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Otis R. Anthony African Americans in Florida Oral History Project  
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**Robert Saunders:** I was born in Tampa, Florida, in what was once known as Roberts City, 1608 Dorsey Avenue.

**Otis Anthony:** I remember where I was sitting; the first person I heard mentioned Roberts City. My mother worked in the cigar factory over there.

RS: J. W. Roberts Cigar Factory.

OA: That's right.

RS: I was born just behind the hotel that was owned by J. W. Roberts. My grandparents owned the house which they bought somewhere around 1907, that house later became what was known as Rogers Funeral Home. My grandmother and grandfather were, of course, James W. Rogers, Senior, (buzzer sounds) and Marion E. Rogers.

***Pause in recording***

RS: My mother is Mrs. Christine Saunders, and my father was Willard Saunders; he was a brick mason. I have one brother, Dr. Norman Jackson. Different marriage, father; he's younger than I am. Of course you all know who Dr. Jackson is<sup>1</sup>.

I entered school in what was the old West Tampa school on the corner of Green [Street] and I think it's Albany [Avenue]. At that time, it was a wooden four-room, wooden structure, and the kindergarten class—or the first grade class—was a tin structure in the back of the wooden structure. My first teacher I remember was a Mrs. Higgins; she later became known as—ah, I can't remember her name. Lived out on Twenty-Ninth Street; she died on Twenty-Ninth Street.

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of the interview, Dr. Jackson was executive director of the Florida Commission on Human Relations.

At that time my aunt Josephine Rogers, who was a school teacher—she is known to many people as Josephine Newberry and Josephine Harmon—was teaching out there, and she used to take me to school. I remember the transfer of all the students to the new West Tampa school, which is now Dunbar Elementary off Main [Street] and Rome [Avenue]. And among the teachers I remember are Mrs. Lester, the mother of Allen Lester and Dr. Lester and others, Mrs. Juanita Sheehy, and Mrs. Bryant, who lived across from the county jail, who is now dead.

OA: These teachers, they played a really prominent role?

RS: They played a very prominent role in the education that most of—I'd say 85 percent of the students from West Tampa. Mrs. Sheehy is still alive—she's about maybe eighty-five, close to ninety now—but she played a very important role, Juanita Sheehy. I suggest if you haven't talk to her, you might want to talk to her.

OA: Okay.

RS: Of course Mrs. Lester is dead, but Mrs. Lester was the wife of a postman. They lived in West Tampa and were a very prominent Tampa family, as far as the black community goes. And of course her husband being a postman—maybe he was one of the first black postmen in Tampa, I'm not sure. Some of the Lesters are still living here. There is one married and living in St. Petersburg, or Clearwater.

The community in which I was born, the block in which I was born in, we were the only black family in the block. The other families were Italian and Spanish, Hispanic.

**Fred Beaton:** This was around what time?

RS: I was born in 1921, June 9, 1921, and up until around twenty-nine [1929], or even later than that, the community was predominantly Spanish and Italian.

OA: That's what our research bears out, too.

RS: I guess in talking to my mother, she can tell you the names of the people who lived in that area from Tampa—for example, the Matassinis lived in that area, the Mirabellas. The Matassinis, as you know, some of them now own the Mirabella's [Mirabella's Seafood Restaurant], the restaurant downtown; they lived in that area. The Contes, the—well really, some of your most prominent (inaudible) Italian families were there.

In nineteen—well, around 1925 or twenty-six [1926], my aunt took me to New York, where I spent maybe three or four nights and then she brought me back, and then in 1929 they took me to New York. I stayed in New York until 1931, and they brought me back to Tampa and I enrolled in Harlem Elementary School.

FB: You don't know who the principal was then?

RS: The principal was L.W. Longmire. My first teacher was Mrs. Wattman; she's dead.

FB: All black faculty and administrators?

RS: It was all black faculty and administration. I recall Mrs. Arrington was teaching there, Leeola Box was there, Mrs. Bryant, who is now Mrs. Johnson, the secretary of St. Paul A.M.E. [African Methodist Episcopal] Church now, she was teaching. Of course my aunt Josephine, she was teaching there. Mrs. Newmus—as a matter of fact, I enrolled in the fourth grade, and among my classmates were Milton Thompson, Ernest Patterson—that's the husband of Ellen Green Patterson, Ellen Patterson; I think her name is Green now. —W. E. (inaudible), who was related to Mrs. Young. These are just a few of the classmates.

FB: Could you tell us just briefly a little something about maybe the philosophical orientation of the teachers, their time probably—maybe as opposed to now?

RS: Well, they realized that they were living in a society that was racially oriented, despite the fact that Harlem Academy was located in the downtown area. The school was triply segregated by race. As a matter of fact, the superintendent in charge of black schools at that time was a Mr. Miles, a white man who was said to only have had a high school education and not more than two years of college. The teachers—in my estimation, most of them did a very effective job of training us, educating us. I recall that they were very strict. Discipline was not severe, but they required that you attended school. They even went out their way to see that you attended school, and they didn't mind using the rod when it came time to correct you.

OA: Did they make statements, like, ah—statements we've heard, for example: you're black, people will think you are second class, so you have to do better, you must succeed—that whole excellent thing. Did that constantly permeate in your environment?

RS: Yes. This was constantly permeated from—and I know that, for an example, teachers like Mrs. Newmus—Mrs. Mimi West, who is down in Miami, Mrs. Box, Longmire. They all said that, because of the color of your skin that we had to realize that we had to go beyond. And this was probably philosophy, because what really happened was—remember that in those days there was the dual salary. Black teachers, even though they were licensed by the state and required to meet some of the same requirements as white teachers had to meet, they were paid fifty dollars to a hundred, hundred and fifty dollars less than the white teacher. So they realized and were quite concerned with the fact that we had to excel. And I think that, given the materials and the conditions under which they had to work, in my opinion, I think they did a good job.

They had to—I hear today about the community—that is, the environment versus the—not the environment but the area—yeah, the environmental factors versus the educational factors. Well, in my opinion, there hasn't been too much change. Because the situation involving housing conditions in which blacks were forced to live under; the type of police

brutality and police enforcement and law enforcement that was going on; the fact that blacks were—most of them unless you were a preacher or a teacher, the jobs that blacks found were primarily domestic. At that time, as I recall, the black population—for example, the handling or picking up of garbage was not done by black people; the Italians were doing that. So, really, faced with that kind of environment, the educational system, with these black teachers realizing what the situation was, they did a good job.

Now, also at that time—well, I recall vaguely the death of Miss Tina Meacham, who was a staunch educator, and one of those persons who believed that the school—that the teachers also had to do a job, that they had a prime responsibility to overcome many of the type faults that they found in the black community. They knew what the problems were. Miss Tina Meacham; of course you know the school [Meacham Elementary School] was named after her, Christina Meacham.

Longmire; we remember Longmire, because Longmire used to—if we were late, he would meet us in the hall.

OA: How do you spell his name?

RS: L-o-n-g-m-i-r-e.

FB: You can't remember his first name?

RS: J. W.

FB: (inaudible)

RS: I remember him because he had a machine strap, you know, one of these little thin belts that came off of a machine. If we were late to school, he would meet us in the hall, and we had to get our five lashes for being late, and that impressed upon us the necessity for being on time.

OA: So it was the kind of punishment that was done from people who you knew loved you, right?

RS: We knew, and later on in life I realized why they did it, and it was there because they realized that they had to instill in us that there were odds, and that segregation and discrimination—they opposed it. They didn't like it, but there wasn't anything they could do about it.

FB: So, after you left Harlem Academy—

RS: Well, after I left Harlem, I went to Booker T. Washington Junior High School, and there we had double sessions. Senior high school was held in the morning, and the junior high schoolers came in the afternoon.

OA: Those were grades seven through—?

RS: Seven through nine. And I had such teachers as Miss Ellen Turner—I think her name is Ellen Turner—Mrs. Davis, who was the wife of Ed Davis, president of Central Life Insurance Company. [James Senior] Hargrett was teaching there. Miriam Anderson taught math. I can appreciate what Miss Mollie Mickens, or Mollie Boone, who was a distant relative of mine, taught, eighth grade math. Ms. Turner taught the seventh grade math, and Ms. Anderson taught the algebra, ninth grade algebra. And I think that they excelled, because they did a good job instilling in us the background that was necessary. As a matter, I give them credit for giving me the knowledge of math that I didn't get in high school, which kind of crippled me when I got to college. If we'd gotten the type of subjects and the types of training that they did in high school, I feel that many of the graduates from Middleton High School would have been able to move into engineering and other fields.

But from approximately—went on to junior high school; then, of course, I went to Middleton, and graduated from Middleton in thirty-nine [1939]. From there I went to Bethune-Cookman [University] on an athletic scholarship and stayed to Cookman—oh, about a little less than two years, because they sent me down to Pompano Beach to do what they call an internship.

At that time when you got a scholarship, it really wasn't an athletic scholarship. Even though you played football, you had to do other things. For an example, Lutrell Bing and I were supposed to be there on a scholarship, and we had to wash dishes. We washed dishes at Bethune-Cookman three times a day for a whole semester, Bing and I. We had to play football—that was Saturday and Sunday—and even after the football game, (laughs) we had to go in and wash those dishes.

But I think both of us can appreciate the fact that they did that, because we were able to come in contact, as a matter of fact, with Ms. Bethune, and I became very close with Ms. Bethune, then and in later years. The relationship became closer because of my wife's—that's Helen—contact with Wilma Williams, who was Ms. Bethune's secretary, and we were able to—and then of course Ms. Bethune, when I started working for the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People], Ms. Bethune was a vice president of the NAACP.

OA: Okay, Ms. Bethune, at that time, was she over the university?

RS: She was president of the college; it was a two year college at that time.

OA: And was she also teaching?

RS: No, she was just president. She was at that time working with the [Franklin Delano] Roosevelt administration, and very close to Mrs. Roosevelt.

OA: Were there any other black colleges in the state at that time?

RS: Yes, you had Edward Waters [College], which was a junior college, you had Florida Normal [Florida Normal and Industrial Institute].

FB: Edward Waters was where?

RS: Jacksonville.

FB: And Florida Normal?

RS: Florida Normal, a Baptist school—Edward Waters was an A.M.E. school; it is an A.M.E. school.

FB: Where is it located at now?

RS: Jacksonville. And you had Florida Normal, which is now Florida Memorial College; at that time it was in St. Augustine. And you had Florida A&M [Agriculture and Mechanical University]; it was a college then.

OA: Bethune-Cookman at that time had already emerged from two separate institutions, once a male and female institution.

RS: At that time it was no longer a single, it was co-educational.

OA: It was co-educational. Okay.

RS: Then of course I went to the Army. I was inducted—well, let me say I had a lot of experience in Tampa in that.

OA: Hold it, let me back you up for one minute; this is really important. Okay, we sort of went through your educational experiences, and you mention before—we've talked about your parents, and we've talked about your teachers and people like Ms. Bethune. Who would say were your major influence in terms in direction that your life took in civil rights?

RS: I think my grandmother, because my grandmother—I remember very vividly: she read the literature of the NAACP, and participated in it, and in fact she always stood out for better education. As a matter of a fact she was quite concerned about the education of her children and grandchildren; that's why I think most of us, the grandchildren particularly, have college degrees.

OA: Okay, so getting back to the service—

RS: Let me back up a little bit, because I think that another thing that gave me great insight into Tampa was the fact that during high school— (buzzer sounds)

*Pause in recording*

RS: —high school years, I had the opportunity of working at Central Theater, the old segregated theater.

FB: On Central Avenue?

RS: On Central Avenue. I worked there with Alice Foster; a guy named Singletary was the manager. Now, this was owned by a white company. But working every day from three o'clock maybe till eleven, I was able to observe what went on on Central Avenue: the social lifestyles of the black community, the law enforcement, how it was carried out, and the various vices and that type of thing. And I came in contact with practically everybody in the city of Tampa, because the only form of amusement was what, either going to the bars or to the one theater we had. Well, there was the Plaza Theater, the Plaza Theater that burned down; that was on Seventh Avenue, and that was owned by the Martí-Maceo Club.

OA: Was this like the Lincoln Theater?

RS: Yeah; the Lincoln Theater hadn't even come into mind then. Then, of course, I worked with Roy Haygood, he was there, and then Roy Haygood later on became a policeman. And see, this is really insight into the workings and how they choose, persons who became law enforcement officers.

But I think having later going on to college and majored in such things—well, I have a bachelor in liberal arts, but the major subject was sociology. You see, you are to relate back to those conditions, and you're able to see the cause and effect. And I think that played, because having known the forty-four quarters in back of the Central Theater there, Sands Street, prostitution and dope and the liquor and everything, and the seeing of so-called white policemen, the way they would walk up into a house and do some of the things they did. I think that was also very important, because I don't know of any other college student, or any person other than myself, who worked at the theatre and then later on went on to college. And this is key. I think this is what has played such an important role in my being able to identify such things in the community, and getting to know people.

But then, of course, after I went to the Army in forty-two [1942], and was inducted in Camp Blanding and was sent up to Moultrie Field—Spence Field in Moultrie, Georgia. And after basic training there, they assigned us down on the white line. It was very interesting, because at that time, as you know, the armed forces and Army Air Corps was segregated. We were assigned to the aviation squadron, but they had some black fellows in there, who were from Ohio and other areas and one or two of us from Florida, who had such high IQs that they couldn't put us in the kitchen, so they had to assign us down on the white line.

That's when I first made—I was always crazy about building airplanes, model airplanes,



and it was this type of knowledge of aviation and structure things that got me onto the Air Corps. But my first contact with actual airplanes, the mechanics and everything, was at Spence Field. For about a month or two we worked down there on the flight line, during minor repairs and working with the mechanics, and then in December of forty-two [1942] I was transferred along with about twenty others, among them being one Bertcham Cooper, who's now, I think, a band master in Tallahassee.

We went to Tuskegee, and stayed at Tuskegee [U.S. Army Air Field] from forty-two [1942] until February of forty-six [1946]. Now, Tuskegee is where I think—another person who played a very important, vital part in my lifestyle. That's where I met Fred Minnis, attorney Fred Minnis over in St. Petersburg, who was a captain—a lieutenant—when I went there, and then later became captain and major. But Minnis—I don't know; he always took a liking to me. I never will forget one thing that he told me. He said, “Bob Saunders, when you get out of the armed forces (inaudible) Air Corps, don't waste your time on that GI Bill going to a Southern school.” And that is what impressed upon me the fact that when you got out, to take that GI Bill and go to a Northern school. I was glad that he gave me that advice, because—

FB: Did he say go to a Northern school or Southern school?

RS: Northern.

OA: Northern.

RS: Northern school.

FB: Is Fred Minnis white?

RS: No, Fred Minnis is black; he's a black lawyer in St. Petersburg now.

OA: You had segregation in the Air Corps and everything, but he was able to be a captain?

RS: At Tuskegee Army Air Field, you see, the commanding officer was a white colonel. The deputy commander was a white person, and then we had a lot of officers there, black officers who had come from Howard University, who had been in ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps]. And—I'll tell you again, we had some officers there from Howard, such as Captain Bascom, B-a-s-c-o-m, F. Hodge, H-o-d-g-e, who was an undertaker in New York but was a captain down at Tuskegee. Captain Hodge was very tough on black soldiers. We had, for an example, Captain Harold Martin. Martin was killed in an air crash, but Martin always would give me advice; he was a major commanding one of the units down there.

I was able—along about that time, that's when the 99th Fighter Squadron was there. They had not activated the 332<sup>nd</sup> [Fighter Group]<sup>2</sup>. 332nd was activated later on; after the 99<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> These were the two squadrons known as the Tuskegee Airmen.

left, then the 332<sup>nd</sup> went up to Alridge Field in Michigan. At Tuskegee, I became involved in the administrative Army Air Corps; that means I was in the supply. My MOS [Military Occupational Specialty] was clerk typist, but later on they activated what they called the general mess section, and that was all the mess halls on the base; four or five of them were put under one administrative setup. I became the administrative sergeant, which meant that—equivalent to a first sergeant, but you just didn't do everything that the first sergeant did.

My role was to order all the supplies, check inventories, plan and prepare what we called the morning report for the squadron; we'd have to find out how many men were on base, how many with leave, how many were going on leave, figure out the three leaves in advance, the amount of food and supplies you'd need, and all that kind of stuff.

OA: That's good; helpful skills.

RS: Very much so, because it gave me an opportunity not only to learn, give me an insight on purchasing, 'cause you were dealing with the quartermasters, but also to—if you are in the area of working of record keeping and that type of thing.

***Side 1 ends; side 2 begins***

OA: (inaudible)

RS: Yeah. What happened—let me point out that at Tuskegee Army Air Field, from 1939 till around 1943, the average soldier at Tuskegee was a person that you could walk down and tap him on the shoulder and say, “Hey, we want you to go to OCS [Officer Candidate School],” 'cause that is where many (inaudible) officers, black officers, can go. Now, the intent of setting up Tuskegee was token. They would bring a hundred aviation cadets in and only ten of them would graduate. It was the pressure that was brought on by people like A. Philip Randolph and the *Pittsburgh Courier* newspaper which finally forced them to send the 99th Squadron, (inaudible) Squadron, into combat, and later the 332nd.

I had a lot of friends in the 332nd. For an example, Jackie Jeans. I knew Jackie Jeans as a aviation cadet. I knew Copenhan, for whom the Copenhan Village in Tallahassee is named. They were there. You got an undertaker, Philip Bailey in DeLand, who was a classmate of mine at Bethune Cookman, and he eventually shot down the first German jet, when he's flying with the 99th Squadron. Well, all these guys were at Tuskegee, but yet it was pressure that got them into combat, because they never would have gotten into combat. Now, during that time, also, I don't recall A. Philip Randolph's threat; I learned about that later on, in which the fair employment practices—regulation—was ordered into existence by President Roosevelt.

After— (knock on door) Yes?

***Pause in recording***

Well, when I got out of the Army in February of 1946, I came back to Tampa, and upon returning, I went to talk with C. Blythe Andrews. I had known Andrews—

FB: Senior?

RS: Senior—previous to my going to the Army, because at the time that I was coming up, I used to go around to Central Life Insurance Company, which was located on—where this Kid Mason building is; that used to be Central Life Insurance Company. And Andrews at that time was working with the insurance company. I think he was secretary of the company and Mr. Gordon was treasurer—E. E. Gordon, Senior—and Mr. J. D. Rogers was president. I knew all of them.

I had had experience—really, the Potters; Mr. [Marcellus] Potter, the man who owned the *Tampa Bulletin*. I used to sell newspapers and whatnot. I sold the *Bulletin* for Potter. Mr. and Mrs. Potter used to pull us in there when we were kids.

FB: And the *Tampa Bulletin* was—?

RS: A black newspaper, a weekly newspaper.

FB: The only?

RS: The only one—no, sporadically, there were such as the paper—such as the *Tampa World*, which was published at one time by Sanders Mason. Sanders Mason, if he had been allowed to get into the pro ranks (inaudible) he would have been outstanding.

OA: So the *Bulletin* existed in the Tampa into the latter part of the forties [1940s] and to the fifties [1950s] also?

RS: Into the fifties [1950s]; it was established back about 1917, somewhere like that, by Reverend Potter, P-o-t-t-e-r. James Jackson got his training at the *Bulletin*, as did Andrews Senior and some of the others (inaudible).

OA: You said Reverend Potter; was he associated with any particular church, or was he just (inaudible)?

RS: I think he was with the A.M.E. church; he was presiding elder at one time.

OA: Okay.

RS: And the *Bulletin*, I believe, was the official (inaudible) of the A.M.E. church in the state of Florida; it was a very prominent black paper. Potter was also one of the founders of the NAACP in Tampa, and also of the Urban League.

But anyway, when I came back to Tampa, I went to Andrews, and Andrews—just maybe a year or so later, they started the *Florida Sentinel* up in town. I say started to work with

them, because his daddy ran it in Jacksonville, then Andrews started it up in Tampa. And I had written an editorial on something he had had in the paper; when I came home I took it up to him. Andrews asked me if I wanted to work for the *Florida Sentinel*, and naturally, coming out of the Army, I could have drawn on the 52-20—you know what the 52-20 Club is?

OA: Mm-mm [no].

RS: Every soldier discharged with an honorable discharge from World War II could draw twenty dollars a week for fifty-two weeks, and you didn't have to hit a lick. Well, I could have drawn the 52-20, but (laughs) I guess I was not the type to want to do that. I wanted to work for Andrews. Andrews gave me a job working, as—he called me advertising manager and news reporter. And from February until August of 1946, I worked for Andrews; he gave a joint account of five dollars a week, and in three or four weeks I was making forty or fifty dollars a week in commissions. And many of the accounts that you see in the *Sentinel* now are downtown accounts and whatnot. Andrews gives me credit for having broken them open downtown.

OA: You mean you honestly got—you actually got white advertisement?

RS: Yeah. I (inaudible) Andrews paper had started, I'm the one who went into Maas Brothers [Department Store], started breaking into the other stores down there like Woolworth's [Department Store] and Kress's [Department Store], and out in Ybor City.

OA: How was it possible? I mean, we still had segregation.

RS: You still had segregation, but remember, the white man, he's after the dollar.

OA: So how did blacks buy—they could go into the stores?

RS: They could go into store and buy.

OA: But they couldn't—

RS: They couldn't sit down at the counters. What we did—see, the *Sentinel*—at that time, Andrews had applied for membership in the Auditors Bureau of Circulations, ABC. He was trying to get an ABC rating. He had a circulation that met, or outnumbered, some of the major papers so similarly located. And when I approached the sales manager or the advertising manager of Maas Brothers, for an example, I sold him on the idea that there was a ready-made market that they hadn't even touched. And then, of course, we used certain sales gimmicks, like—I remember the first Mother's Day (inaudible) program. The *Sentinel* had—I went out and got (inaudible) all up and down Central Avenue to just pay five dollars or ten dollars for a line on the page, the Mother's Day program, that type of thing.

But anyway, in August of forty-six [1946] I left and went to Cincinnati with the intention

of going to—well, it's a school out from Cincinnati, Fisk [University]—on the GI Bill. I got to Cincinnati, and there's where I became involved with the *Call and Post* newspaper. And I started working for *Call and Post* in Cincinnati and gave up the idea of going to Fisk. And for a whole year, I lived in Cincinnati, and that's when I married Mellius James; she goes by the name of Mel Saunders now. We lived in Cincinnati, and I worked for *Call and Post* place as the circulation manager—and advertising, of course; when you work for a local black newspaper, you do a little of everything. It's there that I got really the first experience in politics, in working with that newspaper, because *Call and Post* is a Republican newspaper. It's published out of Cleveland. (Buzzer sounds)

### ***Pause in recording***

Okay. Well, from August of forty-six [1946] until—must have been December of forty-seven [1947]—I was with the *Call and Post* and working Cincinnati, all the areas of Cincinnati. That's where I first met Berry, McClain and White. Ted Berry at that time was a lawyer aspiring to become mayor—acting mayor, mayor of counseling—of Cincinnati. Later on, I was to begin with Ted Berry in 1966 when I went to OEO [Office of Equal Opportunity]. When I went to OEO as compliance officer, Ted Berry was the Community Action Agency director working out of Washington (inaudible). I met Ted in forty-six [1946], and we attended courses and are good friends. As a matter of fact, Ted is the smiling person there.

I think that the experience I got for *Call and Post*, because in Cincinnati you weren't under that segregated system—although segregation was there, 'cause I remember on the east side of Cincinnati, on the south side, southeast side, when they were breaking up the discrimination of the system in the recreational centers, (inaudible) to enforce the law in Cincinnati, the white broke bottles up in the bottom of the swimming pool when blacks were in there. I recall efforts to integrate the eating places—now, this is back in forty-six [1946] in Cincinnati—and the type of resistance that came from the white community.

As a newspaper reporter in Cincinnati, you see, you get a police card issued by the chief of police. Well, I had a police card which entitled me to go anywhere. As a roving reporter, I was able to go places where the average black person couldn't go. Even investigated cases, rape cases.

I remember one case that Jimmy Smith, the editor, and I got involved in, involving a black youth up there who was accused of—and arrested by the police department—of raping a white girl. The way he arrested was that she and a white friend drove through west end of Cincinnati, and the police was about a half a block behind her. See, this boy that she was with yelled at this other kid, and this black kid jumped on the car. The police came up and arrested him, and she identified him as the person who raped her.

Jimmy and I worked on that case, and we traced the fellow down to the Veteran's Administration down somewhere in Kentucky. What we found out was that if he had intercourse with the white woman, then she had to have venereal disease, because the boy was in the Veteran's Administration hospital at that time being treated for venereal

disease. And it was that type of work that we got into in Cincinnati, where I really investigated reporting.

Of course, then I also attended the University of Cincinnati during the time I was there. I took advertising and creative writing. And then when I left there—Mellius and I left there and went to Detroit, and that's when I began going to Wayne—it's Wayne State [University] now; then it was Wayne University. I was working for Ford Motor Company. I later left Wayne and went to Detroit Institute of Technology, where I got my degree in liberal arts. And then from there—I came out of Detroit Institute of Technology, I went into University of Detroit Law School.

It's very interesting, also: in working with the *Sentinel*, I met Harry T. Moore in forty-six [1946]. Mr. Andrews called me in to write a story on Moore; he was in there talking to Andrews and telling him what he was doing and everything.

OA: And Moore was the field director for the NAACP?

RS: He was executive secretary for the NAACP of Florida; there's a difference between field director and executive secretary. Executive secretary, he's working for the state and paid by the state; a field director is paid by the national office.

I never envision that if you meet somebody you forget them, and then on December on Christmas night of fifty-one [1951], I remember when the news flashed that Harry T. Moore and his wife had been bombed in Mims.

OA: This was in fifty-one [1951]?

RS: Fifty-one [1951], Christmas night of fifty-one [1951]. No thought had ever occurred to me about even working for the NAACP, but in August of fifty-two [1952], Gloster Current approached me as I was working in the—I was doing volunteer work in Detroit branch NAACP office. I was teasing Gloster, and Gloster walked up to me and say, “Are you teasing, or do you really want to work for NAACP?” And I said, “Yeah, I'd like to work for them.” So that was the end of the conversation, and about two weeks later I got a telephone [call] from Walter White, the executive secretary of the NAACP, asking me to come to New York. And there were train tickets, so I went on to New York and talked with Walter, and that's when I met Ed Davis again. I knew Ed as a kid when he was principal of Booker T. Washington. But again, Ed was there, Paul Perkins was there, Walter White, and that was it, I think, and they interviewed me.

After that, Walter told me to go into the other office, and that's when I had my first real experience of meeting Roy Wilkins. And I—Roy and I always laugh at this, because we belong to the same fraternity [Omega Psi Phi]. I was figuring out how I was going to deal with Roy. I knew Roy was sharp. And in talking with Roy, somebody told me that Roy was not financial in the fraternity. So I got in there and the first thing I did was to say, “Roy Wilkins, are you financial?” to get familiar, and Roy had to laugh. We struck it off on even grounds then.

Then, after the interview, I went back to Detroit, and Walter White told me that I would hear from them. These people I'm naming, Walter White and Roy, these are people that you would have enjoyed talking to. Walter White, you couldn't tell him from a white man.

OA: I've heard about him.

RS: There's something else he was, along with A. Philip Randolph. When A. Philip Randolph threatened to march on Washington for fair employment practices [during the] war, it is said Walter White said that President Roosevelt called him and wanted to know could Randolph bring two hundred thousand people to Washington. Walter White is the person who told Roosevelt, "Yes, and even more than that!" (OA laughs)

White also, in forty-eight [1948], was on the committee that was appointed by President Truman to study segregation, and that is the study that came out in which the committee recommended that all segregation should end, in education, in the armed forces, everywhere. And as a result of that study that was made, in which Walter White was on the committee, Truman then issued his order desegregating the armed forces.

In that study, it was also pointed out that racial segregation of public education had to go, because it was a barrier to the nation's defense efforts. They pointed out that two-thirds of all the rejectees in the armed forces during World War II came from the southeastern states. This is black and white, and here's where you had your racially segregated school. So the conclusion was that, you see, this thing was also a hamper to (inaudible) themselves for the country here and you have a white predominant educational system. This is something a lot of people picked up on, that when you fail to educate your male population—or your population, period—then—

OA: You're going to give them the minimum skills required to do the work.

RS: To do the work, or even to carry a rifle. I mean, these guys couldn't even carry a rifle. And this was the basis for the move to desegregate the armed forces, and eventually led into desegregation cases. But Walter White was quite a guy.

They sent me back to Detroit about a week later, prior to us coming to New York for orientation. I didn't know where I was going when I got to New York. And then about two weeks later they asked me where did I want to put my office? Well, naturally I told them Tampa, 'cause Tampa was home. (OA laughs) So I found myself on a flight coming down to Tampa, and the office was located, at that time, at 1404½ Central Avenue.

OA: NAACP office?

RS: Yeah. Now, what happened was that Fordham—William Fordham and [Francisco Junior] Rodriguez were law partners, and they were doing a lot of NAACP work. And having selected Tampa, then the agreement was that the office would be placed—they

had space, so that's where we located it. That was up there with Dr. Ervin and Dr. Silas, and Fordham and Rodriguez.

When I came back to Tampa, the impact of the (inaudible) was tremendous on black people in the state of Florida. They were scared. Teachers were afraid to even join. Membership in the NAACP had dropped somewhat, around from fourteen or twelve to fourteen thousand to about—oh, roughly around fifteen hundred statewide. And in some areas that we went into, people—when you started talking about the NAACP, they wouldn't talk to you.

Tampa has always been a key city when it came to civil rights leadership, and Tampa had the largest branch. I think the membership—in 1952 when I came down, we were able to raise the membership to three hundred, and in Miami the membership had dropped down to about fifty, mostly younger whites. But the impact of Harry T. Moore's killing, they really did a job. And of course, then I began to work out of Tampa, statewide. Now, what we found in Tampa was that there had been voter registration efforts, and playing a major role in it are such people as Mathew Gregory.

FB: And he was with any particular organization?

RS: He was with NAACP, and also president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters; he was working with A. Philip Randolph and the NAACP. There were several individuals, including Ed Davis. There was another man (inaudible), Maloney, and I can't think of this other person's name; it'll come to my mind after a while.

FB: Could you describe these people as the leadership, or was it broader?

RS: In the area of these people today, they would be compared for—you are moving out of the area of being called an activist. You are now moving out the area into what—several years ago they called you an activist. These were the activists.

OA: Okay. All right.

RS: Believe it or not, they raised more hell than you did.

FB: I believe it.

RS: They raised more hell, because in forty-six [1946] I recalled the Tampa branch had a split. You see, you had one segment that wanted to follow the path of conciliation and (inaudible) the table, and then you had this other group over here who said, "Hell, no." They believed, and they wanted to march downtown then, and some of them did.

There was a black fellow killed by—well, he bought some furniture in West Tampa. The furniture dealer sent a collector out to get the furniture, and the guy walked in his house and the guy—the grandfather killed him. And the Tampa Branch NAACP went—I mean, they really defended the guy. Got the lawyer and everything. And what happened was



that—they talk about the youngsters today, who are—the ones who was sitting in—they didn't compare to the group that I was talking about, 'cause those fellows met on Howard Avenue and Cuba Street one day, Howard Avenue and Constant [Street] where the branch was meeting. I remember we had to go out the window one night, 'cause those guys got in there and started pulling guns on each other. I mean, it was just that much turmoil in Tampa, tenseness. They were all opposed to discrimination, although they had different ways of going about trying to resolve it. But the tenseness was there; the atmosphere of the change was there. And the national office had to send somebody down here to resolve it, because they were starting up two branches of the NAACP. (laughs)

OA: Yeah, (inaudible).

Yeah, I don't know what anybody has told you. This historical Mr. Davis told you about, 'cause I was sitting in there one night covering it for the *Sentinel*, and I was the first one to get out the window. Man, let me tell you, it was just that rough. And what was happening was that this other group, you see, (inaudible) opposed to the police brutality, that was in existence. Now, when I came down, one of the things that we were concerned about in Tampa was number one police brutality, voter registration. And of course, I was assigned to work on the Groveland case<sup>3</sup>, which was not a Tampa situation, but it had its effects because of Willis McCall, Sheriff McCall, and Rodriguez was working on it. And we were concerned about the school situation, because I had learned in the national office that Hillsborough County was supposed to be the fifth county in the school suit, which eventually came down as what you call the 1954 case. I don't know whether Ed told you this or not.

OA: Okay, explain that. What do you mean it was the fifth county in the 1954 case?

RS: Well, in the Topeka, Kansas case<sup>4</sup>, which ultimately ended with the Supreme Court knocking down racial segregation in public education, the national office—it was the intent and purpose of the national office to include Hillsborough County, because Hillsborough County has always been a leader in the movement. But somehow, some of the people in Hillsborough County withdrew after—according to what I learned, after there were the acceptance of Howard W. Blake High School. Now, Howard W. Blake was built on a former city dump.

OA: Yeah. And before that, it was—

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<sup>3</sup> In 1949, a white woman accused four black men of rape. One of the men fled the county, and several days later was shot by a sheriff's posse. The three others were arrested, causing a mob to attack Groveland's black neighborhood. All three were convicted, and two were sentenced to death. After the Supreme Court overturned the death sentences, Sheriff Willis McCall was assigned to transport the two men for retrial. McCall shot both prisoners, claiming that they tried to overpower him. One man, Walter Irvin, survived and stated that McCall shot them in cold blood, but McCall was not punished in any way for his actions. In his second trial, Irvin was represented by Thurgood Marshall, and once again sentenced to death. Governor LeRoy Collins commuted his sentence to life in prison. Irvin was released in 1968 and died in 1970. McCall remained sheriff until 1972, when he finally lost the election, and died in 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas.

RS: Before that they had Don Thompson, which was a warehouse down here, just on the other side of the graveyard. Don Thompson was the end result after the old Middleton burned down. But Hillsborough County withdrew, and they missed, I think, a golden opportunity, because historically they could have been the fifth county in the school suit that ended in wiping out discrimination across the country. Now, this came to me from one of the lawyers in the national office; they indoctrinated me when I came down.

When I got here, we embarked on voter registration, the first major voter registration drives after the—

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RS: —after the Supreme Court marked out the lily-white Democratic primary, in 1950, I think it was, the Committee on Political Education AFL-CIO, sent Wheatman into Florida. Wheatman was able, with AFL-CIO money, to raise the voter registration numbers of blacks and whites around a hundred fifty thousand or so. When I came down, the national office gave five thousand dollars—it was three or five thousand dollars to Tampa to conduct the first voter registration drive.

OA: This was when now when you came down?

RS: In fifty-two [1952]. And in fifty-three [1953], the drive was successful, and I was approached about running for city council. I refused. And that's when Rodriguez ran for city council, in 1953; this was all part of the program. Rodriguez ran and lost. Rodriguez and I—I think Rodriguez was the first black person to run for city office.

FB: Yeah, that's what I thought.

RS: Then we began dealing with the way Negroes were being treated in the stores—for an example, there was a store out here on Cass [Street], near the foot of the Cass Street bridge, in which the manager kicked a boy, a young boy. The NAACP almost closed that store down.

FB: Was this from direct action or lawsuits, or what?

RS: Direct action, picketing the store. There was a lot of that going on. This is even before your demonstrations were going on. Gregory can tell you a lot about that type of activity. There were a lot of protests against police brutality. As a matter of fact, numerous complaints went up to the Justice Department for investigations of killings and whatnot.

We got into the housing problem. The people down at Columbia Restaurant were advocating under the urban renewal program that all of the property in Ybor City, from Nebraska Avenue east—I think at that time—well, at that time the incinerator was located out by the railroad station, out on Maryland Avenue. They were to take that and go to—I think it was Palm Avenue or Columbus Drive. They were advocating—Cesar

Gonzmart was advocating that all of this property would be cleared away, and they would build Spanish-style houses, using urban renewal funds.

Rodriguez and I got together and we began to raise questions, because at that time, you know, we had half lots. We were concerned about relocation of black people, and would they be allowed to own property? And of course, we had this big meeting at the Urban League—it was on Governor Street then—and it was at that time we found out that some of the so-called black leaders in Tampa didn't even understand what was happening. Because one of the questions (inaudible) was, given the half lots and the value of the houses were not more than about five or six hundred dollars, most of the (inaudible) houses, would these people be allowed to move back? The answer was they'd be given the first opportunity. And then, the next question was how much would the houses cost? And the answer was somewhere around twenty-five thousand dollars. Well, that was one of the reasons that the NAACP finally decided that they would move to ask HUD [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Renewal] to hold up on urban renewal monies, until a workable program complied with the HUD regulations.

The other reason was that the mayor—

OA: Who was?

RS: I think it was Julian Lane at that time—appointed a committee, an all black committee and all white—with some white members. We didn't object to the appointment or that type of thing, we objected to the purpose for which the committee was appointed, and that was to approve this Maryland Avenue project, that is the lily-white—you know, out there where the homes are, where the Urban League is now. And we objected on the grounds that the workable program (inaudible) that the committee—any committee that was appointed for approval of urban renewal programs could not be a one shot committee. It had to be a committee appointed to approve all sites in the community, and it had to be a integrated committee.

When we brought this to the attention of the city planners, well, they advised the mayor and others that the NAACP that didn't know what it was doing. Well, they didn't know that we were being advised by and had brought down an expert from the national office to do a survey in Tampa. That expert had told Nick Nuccio all the problems that they currently have out in West Tampa, and he predicted what would happen if they didn't have a proper relocation program, and he recommended that there be a committee of black persons who had knowledge of real estate transactions to advise the branch and the community on what to do.

We tried to get this committee—and I will not give the names of these people. (OA laughs) We tried to get this committee together, but they promised they would work. But later on, when we tried to follow up, some of them gave all kinds of excuses. Some of them were in the funeral business, and they had to depend on the county and city for ambulances and that type of thing, and they were intimidated—economic reprisals, they were afraid of. This committee never functioned.

But, based on the fact that we had them on a technical ground, a letter went up to Dr. Bob Weaver, who was then head of HUD, and he was formerly the national chairman of the Board of Directors of the NAACP. We sent this protest up, and Dr. Weaver notified Julian Lane that they had to comply with the workable program. He would give them one year to bring the program into effect, or no monies would come down. One night, about two weeks before the deadline, I recall Julian Lane calling me and saying that the city was going to comply, and requesting that the NAACP withdraw the complaint.

What could we do? We withdrew the complaint, even though the result still wasn't that satisfactory. But the urban renewal program did move forward during that time. The night that we had the meeting at Bethel [A.M.E. Church] right after the complaint was withdrawn, it was announced that this committee will be integrated. We had a mass meeting at Bethel. And I never will forget Cody Fowler and the city planners and all the white fathers sitting on the front down there, and they explained to the public what the problem was. And they got up and they said, "Yes, we're going to comply," and everything. Well, it was the threat of the loss of the money that brought that about.

Then they moved into the school desegregation fight, right after the 1954 decision. Well, in fifty-five [1955], Hillsborough County was chosen as one of the counties that desegregation along with ten, nine other counties that I had been assigned to move the program forward. And we had been—part of the training of implementation of the program was that you could begin with a petition to the school board, to implement the law, the Supreme Court decision. After a reasonable period of time, if the school board did not implement the decision after being petitioned by parents of children in the school system, then the next step would be initiation of lawsuit.

OA: Okay; how were you—who were the parents?

RS: Well, there were sixteen parents, originally; you'd have to go back and look in the newspaper in fifty-six [1956].

OA: Okay, we have that.

RS: There were sixteen petitioners, and nothing ever came out of it. The school board never responded to the petitioners. Later on, they began talking about [how] they were operating under the freedom of choice system, and they said that in a school system that was not segregated—racially segregated—the parents had the rights to go to any school they wanted to. Now, you know what was going to happen. (laughs) Eventually in 1958, all of those petitioners had dropped out, with the exception of maybe three or four, and there'd been pressure put on by the legislative committee—Charley Johns Committee, which was conducting a statewide effort to harass and intimidate the NAACP. They wanted the NAACP membership roster.

Incidentally, that's the case in which Father [Theodore R.] Gibson walked out on them in Miami, and the NAACP took the state legislature into court. Ended up in a case in the US

Supreme Court, Gibson versus the legislature<sup>5</sup> or something, and the Supreme Court ruled that the legislature did not have a legal basis for which they could ask for the list, and we didn't have to give it to them.

OA: So this was a committee in the legislature. They were attempting to terrorize—?

RS: They subpoenaed most of the key cities, out of which they subpoenaed persons of Tampa, Miami. Well, they subpoenaed NAACP people from all over the state. And in Miami, they even went so far as to subpoena people like Reverend [Edward T.] Graham. In Tallahassee, they were subpoenaing anybody who—any organization, like (inaudible) and that type of thing.

OA: They actually had the committee hearings?

RS: Oh, yeah. I was subpoenaed about seven or eight times.

OA: And you had to testify each time?

RS: Reverend [A. Leon] Lowry was subpoenaed.

FB: On the private—on the internal matters of the NAACP?

RS: On the internal matters of the NAACP, and we refused to go into it. I recall coming back from a New York staff meeting, and when I got back there was a letter and a money order. And something told me that this looked kind of funny coming from Ybor City, somebody saying they agreed with the work of the NAACP, and I turned the money order and the letter over to the Tampa Branch. Cause you see, they were issuing subpoenas (inaudible), combing through your records. We had no records. All the records—the national office had them.

Well, I was the—what you'd call the representative of the corporation in the state of Florida. And when I was subpoenaed before the committee, Mark Hawes<sup>6</sup> asked me about my records. Well, all I had were clippings of the committee's actions, 'cause they had sent somebody from Mississippi to find what they were doing in Mississippi, and they were going to set up the same program here in Florida to harass and intimidate and that type of thing. And Mark Hawes asked me were these all the records I had? I said yes.

Then he pulled out a carbon copy of this letter that I had received with the money order, and asked me do I recall seeing that?

I say, "Yes, I recall seeing that."

He says, "Well, it isn't in your records."

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<sup>5</sup> Gibson v. Florida Legislative Investigation Committee.

<sup>6</sup> Chief attorney for the Florida Legislative Investigation Committee.

I said, “No, it isn't,” and then he put it in the legislative records as an exhibit. And then I pointed out that this was a money order from Tampa, and the policy was to turn that over to the Tampa Branch. Since he had not subpoenaed the Tampa Branch records, he couldn't crack me. But they tried everything; they tried everything.

OA: Now, that is interesting. And you were the only one from Tampa? Did Ed Davis have to go before them?

RS: I think Ed Davis was subpoenaed, too.

FB: Anybody else from Tampa?

OA: This was what year?

RS: This was from fifty-eight [1958] on, until around sixty-one [1961] or sixty-two [1962].

FB: That committee lasted that long?

RS: Yeah. When we got them on the Supreme Court and the Supreme Court ruled against them, then they began coming down here to the University of South Florida looking for homosexuals, to justify the existence of the committee. But the Johns Committee was really defeated when the NAACP took them all the way up to the U.S. Supreme Court. I mean, these are things that the public doesn't know.

OA: (inaudible)

RS: No, we were subpoenaed, and I just—whole weeks sat up there, and they gave me twenty-six dollars. I endorsed the check over—all of us endorsed the checks over to the NAACP, and they didn't give us any more checks after that. (all laugh) But anyway, this is type of harassment and intimidation we had to undergo.

And finally, in 1958, it was decided that we would file suit after the parents—for the remaining parents. That's Manning, Willie Mae Manning, on behalf of her son; [Sanders B.] Reed, who was a barber; a longshoreman, I've forgotten his name, Randy somebody [Randolph Myers]; and [Nathaniel Senior] Cannon from Port Tampa. They were the four plaintiffs in the suit. And that case—

OA: And the name of that suit was what?

RS: Manning v. the Board<sup>7</sup>, Hillsborough County Board of Public Education. I remember when the case was filed I came down to the school board under the court order, and I went through every minute they had going back for twenty years and complied all the information necessary for the case. It showed the existence of racially segregated schools, and you'd be surprised what was in those minutes, what we pulled out of those minutes.

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<sup>7</sup> Manning et al v. the School Board of Hillsborough County.

But anyway, the case judge, I think—I forgot the name of the federal judge that ruled against us in Tampa. The result was that the—when he ruled that we had not exhausted administrative remedies and threw it out, because he said that we had not gone through the freedom of choice. I recall some of the—three or four so-called black leaders in Tampa—coming to a meeting and laughing, and one of them said, “Yeah, we told you, but you y’all didn’t know what you were doing. This thing ain’t gonna work,” and that type of thing.

OA: You can call his name. It’s okay. (laughs)

RS: I won’t call his name.

OA: Are they still—

RS: There are some very key people in the community.

OA: Okay. Oh, I see.

RS: But one of them came up to me one night, made sure that I was by myself, and told me that no SOBs in New York or nowhere else were going to get the desegregation program going, because it was not going to do anything but kill up a whole lot of nigger children and get some Negro teachers fired. Well, this is what was coming from the black side, too, you see. I laughed, because I was not—economically, my check was sign by Roy Wilkins; my travel and everything came from New York.

OA: That makes a difference.

RS: That pressure that came from the black community and the white community didn’t affect me.

But once the case was lost here, it was decided to appeal it to the Fifth Circuit. It was appealed to the Fifth Circuit, and I recall that we—Rod [Francisco Rodriguez, Junior] and I were trying to raise the money, the fifteen hundred dollars necessary to appeal it, and everything, and we couldn’t raise it, no contributions or anything. And, almost on the last day, I had to get on the phone to Roy Wilkins, and Roy told me, “Look, put Rod on the plane to New Orleans and tell him to pick up the Western Union money order for the necessary (inaudible) fees.” The national office paid. So we got Rod up there—on the last day!—and Rod was able to file the notice of appeal with the Circuit. Later on, the Fifth Circuit heard the court—case, rather—and reversed the judge here.

OA: Rod did the argument?

RS: Rod and somebody from the national office were the lawyers. The Fifth Circuit reversed the judge here and remanded the case back here for a hearing. And then—we sat back laughing then. (laughs) So when it came back, in the meantime Reverend Lowry

and I had begun to work the community, to get black people to ask for transfer of their children. We were able to get, I think, a hundred and sixty-eight persons to ask for their kids to be transferred under the freedom of choice plan.

OA: Transferred to predominantly white schools?

RS: Yeah, and every one of them were turned down. Some of them, the school board—all they did was just send you a mimeographed sheet. Denied, denied, denied. And when my boy became six years old, I enrolled him at MacFarlane Park [Elementary School], and as soon as I got to the door, they handed me a slip of paper that he was to be put into Dunbar [Elementary School]. Well, I appealed it; they turned it down.

In the meantime, the case was going to be heard, and Connie Motley came down, Constance Baker Motley. That picture there was taken the day she and I were walking into the courtroom. She came down, and in talking—she was trying to find out, you know, to make the case stronger, what could we do. I mentioned to her there were about a hundred and sixty persons that had petitioned the school board, including myself, because in the second grade—when my boy went to second grade, I again asked for him to be transferred to MacFarlane Park. They turned it down. I told a certain principal, “Don’t get involved in it,” because I was going to file suit myself, but fortunately I didn’t have to file suit. Although if you look at the decision of Judge Bryan Simpson, you’ll find that there are four or five paragraphs in there—almost the whole decision talks about what I did to get the school board into a trap.

And what we did—Connie sent a hundred and sixty people a petition. I said yeah; she said, “Let’s go to work.” So about three nights and days we worked, contacting all the parents that we could.

The day of the court trial, the school superintendent at that time was testifying, and Connie Motley asked the judge to ask him where were the petitions for the hundred sixty-eight or so people that had asked for reassignment. He said that they were on record. The judge said, “Why don’t you have them here?” and he said, “We didn’t know we had to have them,” so the judge gave him forty-five minutes to go pick them up.

He brought them back, and, thumbing through them, Connie said, “There is one missing.”

The judge said, “Which one?”

She said, “The petition of the Saunders child.” You see, they had already put my boy in. You know why they were doing that<sup>8</sup>. And the superintendent said they couldn’t find it. See, the judge told him that he would give him so much time to find it, or else he would hold him in contempt of court.

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<sup>8</sup> In his 2002 interview with Canter Brown, Saunders provides a lengthier explanation. When the school board found out that the case would be retried, “they hurried up and got him into that school because they were afraid that there would be proof that they were not acting in good faith.” See also a January 24, 1962 article in the *St. Petersburg Times* titled “2nd School Desegregated in Tampa.”



And they went and got my boy's records and brought them back into the court—all of this is in the record down there in the court.

OA: Wow.

RS: But anyway, that's when Judge Bryan Simpson came down here, and the word was that—I can't prove this, but the information I got was that none of the federal judges in this district would hear the case, and that the lead judge from the Seventh District of Florida had to come down here and himself and try it. And he ordered—that was the first order for the school board to begin desegregation, and then they began to get the trick on us. It wasn't until 1970 or so that the NAACP Legal Defense went back into court, and that's when we got the order—you know, 80-20<sup>9</sup>—because the school board was still dilly-dallying around.

Other areas in Tampa—

OA: What was the basis for that suit in 1970?

RS: It was the same case.

OA: Same case, it just (inaudible)—

RS: You see, the case was still under the jurisdiction of the court. The school system is still under the court.

FB: So your position is they weren't really desegregated?

RS: They were not desegregated. And even now, any person—the NAACP Legal Defense Fund still is the organization representing to the original plaintiffs, and they can go back in court any time against the Hillsborough County School Board. The court still maintains jurisdiction. You didn't know that?

OA: That's interesting. We need to talk about it.

RS: The NAACP still maintains jurisdiction over this case, and the local branch put down the first three hundred dollars to get the case filed. Then the Legal Defense Fund picked up and paid all the attorneys' fees and expenses. This community has never paid for it. Most of the fights that have been up, most of the money coming from the national office.

OA: I believe that.

RS: The interesting thing is that the NAACP only paid its attorney—local lawyers of records—only seven hundred dollars. The school board paid its attorneys twenty thousand dollars to lose that case.

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<sup>9</sup> This was the target ratio for schools: 80 percent white, 20 percent black.

But that's the general history of it, and then, of course, we got into other court suits. The recreational fight here—Rod can tell you about the court suit to open up recreation, and the compromise that was reached on Ballast Point. Seems that there was a reverter clause there that, if that was opened up to the public or something, blacks used it or something, that the land would revert to the Tampa Electric Company. And rather than get into a long fight on that, because we knew we were going to win that—reverter clauses are by nature unconstitutional—they agreed to open up everything, including the beaches and the parks.

(Buzzer sounds)

***Pause in recording***

RS: See, the issue was that they were scared. They were being attacked by the Charley Johns Committee. Economic pressures were there. I remember—you need to talk to Mazie—what's Mazie's name? I think she's with MRC now. Mazie was my secretary for a long time. Her husband used to play football for Florida A&M, was a professional guy—Braxton, Mazie Braxton. Mazie was my secretary. Mazie can tell you about coming to work, and the telephone calls. One morning we came to work, and they had thrown bricks through the windows, in the office and everything. The general trend was that you didn't join the NAACP, because then you would lose face with the white folks out there.

OA: So [James] Hammond organized the Young Adults [for Progressive Action]?

RS: Well, Hammond organized the Young Adults. But at the same time, there was this close tie in between, because anything the Young Adults did, we always knew it, and we always were ready with the money and the lawyers. It was Young Adults—it was mostly the NAACP Youth Council that did the picketing and the sit-ins downtown.

OA: That's the kind of things the Young Adults did? (inaudible)

RS: They participated, but not to a great extent.

OA: What were they—just a voice, kind of a voice?

RS: They were a kind of a voice that—we worked on some things that were important to the community. The driving force behind them were Hammond, Aurelio Fernandez, and Jones; he's somewhere down in Miami, Reverend Jones—James Jones's father. (inaudible) Jones was a member. And you see, they were used in such a way as to get them involved without them becoming identified with the NAACP. Remember, there was a lot of—

OA: Would you say they were basically kind of a middle-class bunch?

RS: Middle-class bunch, yeah, for that period, and they didn't want to (inaudible). Even though when we put on a membership drive—most of our memberships came from black teachers in Tampa, but you ask them to show a membership card, uh-uh [no]. And some of them would deny belonging—you see, it's just that type of thing.

But I recall during the Cuban [missile] crisis when the black soldiers were brought in here, they were living in the Pyramid Hotel. The white soldiers were being bivouacked all up and down throughout the major motels and everything. And Hammond and I got together—Hammond, Perry Harvey and I—and we sent a telegram up to the Secretary of Defense and to President Kennedy protesting what was happening. Kennedy sent a three-star general, I think, down here to MacDill Field. He called everybody in and threatened them.

*End of interview*