participate actively in the civil
908 01:42:35 rights movement.
909 01:42:44 INTERVIEWER: What about the Black
910 Panther Party?
911 MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, the Black
912 Panther Party I believe had the energy and the ambition, and a sense
913 in my judgment of misdirection eventually. It started as a militant
914 group wanting to use its power and apply it actively. Then it veered
915 towards separation and separatism.
916 Black power became an instrument, in
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<td>926</td>
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<td>my judgment, to shall I say encourage</td>
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<td>927</td>
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<td>and focus on black separatism, which</td>
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<td>928</td>
<td></td>
<td>I believe and am convinced was then</td>
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<td>929</td>
<td>01:42:47</td>
<td>self-defeating and would be today.</td>
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<td>930</td>
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<td>INTERVIEWER: Back to the NAACP for a</td>
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<td>931</td>
<td></td>
<td>moment, I think many people think of</td>
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<td>932</td>
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<td>the NAACP primarily as a legal</td>
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<td>organization. It's an organization</td>
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<td>01:42:59</td>
<td>that achieved change through legal</td>
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<td></td>
<td>means through the courts. Do you</td>
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<td>936</td>
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<td>think this fairly characterizes the</td>
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<td>937</td>
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<td>NAACP?</td>
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<td>938</td>
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<td>MS. ROXBOROUGH: No.</td>
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<td>939</td>
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<td>INTERVIEWER: Why not?</td>
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<td>MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, one of the</td>
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<td>941</td>
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<td>first executive orders that President</td>
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<td>Roosevelt--not one of the first ones,</td>
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<td>943</td>
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<td>but an executive order that President</td>
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<td>944</td>
<td>01:43:22</td>
<td>Roosevelt issued about the arms</td>
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<td>945</td>
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<td>services, the preliminary one, was</td>
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<td>946</td>
<td></td>
<td>done as a result of the NAACP's</td>
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<td>947</td>
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<td>lobbying and campaigning and the fact</td>
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<td>948</td>
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<td>that Ms. Roosevelt was on our board</td>
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<td>949</td>
<td></td>
<td>of directors. Walter White and Ms.</td>
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| 950   |           | Roosevelt had a good relationship,
and it was possible to get Ms. Roosevelt to work with Walter White and Phillip Randolph, and to get President Roosevelt to understand that an executive order desegregating federal installations should be issued. Of course that wasn't integration, but it was a first step. That was done without any legal action.

The first civil rights law was achieved primarily through lobbying and under the aegis of Clarence Mitchell, the Washington Bureau. Again, that historic was passed by congress as a result of lobbying. It was within the confines of reality, but it wasn't an illegal act. I think the public accommodations are a lot of the same things. There are so many things which widely affect our society, which the NAACP inspired, led and accomplished, which were not legal actions; such actions as far as litigation is concerned.
INTERVIEWER: Again, this may be redundant. Why is it that many people think of the NAACP as primarily a legal organization and these other activities that you've mentioned aren't associated in the public mind with the NAACP?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: I suspect one of the reasons is our lawyers appeared before the Supreme Court so many times. Former general counsel Robert Carter had made some 36 appearances before the Supreme Court and won about 30 of those cases. Before that, Thurgood Marshall, before he became a justice when he was NAACP counsel, appeared before the Supreme Court. I can't remember the exact number now, but it was more than two dozen times and of course most of those cases were won. This of course, the publicity of these cases, set in the minds of people that legal action is responsible for our progress in this country, and to an
important extent it is. Without the
group roots lobbying and without the
meticulous work of putting before our
congressman both on local, state, and
federal levels the need to enact
certain laws and the pressure from
the grass roots, we would not be
where we are today.

INTERVIEWER: Skipping to another
personality, do you think Malcolm X
had any effect during his life on the
NAACP or civil rights generally
speaking? Did his death or his
murder have an impact on the NAACP,
particularly in northern cities,
northern communities?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, this is one
person's opinion. I think certainly
he demonstrated the fact that
discipline could be achieved in
leadership. He exercised discipline
in the sense of the followers who
became committed to the movement
which he lead believed and committed
themselves to conforming the
guidelines and expectations. These were in so many instances young men who had been street people, who had no commitment as such except to survive the best way they could for themselves. They became part of a cohesive group, interacting with each other, and willing to help each other, and then project this on to the community. I think that's one excellent cause he served. I believe that his death did have a serious impact because of the fact that it represented the death of a leader who had a following over whom he had shall I say such vast experience that they could be effectively banned together to achieve progress by folks who have been formally on the streets and who have formally not been engaged in any meaningful activity. This was important example it seems to me for those of us in civil rights, not that we agree with all of his philosophy.
INTERVIEWER: Do you think you could feel a measurable impact that he had, particularly after his death, that there were people within the NAACP perhaps who said perhaps in some ways we should emulate his dedication, his conviction?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: I think there were some people like that. Measurably there were, especially among our youth. They felt that he had the right idea in terms of his discipline and his rhetoric, which became more bland before he died than it was when he began when he was preaching almost anarchy at one point in time. He modified his position to develop pressure on what he called the power structure by threatening and also showing that he represented a force in the community--in the society I should say, not just the community. I think this impressed especially our younger adults and youth in the NAACP. You had a reaction that they
believed that he was on the right track or he's a good example for us to follow.

INTERVIEWER: You were married to an attorney who worked with the NAACP to effect change. How did his work construct your lives together?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, before I knew him, John, he was Chairman of the Legal and Redress Committee of Detroit Branch, having been born in Michigan and reared in Michigan. When I first went to Detroit to work with the NAACP branch there and Arthur Johnson as executive secretary, we were organizing the first Freedom Fund and Life Membership dinner.

At that point, the Legal and Redress Committee of the Detroit Branch was very active, and they had won two or three cases in Michigan before the Michigan Supreme Court involving housing and education. John was the lead lawyer in those particular
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1101 01:51:30 cases. It was after then that I got to know him. I always felt that the Detroit Branch was an excellent example of the kind of activities and accomplishments that an NAACP branch should undertake.

1107 Of course, the work of the legal committee actually got commendations from the national office and Thurgood Marshall, who was then our general counsel. That kind of thing impressed me about the importance of having a varied scope of activity in the civil rights movement. Of course, he on the other hand was supportive of the Detroit Branch's other activities. We were, shall I say, compatible in the sense, and we share an interest in terms of civil rights. That wasn't the reason we married, but that was one of the reasons of the common interest in the early days.

1124 INTERVIEWER: Thinking about the Detroit Branch from your perspective
and what you've seen over the years, what is it that makes branch A effective, efficient, hard-fighting and so on; and branch B lackluster, sleepy, do-nothing?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Its leadership. I believe it's the leadership. The extent which your leadership inspires, the board, and the members will be the extent to which they respond and become creative and are inspired to become creative and do things in a more positive and forceful nature. I think the key is in the kind of leadership branches have across the country.

INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you to talk about some occasions in the past over time when the leadership of the NAACP has faced real challenges or difficult circumstances. I'm thinking about the barring of the NAACP in Alabama, the lawsuit against the NAACP in Mississippi because of the boycott. Let's talk about those
MS. ROXBOROUGH: When you say here, are you talking--


MS. ROXBOROUGH: About the national office.

INTERVIEWER: National office.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: First of all, they were defiant, one. We are not going to give those membership lists up.

That was the first thing. Second, we've got to find a way to work around this and continue our work.

We had employed recently Ms. Ruby Hurley [phonetic] who was sent to Alabama to organize units of the NAACP in the southeast region, which is the confederate states. Ms. Hurley had been in Alabama not too long--I guess probably less than a year--doing this and organizing units headquartered in Birmingham, as I
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<td>recall.</td>
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<td>She moved after the NAACP was banned.</td>
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<td>1178</td>
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<td>The office there was moved to</td>
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<td>Atlanta, but as a result of that, she</td>
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<td>1180</td>
<td>01:54:36</td>
<td>and some other NAACP volunteer workers would visit these states in</td>
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<td>1181</td>
<td></td>
<td>which the NAACP had been banned,</td>
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<td>Alabama and I forget the other state.</td>
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<td>There were two states whose</td>
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<td>membership roles were taken, would</td>
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<td>not be given up I should say. In any</td>
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<td>case, the thing I wanted to say is</td>
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<td>1188</td>
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<td>Ms. Hurley and other volunteers went</td>
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<td>almost surreptitiously into</td>
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<td>communities to work, again,</td>
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<td>memberships with the NAACP and to</td>
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<td>organize certain things like getting</td>
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<td>petitions signed and to get them to</td>
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<td>1194</td>
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<td>get organized to go to the polls to</td>
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<td>1195</td>
<td>01:55:32</td>
<td>register, go to the courthouse or</td>
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<td>1196</td>
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<td>wherever to register and vote.</td>
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<td>1197</td>
<td></td>
<td>It was done under the cover of night</td>
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<td>so to speak without the banner of the</td>
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<td>1199</td>
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<td>NAACP in the daytime having these</td>
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<td>1200</td>
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<td>meetings. It made it shall I say</td>
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dangerous. Ms. Hurley was threatened many times. Her life was threatened and she was in danger doing this, but she was a spokesperson who was able to get these groups in these various states in Alabama and Georgia and Mississippi to come together to agree to do certain things in terms of continuing the fight for civil rights in their communities.

INTERVIEWER: What about when the local leadership would be under attack, as in the case of Medgar Evers assassination? What was the New York Headquarters' response?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, its response was to send people into Mississippi to fill the void; actually, to reassure the people that the NAACP was continuing its fight with Medgar's death. This was just even more important that we demonstrate that we were not intimidated by the fact that
Actually, his brother took over the position of field director for the State of Mississippi and he's still there in Mississippi. He eventually became Mayor of Philadelphia. I believe it was, Charles. This is the kind of thing the NAACP was forced to do in order to make sure its constituents had examples of our continuing the work of the association one way or the other.

INTERVIEWER: What was Medgar Evers like? You surely knew him.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, I worked with Medgar. I was sent to Mississippi in the '60s to interview farmers who had been denied credit, who were subjected to economic reprisals because of their NAACP activities, continuing to go to the polls to register and vote. Medgar and I, as a field director, he would drive to the various places because that's the best way to get
there. We went into the Delta area to interview the farmers so I could take these reports back to New York to see how we could help them to survive the winter. Being denied credit over the winter season, it meant they had no means of getting food because that was the tradition. You get credit for the next four months, and then when the spring came you were able to start planting and you would be able to start paying the bills again. All of that credit was cut off.

We traveled. I guess we spent at that point about two weeks doing this. One particularly difficult time when our farmers were being economic reprisals, we had had two branch presidents who had been killed just before this particular time. It was difficult to believe that these people would continue to carry on like this because the situation was so oppressive in Mississippi. We
1276 were driving one night and I had
1277 taken off my shoes and felt something
1278 on the floor which was cold. I said
1279 to Medgar, "What is this? Maybe I
1280 can move it." He said, "Well, that's
1281 01:59:22 my shotgun you have your feet on."
1282 Of course my feet flew up. But this
1283 is just to give you an idea of the
1284 sense of the environment.
1285 We would drive each night from
1286 01:59:35 wherever we went, Yazoo or whatever
1287 town, into which we'd gone at night
1288 again--not to further endanger the
1289 farmers and the people who were being
1290 subjected to these reprisals--and
1291 drive back to Mound Bayou, which is a
1292 black town in that area, in which
1293 there was a motel. We would go back
1294 to stay at that motel and then start
1295 out the next day, planning to arrive
1296 02:00:03 in sort of the evening to visit the
1297 farmers. This is the way in which
1298 you had to function in those days out
1299 of Jackson where you walked around in
1300 the daytime and did your interviews.
1301 Does that answer the question?

1302 INTERVIEWER: Yes, it does.

1303 MALE VOICE: Pardon me before you

1304 move on to the next one. It's been

1305 an hour, so I need to start a new

1306 02:00:26 tape. Do either of you want a glass

1307 of water or anything? Can we get

1308 something for you?

1309 INTERVIEWER: No, but I could go to

1310 the bathroom. What a memory. I

1311 02:00:39 don't remember what I did yesterday.

1312 [END AFC2010039_CRHP0002_MV1.WMV]

1313 [START AFC2010039_CRHP0002_MV2.WMV]

1314 INTERVIEWER: --them on first

1315 meeting?

1316 MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, I really met

1317 them at first at a meeting. Ms.

1318 Bates would plan to have them gather

1319 not necessarily an NAACP meeting as

1320 such, but just to meet with them, to

1321 01:00:23 talk with them, and I would say to

1322 inspire them and to sort of inject

1323 discipline. To keep them together in

1324 other words. They were individual

1325 personalities. I did not get to know
them well. I only knew them as a group in the course of the meetings because they were carefully tended in the sense of for their own security. This was year before the Central High School began, the actual process of integration. I forget the year, but it was '55 or '56. Then they actually entered the next year in the fall.

The thing that impressed me was the quiet determination of Ernest Green--I remembered him--who later became a member of the NAACP Board of Directors. Another one whom I remember is Minnie Jean Brown, who had a special assertive personality.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, she did.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Some of them were quiet. Others, they were sort of followers in this sense. I'm sure they had their own individual personalities outside of the group, but those are the ones I remember most particularly as being responsive
1351 and actively ready to go forward with
the process of going to school.
1352 The others, I wouldn't say they were
followers, I would just say they were
generated in a quieter fashion. They
1356 were less vociferous or less active
1357 in the process, except that they
1358 wanted to finish their schooling.
1359 They all had that.
1361 Okay, we can continue. Thank you.
1362 INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you about
two women from South Carolina whom
you may have met, Septima Clark and
Bernice Robinson. They're cousins I
believe.
1367 MS. ROXBOROUGH: I met them, but I
didn't really know them, except by
reputation that they were very active
and engaged. But I really didn't
1371 know them.
1372 INTERVIEWER: What about Ella Baker,
who worked at the NAACP?
1374 MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes. After she
worked for the NAACP is when I met
her because she was a very forceful personality. She became focused on our youth if you recall and actually was involved in the founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee. She worked in our Department of Branches before I came on board to the NAACP. She spent considerable time traveling around the country organizing branches, eliciting memberships, developing membership campaigns, and instructing our branches how to do that. She was a very forceful woman. I was always impressed by her determination and her aggressiveness.

At the time when I first started to work for the NAACP, you didn't have that many women who were working in levels up beyond the support levels in the work arena, period—in other organizations as well. Most of the females were assistants or secretaries or that type of thing in the NAACP. For example, Lucille
Black who came in at age 17 as a secretary, she worked her way to become membership secretary it was called then of the NAACP. Bobbie Branch came in as a clerk wound up as office manager. Obviously, in NAACP in the legal department, there were always one or two females. Then when I came on board, one of the few female executives was June Shagaloff, who was a field director in education, who traveled and worked providing information and support for the legal department and our legal programs.

INTERVIEWER: Not a woman, but Jack Greenberg. What do you remember about Jack Greenberg?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, he was a young lawyer. He was on board about a year before I came on. I got to know him quite well. Very active. We were contemporaries in terms of age also. We were about the same age. He worked well with Thurgood Marshall.
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<td>I believe they were called either associate or assistant counsels during that period, the young lawyers who were brought in. He was focusing a lot on the education cases. That was one of the things that Jack focused on during the period when they were putting together cases in the various communities--about six or eight communities primarily in the south or as far west as Kansas, which eventually became the group of cases led by Brown to go up through the process on to the Supreme Court.</td>
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<td>1431</td>
<td>01:06:00</td>
<td>INTERVIEWER: What about Robert Carter? What do you remember of him in those days?</td>
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<td>01:06:27</td>
<td>MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes. Well, Bob was the associate I guess. He was a second attorney to Thurgood, who was still NAACP counsel at this point when I came on board and remained so for the next few years. Bob was the quieter one, but he also was the one</td>
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<td>who reached out in the communities and spent a lot of time and effort putting together the South Carolina cases, for example. He eventually pled in a couple of instances during those trials before the Supreme Court.</td>
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<td>He has as wonderful time. He was meticulous and concerned about amassing the information in an orderly way. He spent a lot of times questioning and really you got the feeling that he was being too meticulously difficult, but it wasn't at all. He had this commitment to make sure that nothing was left unturned and no I was undotted. As a result, it became sort of laborious sometimes, the work for the people that were working for him; that is, the assistants and the researchers. In the final analysis it was what had to be done. It was not easy, but he was willing to put himself into the task of getting this part of the work</td>
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1477 INTERVIEWER: Do you want to stop that? Can you hear the talking down there?

1480 MALE VOICE: Yeah, I can hear it.

1481 01:08:10 [break in video]

1482 MALE VOICE: Cameras rolling. Ready?

1483 INTERVIEWER: A moment ago, you mentioned that when you began working here at the NAACP the employment sort of paralleled what we saw in the larger society. That is, women in clerical roles and men in the executive roles. Over time I guess that's changed, but it also strikes me that it contrasts with a different picture in the branch system. In the branch system, women are presidents. Women do serve in roles that maybe they weren't expected to serve in.

1496 01:08:45 How has the situation changed over time?

1498 MS. ROXBOROUGH: You mean in terms of the--

1500 INTERVIEWER: [Interposing] Of women
MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, actually when you think about women's contributions to the NAACP, without the women we wouldn't have an NAACP. The person who was responsible for generating the organizing meeting was a woman. Of course, ever since then we've had women in key roles—not in the majority, but in the very key roles which were responsible for the evolution of the NAACP. I think in terms of people like Daisy Lampkin, who was a member of our national board from Pittsburgh; she traveled around the country garnering memberships and helping to organize branches. That was back in the '30s and '40s before it became fashionable or popular for women to travel. You have women who subsequently held positions in the NAACP nationally as program directors and as leaders of various divisions. For example, Althea Simmons actually succeeded
Clarence Mitchell as head of the Washington Bureau. We had Constance Baker Motley in the legal department who eventually moved up to the leadership role in the NAACP Legal Defense Fund subsequently.

Women had no defined place in the organization and Ms. Frances Hooks, the wife of Benjamin Hooks, founded when WIN, Women in the NAACP, which gave them a structure in which to function and reach out and do the things in the NAACP that they had been doing, but in an organized and recognizable fashion. You wound up having Margaret Bush Wilson become the second female to be Chairman of the Board of the NAACP. Then the vice chair has developed Roslyn Brock, who has succeeded you as chair.

As a matter of fact, I don't know if you know this in your research of the NAACP, but the 19 march in New York here in protest to lynching, the
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<td>silent march, the research in Arkansas of the lynchings and then on to Georgia was done by a female. She brought the report back for Dr. Du Bois, who was involved at that point in terms of amassing the information, which was the basis on which that march was constructed and held as a result of that report she brought back in 1918. The march subsequently was held in 1919 after the information on the lynching and the murders that she had investigated was submitted really through our Washington Bureau to the federal government. It was felt that nothing would be done, so this march evolved. Of course Dr. Du Bois was given the greater publicity for having been the leader. Actually, the responsibility of putting that together and causing it to happen was the report done by a female.</td>
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<td>INTERVIEWER: Did you have any interaction with Dr. Du Bois?</td>
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MS. ROXBOROUGH: No, no. He was even

before my time.

INTERVIEWER: I mean do you ever run

into him? You both live in New York.

I know it's a big city.

MS. ROXBOROUGH: I met him and had

written him for a copy of one of his
documents, one of his papers. He
wrote back saying he'd be delighted
to send it, to send $5. I sent the

$5 and got the paper. He was

interesting I gather from those who
knew him in our office. They would
relate stories about Dr. Du Bois and
how acerbic he could be.

INTERVIEWER: Can you share a story?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, I don't
remember them well enough to tell, so
I won't undertake to do that and
mislead the history.

INTERVIEWER: What would you like the
public to know about the work you've
done here at the NAACP?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, not really. I
never thought about the public
Civil Rights History Project

Line# Timecode Quote
1601 01:14:05 knowing much about what I do. My
1602 concern as far as my being a part of
1603 the NAACP was to do what I could in
1604 my small way to make it through its
1605 leaders and that's my satisfaction.
1606 01:14:08 INTERVIEWER: I'm sure your parents
told you don't hide your light under
1607 a bushel.
1608 MS. ROXBOROUGH: They sure did.
1609 01:14:08 INTERVIEWER: There must be something
1610 here that you've done here that you
1611 are proud of among other things.
1612 Among all the things you've done
1613 here, there must be things that stand
1614 out, something that you're happy that
1615 you did.
1616 MS. ROXBOROUGH: I'd have to give
1617 some thought to that. I can't... I've
1618 had to do a lot of different things
1619 over the years. I wound up getting
1620 into that position where it was felt
1621 that I was flexible and I could fit
1622 01:14:36 into a lot of different places doing
1623 a lot of different jobs.
1624 The reason I'm still probably at the
Civil Rights History Project

Line# Timecode Quote
1626 01:15:00 NAACP in one sense--I worked as a
1627 01:15:17 full-time person until 1997--was
1628 01:15:34 every five years I moved into a
1629 01:15:51 different department or different
1630 01:16:08 job. I have held, let's see,
1631 01:16:25 probably about 8 or 10 jobs in almost
1632 01:16:42 every department in the association
1633 01:17:09 except its accounting department. I
1634 01:17:26 can't count.
1635 01:17:43 The satisfaction I got was learning
1636 01:17:50 how the NAACP functions and how I
1637 01:18:07 could make it more effectively
1638 01:18:24 function in that particular area.
1639 01:18:41 For example, I went from the branch
1640 01:18:58 department as an assistant to Gloster
1641 01:19:15 Current and a field secretary at
1642 01:19:32 large. Now that was my baptism. If
1643 01:19:49 you traveled in the early '50s, and
1644 01:20:06 as a female, a young, unattached--I
1645 01:20:23 wasn't married then female--it was
1646 01:20:39 quite an experience. First, you had
1647 01:20:56 to be sure in the cities where you
1648 01:21:13 went and the meetings and whatever,
1649 01:21:30 that you were properly on your guard
1650 01:21:47 in terms of the male-female
interaction. Then you had to be concerned about the branch president who was an authority, but you were a young female. You had that as a thing, traveling in those days. It's no issue in later years, but it was unusual apparently for young, unattached women to travel into the kinds of byways I traveled. That was an education. I thank the NAACP for educating me, giving me the experience of being educated. Each time you had to be careful. You had to learn diplomacy. You had to learn self-protection, and you had to do your job. Now all of that was combined in the process when I started work for the NAACP. I won't go into all the departments, but I've worked in virtually every department. For me, it was always a good female when they said to me, "Well, you've done the basic organizing in the membership department. We need you as an executive assistant to the
We would like to get you to move into the executive department. So I did. I was director of operations at one point, director of programs, and I wound up being development director.

With the education I got at the NAACP and the knowledge, I could use that for marketing. Then I of course wound up going to school taking courses so that I would know the technical side of fundraising. Then you had to learn how to respect confidences. I've learned an awful lot about the leaders of the association, the executive directors primarily; and what makes them tick and how they do this, that, and the other, or what they shouldn't do, what they did do, and shouldn't happen, whatever. It was a part of the education in terms of understanding what the NAACP needed and what they needed is leaders.

It's hard for me to say to you I'm
most proud of this or that or the other. There's probably something I am most proud of. But I guess I'm proud that we were able to keep the parents inspired in Hoxie, to keep the children, walking the children to school every day, and getting them. That school board voluntarily desegregated its schools, but the parents needed support and help. I got a sense of satisfaction of walking with these children, holding their hands, going to school with them. Then they are persevering so that they wound up not being forced out of the school. It's hard for me to pick an item like an accomplishment. I don't know what accomplishment I might have achieved that would be worth talking about in the sense of an event. It would be cumulative the fact that I've been able to serve. I'm not answering your question, I know.

INTERVIEWER: It's okay. Let me ask
one more. In Hoxie and in other places where you went traveling for the NAACP, were there times where you felt in fear of your life?

MS. ROXBOROUGH: Afterwards, yes. A funny thing about it is when you're in danger--like Medgar and I were traveling around and I didn't realize I had my feet on the shotgun there--and being intimidated and going across cotton fields and other fields at night to get to a local meeting which was being held, and the fact that there were police patrolling in the Delta area, my reaction of fear has come after I've gotten through it. Because you don't have time to be afraid. I have found that after I said you're stupid. How could you get into such as situation out in the middle of nowhere and nobody on whom to call. But the fear comes as far as I can recall after you've gotten out of that particular physical situation. It does come, but later.
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<td>1751</td>
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<td>I think if you're pushed to do</td>
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<td>something or have to do it, you're</td>
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<td>1753</td>
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<td>more focused on &quot;How can I get this</td>
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<td>1754</td>
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<td>done?&quot; That's just been my</td>
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<td>1755</td>
<td></td>
<td>experience.</td>
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<td>1756</td>
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<td>My parents always had said to me</td>
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<td>you're an idiot if you get afraid</td>
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<td>1758</td>
<td></td>
<td>while you're doing something because</td>
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<td>1759</td>
<td></td>
<td>you're becoming your own worst enemy,</td>
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<td>1760</td>
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<td>and you act without logic or reason.</td>
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<td>01:20:43</td>
<td>You don't want to do that. You want</td>
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<td>to plan and try to do what is the</td>
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<td>most appropriate to safeguard</td>
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<td>1764</td>
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<td>yourself and reach that goal,</td>
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<td>whatever it is. Some things I look</td>
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<td>at now. As I said, some of the</td>
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<td>travels in the '50s, say I spent a</td>
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<td></td>
<td>summer in Arkansas traveling to the</td>
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<td>various branches--El Dorado, Arkansas</td>
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<td>1770</td>
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<td>and Cotton Plant, Arkansas, I never</td>
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<td>1771</td>
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<td>heard of it until I went there--and</td>
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<td>1772</td>
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<td>places where the white citizens in</td>
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<td>1773</td>
<td></td>
<td>the town, the power structure, the</td>
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<td>1774</td>
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<td>worst thing that they could learn was</td>
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<td>1775</td>
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<td>that a visitor for the NAACP branch</td>
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from New York was coming in to stir
up trouble. That was the kind of
environment in which I worked, so
many instances, during that five-year
period that I served as a field
secretary.
I guess I must've worked in about 40
states. Some of them, the western
north, were not as intimidating as
the south, but I traveled frequently
in Mississippi, also in Georgia, also
Alabama. Those states were where the
tensions were greatest and the people
were most fearful, including the
local units were exceedingly careful.
That was a learning experience for me
about people and how you could
survive and accommodate yourself to
staying in their homes and feeling
that you were bringing them danger,
the fact that I was there sleeping in
their room. There was nothing secret
eventually. The town knows what the
folks are doing.
Those experiences have I think made
me maybe more humane today and made me understand that people are imperfect, but they are worth any help you can give to ameliorate the problems and negative problems. I think the NAACP has had that kind of an effect in communities where it has functioned as an entity. People have felt that they could get help going to the NAACP, that there would be something done in their behalf. I think they believed that. I believe in large measure they still do. We, on the other hand, should be accountable and responsible and our leadership should be effective in the sense that they should be able to reach out to people and inspire their confidence about what they do as an example. Any help you can give to make that happen should be given. I still haven't answered your question, have I?

INTERVIEWER: That's okay. Thank you for giving your help. Thank you. I
think we're through.

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