

MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Oral History Office

JUDGE ROBERT WATTS

Interviewed by Richard Richardson

The Governor Theodore McKeldin-Dr. Lillie May Jackson Project
An inquiry into the Civil Rights activities
of
two Maryland leaders
during
the mid-twentieth century

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Baltimore, Maryland

Judge Robert Watts
Richard Richardson
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Court House
Baltimore, Maryland
Richard Richardson
Cassette I

Cassette 193

I. Please tell me about your early life and your first recollections of Dr. Jackson.

A. Well my early life is always been in Baltimore City. My grandparents and my parents were all born in either Baltimore City or Maryland. My first contact with Mrs. Jackson was indirectly my grandmother was what you might call the founder of Sharp Street Church or one of the founders and Mrs. Jackson came along later and was a very active member in that church. So when I would go to Sharp Street Church (on visits because I'm Catholic,) Mrs. Jackson would be there and I always remembered her. My first one-on-one contact as a beginning to be an adult was..... I was a freshman at Morgan State College. There were some problems involving theatres for blacks in Baltimore City. The rest rooms weren't clean and I got a little upset about it. I formed a group of students to protest the theatres in the city. Somebody suggested, you know, since she was President of the N. A. A. C. P. that I should contact her and I contacted her about that, got some advice and of course she translated that committee into a N. A. A. C. P. youth chapter. I got busy and I got enthusiastic about the N. A. A. C. P., got the

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literature and I formed a chapter out there which that year became the largest youth chapter in the country. So that's when our relationship started.

Before my work they sent me to Atlanta to a national convention and we had the largest chapter in the country. So from then on working through the college chapter of the N. A. A. C. P. as a college student, I dealt with her on several matters, many matters I should say. When I was in law school I recall Charlie Houston was the forerunner of Thurgood Marshall in the N. A. A. C. P., very prominent and brilliant trial lawyer whose really the father of all the N. A. A. C. P. cases in the sense that he dreamed up the Fourteenth Amendment's uses in civil rights cases. Thurgood and Hastings were students of Charlie Houston. But Charlie had a case, two cases one involving a young black who had allegedly stabbed a white girl in Pimlico that had the community very upset.....the N. A. A. C. P. felt he wouldn't get a fair trial. They employed Charlie Houston for that and then they employed him to fight the Druid Hill Avenue - thoroughfare. They felt it was unfair to blacks to run that highway through the black community in our best neighborhoods simply to bring whites from the suburbs into the downtown area. And I worked with Charlie and the N. A. A. C. P. on those two cases and this is when I was a student in law school working with them which I was very happy to do because

I learned a lot about being a lawyer. And then of course as I got to be a lawyer I got involved in the civil rights cases and in the student demonstrations in 1963. This sort of briefly, that's mostly my contact with.....

I. You attended the University of Maryland Law School.

A. University of Maryland....right.

I. All through this time were you working with Mrs. Jackson?

A. Working with her in the N. A. A. C. P. I worked with the voter registration campaign then when I got out to be a lawyer I chaired that, I did some research, checked law on one or two of the early cases to open up the University of Maryland and then when I got to be a lawyer we were associated with two or three of those. As a lawyer of course is when I did most of the work and that's when I really became her boy in the sense that just about everything came through me. Her daughter Juanita was not a lawyer and I guess I was way up in her esteem as a lawyer so that I got a lot of the work. But I didn't get paid for it but she just had me because of my enthusiasm working on a lot of cases. There was just so many of them I don't want to clutter up the record with them, but every time a kid got beat up by a policeman I had to go. Every time there was some mother who called and felt somebody was mistreating in the station house I would go. I began to go down to the counties

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represent people because they felt white lawyers wouldn't give them fair representation in county situations. It was helpful to me as a lawyer. I was learning a lot too, and I got cases that maybe as a young lawyer I would have never gotten and I got headlines, stories and that help to build up me and my practice. I was very appreciative of what she did at the same time I lent a lot of assistance to the N. A. A. C. P. and her cause too.

I. I was just about to ask you about the effects of the Supreme Court ruling of 1954 on the civil rights movement as far as you and Dr. Jackson were concerned.

A. That was of course a momentous time for us because I worked with the N. A. A. C. P. I went to all the national conventions from 1949 on...for like eleven, twelve straight years. I was there in Atlanta in 1950 when we decided to take on the separate but equal doctrine of Plessy vs. Ferguson. I recognize what a big battle that was of course and so did Mrs. Jackson, she was there too. She had always believed that the separate but equal doctrine was wrong and she was the one that helped us get the state conference of branches to adopt that concept. See they always felt, especially the southerners^R in Mississippi, Alabama...when race relations were such strange situations. They felt that the best we could hope for is our schools will be

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equal you know its significant now days...a lot of them are still. And it took a lot of persuasion on the part of lawyers to get them to adopt a concept that, that in itself, a concept that cannot live in an American democracy. And that merely separating the races, even when the facilities are equal is inherently unconstitutional and wrong. She was the one who helped us get the state conference branches to do this. There was a tight, close vote on that too, incidentally and we did agree to go after segregation on that level. In Maryland we had a case in which we agreed for the purposes of the suit that the facilities were equal and in spite of that we claimed that it was unconstitutional and that case was pending when the '54 case came down. So that was a great day for the N. A. A. C. P. in Baltimore... for the reason that Mrs. Jackson had been one of the early believers in that concept, which was vindicated by that decision.

As a result of that '54 decision she sent me, my law practice was building up then, but I did it.....I ran around to eight or ten counties and appeared before the school boards between the '54 and '55 implementation decision urging them to obey the law and explaining it...that type of thing. So that I was very involved with her on that and she was very involved in that.

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I. What was the reaction at the places you appeared?

A. Mostly not daring to say that they would not obey the law, but promising nothing and of course I went back to several of them and then in 1963 it might have been.... as a member of the Civil Rights Commission for Maryland we held hearings down in Easton on school segregation and the school board heads appeared before the committee with the same thing they told me in '54 and this was '63... were were we can do it, but we can't now....we are going to do....I remember how much difference that was.

During that time she was steadfast in insisting on us pushing this '54 decision so it was a real victory for the N. A. A. C. P. which she was very proud of and she worked very hard not only in Baltimore City but in the counties too. She had been very active even prior to the '54 decision. In '53 she brought Thurgood Marshall over here and they went down and had the school board integrate the Poly A course which was a real breakthrough for us in Baltimore City....and of course next year Baltimore City schools opened without too much fanfare. She concentrated on the counties and we had to file a couple of suits to get them to obey the decision. I am kind of hazy about where it was...I think Harford County and St. Marys County....a couple others. I worked on those.

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But she was very interested in pushing the integration of the schools in the county and she had me and she had Tucker Deering another lawyer. We drew up suits and we worked with lawyers from all over the country. I attended several conventions on groups of lawyers...for instance... she was so concerned about the '54 decision...that when they called an emergency meeting in Atlanta a few days after this to prepare the attack...to implement the decision...she sent me down to Atlanta to get the information so she could carry this fight on in Maryland.

That became the focal point of our work for many years after that '54 decision which she was very active in...in the city and the county....

I. Baltimore County or all the counties?

A. All the counties...we had some counties ignoring the law...hoping it would just pass away...nobody would do anything about it, several chapters were formed as a result of that and she got them in her own group, went down and organized chapters...had us go down and speak to them about the law... offered them legal protection. She was very concerned about implementing that '54 decision.

I. What was the atmosphere like when you went to the counties or small towns?

A. They would listen respectfully because I was reciting the

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law, I had the decision there, I gave them some of the background materials and urged them without us having to file suit, as a matter of education for youngsters, that nobody in Maryland could be big enough to carry out the mandate of the court and not have to file suit. The school boards listened without any of them committing themselves except to say that they would obey the law but they would bring up the different problems they would have. We can't do it over night, we have got to ^edo this, we got to do the other... of course I was arguing they didn't have to and they wanted to prepare the teachers and they wanted to prepare the students, they would talk about the logistics of the buildings and that type of things.

One of the biggest things they brought up was that they would have riots and of course I had the decision saying that that's no way to deny people constitutional rights. That was one of the biggest things they brought up...the riots...fights...disruption and of course we had several decisions that said that's no reason for denying constitutional rights...if that were the case you would never have minorities anywhere asserting their rights...it always causes some disruption of the society.

So briefly Mrs. Jackson was very active herself in speaking to groups all over the city and the counties in urging them to

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support that decision. I remember she to tell a story which impressed her about one of the psychologist, Dr. Kenneth Clark did a test...he took a group of dolls... white, blue eyed, blonde and dark skin negroid type doll babies and he took them into both white and black schools and ask the kids to come up and select what doll they like to have. Well significantly the white kids, which you might expect, all took...which shows you the feeling that even youngsters had been brainwashed because of separation and not use to being around blacks so they went up and took what they were used to, but significantly enough the black kids, I don't remember the proportion, but an astounding proportion picked the white skinned children...He demonstrated that's what school segregation does to young minds. It distorts their own ethnic background for the black community and gives white kids the idea that some how they are better by being white.

I. I think you were telling us about Mrs. Jackson and her work in the city and the counties and within the N. A. A. C. P.

A. I want to make this point if you want to get back to it. While she was pushing this, it was a slow process and a lot of the counties were not integrating their schools. I think that's one of the reasons...nationally...why we had the demonstrations in '61, '62 and '63. Because of the slow

pace she was very frustrated in all this work. We started '54 to '55 urging, going to the school boards, urging them to do so and then the biggest demonstrations were in '62 and '63. So you can see how frustrating that was and young people realizing that they had this decision from the highest court in the land, it didn't make their lives any different, they still were not integrating the schools and I think that had a lot to do with going to the street as they did. She played a significant role in that if you want to get to that...I know you were interested maybe eventually.

I. On a more personal level what kind of person was she?

A. From a personal point of view she was a person who loved people, but I think more than anything else she hated with a passion, injustice. One thing I admired about her that she didn't care who you were, whether you were black white, blue and she meant it. Many a time we were going representing some poor white person who thought they had been mistreated...in some way...not a racial thing. Her heart went out to people and we all loved her. She wasn't that kind of warm person as I felt, we just loved her because of her passion for injustice...not to reach out and touch her...see what I mean or to hug her. She wasn't that kind of...what psychology would call anal type of person. She wasn't an oral person, she was a more anal person. It was obvious to her that she liked people and most of all

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she wanted to come to the help of anybody in trouble. I remember that I use to get a little upset with her because I didn't have quite as much passion in many cases because having been a lawyer representing people I had been bitten by those who claimed they were being mistreated and I found out they really weren't. For instance, mothers would call up and say they locked my boy up and the police beat him and he didn't do this and he didn't do that, my poor boy. Well she would call me with this idea you go down there...they are mistreating that young man. Well you know in my mind...three o'clock in the morning this was probably some guy who had his head busted and probably deserved to have his head busted, which was true in many cases too. And she had me tramping down to the station house and the kid would say did you have the gun, yes. I said your mother said you never had one at all, you know mothers, the kid never tell her. Its that kind of thing. She would always want to go, she never would hesitate. I said Mrs. Jackson you know some of these cases aren't like you said...all no no, this good mother why she is a member of the church, she's a good Christian woman and she wouldn't lie to me. You would go down and find out the guy didn't really deserve a lot, a lot of them did of course. And I remember this kind of passion lead us...to really...there was a period...the years are kind of mixed up...but I guess it was like '52, '53

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somewhere in there ~~were~~ we had a wave of police brutality... really...we had a police commissioner who practically said wait till they hit a nice person like you, we were all there, the editor of the Afro, the ministers, when people like you get beat up come see me but he didn't want any...he almost felt they had a right to beat the guy in the ghetto and that gave the police a sort of a license to mistreat people, nobody was doing anything about it, police commissioner was backing them up. So we documented case after case, I worked very hard on that and we got about fifty some cases, we went to him and showed them to him and asked if they would be investigated and he would write back...we looked into the matter and see no reason to take any action, we just got letters. Then we went down to see him two or three times with allegations and apparently got so exacerbated we decided to take it before the grand jury when we got special permission to take the case before the grand jury. Well I took fifty eight cases and I said well now I could have taken all I said no...lets take the best of the fifty eight and I took twenty seven of my best cases, ^h were I had the best witnesses before the grand jury and there was not one indictment in the whole thing, they just threw everyone of them out, refused to take any action which...she pushed us.

I. Were there any blacks on the grand jury?

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A. In those days very few, maybe one or two at the most.

I. Were there any black judges then?

A. No. So we got no justice there. Let's say I'm stupid, out of fifty eight cases what did I have, one good one?

Let's say I'm _____...

which shows you the kind of climate we were operating in, but she pushed it any way. You would almost want to give up, but many a time a guy would get mistreated by the police. She would always send me or some other lawyer down to represent him, we got maybe fifteen dollars if we could get anything, sometimes she would send us ten...she didn't have a penny, that much money. You have to admire a woman that insisted in protecting people that you really don't like because they were people...that's what made the cases difficult. They were usually people who, number one, couldn't talk, they couldn't even explain what happened in an articulate way. I remember lots of times I would have a guy on the witness stand, he couldn't even tell his story, but I can't go up there and tell it. I guess if I would have taken the stand the judge would have believed me. But the way they talked and sometimes the roughness would come out and the police who is trained in testifying would get on the stand and you would look at the two, you would figure who you think is wrong here, the police is very calm and articulate and this poor, ignorant black...couldn't talk and he has a

a criminal record...so they were throwing cases out on us right and left.

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25 Mrs. Jackson demanded protection for those elements in society who were unable to protect themselves.

Mrs. Jackson was hurt by young civil rights demonstrators who complained that the N. A. A. C. P. and the older generation were moving too slow. Mrs. Jackson didn't like this militancy, but gradually came to accept their point of view. The N. A. A. C. P. provided financial and moral support to the youngsters.

Mrs. Jackson was always available to those who needed help. She was persistent and determined to obtain justice. The change of neighborhoods in the late forties and early fifties brought the question of bars and saloons to the forefront. Mrs. Jackson took a strong stand against these establishments in the black community. She later accepted the idea that blacks should be allowed to enter any bar or saloon.

This page is the last of the transcription as done by the interviewer, Richard Richardson. From page 15 on the transcription was done by Jean Porter.

criminal record so they were throwing cases out on us right and left. But, she persisted and you've got to admire that because somebody had to represent that kind of a person in the community.

I made a talk some years later in which I quoted from Justice Murphy -- I said, "To the extent we protect the most unorthodox and hated and most undisciplined among us, to that extent make all our lives more secure." That is true. That's what she really believed and she said that very often . . . "That's the guy we have to protect. He's entitled to his constitutional rights just like anybody else." There are very few people who would say that. She was one of the few that really went ^{(to bat)*} and . . . people criticized her, criticized me many times about wasting our time with the people who were not really wholesome people in the community. But, she always said, "They have a right to be treated properly like anybody else."

That was one of the things that I admired, and I was pushed into it; but I began to see what she meant. People felt good sometimes just to have people like us showing an interest in them. It gave them the idea that they were somebody in the community and weren't just some garbage to be pushed around like a pail of garbage. That's one of the things that was really outstanding about her. She would go down and complain to the Mayor. She would complain to the Governor about these poor, blacks being mistreated, and even though they had records . . . "Well, this guy has committed two burglaries. He's been in jail. So what, Mrs. Jackson?" "He still has the right to be treated properly." We always admired her for that.

* Editor's words in brackets

When the Civil Rights kids came along, the youngsters, as a result of that North Carolina situation in '61, she was very hurt and I stuck with her, but youngsters kind of felt that we were too slow. . . the NAACP method . . . they were going to take things in their own hands. So, they went in restaurants and were refused -- you know that story. I don't know how old you are but I guess you were around in those days. I. I remember a lot of them.

A. It was '61 to '63. They used to say the NAACP was passé. We didn't have the militancy. We didn't have the daring -- the Court System -- we always went to Court. We went to the mayors and the governors and as a last result, we went to Court. They said the courts were slow, the government didn't do anything -- "We're going to do it ourselves." But, significantly enough, she played a very significant role in their movement -- the bus rides, the arrests. She supplied the bail. She supplied the lawyers. She gave contributions. They didn't have any money and every time they got locked up, who did they call . . . the NAACP. She sent lawyers and bailbondsmen to get them out of jail. So even in that movement -- I remember she didn't like what they were doing -- she thought that was disruptive, and as an older person, she didn't have the exuberance -- she still supported them with her money. The grandson who is a senator now and one is a lawyer -- Michael. They were all out there and they were getting arrested.

She finally came around. Juanita and I would represent them at the station houses. Even when the storehouse was not full and they needed

bail money or money for lawyers, she came up with the money. She played her role there even though -- the NAACP, as you know, didn't participate as an organization in demonstrations. The first case we had involving an arrest in a restaurant, Mrs. Jackson retained her daughter, Juanita, Tucker Deering and I to represent them in the Courts here. The first big case to come downtown -- and I remember very distinctly -- I had to remind CORE -- CORE took over then -- The Congress of Racial Equality -- I had to remind them that the NAACP and Mrs. Jackson still played a significant role in the whole operation.

Now, Of course, during all this time, not only was she claiming police brutality and trying to integrate the schools, she was giving awards to outstanding citizens who had made a contribution which encouraged people to get active. His phone was always opened to anybody in trouble. Mothers, grandmothers, youngsters would all go to her with all kinds of problems -- some of them didn't involve the law -- segregation, discrimination on the job, some taxi driver didn't pick somebody up or a bus driver was rude -- she was right there. She would write a letter or go storming in complaining. I mean, I don't care who you were or how little you were or how insignificant you were in terms of the total power structure, she was always standing up for the little guy. She had won the respect of many people in the power structure.

I remember, I had been in to have a man's sentence reduced -- prisoners used to write to her and she would turn them over to me because they had certain legal problems. I would go in and talk to the judges . . . "No, can't do it" . . . I figured it was a failure in

trying to get a sentence reduced. I'd call up and say, "Mrs. Jackson, I'm sorry." She'd say, "What do you mean . . he didn't do this . . he should be out . . ." and she'd run down there -- two days later that man would be on the street. I'd see the judge, I'd say, "What did she tell you?" He'd say, "Bob, I tell you the truth, that woman exacerbated so much I let the guy go just to get her out of my office." She would just plead . . you know, she touched their conscience. Whether you liked her or not, you respected her because she was there pleading and fighting for some poor old guy who had probably done something wrong and deserved to be where he was, but she thought he ought to be out. She usually based it on the fact that they had a good mother or a good Christian family . . and you know, . . ."Give the boy a chance." She was terrific.

During this time, and I hope we don't forget that neighborhoods were changing -- '49, '50, and '51 -- blacks began to come out of the locked-in ghetto. As a result, when neighborhoods moved up, the bars-- in those days a bar that was serving whites couldn't serve blacks -- when the neighborhood began to get blacker, the barkeep or owner would go down and file for a petition to serve blacks. In course, in order to keep liquor out of our neighborhoods, Mrs. Jackson was on the war-path. She didn't want any changes. She said, "You take that liquor out of here. You're killing my people with liquor now. We don't want liquor establishments." She went to many a fight down at the Liquor Board. They respected her too. When she mounted a fight, she usually won it. She'd get community support. She'd go down with 200 people. I went with her many times as a lawyer. Many times, since I was a

lawyer, the bar owners who would like to change used to come to see me. They figured since I represented her that I would be in a position to calm her down. I said, "You're wasting your time. I don't care how much money you could pay me. If you paid me a million dollars, I couldn't do it. That lady is so dedicated there is no way I could change her even if I wanted to." She was a real pro and she won many a liquor fight.

Then, significantly enough, the Chief Judge, Michael J. Manley, got a case before him in which they were challenging that as discrimination -- a man ought to be allowed to serve who he wants. So I said, I agree with you Judge." So I went to Mrs. Jackson, I said, "Mrs. Jackson, I've got a problem. We are using this thing, you know special permission to serve blacks to keep liquor out of our neighborhoods, but I think we ought to support this concept of white discriminatory act even though it means all white bars can serve blacks wherever they are." She went right along with that. It shows she wasn't just a racist -- a chauvenist for blacks -- and even though that meant that now we couldn't knock out these bars -- we were knocking them out pretty regularly -- now a bar, wherever it was, could serve black or white or whoever they wanted. I joined in that suit that went before Judge Michael Manley, I think in some way saying we would not protest or object, and by that Judge Manley worked it out with the Liquor Board and ended a discriminatory practice. But the significant thing you see in this new blacks that were coming up, this separatism, they would have opposed that because they were so bent on this black and white separateness but, she right away saw the inequity in

that rule and she was immediately amenable to having it changed.

These are really the ends that she fought for the hardest and they were peripheral matters like I remember a black was picked up for rape of a white person -- I remember one case down on the Eastern Shore -- in those days we used to have to move the guy to another county because they would lynch him. She used to send us down to investigate cases and lots of times our being on the scene would calm the community down and several cases we represented the man. I remember one case . . .

End of Side 1, Cassette I

A. Judge Robert Watts

I. Richard Richardson

February 2, 1976

Court House, Baltimore, Maryland

Transcribed by: Jean S. Porter

McKeldin-Jackson Project

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A. . . . and they were really ready to railroad him on in and the blacks in that county thought that there was an injustice here and they called Mrs. Jackson and she sent us down to represent him. We raised an insanity plea and had him not charged criminally. He was then committed to an institution.

There were several other cases like that. You know, a rape case or some guy was mistreated by policeman down in the counties and we all would run down and check it out. There were several cases that I recall that people called about, that they were taking their property away, that had been in the black families for years. The whites were devising all kinds of schemes to take away their property. We investigated that and got to the bottom of it and prevented a lot of that. She was always very anxious to help people wherever they were. During all this time, of course, one of her great contributions was her ability to raise funds. She was a great fund raiser. In campaign after campaign she raised money and sent it up to the NAACP. At one time we were the largest chapter in the country even over New York and Detroit. I think most of the times we were in the first five or six in the country, and of course, Baltimore City is not as big as Chicago and Detroit and a lot of the other large cities. So, she was a great supporter. You know she was on the Board of the NAACP nationally. They respected her. At all the conventions, everybody at the convention knew Ma Jackson. She'd

take the floor. When she would take the floor everybody would clap afterwards. She was just that kind of electrifying speaker. She conducted mass meetings on Sunday at church. She brought prominent speakers, orators that would speak to the community about problems, which educated the public about what needed to be done to help blacks. This was a great contribution that she made.

These are just some of the things that I think of off the top of my head. Oh, voter registration . . . she got very involved in voter registration. She always urged people to vote. She wasn't interested in politics. She never sided with any political person in terms of partisan politics . . .

I. She never endorsed them?

A. No. The NAACP as a policy could not and directly she never did but when good people ran, she would say nice things about them. But, her main interest in politics was to get people to register and vote; and she conducted -- I could tell you about one or two of them. She always had these voter's registrations. She would hire busses and cars and pay people to take people down to the polls to vote and that cost a lot of money to hire those busses and to get literature out and stamps and all like that. That was a very busy project that she was very vitally involved with.

One of the criticisms that I had in looking back to those days -- she was not one for making coalitions with other white groups. She was the kind of a person that wanted to run ~~the~~ the show -- and I don't mean that *perjoratively* -- but she had such an organization that was so wrapped around her as an individual that it was difficult for her to

become associated with other groups in a coalition type thing. There were many times that many white groups wanted to join with the NAACP and she kind of turned them off. That was one of her weaknesses. She was so dynamic that a lot of the white leaders didn't feel they could be in partnership with somebody like that, but they respected her and the NAACP did engage in . . . I know we were very close to the National Council of Christians and Jews. I remember she took me to several of their banquets and also the ADA - Americans for Democratic Action, and even though she didn't get on their Board/^{and}become an active member of these groups, She did work in tandem with them. She could have been strong in that area as I look back, but at the same time, being the personality that she was, it was pretty difficult to do.

So that's pretty much my picture of Mrs. Jackson. There were many, many more things that she has done but it just escapes my mind at the moment.

She was very upset about the separatist movement that developed. She always said, "Black and white together too white to be black and too black to be white. One of her pet expressions was -- her husband could have easily passed for white. A lot of people thought he was white. She said, "Look at my husband. He can go in any hotel in the country. I'm his wife and I can't go in with him." She'd say, "He's too white to be black and too black to be colored" talking about her husband and that made everybody laugh. And white/^{groups} it made them realize how ridiculous this whole thing was. He could go but his own

wife couldn't join him because her skin was browner. He was good enough to stay in the hotel. She joined with the ADA -- Americans for Democratic Action -- to fight hotel discrimination which finally we did take legal action. We just put pressure on the hotels mainly through the ADA but in conjunction to a great extent with the NAACP.

I. When was this approximately? In the '50's?

A. Yes. That was before we had any civil rights for public accomodation. The hotels we boycotted. We had other groups not to go to the hotels -- telling people not to stay at the hotels. Then one hotel opened and then we had everybody go there. Economic pressure was brought to bear and they all finally opened. That was in like 1955 or 1956. I'm pretty sure it was '56 when the hotels opened, but still large downtown restaurants weren't open, movie houses weren't open until '63. She was active in that but that was more of a student thing and we had students from all the colleges join together to bring about the end of segregation in the restaurants and the downtown lunchrooms and movie houses and the NAACP and Mrs. Jackson supported them 100%. Then, when the separatists came along, -- the Rap Browns and Skokie Carmichael talking about separatism and this Africa thing, she never approved of that. I think it was dismaying to her -- her whole theory of black and white together -- don't care what the color of the skin was -- all going along together -- to have blacks that didn't have anything to do with whites -- you know, we don't want to eat with them, we don't want to go to schools with them and all that -- I guess this was a terrible blow to her but this was in later life and I used to talk to her about it. She used to say, "I don't

believe in it." I was glad to hear her say that. She never forfeited that philosophy of life.

Even before my time, she fought discrimination on Pennsylvania Avenue in the clothing stores. Pennsylvania Avenue was the main street in the black community in those days and they had all kinds of stores up there -- womens apparel, mens' apparel, book stores -- when I say book stores I mean school supplies, five and ten cent stores, everything you ever wanted. She thought that was wrong and she and a fellow -- I forget his name -- Cositoni I think it was -- this was when I was a high school student -- they got together a group of people and protested it -- "Don't buy where you can't work". That was before I met Mrs. Jackson.

I. Were these all white establishments?

A. White owned.

I. White owned.

A. It seems ridiculous as we look back. . . I mean even the fact that there weren't blacks to wait on blacks. It was tragic what the blacks had to put up with in this country. Can you imagine a whole black community, where you go in the market or the five and ten cent store, and with all that service, you couldn't even get a job except clean up the floor and washroom. I don't care how attractive you were and graduated from Morgan College, you couldn't go up there and get a job as a salesman.

I. I just couldn't

A. I say . . . I tell these young lawyers, here I am a judge, I've been a judge for almost 20 years, but when I came to practice

law 25 years ago, they can't understand that I used to stand out and talk with lawyers that I was on a case with and they would say, "Well, come on let's go in and get a cup of coffee", I couldn't go in and sit down at the lunch counter and get a sandwich. There was a little grocery store up here on St. Paul Street, down in the basement, and I'd have to get another buddy to go in and get a 1/4 pound of bologna, and I'd have to buy a small loaf of bread and a bottle of milk and sit out on the steps and eat my lunch -- or go up on Pennsylvania Avenue and eat lunch.

I. . . And you were a member of the Bar -- a lawyer.

A. I couldn't do it. I couldn't even go in and get a cup of coffee.

So, Mrs. Jackson fought all of that and right before she died, thank God, she saw the end of most of those practices she fought so hard against.

I. Were there many blacks in your law school class at Maryland?

A. Milton Allen. He was the only one the first year I went.

I. How about Judge Cole?

A. Judge Cole came the year after that. I think there was a lawyer at night school named Brundy and than Emerson Brown came in after that. school.
So, I think there were four in day school and one at night/. Now there are a hundred and some over there, I understand. Things change.

Blacks weren't in any part of the Bicentennial -- I told the youngsters here -- they came into the world and can't understand what we went through. I can appreciate the changes this country has made. I appreciate the opportunity to be involved and being able to make change. That's why I think we should celebrate the Bicentennial and

so would Mrs. Jackson. She and I were of the same mind, you know.

We've made a lot of changes and we are still making changes. I don't think we should become bitter -- so much so that we deny our country -- but a lot of these young blacks -- they don't want anything to do with the Bicentennial or this country -- she always was against that. She would never go for this 'back to Africa' or that type of thing. She had faith in democracy but most of all, her pet expression was "Thank God." She was very religious. No matter how dim things looked, she always felt that God would pull us through -- financially or with cases. She always was looking at things from a Christian point of view and you can't argue with her because she was on the right track.

But, getting people to believe her was another thing. She was a very persuasive person. She turned a lot of people off -- a lot of people didn't like her because she was so forceful -- many whites just thought she was overbearing, but I think those that didn't like her respected her and that's all that she wanted. She didn't want anybody to like her so much -- she would charge in and get up at meetings and everybody would say, "No Mrs. Jackson." But she would get up and people would get mad, "Why does she have to get up?" She would always re-preach the sermon. If you were the main speaker, she'd get up and have to repeat what you said. You talk for 30 minutes and we would all want to go home and then you'd have to sit and listen to her for 5 or 10 minutes -- she would go on and on; but most of us were glad but when she got up, everybody would say "Oh no . . ." But after she got into it, she was so good we usually always stood up and clapped.

She really inspired you. She was a very impressive person to both black and white -- mayors, governors -- all of them had a great deal of respect and admiration for what she was trying to do even though some were enemies in the sense that they would not make the changes that she wanted. Deep down inside all had a great deal of respect for Mrs. Jackson.

During all this time, she was a good mother to her children. She raised a nice family and saw that they were all educated, conducted the real estate business she was in, raised money for the NAACP. Her energy was unbounded. She was going all the time. . you know, meetings, dinners, she would always show up. She was very active. One program after another. You know that takes a lot of doing. You get tired. Most people would do it one or two years and say "Let someone else do it." She was always ready to do -- meeting once a week, or twice a month, whenever the Board or little groups would meet -- on Tuesday, go back on Thursday, Saturday afternoon meeting or Sunday morning. She was always there.

I. Judge Watts, what was the reaction to your being appointed Traffic Magistrate in 1957?

A. Well, I was accepted because the "Jackie Robinson" of the Traffic Court had been established. I was the second. Judge Edward Lane had preceeded me there by two years and he was moved to the Peoples Court. I was appointed to replace him. He had done a magnificent job. He was well accepted. The clerks and the people down there, I had worked with. They knew me from trying cases down there so when I went in it was

just like "old home week" because I knew everybody and it removed the fear that people had about a black judge. So, really, I'd have to say I met, while sitting in that Court -- I don't think I could pick out three incidents where my color made a difference.

I remember once or twice somebody not wanting to be tried by me.

I. They actually said this?

A. Yes. The officer said they wanted a postponement. I said, "Why?" She said, "Well, I think I'd rather have another judge." That happened maybe twice in all that time. I would go on and try the case and I would get beautiful letters the next day saying they were very impressed. I don't know whether I helped them or whatever helped them but other than that, my color was never of consequence at all. There might have been two cases like that in . . . I sat in that Court to finish Lane's term and then I had a four year term myself so that was six years and just two incidents I vaguely remember. They were not incidents in the true sense of the word, but other than that, people came up and I tried them, fined them, sent them to jail. There were no racial overtones in there at all.

You see, it had been pretty well established that Judges had sat in the /station house and then when I was appointed to the Municipal Court in 1961, black judges hadn't sat in the Station House and I was sent over to the South East, over to City Hospital and for the first time black judges began to sit all over the city. Again, we were all respected. We were all accepted. I had no difficulty whatsoever. They treated me fine and I treated them fairly and litigants appeared. Blacks had

only sat in ^{Western} Westwood so I got my robe in '61 and I had sat at Western as a substitute. So, in '61, they sent me to Western which was the tradition but in the meantime, in our first group meeting we decided that we could only stay in one court two months and we rotated every two months. That was to keep you from getting too friendly with the police.

I. That's nothing to do with race?

A. No. It's even stricter now. And I was the only black in that Court so that meant -- and I'm thinking this behind my fellow this was integration. So two months later, I was sent to Southeast. That was the last place I would have picked. I said, "Well, you ought to have started me at the Northwest, a Jewish community. I would probably be more accepted there." But, I went to Southeast which was all white, just about, and that was my favorite Court. When I ended up there, they didn't want me to leave, the police didn't want me to leave. The people all said, "What can we do to keep you here?" You know, certain people would come in quite often to get warrants and they always were helping someone. I liked it, they liked me. I got along fine. They kept me there as much as any Court in the city. I liked it as much as any Court in the city.

One of the reasons -- well, you're not talking about me. That's why I believed so much in integration. I felt like if you just go out and treat people right, they'll treat you right in most cases. Get that chip off your shoulder, because I can't remember any incident that was so horrendous that it stayed in my mind and made me bitter -- not one.

I've had some people come up -- half of the time they didn't know I was black in some cases -- they used to call me the Greek judge or something, I don't know what -- but they'd be upset. They'd say, "Judge, you know that nigger came in here and did so and so." You know, I've had incidents like that. Then I would tell them, "What would you say if I told you that I was . . ." and they'd say, "Oh my God. Well, see I didn't mean any disrespect about race. I mean all people are equal . . ." But, that's the term they used. It was things like that, but nothing where I was called . . . or somebody said "I'm not going to have a nigger judge try me" or anything like that -- or I was unfair because I was black or anything like that. Most of the judges that have sat around would say the same thing.

Mrs. Jackson saw this and that's why she always said, "If you treat people -- each other with respect -- it will all come out that we all have our weaknesses and our strengths." She believed that wholeheartedly.

I. Did your relationship with Mrs. Jackson change after you were appointed a judge? . . . as far as . . . I don't know the legal complications.

A. I couldn't represent her, the NAACP, from '61. The best thing that happened . . . I think God works in strange ways. I was appointed in 1961. At the time, I was very active representing the demonstrators in CORE more so than the NAACP and when I got on the Bench and I was defeated in about a year and a half after I first ran, and I came off the Bench and started practicing law the 1st of January, 1963 and I went

back on the 18th of December, 1963; so I was off the Bench for 11 months. During that 11 months, we formed the first black law firm over in Charles Center -- the first downtown group of lawyers to move into a prestigious downtown office. We ended segregation in the Hecht Company, out at Morgan College at Hechts. We opened up the downtown theaters and I participated in all of this. We opened up the restaurants all over the city. We had the Gwynn Oak thing which was a combination of all of that. I participated actively in all of that -- very actively; and just as we won the greatest victory, Gwynn Oak that summer -- I was appointed back to the Bench and it has always been good for me because I had now made my contribution and I don't feel guilty being on the Bench. I played a significant role -- I'm not tooting my own horn -- but I think I was very valuable because I never charged people in '63. I was so wrapped up in this thing that I went out and represented people for nothing even when -- for a whole year I got \$100.00. Mrs. Jackson sent me \$100.00. They voted me \$100.00 for expenses. I went somewhere. But the whole year I made \$100.00 on civil rights cases and I was in the station house practically every morning at 8:00 and sometimes I wouldn't get back to my office until Noon because by the time you tried your case and talk to the witness and talk to the people about what your next step would be -- and then I was able to talk to the restaurant owners -- many of whom are my close friends now; because they admired the way that I wasn't angry and the way I pleaded with them and begged with them. Little by little, they woke me up because of the talks I had with them. I played a significant role there.

Then, I went back on the Bench in November. What I am making is that during all that time I was in close contact with Mrs. Jackson. In '63, before I came off the Bench and while I was on the Bench, she would always call me for advice -- not so much in trying cases but she would say, "You know, you are Number One. You know, I have a lot of confidence in you." Lots of times she would get advice from me about different matters in the Association. She always had me be the Master of Ceremonies at the annual dinner. She would send me somewhere to speak. Any time she would need a speaker somewhere, you know, she would call me. I didn't know how to say "No" to her.

I was a great Colt fan and I would say, "Mrs. Jackson, why do you have these on Sunday when the Colts are playing?" She would call me up -- "I want you to be the Master of Ceremonies." I would say, "Mrs. Jackson, that's the biggest game of the year." I would say, "All right." She would say, "You're a judge now, but don't forget your mother. You've never let me down." I would always feel guilty so I would go. So, I kept in touch with her. . all the way up. In fact, when she died, I was asked to be one of the eulogists at the funeral.

She called me just a few weeks before she died to do something -- I've forgotten what. I always kept in touch with her . . stop by to see her . . send a letter to her. If I read something about her, I'd send her a letter saying, "I can't be with you but I'm always with you in spirit. Keep up the good work." Things like that.

She was a wonderful woman. You are going to hear a lot of

nice things about her from those people who knew her well.

Any other questions you might like to ask?

I. Judge Watts, what are some of your early recollections of Governor McKeldin?

A. Well, Theodore McKeldin, first of all, at a time when it wasn't popular to do so, always stood up for equality of people regardless of race, color or creed; and was really, probably the only person in high office who would do anything but give lip service to it. Not only did he, in his daily life, in visiting churches and speaking from the pulpit, talk about equality -- the thing I always admired about McKeldin was when he got in position, and he was in position to do something about it, he did act.

You know, he appointed the first black magistrate in the police station, John Barry, up at Western. He appointed the first black to the Traffic Court, Judge Edward Lane, the first black on the Census Board, the first black on the motion picture board. Whenever he would speak -- I have been in a lot of integrated groups -- there were a lot of political leaders that would come into the black community and preach all about brotherhood, but never mention it where it really counts; but I have been in white groups where McKeldin talked and he still preached brotherhood wherever he was. As I say, I always admired him because he backed up his preachments with his actions. He made many "firsts" in his community.

Back in the days when we were trying to bring about a change in the "A" Course at Poly, he stood up with us. He was always very re-

spectful towards the NAACP in its work, encouraged us in the work we were doing.

But, most of all, my recollection of McKeldin was his eloquent way of preaching of the brotherhood of man became significant because he backed it up with action. You didn't find in those days many people who could do both . . .

He was very active as a Republican. I am a Democrat so I didn't have as much contact with him as I might have if I had been a member of his party even though I supported him every time he ran because I was what you might call an independent Democrat. I didn't care as much about "party" as I did the man. I supported him when I was active in politics -- not only because he stood head and shoulders, as far as my perspective was concerned, above his opponent, but I admired the man as an individual. Very often I supported a white candidate against another white candidate simply because he was the better of the two. In McKeldin's case, I can really say I admired him as an individual and I would have supported him against a black had a black run against him. I mean I just had that great feel of admiration for McKeldin.

Even though I recognize that as a Republican, there are a lot of blacks who vote Republican, he couldn't probably be nominated without the black vote, because the blacks made up a large proportion of the Republican party, I'd take that into consideration, but I think as a Christian man who believed wholeheartedly in the Bible and in God, I think from the perspective of a Christian gentleman, he believed in the brotherhood of man. He didn't go as far as I would have liked him to go. There were many things he could have done that he didn't do, but

in his day and his time, you've got to admire the man for going as far as he went. I was very fond of him, not only because he appointed me -- he didn't appoint me because of his affection for me because I said I didn't have that much personal contact with him. I was recommended to him by Harry Cole who was the black State Senator and I was his friend and partner. We have been friends since childhood. So, when I say I admired him, it was not because he gave me a job because Harry Cole asked him to give it to me.

He said to Judge Cole, "Name your judge." and Harry Cole named me. I just admired the man as an individual. I was just so pleased in those days that he made some of the speeches that he did make from a public platform . . . people were listening to him that normally a black could never have gotten on the platform and said . . . (what he said.)*

End of Cassette I

* Bracketed phrases by editor.

A. He was a significant Governor and Mayor and the terms he served -- and in each term he did many things for blacks which made me respect him a great deal.

That's mainly my recollection of Governor McKeldin. I can't remember all the "firsts" but I remember the first black member to the board of barber examiners, beautician examiners, things like that where blacks could really play a significant role in the city. There were a lot of them that he could make and a lot of them he did. There is nobody in even this date that could say they made more black appointments than McKeldin did -- particularly making them at a time when it wasn't popular.

I. Was he making black appointments the first time that he was Mayor in 1943, '44, '45?

A. Yes. The more significant ones came when he was Governor, but he made some . . . I'm trying to remember now what he did make when he was Mayor . . . I can't remember. Isn't that funny? I remember most of them when he was Governor and his second time around as Mayor.

The first time, I was a student in law school and I don't quite remember.

I. You also served in Europe, didn't you?

A. Yes. I was overseas.

I. . . . in the army?

A. He was Mayor.

I. Yes, when he was Mayor.

A. You will come across a lot of people who will know what these significant appointments were -- an astounding large number.

I think he even supported the end of the Jim Crow law when he was Governor -- things like that. Some of the things I can't remember. I remember there were a lot of things that he wouldn't do because Cole would be disappointed some times, but there is no doubt, he was a great friend of the black man at a time when it was not popular to be a friend and I think that is his greatest significance. Plus, as I said, he preached this everywhere he went, not just locally. These are the most significant things I remember about McKeldin.

I can't think of anything else. He appointed Edward Lane, the first black to the Peoples' Court and appointed Hargroves to replace Lane when he retired, the first black at the station house. Oh, black policeman came much better. Everybody appreciated the black policeman.

I. I think Dr. Jackson also brought a lot of pressure to bear against him while he was Mayor and also while he was Governor.

A. Oh she was always bugging him. You had to keep pressure on him but he finally came around. He spoke at black churches on Sunday morning, preached sermons -- beautiful sermons. He was a great speaker, of course. I think that meant a lot to this community -- he, as Governor and Mayor, would come to these churches and afterwards stay and shake hands. He was very distinguished, full of life, full of joy for being. He really was a tremendous person, especially at a time when we didn't have the most eloquent mayors. You know, in politics

you didn't generally get somebody with the polish and eloquence of McKeldin. You know the D'Alesandros were good mayors in that sense but they weren't removed from the "b'hoys" kind of thing.

McKeldin did exude sometimes that he was above all that, even though he had his political cronies. But, that's mostly what I know about McKeldin.

He was a great man and I'm glad to see that you are doing what we are doing. I can't think of anything else.

End of Interview

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