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Reverend A. Leon Lowry: In response to your to question, Mr. Jones, I was born in Savannah, Georgia, reared in New York City, attended public schools there in New York City and Brooklyn. I attended Morehouse College, graduated from Morehouse College, and did graduate studies at Andover Newton Theological School, Newton Center, Massachusetts. I had one year of graduate study at Boston University, and another year of graduate study at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Subsequent to that, I came to Atlanta, Georgia as part of the faculty at Morehouse College and the first dean of men. While in Massachusetts, I also pastored Massachusetts Avenue Baptist Church, which was my first pastory. After leaving Morehouse College, I pastored the C.T. Walker Tabernacle Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia for nine years.

In 1956, I came to Tampa, on January first. From that time until the present time, I have been minister here in Beulah Baptist Church. During these twenty-two years in Tampa and Hillsborough County, I've been president of the State Conference of NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] Branches. I led the sit-in demonstrations, organized them and led them, desegregating lunch counters, restaurants, and also led in desegregating the Tampa transits lines. Served on the Bi-Racial Committee of Tampa, also served as chairman of the Commission of the Community Relations. Became founder, prime mover, of the Community Federal Saving and Loans Association, which is a biracial bank here in Tampa, the first of its kind on the west coast of Florida.

I serve currently as moderator of the Florida West Coast Association. I've been part-time instructor at the University of South Florida in the area of black studies, also part-time instructor at Hillsborough County Community College in the area of religions of the world. I have served on various committees here in the community, such as the Advisory Committee of the University of South Florida, the National Conference of Christians and Jews, a board member of Junior Achievement, a board member of the Hillsborough County Community Mental Health Center, Vice Chairman of the Crisis Center Council.

First black ever elected to a public office here in Hillsborough County, that is the Hillsborough County School Board.

That brings you up to date. There are some others, but I don't know if you necessarily need them.

Herbert Jones: Reverend Lowry, can you tell us what were the conditions of blacks when you first came to Tampa?

LL: When I first came to Tampa, Tampa was a highly visible segregated city. Blacks were not allowed to eat in the restaurants; they were not allowed to eat at lunch counters. There were, in the dime stores, holes cut in the front glass, and blacks would have to stand outside on the sidewalk and be served through the hole cut in the glass. They were mostly elevator operators, maids, messengers, janitors in the courthouse and the banks. That was about the substance of it.

On the buses, of course, blacks were seated as they were accustomed to in the South, in the rear, while whites were seated from the front to about the middle of the bus. There were no beaches to which blacks could go. The city owned golf links, and the only one available to blacks was Rogers Park, and that was a poorly kept golf course. Of course, it is now different. Blacks were relegated to menial tasks just about everywhere in Tampa. They did not serve on any committees, and all the schools were segregated. Everything was segregated. They had a segregated hospital, the old Clara Frye. Everything was separate, but real unequal.

Shirley Smith: What prompted you to start this movement of sit-ins, the struggle to help integrate these systems?

LL: Well, I had been involved in things of this nature in Augusta, Georgia prior to coming to Tampa. For many years, as I grew up from childhood, my father before me was a fighter for human rights and dignity and for first class citizenship for blacks. And the thing was accentuated by the awakening of blacks across the South with the kind of thing that Mrs. Rosa Parks did, and also the sit-in demonstrations that occurred in North Carolina and out in Kansas City. And at this particular time, Martin Luther King and Ralph Abernathy and [Fred] Shuttlesworth and a number of others in Alabama and Mississippi were involved. And just total feeling and awareness that we had to do something and nobody else would take a stand.

So I suppose in part it was a spinoff of what was happening in other areas. But the whole thing—that is, the idea of fighting for first class citizenship—had been ingrained and been taught many, many, many years before. So it was not a difficult thing to just continue and involve myself here in Tampa. It was a dangerous thing. It marked one and made one very, very visible when one took leadership in that area, because there were those who were in power and who occupied a certain position and did not intend to very easily relinquish their position and power and their place, lording it over blacks in the community.

SS: When you first started these sit-ins and marches, were the blacks in Tampa eager to help you?

LL: Not the adults, the children in junior high school and senior high school. In fact, not even adult members of the NAACP would involve themselves in it. As a result of this, I had to be responsible for perhaps some two hundred youngsters, who were real eager to share and to participate. One thing I must say: even though the adults did not participate as such, they did not prohibit their children from so doing.

At the same time, the legislature of the state of Florida demanded that I appear in Tallahassee and bring all of the records of the NAACP. In fact, they subpoenaed all of the records of the NAACP. I did respond to the subpoena and went to Tallahassee, but without the records. I was cited for contempt of the legislature, and they threatened to put me in jail. Of course, the threat was never carried through to completion. I didn't get to jail. Some others, in other sections, did. For some unknown reason, I was not jailed. When I walked out of the hearing, I did not return.

The cooperation came from the young people, the children, not from the adults.

HJ: During this time, what was your so-called black bourgeoisie doing? The black middle class? How did they—?

LL: Sitting on their hands, doing nothing. Looking on, saying that the children were going to get killed. Many of them saying that I was a troublemaker, and then there were some others who secretly admired what was happening, but stood far off. They did nothing.

HJ: Did they provide, say, monies or any other subsidy?

LL: No, not that I can recall. It was the NAACP that I was heading. It was struggling. I borrowed money to keep the local office open, paid that money back when the state conference met. That's the way we existed, or subsisted.

HJ: Do you remember some of the younger people that was in the march that are in Tampa today?

LL: Well, one has gone on. The late Judge George Edgecomb was involved. One of the daughters of Mr. Pride, and he'll have to give you her first name, because unfortunately, I did not keep a daily diary. There is a Forte, F-o-r-t-e, who drives with the Tampa Trailways. I'm not too sure, but his name was Clarence. There are many of them around, but their names escape me at this point in time. There are a number of them around; they are scattered across the country now, but a few of them are here. I'm really disturbed that I did not keep a record of them.

SS: In your marches or demonstrations, were you ever met with violence?

LL: Attempted. I had police protection, and the youngsters had it. We usually formed our line of march at St. Paul A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal] Church, in the basement. There, I instructed the youngsters, and we marched downtown. We were given police protection. No attempts of violence were made, as far as the children were concerned. All the attempts at intimidation and violence made were directed toward me, and even to the shooting in my home; threats of bombing of the church, threats from the Ku Klux Klan.

I was never bodily harmed. There were those who were after me, with baseball bats and ax handles and things of that nature, but because of the proximity of officers assigned to guard me, I never was harmed, fortunately. There are bullet holes in the windows of the house over there that are still there, and you can take a look at them. This happened during the heyday of the demonstrations.

I couldn't use my telephone at certain time of night, because it just went off, and we assumed that somebody was cutting it off downtown or someplace. I got many threatening telephone calls, and many instances when I picked up the telephone, the language that came over it was quite profane. "You black this," and, "You better do this, that, and the other," this kind of thing. More to worry you and to keep you from sleeping and things of that nature. Fortunately, as I say, I was not bodily harmed.

HJ: So after the gun shot through your window, were you dismayed any?

LL: No. In response to the news media, Channel 13, Channel 8, all of whom came out to the house, and the [*Tampa*] *Tribune* reporters, they raised the same question. So I said, "I am now more determined than ever to fight harder for what I believe to be right. And instead of frightening me, this has just solidified my determination to continue the fight to the very end, come what may. If my life is taken, it will be taken, but I am going to fight on through, until this thing is accomplished."

HJ: So how long within that struggle—how long did it last, before you were allowed to sit and eat in the diners?

LL: Anywhere from approximately three to six months. The Bi-Racial Committee became involved. This was headed by Mr. Cody Fowler, and on that committee was the late Perry Harvey [Senior], C. Blythe Andrews [Senior]. Jim Hammond was on that committee; he led the Young Adults for Progressive Action at that particular time. We met at the boardroom of the Exchange National Bank and discussed our strategies on how we would proceed. They asked for a moratorium on demonstrations, to which I agreed, while we worked on this matter around the table, negotiating.

The first meeting I recall very distinctly, and I felt somewhat frustrated—well, "somewhat" is not the proper word there; that's a mild term. Very, very frustrated, because the downtown merchants, who had been really been hit hard, because people would not come downtown to shop and they were hurting. So it was the pocketbook now, and stockholders were also raising questions about this business. I sat and listened. They

said nothing; they did not respond whatever.

I started to leave that meeting but Bob Thomas, who is president of Bob Thomas Enterprises at Port Sutton, Robert Thomas, said to me, "Don't feel that way. Give them an opportunity to listen and hear you out, and we're going to meet again." And I accepted his advice. I say I, because I was the prime mover at that particular time, anything else that came; others wanted to get on the bandwagon a little bit later on. So of course, up came Brother Hammond with his group. and they wanted to get in and become involved in some things, and did become involved.

So we went back for a second meeting. At the second meeting the merchants talked, and we agreed on the manner in which we would approach the desegregation of the lunch counters and the restaurants and so on, hotels and what have you. It was done in this manner: that we would not descend on downtown wholesale, but that we would pick certain blacks, couples, and we would screen them. We would sit down and brief them and talk with them about their approach.

All right, we have won a victory, so we don't go in now just throwing things around and behaving as the individuals on the other side had been behaving, because they were real unkind; they were profane. Now that we had won a victory, we felt that we could afford to be magnanimous. We talked about this business of tipping and so on, and we talked about courtesy. At the same time, the store managers and the owners also briefed their employees and had them to understand what they expected from them, certain types of behaviors.

So it went off very well. The press was there. We did not inform the press beforehand what day we would be doing this. So each day there would be black couples going into various sections of the community going into restaurants and sitting down, and from that point on until the present time.

Then we decided that the next step was to get to jobs. Because to have the bars let down so you could go and get prime ribs, but you would be paying seven dollars for a dinner; if you did not have the seven dollars and yet you had the privilege of doing so, that didn't mean too much. You could, but if you didn't have the money, you were still sort of frustrated. So it was a matter, then, of getting jobs.

So the Young Adults for Progressive Action, plus the Commission of Community Relations, involved itself in the job aspect. We went from that point on, and continue to make progress with General Telephone Company and the city civil service commission, arguing with them and fighting with them about the manner in which the examinations were structured, questions were framed and imposed. Worked to get blacks in the fire department and upgrading the blacks in the Tampa police department, which is still a difficult thing, and we are still working on that.

HJ: I also read in the—what was those papers we were reading at the library? Was it the *Tampa Tribune*?

Fred Beaton: Uh—Tampa (inaudible), I think, was the name of it, by (inaudible).

LL: Mm-hm.

HJ: It was mentioning him. It said something about your meeting with the man from Wolf Brothers [Department Store].

LL: Yes.

HJ: What was that about?

LL: Well, Harold Wolf—and I regret that you came late on the scene, you young people; if you were around at that time, you were just babes in arms. Harold Wolf was an unusual man. He headed Wolf Brothers. He was a very liberal individual, who was involved deeply in the fight. He was involved with the National Conference of Christians and Jews. He was a part of every upward bound movement—Progress Village, he was a part of that—and led and participated also, along with other whites—he was a Jew, incidentally—for desegregation. An unusually liberal person, one who did not have to be converted but who already believed in it and worked to make this a better community. Even offered to give me sanctuary in his home if anything happened here, and even offered my family sanctuary if I had to be out of the community at any time. He said there was a place in his home on Davis Island. At that time, there were no blacks on Davis Island, except those who worked. And under his roof, they would find sanctuary. He was that kind of person, Harold Wolf, Senior, a very unusual person.

FB: Okay, we kind of strayed away from the early (inaudible) politics. One question that you've probably answered time and time again: why has it been so long for Tampa to elect a black elected official?

LL: One reason is that blacks did not register at the outset. They did not take advantage of the opportunity to register in large numbers, and then when they did, they did not vote. I think along with that, we must say that they have not been properly trained, and did not know the importance of the political process, of involving of themselves in politics, whereby they could achieve certain goals which are definitely political. They had been somewhat brainwashed that there was no need to vote, because white people were going to do what they wanted to do anyway. They did not understand that you need a power base from which to work. You cannot, in a democratic society, depend on others to understand your particular problems; you have got to involve yourself in these problems.

I think it's partly a historical carryover from the past that is responsible for the lethargy and the apathy on the part of black people getting them. And they have been taught that politics was a dirty game. They have been taught that, and that one should not get one's hands soiled by becoming involved in politics.

I think the other thing is they felt that maybe you just could not get elected. They did not

see the advisability of forming coalitions with other minority groups. And they did not see the advisability of sometimes voting in a bloc as others did and pooling their votes.

Then the other thing was you had too many splinter groups, too many people who wanted to be chief. Then you had others who involved themselves for only what they personally could obtain. For instance, they could get maybe a thousand dollars or a couple thousand dollars, and so they would try to deliver maybe five or six hundred votes or something of that nature. I think all of these things put together might be a partial answer to the question you posed; it has been one that has disturbed us for long time.

Then, it may be that white people on the other side did not feel that there was what they would call a “representative black” who would relate to people, one that would come in and not be just for blacks, but one who could see that as an elected official, he would be responsible for acting on behalf of all the people. I cite an example like this: there are many blacks who feel that a black official should represent only black people, and that you are there to represent only them. Well, that cannot be.

For instance, as a member of the school board, I am one out of seven, that’s one-seventh. And really it disturbs me very much, because that’s just token, in a sense, because there isn’t a whole lot that one black person can do. He can certainly be there when issues come up, and things that would be ordinarily be done cannot be done so very easily with the black person sitting there. They say, “Wait now; hold it; you cannot do this,” to have some input. That was one of the things. We need more black people in office, more black visibility in office.

I was really surprised at two things: One, the small number of black votes that I got, which was about eight thousand; and the large number of white votes, and I was surprised. On the other hand, when I looked at the areas from which the white votes came, they came from places like Ruskin, Mango, Riverview, Plant City and I recall the time when I dared not show my face in some of those areas, at some of the places that I went. And way out in rural areas, I had white people saying, “Bring us a sign and put it in our yards.” There was a time that I attempted to go out there and put a sign up in the yard, and they said, “Nigger, you get away, you know we will fill you with buckshot,” and this kind of thing. So, I was really surprised.

I think another thing: many black people do not involve themselves in community activities officially. We stay within the black community; we don't serve on committees. Now, I tried to serve on every possible thing I could, not that I even realized that one day I was going to run for office. So I had visibility, and I guess they knew me from television, radio, and newspapers. The time has always been right for this kind of thing, but somehow it just did not happen. It’s just hard for me to explain.

I hope that there will be others who will follow, and I hope this will make it easier for other blacks. It can be done. I believe it can be done, but I was surprised—very pleasantly surprised—and I ran against two white opponents.

HJ: There is this thing that is being said, Reverend Lowry, about— (coughs) Excuse me.

LL: Mm-hm.

HJ: What were you and Otis saying about the ratio of blacks and the voting power?

FB: Since blacks only make up only twenty percent of the population, the only way feasible for a black to be elected is by allies of, say, other splinter groups.

LL: Well, that is what I was referring to a little bit earlier when I said we reform. I didn't use the word alliance, but—

Side 1 ends; side 2 begins

LL: The coming together of black minority in this community and other minority groups—or splinter groups, whatever you call them—will be a viable way in which to get blacks elected. There must be a coalition of some kind. There are enough blacks here to elect a black in certain elections, provided those blacks will go out and vote. But you can never count on a hundred percent.

SS: That's right.

LL: Therefore, you've got to join with other groups, and you've got to work this thing out. If we support you, then you must support us. And there must be that kind of understanding. Now, we have been supporting you all these years. For instance, blacks have traditionally supported the Latins. Well, now it's time for the Latins to support the blacks. Now, let's determine.

But you've got to get a qualified black person. And when I say qualified, it does not necessarily mean he's got to have a Ph.D. or anything of that nature, but he must be qualified character-wise and so forth. When you become involved in this thing, they go back and look to see exactly what's behind the curtains to knock you out, because political office gives you certain powers. If your conduct has been a little on the opposite side, you find it difficult. So if you have any idea that you're going to run for office, then be very, very discreet in whatever you do.

And it's good to wave a flag. Now, I did wave a flag at one time, but you just can't stay out there on the street waving the flag, because the man on the other side of the fence has all that power, has all that knowhow, has all that money. I sat the other day and I listened to fellows talk with my dad and I; we were attending a meeting. They were talking about three, four, five and six and seven and eight and ten million dollars as if they were talking about a hundred dollars. We just sat there and listened. Well, that's the kind of situation you are dealing with, you see, and you're talk about involving yourself in million dollar situations when you get into this thing.

We're going to have to learn so much, but there must be a unity, a togetherness, among

black people. We're going to have to learn to trust each other in all of our operations. We're going to have to learn to trust black doctors, black attorneys. Then those individuals, the doctors and attorneys, are going to have to keep faith with black people.

If you are going to take my case, you are going to have to do as good of a job as the man downtown would do. You can't come up here with a shoddily prepared case, you have got to sit down and bend and bow your neck and dig, and present a case that will stand up. It is one thing to pass the state bar, but then to get out here and practice is another thing, and give people their fair shake. Now, black attorneys and black doctors must seek to be perfectionists, to be as good—black preachers the same thing, whatever—and we must have an interest in black people. Their concerns must become our concerns.

FB: Another problem that has been proposed by certain urban planners, and has been a controversy in Hillsborough County, has been reverting back to the ward or district type voting system.

LL: Well, I would not be opposed to it. I have come from communities where you had it. That would give black people an opportunity. Of course, the antagonists to that point of view feel that that would bring back a kind of politics that would not be good for the community, would give too much of an opportunity for other things to happen to which they refer to as the ward days. That is not necessarily true, because you have it in other communities.

That's one viable way of getting blacks elected. Of course, the power structure in this community does not want that, and we should fight for it, if we believe in it. I don't see any reason why we should not fight, and I should not be taken as an example, you see. What is happening is that most of the people who argue against the ward politics and going back to the ward system point to me as an example of one black who can get elected without, who could get elected at large. They use that as an example. Well, that's the first time. Now, maybe there are others who could get elected, I don't know. I would hope so. But certainly I would not be adverse to the ward system.

FB: In recent months—as a matter of fact, three months ago, I think—it was proposed, and a certain commissioner stated that she did not see the practicality of initiating this.

LL: Yes, Jan Platt; she was on the radio here a few night ago, fighting the same thing. However, if blacks feel strongly about it, then they should fight for that.

FB: The only way we can we revert or change the system is through the legislature, because you can't do it on a local level.

LL: No, you probably would have to go through court to do it.

FB: Right.

LL: Legislature would not go along with you, I don't think. We'd have to have a change

of heart in the legislature. And they may recognize that more blacks should be given an opportunity. Now, certainly we should have some blacks in the legislature, county commission; at least one on the county commission, at least one on the city council. And policymaking bodies, we should have at least one or two blacks. Some cities have two or three. Some school boards have two or three; where you have a seven man board, there are two or three blacks, then you can. But now you got to wheel and deal.

FB: It seems like the problem has been, historically in Tampa, when you have one black sitting on it, the other blacks in the community, they do not get on the bandwagon.

LL: They won't do it. They will say all kinds of things. "He don't know me, I don't know him." Well, they don't know the white people. Those white people do not appear in this community until time for election. So we've got some hang-ups. We have been well brainwashed. But no group can really come into its own without a power base from which to operate. Either you must have the money, or you must have the numbers. You have got to have people representing a good solid base, or you have to have the money.

The Jews long ago recognized that. They are a minority, but they are a powerful minority. They have gotten a hand on the economics. They've gotten into everything. I recognized, of course, that it's a little bit different for us. But when I look, I see it. We are quite visible; we cannot change our complexion. But they can do so many things. I know any number of people in this community who are not Caucasian, but they are of foreign extraction. They've changed their name, but they are whites. They're in certain things. In New York they were Epstein; they are Williams or Johnson here in Tampa. Some people I know very well, you would be surprised. Now, when they came to Tampa they could not read it as Epstein, so they just changed their name. Now, not all of them have done that. The Jews have found a way, and we need to do that.

We need to pool our resources and come together. We can do it. You got enough people in this town—you had even before we got Community Federal—to form the bank. You have Lee Davis, who is a millionaire, you have C. Blythe Andrews, you have Ed Davis, and there were others whose names I do not have, who had sufficient money to form not only Community Federal, but a commercial bank. But they just wouldn't do it. And it is still that way. You have Community Federal over there, it ought to be a ten or fifteen or twenty million dollar institution. Blacks support it more than they did at the outset. It was almost totally supported by whites at its opening, but gradually more blacks, as they gain confidence. And that's another thing, of course, I recognize. We have problems and we've got to work at them. But as you say, we are smothered.

HJ: Okay, Reverend Lowry, suppose you give us some background information on Beulah?

LL: Okay. Beulah Baptist Church came out of First Baptist Church over on Kennedy Boulevard. This is the first black Baptist church in Tampa or Hillsborough County. Shortly after the emancipation, approximately two years after the Emancipation Proclamation was signed, a group of blacks, who were formerly slaves and who

worshiped only in the balcony of First Baptist Church, decided that they no longer wanted to worship in that kind of situation where they could not be full members, decided they'd come out and form the First Beulah Baptist Church. They had to name it Beulah Baptist, because First Baptist already had the corporate name, First Baptist, so they had to put in the name Beulah. So, it's the First Beulah Baptist Church of Tampa.

Unfortunately, records of this are not available, because a fire over there at First Baptist destroyed the records, the names of many of the blacks as well as the whites. So we do not have the names of the people; we just know some of the families that came out of that church. They were given a piece of land by Miss Fortune Ransom downtown; that's the person after whom Fortune Street was named. And they built over on Central Avenue—what was formerly Central Avenue—and stayed there for a while. And from that point, they came to the point where the Longshoremen Hall is located and built there.

Subsequently, they sold that property to the Longshoremen and built on corner of Pierce [Street] and Tyler [Street]. That building was destroyed by fire three years ago. We remained there until we came over to this particular point. Out of Beulah came some of the first families in Tampa who are Baptist. Beulah had a grocery store. They had the first choir on the radio. Middleton High School was named after one of its members. Clara Frye [Hospital] was named after one of its members, Miss Clara Frye, who was the first black nurse. And so forth.

What else do you want to know about Beulah?

HJ: We were reading a clipping; somewhere in it was some sort of disturbance in Beulah.

LL: How far back?

HJ: (inaudible)

FB: Nineteen aught-seven or 1908.

LL: Nineteen—yes. That disturbance, as I recall from my reading, resulted in the formation of the Bethel Baptist Church. I don't know what it was all about, but it came to the point where the members were in intense disagreement, so they split and the Bethel Baptist Church was formed. Also out of Beulah came the New Salem Missionary Baptist Church. The members lived on this side of the river and felt that it was a little far going across the river, so they formed the New Salem Missionary Baptist Church. And then a number of them also came out and formed the First Baptist Church of West Tampa.

What you will really find in Tampa is that in almost every black church in Tampa, you have some people whose ancestors were members of Beulah Baptist Church at one time, at one early period. In almost every church, either grandmothers, their mothers, their fathers, uncles, or somebody, they were formerly members of Beulah. And that, of course, stands to reason, because it was the first church. It was a church with some sophistication. It had most of the educated and trained people. Of course, there was one

church that was older, and that was Mount Sinai [AME Zion Church]; that was older than Beulah. But Beulah is a hundred and thirteen years old this year.

SS: How large is your congregation?

LL: Right now we are about eight hundred; at one time it was two thousand. But after the split up and the fights they had, people left. Tampa at one time was quite a church town, and somehow, for some reason, it is not as good a church town, in my opinion, as it formally was. We need to work on that. I think that's due to affluence. The black people will come back to the church, I think. Because of affluence, they are depending more on the material than they are on the spiritual. They don't see the need for the balance.

HJ: And then too, can you contribute that to the fact that a long time ago there was less entertainment and less things to do?

LL: Yes, the church was the center around which all the activities in the black community revolved. And still today, the church does play a very important role in the life of black people, and you will discover that most black people are either Baptist or Methodist. You have them as members of the Episcopal Church and the Catholic Church, and some are Presbyterian. But the reason for this is that the Baptist Church and the Methodist Church had a kind of—how shall I put this?—the worship. They accepted more readily into their congregations, black people, and they could more easily identify in the worship in these churches than they could in the highly liturgical service in Catholic and Episcopal churches. There was more freedom in the Baptist churches; the emotions could be vented and so on. Of course, religion without emotion is nothing; you can overdo it but without it, it's very dry. You've got to have emotion in it—in fact, in anything—to give it the life it should have.

FB: Skipping back a little bit, were there any other preachers or pastors or any other members of the congregations, say, bishops, that were (inaudible) in the sit-ins?

LL: Not in Tampa. In Miami, Father [Theodore] Gibson, Reverend Edward T. Graham; in Tallahassee, C.K. Steele.

FB: Were there any attempts to encourage participation?

LL: Yes, but they did not participate.

HJ: So the sit-ins were basically done by you and younger people?

LL: Yes, Youth NAACP.

HJ: You had no other adults at all?

LL: It is almost unbelievable, but nevertheless true. Not a one.

FB: After the tensions cooled, did you have influx then?

LL: Oh, yes, they would come in. It was like the chicken asking for help to plant the seeds that she found—Henny Penny; you know, the nursery story—and after she got everything planted and she worked it and it bore, she ground it at the mill and she cooked the bread. “Who will help me eat it?” Everybody was ready to eat it.

HJ: Okay, so when you screened those couples to go to the restaurants or whatever, did you select couples that had worked with you? Were they couples—you know, bourgeoisie, or whatever.

LL: Bourgeoisie, bourgeoisie.

HJ: Okay, so how did they respond to that? Were they—

LL: Oh, that was all right. No problem. And that was deliberately done. Of course, not all of them were bourgeoisie, but most of them were. Now, we did have, during that time, other little splinter groups that attempted to come, but they were not a part of our organization. They ran into problems at the bus stations and so forth, and they really had some violence. Not such as you had in Alabama, but they did have some arrests and other things like that. We did not have that.

HJ: How did you handle the riot situation? What was that, sixty-seven [1967], sixty-eight [1968]? Were you—

LL: I talked, mostly. Jim Hammond, Bob Gilder, uh—the doctor’s deceased now; we called him Chink. There were more involved in the riot out there on Central Avenue. They got fellows who were involved in the riots to become the go-betweens—maybe that’s not the best term, but to carry the ball, to work in the community, help calm the community. That was—I didn’t become involved in that—

(Phone rings)

Pause in recording

LL: The riot resulted from the shooting of a fellow by the name of [Martin] Chambers, over in the Central Avenue area. That could have been a very nasty thing. It eventuated in the burning of many of the businesses on Central Avenue. There was quite a bit of looting. It was finally quelled by the intervention of Jim Hammond, Bob Gilder, and many others, who went into the area. In fact, I did not know anything about the thing until it was just about over. A police officer shot a youngster who was alleged to have done some robbing in the downtown area and then fled on foot and was cornered right near his home in that area. There was a seven foot fence; he attempted to climb the fence, but could not do so, and was shot in the back.

HJ: (inaudible)

LL: That brought about the riot. Subsequent to that, however, I was involved in attempting to keep peace when other situations of that nature appeared as if that was going to happen. But the principles in that are the various other individuals named.

SS: We have one more question (inaudible). What do you think—what is your opinion on the coming election? And I mean by that, do you think any of the black candidates that might run, do you think that their chances are good?

LL: I would hope so. Of course, based on what we've said here today, the chance of it would be excellent if we could somehow form this kind of coalition that we have talked about, and pick a candidate who has viability, who has the personality, who is known, that we can get behind and support—one in whom we have confidence. We ought to have some candidates out there. Now who is going to run, I don't know.

SS: (inaudible) particularly the mayor's race.

LL: Mm-hm.

SS: (inaudible)

LL: I believe Mr. Alton White is going to run. I will have to support Mr. White. He is a member of our church here; he's on the board of trustees. I believe that he is qualified. I think he knows the work; he has background in the mayor's office. Certainly I feel that he is deserving of our support.

One of the problems he faces is, of course, something that neither you nor I can do anything about, and that's family connections. We can't do anything about that, and he ought not to be held accountable or responsible for the behavior of any of his relatives. We should be dealing only with this individual, whether or not he is qualified. We have a (inaudible) that advised that he is not qualified. But how qualified was [William] Poe? How qualified was [Joe] Kotvas?—any of these individuals. We shouldn't hold against him the fact that his name is White. That's just incidental. It could be black, it could be green, blue, it could be Lowry or anybody.

The thing that we should be concerned about is whether he can do the job or not. Then if in our opinion, he can do the job, then vote for him. There are those who feel that he can't make it. Well, that's a negative. There's already a push in the negative: he can't beat this or that or the other one. Well, all right, for the sake of argument say he can't, but it doesn't say he should not run. Let him run. Nobody knows what may happen. Let him run. The more blacks that run the better, I believe. I think these black people need to start this. All right, who else wants to run? Who else is offering their name? I don't know of anybody else. He wants to.

HJ: Somebody in the black group?

LL: Yeah.

HJ: That's the only person that I know of.

LL: I don't know of anybody else. I guess there are objections to him running.

SS: (inaudible)

LL: (inaudible) Let the white community know that win or lose, we are behind him.

HJ: Some of the people we have come in contact with seem to be somewhat animostic.

LL: They are, that's true. They are. They do have that animosity.

SS: That's why we don't (inaudible).

LL: That's exactly right. That is true.

HJ: This is going to be the problem, I think, that what you were saying about the family ties. That is going to be more with the black folks than with any other races. It's going to be people like us saying, "I don't want him because his brother did this, or his dad did that," this type of thing. We're the ones that really hurt ourselves.

SS: (inaudible)

LL: Now, the *Tribune* is not going to support him, I'm pretty sure of that. And of course, what they are attempting to do is to get Terrell Sessums to run, and if Terrell Sessums gets into the race, then it's going to be quite a thing. And Bob Bondi wants to run. What he will do if Terrell gets in, I don't know. That's going to be something to observe. You'll have Bondi, Sessums and White, and if things go according to history, White will be low man on the totem pole. But not only do you have those three, you are going to have [Guy] Spicola. You'll probably have either Sandy Freeman or Jan Platt.

HJ: For mayor?

LL: Yeah. Or [Charles] Miranda.

HJ: That might be good. (inaudible)

LL: Yeah, if all of those, because—

SS: You'll have more interesting candidates.

LL: Now, we don't know what's going to happen, but those are the rumors; that's the rumor around town. All of these people at one time or another have expressed themselves as being very definitely interested in the mayor's seat.

HJ: But Terrell Sessums—he seemed to me, from my reading, that he is just about being forced to run.

LL: That's the power structure. They want to get him in. He's a good man, no question about it. He is able and well thought of. He did a marvelous job in the legislature, if you follow that. In fact, they had an excellent delegation. The only thing wrong with it was we just didn't have a black up there from Hillsborough County. We should have one black. I think Warren Dawson would have been excellent. Now, we can talk about people. Warren does think a lot of Warren, and that's all right. He's got it right in here. You can't take that away from him; he's got that in there.

So, like him or not—now, he's disliked intensely by many, many black people, you see. They are not looking at his ability. They say he thinks he's bigger than they are, all of this kind of thing, he doesn't know anybody. Warren says he's not going to run. Hopefully he can get an appointment to a federal position of some kind, attorney or federal judge. He is quite disillusioned. I've talked with him a number of times. But the boy has the ability, you can't deny that; can't take that away from him.

HJ: Okay, thank you very much.

LL: Let me give you one of our church—

HJ: This has been Herb, Fred, and Shirley interviewing Reverend A. Leon Lowry. March 23, 1978.

End of interview