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James Hammond

James A. Hammond

Black History Research Project of Tampa

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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project
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Florida Studies Center
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James Hammond: I was born in Tampa and went to public schools here. I was born November 11, 1929, so I'm forty-seven. I went to Lomax [Elementary School], Booker T. Washington Junior High, Middleton [High School], and then to Don Thompson, which was a vocational school. I finished from Middleton in 1946.

I left there and went to Hampton Institute in Virginia and majored in Electricity. Industrial Vocational Education was the major, and it was a five-year course. Throughout Hampton, I participated in the ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps], and I was the cadet colonel—which is the highest rank in the Hampton ROTC—and upon graduation from Hampton, was a distinguished military graduate and received a regular army commission, second lieutenant, in 1951.

Just about that time I came back to Tampa, after having finished college, and took the electrical contractors' examination and became the first black in Tampa to become a licensed class-A electrical contractor in 1951. During that time I would congratulate any black person who was a class-A any kind of contractor in this area. But I did not go into business at that time, because I had a regular army commission and immediately went to service in January of fifty-one [1951], and spent almost five years in the service in Germany, Washington, England, and Oklahoma. I spent time in military schools in command positions, and came out and became an active reserve officer in Tampa in 1955, until this year.

Primarily, that was my beginning. I came back to Tampa and went into the electrical contractors business in 1954—and I got out in October, so I would say the last of fifty-

four [1954], and the first of 1955. I went into business for the first time, and from fifty-five [1955] to 1970 I was in the electrical contractors business, and had the opportunity to be very successful at that. I was also fortunate in that period to get a major contract in the electrical business to do just junior high school: total electrical system, fire alarm system, intercom system. I also did the complete electrical remodeling system at the Hillsborough County Six Mile Creek Convict Camp.

Otis Anthony: This was about what time?

JH: It must have been around 1964, sixty-five [1965]. Those were the last major jobs that I did prior to going into (inaudible) at that time the civil rights movement was starting. I came out of the service in the latter part of fifty-four [1954], early part of fifty-five [1955], got very disenchanted with the whole segregated situation and began to do several things.

Number one, I became indignant at the fact that no blacks could use the library, so I incited on that. So, that was an insight to be able to use the library card to go in and withdraw books, which I was refused prior to that time because I was black.

OA: Suppose you tell us more about the fifties [1950s] in Tampa?

JH: During the fifties [1950s] this was where you got very involved, and the fact that discrimination had started an organization called the Young Adults for Progressive Action. And that organization was composed of anybody that was interested in trying to do away with discrimination. A lot of people—because of the younger adults, you had to be twenty-one to thirty-five. We felt that if you were over thirty-five you were too engrained, not having a more progressive view, feeling to change things, empty.

But part of our motto was "Now is the time to change things." In those days, a lot of the people involved were school teachers who wanted to get involved, who weren't afraid of (inaudible) their jobs. Also people from the community, from all walks of life, who wanted to do something and get this town moving progressively in destroying discrimination. We met weekly, sometimes over the weekends and holidays. So, our first target or strategy was where could we do something that would have the biggest impact? One of the things we thought about was supermarkets and places that blacks bought.

So one of the first things we did was to organize ourselves into contacting the supermarket owners and the merchants. That was our second objective, to contact the merchants downtown to get them to stop discriminating and to hire blacks. There were no blacks working, even as bag boys, in stores. No stores hired blacks, except as janitors and other typical stereotype jobs. We felt that our first major thrust, almost simultaneously, would be in supermarkets. And our secondary thrust would be the downtown stores. So, we talked to merchants, and they did not hear what we were saying, so we decided to start the boycott in Tampa, and in doing so we started talking with B&B Supermarket people, who refused to (inaudible); located downtown on Morgan [Street].

OA: What year was this boycott?

JH: Around fifty-six [1956], fifty-seven [1957]. What we did was make a head-count, particularly on the weekends, of how many blacks by numbers worked in the store and how many whites worked in the store, and we also made an estimate of the stores that had from 80 to 95 percent of blacks buying, as opposed to whites buying. So the highest head-count of blacks buying, we decided that we would use this as our first target.

So then we went downtown—had a very large percentage of blacks—to the store on Twenty-Second [Street] and Eighth Avenue, which is part of the Kash 'n' Karry chain. Food Carnival, I believe, was the name of the store. There was another store which opened up later on in Progress Village on the Causeway. Those were our major stores and we picketed them for weeks and weeks, and finally we pretty well detoured all blacks from buying at these stores. The stores went down to practically no business. B&B Supermarket finally threatened us and me personally. They—B&B—filed an injunction against us, and then we actually went to court and there was a court decision. And they filed suit against us for economic and punitive damages for the fact that we caused them to lose a lot of money.

OA: You all weren't incorporated or anything were you?

JH: No, we weren't incorporated as such, but we were an incorporate body of young adults, but they were still unique personally because—I guess I was financially secure, since I had a business and had some financial stability. Therefore, they figured they could sue, so we were sued as an organization and individually.

OA: Were you chairman or president?

JH: I was president of the Young Adults.

OA: What happened?

JH: They got an injunction against us picketing and boycotting. You know, I don't really know how that case turned out. We were sued, the case was continued, and it was in the federal court. I don't know what really happened in that court, but we were enjoined for picketing, and the punitive damages still hung on. But the store did finally negotiate to hire, so blacks started as cashiers and bag boys. It did end up with some material advantages. They also hired some blacks as meat cutters.

OA: At that time, did you all have any inspiration in terms of civil rights movements, such as the national civil rights movement?

JH: Not really, no. It was primarily a local thing.

OA: Was the idea of Young Adults picketing an economic approach to the problems of blacks? Whose brainchild was that?

JH: It was really a group kind of thing. I guess as president I had some of my thinking, but everyone planned. We were really a stirring committee of about a dozen or so. There was Florine Jones, Zelma Hodges. They were very active. Helen Williams, Wilson Sweeny, quite a number of teachers.

OA: Was the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] strong at this time?

JH: Well, we felt at that point same as it is now: a lot of old folks that were moving too slow. They had been here for a long time. We had an agreement that we would not work against the NAACP. We did work with the NAACP, but we still had our own thing so that we wouldn't have to go through so much bureaucracy, and we could do whatever we wanted to do in so many words. Overnight, we started seeing things change because of our economic boycott. We figured a lot of people in the NAACP were tired and afraid of their jobs. Bob Saunders was field executive director of state and very active, and I worked very close with him and he knew what we were doing, and he kept saying, "Why don't you become part of the NAACP?" And we kept saying, "We'll work with you, but we still want to do our own thing."

Another thing we did was met with a guy by the name of Coby Armstrong, [who] at that time was head of the Merchants [Association]. We sat down and met with him, and we said, "[On] Easter we're going to boycott this damn town and blacks are going to have some jobs. It's just that simple." They got upset about it and called a community meeting, and we sat down and finally worked out some negotiations that we would. And we said we were tired of hearing that blacks weren't trained or qualified because they never gave them a job, but we do have people that are qualifiable; they can learn if you teach them.

So we worked on the situation and got them to set up a training program, and we got the Urban League to be the vehicle that would do the training. They would hire the merchants to come down and train the folk. We would do the recruiting. So that was the first major thrust.

OA: This was a sequence of events? How long was the process?

JH: From the first meeting, we were serious. We didn't give a damn. We wanted them to hire blacks. Now, this was like two months before Easter. We said if they didn't hire, there would be an economic boycott for Easter. And they hurried and got some folks together to come and train our people. And by this effort, we got the first black cashiers in our stores.

OA: That won a great deal of creditability in the community?

JH: Yes, that won a great deal of creditability with both whites and blacks. This was also back in the fifties [1950s]. Say fifty-seven [1957] or fifty-eight [1958].

OA: Did you encounter a great deal of resistance personally from the white community?

JH: Not really. The resistance was more of ain't nobody qualified and how hard it is to be a cashier.

OA: Did your imaginary resistance expect more?

JH: We didn't care; we weren't concerned about resistance. We were very dedicated. We were successful in two supermarkets.

Again, we did the same things with the banks. This was probably the third phase of our force. The Merchant Association agreed to be the catalyst between the businesses and us, and to act as the focal point of dealing with all of this. The Merchant Association, back in fifty-nine [1959], agreed—no, this was probably in the sixties [1960s] we started dealing with banks. And we got some tellers; again we got the bank to hire and train tellers. I think the First National Bank hired the first black teller. And then we dealt with the Exchange and the Marine Bank. Around this time our next biggest thrust was with General Telephone. By 1962, sixty-three [1963], we started dealing with the theaters. We wanted to integrate the theaters. And so the Merchants again were the focal points.

Bob Thomas was the key black person in this town. Perry Harvey, Senior, was a key person in keeping the young people—the young dudes—level-headed and to keep the white structure to want to meet with the merchants. He acted sort of like a buffer or catalyst. Blythe Andrews, Senior, Reverend [A. Leon] Lowry got involved.

OA: What was the relationship with the Young Adults now that Reverend Lowry had started?

JH: Reverend Lowry was in the NAACP during that period. The Young Adults got together around this time on trying to—again with the Merchants acting as the focal points—for the lunch counter, going for the lunch counter. Around this time we were meeting with the Merchants to try to pull together this continuous effect, and then the Young Adults and the NAACP—which Reverend Lowry was with the NAACP. We were both pulling together.

We got an agreement that they would open lunch counters. We worked out a scheme by which we would get so many blacks to actually go to ten different stores at one time the first day, so that there would be a massive effect. The Young Adults had the responsibility of working out the scheme and activating it. Reverend Lowry was very involved in being a front runner in going with a group to lunch counters downtown. We had people who agreed to go all different times. It was really an orchestrative effect.

OA: Was part of the orchestration some kind of police protection in terms of them being aware?

JH: Yeah, part of the whole thing; this was worked out between us and the merchants.

The merchants also knew what day and what time we would be there, and they agreed they would serve us. All this was worked out beforehand. The merchants agreed to serve us after the pressures from the Merchants Association through this biracial group. I think around this time the mayor appointed a biracial group; this was part of the beginning of Biracial Committee. And the merchants were brought into the meetings. We had the responsibility of pulling everything together. The police department was brought in for protection for all the stores. Everyone knew what was going on, except for the mass of the people. It all worked out smoothly.

OA: This was to prepare the people for acceptance?

JH: It was to prepare the people for acceptance, and also to minimize any dangers that might have occurred.

OA: What were some of the reactions of the white community and the press?

JH: Again, they were all organized and coordinated, so everyone was supportive. The press was there, but supportive. Nothing went derogatively. White structure was concerned with the image of this town economically, so that was to our advantage. So they were supportive of not letting anything happen. No shooting, killing or scaring people from downtown. The Merchants were supportive, because they knew if it were disrupted no one would come downtown and buy. So the whole strategy was economics.

Around sixty-four [1964]—I had tried for some time to get the president of General Telephone to hire blacks in that system, and again the same Merchants group we went back to, and told them that if we did not get a meeting we would do something drastic and boycott. The next day we got a meeting. Our strategy again was that we wanted blacks working in telephone companies, and their excuse was, "No blacks qualified, no blacks applied; they can't meet our qualifications." So we said okay, we'll train them. This must have been after sixty-five [1965]; at this time I was administrator of community relations.

Let me stop in between here. So about sixty-four [1964], this Biracial Committee was working, and myself and the group that was meeting with them had a Biracial committee. We were sort of the catalyst between them representing the agitating force.

Around this time another major thrust (inaudible) made happen. I felt education was being screwed over and that our kids didn't have the best of everything. So I said we need to have some kids. I guess this whole idea of rehabilitary needs, to have some kids trained and trained early now, uh, are a little behind. I saw in statistics, twelfth grade kids through test reading on second grade level and 97.4 percent of our black kids failed the college entrance exams, and started looking at that these educational statistics. In fact we need to do something.

So one of our royal things was that we needed to start a pre-school program, a program to bring young kids in early—this was in 1964. And then a man was seen by the university

in the educational system out here. He indicated the fact that we needed something and that he would help us put together something what we needed. And we established a group among ourselves, a group of doctors from the university. And by that time OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] was talked about as being created in sixty-four [1964]. OEO was out there, and by that time I finally got somebody to say, "Hey, man, there's a lot of money in OEO to do something with; won't you put together something?" So I let the university help us put together a proposal in 1964.

And that time I was politically involved with [U.S. Representative] Sam Gibbons's campaign, and I politically got involved with one of the people in the top story committee to get Sam elected. As I said, we needed time of theirs to get some money, so we put together a proposal in the latter part of sixty-four [1964].

And around the same time so many things started happening. The Biracial Committee and all this turmoil was going on, and they realized that they need a permanent Biracial Committee, and they needed really something to happen. They needed somebody to really work with it day to day because the busy people couldn't get together every day; we were meeting once a week every Sunday, and we needed somebody to be the day-to-day person. So Bob Thomas and Cody Fowler asked if I would do this job to do the day-to-day work. You know, I had my business to run, and I ran my business, and I got to say, "Sure, I think I could do that job," so I sort of began to run my business at the same time and started working with this on a day-to-day basis. We were out to have some fun.

So there again, I went to the mayor and got the city council to appropriate some funds, like sixteen or seventeen thousand dollars, that was to pay me a salary and to give me an office. And the first time, we didn't have an office, and they didn't know what to do with me. So I agreed to spend my full-time on this job. And then the commission tried to isolate me from politics, which was one of the things that I wanted to do, and I agreed to do that. And they had nowhere to put me, and they asked Sam Gibbons could I work out of his space.

So for three months I worked out of Sam Gibbons's office in the federal building, being a city employee there. I began to get this thing done and finally they gave me authorization to put an office up, so I said, "What office?" and they said downtown where the action was, and then they agreed to it. They gave me a budget and I got with Harold Wolfe. Harold Wolfe is now dead, but he was the owner of Wolfe Brothers [Department Store], who was another one of the key people. And Harold agreed to give the space of the building, so I got the space of the building, so I got the space remodeled and I was one of the first class situations.

And, finally, I went to work with the city, still running my business; this was in sixty-five [1965]. At the same time this thing with the young kids was being developed—all this was happening almost simultaneously, and now I'm working full-time so that I could spend more time of do some things. We got a proposal together; we got some people of the power structure to get a hold of Sam [Gibbons] and say that Jim had this idea of bringing in a pre-school program together, so we are trying to get some money. If we got

some money we could do something.

So we put a proposal together, and got the university student support, and at the time there was a Dr. Lescider and Dr. Douglas—females, and they were both Ph.D.s—and Pat Barnes, who was with the League of Women Voters, who was very active in working with us on a lot of things. [They] helped us to put this proposal together. The school system agreed that they didn't want to have anything to do with it. So I had to go out personally and get some housing for this. I went to the Lily Whites and the Immediate Temple and some churches, and got them to agree to give us the space. And I also got two people from the school system to help work, a guy named Dr. Henderson—he's not here any longer—Dr. Hernandez, he was with the school, he was a Latin guy. And we got the proposal together.

And then the university backed out because there was pressure from the school system. The school system didn't want to have nothing to do with it, so they started putting pressure. They said, "Why should someone in a business do this thing?" They tried to destroy it. So, I took the proposal myself and said, the hell with it, and finalized the proposal myself. And then got my commissioners to get me an entrée, got Sam Gibbons to get me an entrée to sit down with OEO.

So I went to Washington [D.C.], spent some time with OEO, and [got] a commitment from them to find us. We had a budget that was half a million dollars, and by mid sixty-five [1965] we got it funded for \$535,000.00 and got the unkind contributions from the others in the school system. Now, once we got the money, I became the project director. I wanted to be sure it ran the way I wanted it to run.

I became project director and got back with the university once I got the money; then everybody wanted to be a part of it. The school system then agreed that they would give me all the schools I needed. I set the program up with twelve or twenty schools, so much money to buy equipment—you see, I was going to buy equipment and set up outside the school system. The school realized what we had, that we had the money. Then the superintendent agreed that their people could help us. The early childhood people in school were on loan to me to sit down and work out an arrangement and all the schools.

So, we tried it in twenty schools, elementary schools that we sat up centers, a room at each school. They agreed to let the teachers from the school system be a part of the project, and they hired a coordinator from the school system. I also got the Health Department to create a health component. I got with Dr. Neal of the Health Department to let me hire a nurse and let a nurse be a part of the program. I also got with the Urban League, because I wanted somebody black to have something to do.

So, I got the Urban League to have a social economic facility service component, and I got—the university, now, they wanted to be a part of the program. The university became a part of it, the same people again, and they became a research component. So we actually set up the first major program in the United States, that had five hundred kids in the program and the control of five hundred kids, the research component, the education

component, the social service component, and the health component and the city businessmen, and myself was the director over the project.

We ran our project for eighteen months—this was before Head Start. It was called COPE, Compensatory Pre-Primary Education. Head Start was started, and around the country the only thing that been for the discipline of pre-school kids were the program in New York; a few programs had forty or fifty kids in it. They were all small programs. We had the largest program. The Head Start got started in 1965 or 1966, and then the school system fought my commissioners because why should we have business and a program? There was a lot of pressure, a lot of fighting going on, and so finally the school system forced the issue and got congressmen to OEO eighteen months later to turn the program over to the school system.

So the program was taken by the school system and became COPE Head Start. I pride myself as being the godfather of the Head Start program in this system and got it started into the school system, and it continued in the school system today. It's Head Start now. Claudia Silas was a part of the initial assistant director, and Evelyn Hills, who has just retired, was another assistant director in the school system that got into classes. All these people were involved.

Generally back in that area that happened, while [I was] with Community Relations Commission, we had several things good. I became administrator of the city of Tampa around sixty-five [1965] and we started and started screening out a lot of things. At this time we started dealing with the University of Tampa. I sued the University of Tampa for admission to the school, and they were denying me to go to class at night. I was taking a course in stock market. This was in 1965. Anyway, they denied me admission to the school, so then I went to the NAACP and filed suit against the University of Tampa. So that was the first suit and that went to the courts.

OA: Did you win?

JH: Eventually the university (inaudible)—I think it was done without a court final decree; they finally agreed at some point in sixty-six [1966] or sixty-seven [1967].

At the same time, the Young Adults, they also started the voters registration drive; this maybe going back earlier now in the sixties [1960s]. We started the voters registration drive and we raised about four thousand dollars. We also raised our own defense, cause we sued Penny Savers Supermarket and we paid the attorney fees, and we paid the NAACP to help in our legal litigation. We did a lot of things to raise money to help our own color.

In the sixties [1960s] the Young Adults' thing was the voter registration; we had successful drive raising about four-thousand dollars. We had about six or eight thousand people registered in a nine-day period. We had a massive drive. We got the League of Women voters to work with us, which was major white, and thirteen other groups worked with us, who agreed to write to letters. We had trucks and buses and cars, we had [people

going] from door to door in the rain, we had white women workers. We had people like Helen Davis, who is now in the legislature, who is a representative up there. Helen was very influential in working with us. Pat Barnes, who is now in Washington, who was working very closely with us; these are people and they got other people from the League [of Women Voters] to work with us. They were dedicated.

We went into bars, we went on the street corners, we also got a bill in the legislature to force the books to open so many days at night. The Young Adults got books opened at night down here in the county through the legislature during this period. On Saturdays we got the books opened; we got people off the streets on Saturday. We had to take them—they wouldn't bring the books, so we had to take them to the courthouse. We did this on Saturdays during the day; mainly on Saturday because everybody worked. Several thousand people registered in a nine-day period which was a major thrust from about ten to sixteen thousand for registered voters in this county. This was either in the latter part of the—fifty-nine [1959] or fifties [1950s] or the early sixties [1960s]. It was part of our young adult program. That was another one of our goals; it was economics and then political goals.

Now, all these things that happened [when I was] with the city now, working full-time without being a secretary. We finally got the second year budget to hire, I think, one or two people. This is why I hired John Daniels and Goosby Jones and Yvonne Harris; maybe next year George Davis, probably second or third, or something like that.

But during this period of time, I got tired of companies telling me they would hire blacks in these businesses now in secretary jobs. They would qualify—the same old thing again. So I said okay and I went to IBM [International Business Machines] and said, "Look, I went to the city and I started doing some checking and found out what I could do to accelerate this thing." So I found a company that had a training system that would help train people in clerical work and to type. I got the city to give me about four or five thousand dollars from my budget to get this equipment that was called mine; it was equipment that had earphones, tapes and a system. I went to IBM and begged them and got them to give me twelve typewriters, manual typewriters on loan for a month, and I kept them for about two years. And was able to persuade companies if I trained somebody you would hire them. I went to companies and started with the biggest companies first, and got them and got jobs, and then with the job commitment with the typewriters and equipment. I set my first training program for clerk typist in this town, no money except that one piece of equipment.

OA: What year?

JH: Nineteen sixty-six; this was when I was with the city. That was our next dated manpower phase. We started training. CEP [Concentrated Employment Program] was also doing clerical training. This was the first CEP had some money; they were paying to stipend. We had all the jobs, we had twelve people and twelve typewriters; we had twelve people, twelve jobs. We trained them with twelve commitments.

I required everybody to come to training. It cost fifty cents a day. We got people who were basically unemployed. CEP was paying people thirty-five dollars a week stipend. We got people to come to us to train them and pay us fifty cents a week to put some money down, no stipend, and to come to us full-time. We train and have a job for them at the end. So I think two weeks before the end they went to the job and got exposed to the job half a day: half a day with us and half with the job. They all went to work.

Those were the first major thrust and training for clerical work. From that we had about thirty-five companies, including all the major banks, all the major department stores—all the major industries committed, sight and seen. I said, "I don't want your interview. When you interviewing, we do the training and we do the hiring." They thought I was crazy. But I got that first commitment, and it worked.

OA: Would you say that it was generally what the members of the establishment accepted and demanded?

JH: They charted positions for all women.

OA: But prior to that time, were they more receptive to men?

JH: We must remember these were teller jobs and sales clerk jobs in stores, so most of the positions were women positions. The big breakthrough was when we got the General Telephone Company—this was during sixty-six [1966]—I got General Tel to give me an audience and got them to give me a whole building, every conference room in the building, and also give their personnel people to work for me and to give me an opportunity for their people to help our people get some teachers.

So, I got some teachers to volunteer their time to work in the evening. I got them full-time and we set up a recruiting night. We had everybody who passed the test. We would hire them for ninety days, and they agreed to it. I would take about fifteen or twenty people; we had about four or five hundred people that came and applied for the training. We brought in a hundred people, and we got ten classes at the General Tel building. They volunteered their time, the curriculum and they put together a package and we brought people there every afternoon from six to nine. For ten weeks we trained eighty-eight people, finished that training, and returned to work within ninety days.

That was a major breakthrough, Gen Tel. They went from every type job to keep from being angry. Mr. Franklin, my tellers, linemen, repairmen, switchboard operators, clerk, receptionist, and the whole thing. Three years later, 82 percent of all those people were still working at Gen Tel. Willie Mitchell was one of those products. He's in management. Hardy is another one. That thing (inaudible) until Gen Tel adopted that program, that concept, worldwide, and they became one of my biggest ambassadors as far as recruiting blacks into their system. They started with sixty blacks and twenty-one other, none domestics. We pledged sixty people in ninety days that went to work. All the other in domestic work at Gen Tel.

At the time, we had a foundation called Lane Brown Foundation that Cody Fowler drew about. They gave us matching money. Whatever money we could match, a hundred thousand dollars, they would give us. So I went around to the merchants that we had been working with from clerical training, and other merchants, and got them to give me sixty thousand dollars. They matched the sixty thousand dollars, and this set up another training program. We brought men in, young adults primarily from eighteen to twenty-five. We set up some basic education training and got companies to agree to hire them. We got the same job commitment holdings in Westinghouse [Electric], all of the companies.

Ah, the same time another thrust that I wanted to do was to set up a economic base, economic development, so I got these companies to give us a slot working in the county. Marketing, sales and the whole gamut, with the idea of spreading our economic development thing. Our thing was to start a black business that young adults could run on and control the economic base using that grant; this was in sixty-six [1966] or sixty-seven [1967].

At the same time the staff was beginning to organize in West Tampa and Ybor City, Belmont Heights. Belmont Heights and West Tampa were the central areas; a young club, young adult clubs. We were going and trying to find out what needed to be done, what kind of things we could do, trying to meet our young adult training program, so everybody began to see us doing something. Tying them into jobs—we had a good field that we were giving people jobs. We were doing something. We had training going on. Everybody was in clerical training on the job, and everybody, male or female—the young adults which were in training were mostly men, because we wanted to do something with men, cause everything else had been female. We got guys—all drop-outs, just about; a few high school graduates—and we tied them into our training, and everybody was young, about twenty-five of them.

And then when all hell broke loose in Tampa about sixty-seven [1967], whenever the riot was, we were able to have a staff at this time to get involved with all of the community. And during that period of time we—the young adult training outfit—we had several things tied in the community. When the riots happened, we were able to really get back into the community and pull together Norris Monroe and several folks to help set up a military thing.

I got with the sheriff. I told the sheriff that I'd like to set up a military formation, a platoon and the officers are militarily structured. I think we pulled some guys together, something to give them some leadership roles and let them have the responsibility of quality ranks. I needed something to identify the guys with that nobody could duplicate. I suggested that we go over to the Army-Navy store and buy some helmets and paint them white so that they could be identified or seen and obviously stand out. And they did this, and that same night we had to back all the National Guard out of the town so that these guys could take over.

OA: You all created the White Hats. Was that in a sense something to protect the

community from the fact that the National Guard was coming in?

JH: Well, not only in, but the National Guard was out there, and I was usually in position where I knew what the sheriff was gonna do, the police were going to do, and what the community was going to do. Them cats had tanks and machine guns and tear gas and everything. They had been ordered to use them. There was no question in my mind that blood was going to be shed, and blacks had nothing but bricks and sticks and puppies. So the thing was what could we do to try and get the folks out of the community, because the hostility was there.

OA: So was the National Guard in the community?

JH: The National Guard was employed the first night our group arrived. The first National Guard was employed throughout this town. They were actively employed on Central Avenue, Belmont Heights, everywhere, with guns, rifles and tanks. It was the second day of the riot that the White Hats—the first night that we got out there and became to deal with this thing. I was home, and somebody called and said all the shit is breaking loose on Central Avenue. That afternoon, I got the news that all hell was breaking loose, that whole evening and night. I didn't get off for two days and two nights.

It was the second day. The first day the police was out there, the second night the National Guard was out. It must have been the third night that the White Hats were formed, that we went out in the community. I had asked the sheriff to pull everybody out. The National Guard was ready to roll in this community and they were asked to pull out, and the sheriff gave me the autonomy to deal with the whole thing.

OA: How did you get the police to agree to the White Hats?

JH: I got guys like John Daniels and Goosby Jones and George Davis. I had the four of us. We started hitting the enemies in the streets. This was the second day of the riots, and we saw that the people were really stirred up. We were looking for some of the guys who had worked with the neighborhood. And we saw some of the leaders out there, and we said, "Look, man, how about let's meeting tomorrow morning in my office and see what the hell we can do?"

At the same time, after I got them to say okay, I told the Sheriff, "Look, I got guys that I got to meet and put together, and I need your cooperation to give us a chance to put these guys out, stop all this bloodshed that was going to happen."

And then the sheriff at that time, the National Guard's commanding generals—this was down at the sheriff's office. Ernie Myers was involved, and the other black officer was involved in some of these conversations. And I gave the sheriff the idea of putting together his military structure for these guys. And I said, "I got your commitment that if I pull the guys together that you will get some helmets." I indicated what we were going to do, and they agreed to do it. And by that time, I said, "Sheriff, I found these guys. I need these helmets painted. I need one car." They agreed to do it.

And that afternoon, the National Guard was ready to employ their people back out in the streets. I asked the sheriff to pull them in, to let us go out and take over the things. The idea of anything happening, we are going to take off. And these guys went out there. We coordinated the thing and explain what we had to do, to try to get the people to squash the whole thing and stop all this fighting. The next day it rained, and by that time things had subsided. The White Hats were still out there the second day, and that really was the end of it.

The next thing was I got a grant EEO [Equal Employment Opportunity] to deal with discrimination with the companies, a small grant to hire somebody. At that same time, we continued work through the same service, that manpower thing that we were working on. The youth thing kept moving, businesses kept moving. We had five or six things going on as Community Relations.

OA: When you ran for political office, what [did] you run for?

JH: That was the time when I was working with the Young Adults; it was in the latter fifties [1950s]. I ran for the election board, member of the election board. At that time there was a county election board in the district; that was the only position that was a district. Everything else was county wide. I ran that office and the president of the election board appointed all the people to work in the precincts, so the position had no blacks working in the precincts.

end of interview