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**An Oral History of Enolia McMillan
Conducted by Richard Richardson**

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Abstract: Enolia McMillan (1904-2006) was a dedicated civil rights activist and a passionate educator who worked for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) for over five decades. She served as president of the Baltimore branch of the NAACP for 15 years until 1984 when she became the first female president of the organization nationally. In this oral history interview, McMillan shares her experience working as a Black teacher in Maryland during the 1920s and 1930s, while illuminating the racial inequality and segregation that existed within the educational system. She discusses her service as regional vice president of the National Association of Colored Teachers (later named the American Teachers' Association) and her contributions towards achieving better pay and facilities for Black teachers and students. McMillan explains how she became involved with the NAACP and touches on the process of its reorganization in 1935 when freedom fighter Lillie May Carroll Jackson became president. She describes the dynamic relationship between the NAACP, the Baltimore Afro-American newspaper, and the religious sector of the Baltimore community, and explains how this support network facilitated progress in seeking racial justice. McMillan also touches upon the positive effects of the 1954 Supreme Court Decision, which outlawed separate but equal education. She further discusses Jackson's work in real estate, the demographic shift in Baltimore, and the cooperation between the Urban League and the NAACP.

Note on Oral History: Oral history is a methodology of gathering, preserving, and sharing the voices and memories of individuals and communities. As primary material, it documents personal reflections, commentary, and recollections, and is not intended to present a verified or "complete" history of events.

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Mrs. Enolia McMillan was interviewed on April 6, 1976, by Richard Richardson at the NAACP Offices at 1390 W. North Avenue in Baltimore City.

Richardson [00:00:11] This is an interview with Mrs. McMillan, president of the Baltimore branch of the NAACP, for the McKeldin-Jackson Project of the Maryland Historical Society on April 6th, 1976, at the Baltimore headquarters of the NAACP. The interviewer is Richard Richardson.

[00:00:36] *pause in recording*

Richardson [00:00:43] Mrs. McMillan, please tell us something about your early life, education, and your involvement with the civil rights movement.

McMillan [00:00:51] Well, I was born in Pennsylvania at Willow Grove but came to Maryland when I was three years old. I lived with my dad, who was a farmer on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, but I came to Baltimore at the age of eight to enter school because the school system and Cecil County was quite inadequate. I was educated in the schools of Baltimore, going through the segregated school system here, and finally entering Howard University in Washington, D.C., because there was no accredited college in Maryland that I could attend. The University of Maryland would not accept us in those days and Morgan was not accredited. We lived right out on the campus. My dad was a farmer.

McMillan [00:01:42] I had been concerned about inequalities and injustices ever since I left the country at the age of eight because it was quite evident that we did not enjoy the opportunities that the white segment of the population enjoyed. We were unable to eat in restaurants, unable to go into some of the department stores to purchase items, unable in other department stores to try on garments—hats and what have you. We had to pass—I lived out in Northeast Baltimore, where Morgan is located now—and I had to pass by the Eastern High School on my way to the one high school that I was permitted to attend: the Baltimore Colored High School. The name wasn't changed on that until after I had graduated. Now it's the Frederick Douglass High School, but then it was the Baltimore Colored High School. And constantly observing the discriminations that we were subjected to, I naturally had a desire to do something about it.

McMillan [00:03:11] When I graduated from high school—when I graduated from college in 1926, the only job available to me was teaching. Other than domestic work, and I didn't need to go four years to college to learn how to cook, and iron, and clean, and wash. My mother had taught me that. Knowing that, I prepared myself to teach, and at that time, the Black teachers—colored we were called then—received only about one-half as much pay as the whites had, according to the Code of the State of Maryland. We had to meet the same qualifications, though. Our school terms were shorter than the whites. We were paid on a monthly basis, which saved the state some money when they chopped two months off of the school term. The whites were paid on an annual basis. So you see, they didn't save any money on cutting their school term short. So the first year I taught, the school term was eight months. I received \$80 a month, \$640 for the year, which was just about half of what—well, a little less than half because the whites had a nine-and-a-half to ten-month school term; a minimum of 180 days.

McMillan [00:04:34] So when I decided to work on my master's degree at Columbia University, I chose to make a study and report on the factors affecting secondary education among Negroes in

the counties of Maryland—we were called Negroes too then—and I wanted to call attention to the inequities that existed. And of course, as a result of that study, that did cause my instructor, Dr. Briggs, up at Columbia, to contact the State Superintendent—who was Superintendent Albert S. Cook—about the study that I had made regarding our group. And the Maryland Colored Teachers' Association gave me an opportunity to present the results in condensed form before that Association, which did attract some attention and gave me an opportunity to inform not only Maryland but some other states, what was happening here in Maryland. And Maryland, because of its equalization fund and some other features, was tops in the estimation of a number of groups—educational groups—when it came to provision for educational opportunities. I was elected president—a little later—of the Maryland State Colored Teachers Association, that gave me the opportunity of working even harder to bring about some changes.

McMillan [00:06:31] I left my job in Charles County after having served in the state for nine years, seven years of which I was principal of a high school in Charles County. Upon coming to the city, because of the study I had made, the President of *The Afro-American*, Dr. Carl Murphy, got in touch with me and said that they planned to reorganize the NAACP. It was one of the earliest branches. Originally, it was chartered back in 1913, just four years after the National got started. But after I don't know how many years, we had sort of faded out. So in 1935, it was reorganized and I had the privilege of getting out and getting members in the Baltimore community. I headed up the women's division—Raymond Young headed up the men's division—to get members so that we could reorganize. Mr. Murphy told me, too, that Mrs. Lillie May Jackson had consented to serve as president, but they had to have the members first. So we worked to get the members so that we could reorganize the Baltimore chapter of the NAACP. And of course, from then on, I was active. I served as Chairman of the Membership Committee for quite a while and was on the Executive Board of the local branch.

McMillan [00:08:03] Meanwhile, the State Colored Teachers Association began to work very hard on this matter of unequal pay and unequal school terms and what have you. And we had bills before the legislature every year, but they—for some reason, they never got passed; they would be postponed until the end of the session. And I remember one year they couldn't even find the bill and the session would close without any action. So we decided that there was only one thing left for us to do, and that was to take our case to court. So we had a joint committee of the Teachers Association and the Baltimore branch of the NAACP, of which I happened to have served as Chairperson. The purpose of that was to get some money together for the court case and, also, check into possibilities for the plaintiffs. We did work on that, and when they found that after we got our plaintiff and we got started—and the powers that be happened to know that the NAACP wasn't in the habit of starting things and letting them drop—why we finally had the law that provided for unequal school terms and unequal salaries removed from the Code of Maryland with the result that we were no longer subject to that type of discrimination. And of course, later, because of our activities with the Teachers' Association, I became active in what was called, originally, the National Association of Colored Teachers. It was later named the American Teachers Association and I served as Regional Vice President, and in that capacity, I did get around in the region quite a bit. So it was a matter of working with the educational institutions and with the NAACP to bring about changes. I don't know whether that's most of what you wanted or not.

Richardson [00:10:23] That's fine. You mentioned about working with the teacher's group on a regional basis. This was during the thirties and the forties?

McMillan [00:10:33] That's right.

Richardson [00:10:34] How would you—if you remember, how did Baltimore compare with other cities in the region as far as Black teachers and Black education?

McMillan [00:10:42] We were taking leadership in the area of ending discrimination in the length of school terms and pay remuneration, and that's the reason I happened to have been called on rather frequently to visit some of the other state conventions, and so on.

Richardson [00:11:04] I see. When did you first meet Dr. Jackson? And tell us something about your early relationship with her.

McMillan [00:11:15] I didn't meet her until after Mr. Carl Murphy had asked me if I would work to secure memberships. I don't remember how soon—I didn't know her at all. I had been out of the city for nine years working. And of course, the four years before that, I had commuted back and forth to Howard for four years, which meant that I didn't have time to become involved in what was happening in the Baltimore community. I happened to have been too poor to have stayed there, so. Transportation was available on the old W.B.&A. Electric Line for \$13 a month, and I could board and lodge home—take my lunch with me. So I really didn't know the members of the Baltimore community too well, and I didn't meet her until after we had started working on the problem of reorganizing the Baltimore Chapter. Of course, from then on, after she was elected as the Chairman of the Membership Committee and a Member of the Board, I was involved from then on and got to know Mrs. Jackson better, but prior to that time, I really didn't know she existed.

Richardson [00:12:38] Did you work closely with her during these earlier years?

McMillan [00:12:43] Closely in the sense that I helped to plan the membership campaigns and worked faithfully in that area. Of course, as problems came up the Board naturally had to take positions and work towards implementing those stands whether it was a matter of securing a colored policeman, a colored fireman, or making the Ford's Theater available to us, or the employment of Blacks in government and business and industry—whatever it was, well naturally we were involved in working it out. Mrs. Jackson was a very dynamic leader (telephone rings).

[00:13:33] *pause in recording*

McMillan [00:13:33] She was a very dynamic leader, and as such she (background noise; buzzer)—As a dynamic leader, she usually formulated the plans herself and told you what they were (laughs). The discussion usually centered around her—It was more or less a one-way street whereby she would indicate what we would be working on next and how we proposed to do it and what she wanted us to do. It's a very efficient method of procedure; a method that the nations of the world used for many years. Sort of autocratic, but things get done.

Richardson [00:14:28] Was there much conflict or was it the kind of leadership that the movement transcended, this—the way she managed?

McMillan [00:14:42] (speaking at the same time) Yes, well everybody—

Richardson [00:14:43] Because you were all interested in the same goal.

McMillan [00:14:45] That's right.

Richardson [00:14:46] Yeah.

McMillan [00:14:46] We concurred with her in the goal and since she was accepting the leadership, we supported her. We agreed with the goal 100%. And if there was a difference of opinion regarding the method, she was given the benefit of the doubt. We were willing to try her methods. They usually worked. I can only recall a few goals that we had that didn't work out. I remember one was when they decided to make Druid Hill Avenue and McCullough Street one-way streets, and she said, "Nope, we don't want it that way. That makes the people in the inner city, the victims of the people who live in the outlying areas in their effort to get downtown to their jobs hurriedly." So they went to court, but they lost that case. That was one of the few cases that they lost.

Richardson [00:15:53] Were there any others that come to mind? Any other cases?

McMillan [00:15:57] Of course, we lost some other cases in the lower court because we didn't have money to carry them up higher. We lost our case against restrictive covenants here in Baltimore when Reverend Mead, who is now the pastor of Israel Baptist Church and is about to retire, bought a home in a white block and the members of the community carried it to the court in the city. And the lower court said that he would not be permitted to live there because he had violated the decision that the members of the community had made in declaring their refusal to sell or permit Blacks to live in the neighborhood. Of course, later on, another branch that had the money to carry it on carried it all the way to the Supreme Court of the United States, and that decision became the law of the land. They said that the government itself was unable to discriminate, say who should live where, and that was permitting a group of citizens to do what the government couldn't do. And that was responsible for the opening up of housing throughout the nation to Blacks in areas where they wish to live and can't afford to live. Of course, it like all other decisions is never perfect; it never does a whole job. There are always loopholes and ways of avoiding it, but at least we have that decision and by and large, it has been effective.

Richardson [00:17:50] How did the NAACP and *The Afro-American* and the churches—Black churches in Baltimore— decide to unite for civil rights and carry the thrust forward?

McMillan [00:18:06] Well, support from *The Afro-American* was built in, if I might use that term. Carl Murphy, who was head at that time, supported Mrs. Jackson. They wanted an NAACP chapter here, and he pledged their support. And he knew that she was a person who would go for the goals, and so they worked together right straight through to his death. So that was a big plus because at least the Black community was always aware of what the NAACP was doing, and communication is half of the job. When people know what's going on, why, it helps a lot.

McMillan [00:18:59] Now, as far as the clergy are concerned, even before 1935 the clergy had been active in the civil rights movement, perhaps due primarily to the fact that equality of opportunity and justice is a part of the Christian creed. And certainly, those who are proclaiming it from the pulpit should be willing to practice it and support an organization that believed in it. And so from the beginning, back in 1935, our strongest support came from the religious element of the community. And even until this day, we get our most dependable support comes from the churches in Baltimore. I think we get more support in Baltimore than they do in some other areas, but the churches throughout the nation do provide a very potent form of support.

Richardson [00:20:09] Please tell us something about the March on Annapolis in 1942 and your involvement.

McMillan [00:20:18] Oh, in 1942, I did not march on Annapolis myself. I was in the school system and I didn't permit any civil rights activities to interfere with my obligation to the girls and boys that I was responsible for teaching. So I wasn't an active participant in that march. I knew about it and all of that, but I was employed.

Richardson [00:20:51] Did the NAACP take an active role in it?

McMillan [00:20:57] Yes. I'm not too certain as to just what things it did.

Richardson [00:21:03] How about Mrs. Jackson's involvement in it?

McMillan [00:21:06] I'm confident she was involved, but there again, I don't know to what extent she assisted in the organization and what have you or whether it was primarily a matter of approval. Wasn't that led largely by the colleges?

Richardson [00:21:24] I believe so. It was over the treatment of Blacks by white policemen in Baltimore City and some students—one that comes to mind is now-Judge Harry Cole was deeply involved in the march.

McMillan [00:21:45] Mhm. I know throughout the years one of the goals of the NAACP Baltimore Branch as well as nationally was to abolish police brutality. There was an awful lot of it. And even though we still have some, it's very, very small as compared with what it used to be. The brutality was amazing. Frequently, Blacks weren't even permitted to ask questions. You were clubbed and told to attend to your own business. And then after, in the matter of making arrests, the brutality was all—most of the time, uncalled for. Sometimes we have some brutality now. Sometimes it is fomented because of the attitudes of the person being arrested. But back in those days, an unsatisfactory attitude wasn't necessary for brutality.

Richardson [00:23:00] What changes have you seen in education and also the school system and maybe even bringing the teachers' position, too, in regards to the 1954 Supreme Court decision on outlawing separate but equal education?

McMillan [00:23:17] There've been tremendous changes, changes that those of us who worked to get that decision had had doubts about (telephone rings) coming to pass during our lifetimes because it really seemed as if we were butting our heads against brick walls. But we continued to pass resolutions, and to trouble legislators, and then finally get the citizenry concerned about it to the extent that memberships grew so that we were able to go into court after collecting the facts. And now, even though equality doesn't exist everywhere, that is the law of the land. Our buildings were outmoded, inadequate; equipment was unsatisfactory. They were some of the things that I had dwelt upon in the study that I made that was a part of the requirement for my master's degree. We never received new textbooks in elementary or high school. We got the hand-me-downs, and when they got ready to put in new textbooks in the other schools, they sent the old textbooks over to us. The curricula were unequal. And my sister, who finished from the commercial course here in 1923, was unable to get a job as a typist, a secretary, a stenographer, a bookkeeper.

McMillan [00:25:09] The jobs just weren't available. The government wasn't hiring blacks in those capacities, with the exception of some in Washington, D.C.. Business and industry were not hiring them. There were only a few black businesses like North Carolina Mutual Insurance Company or *The Afro-American* newspapers, and they had enough people in their family to take care of their needs. So there, again, the NAACP had a tremendous fight on its hands to get the government

and the private sector to employ Blacks even when they were qualified. The 1954 decision, though, did make it much easier for Blacks to qualify for jobs that heretofore they had not been able to qualify because they were denied opportunities. Take, for example, right here in Maryland, the NAACP had to have seven separate cases against the University of Maryland before those schools were opened up to Blacks. First the law school, and then the School of Nursing, and then Engineering, and then straight through. Curly Byrd was determined that if they had to give in to the demands of equality of opportunity, he would make it just as expensive as he possibly could. And he did a good job at that.

Richardson [00:26:39] Who was Curly Byrd?

McMillan [00:26:40] He was a president of the University of Maryland at that time. So, now our buildings, for the most part, are up-to-date; the curricula are competitive; the teachers are qualified and there we have a handicap that's not a part of the system necessarily. It's a part of the Black community's responsibility, in that in certain areas, the top teachers—Roland Park and some areas—are siphoned off. Now, that's not necessarily due to the school administration, but it's due to the fact that the parents in those communities will accept nothing but the best. Black or white, they want the best. And while they're getting the best, those in the inner community—inner city—many of whom are working and who don't take time to go out to the parent-teacher meetings and what have you, sometimes are not aware of the fact that they are not getting the best teachers. Even though all of them may qualify on paper, there's always a difference in the performance. Teachers—just like any other group, they don't all perform to their capacity.

McMillan [00:28:07] So things are immeasurably better than they used to be, even though we still have some kinks that need to be gotten out of the arrangements. For example, really, the best teachers need to be employed in the inner city because it's there that the needs are the greatest. It's there that we have the underprivileged and the disadvantaged. And the system needs to work out a plan whereby those youngsters can get the best if there's going to be a difference because they really need it worse than the others. They lack facilities in their homes, sometimes not even a newspaper. They also lack the ability to give their youngsters the travel that is a very important part of education. The city is doing something about that now with their trips to the art museum and what have you. They are attempting to equalize those opportunities.

Richardson [00:29:24] What was the role of the NAACP in integrating Ford's?

McMillan [00:29:30] Well, they picketed it for a number of years until such time as the management decided that it was really an economic matter. They were suffering some losses because it wasn't just Blacks that were picketing, there were whites that wouldn't cross the picket line because they felt it just wasn't fair—it wasn't right. So, vigilance paid off eventually, but it was a long stretch.

Richardson [00:30:11] What was your impression of Governor McKeldin during the 1950s?

McMillan [00:30:20] He was, I would say, about the most liberal governor that Maryland has had, certainly in recent years. And he had a type of personality and a persuasion that convinced people that this is the way it ought to be. Sometimes we have liberals, but they don't have the personality to back it up to get things done. And he had just that. He persuaded and, in a sense, compelled people—

[00:30:55] *pause in recording*

Richardson [00:30:59] There've been some who have criticized McKeldin for being insincere on civil rights. Did you ever get this impression?

McMillan [00:31:05] (speaking at the same time) Being what?

Richardson [00:31:06] Insincere on civil rights. Did you ever get this impression?

McMillan [00:31:10] No, I didn't. There wasn't anything that I knew of that caused me to feel that he was insincere. And there were many things that he did that spoke for his sincerity, I believe.

Richardson [00:31:31] How about his speaking or preaching at Black churches in the city?

McMillan [00:31:37] Of course, I never heard him, but I think back in those days, the very fact that he was liberal enough to speak at Black churches was a feather in his hat, because there were many who proclaimed they were concerned about the entire matter of civil liberties, who, for one reason or another, just never got around to it. But he was always willing to come into all groups, and if he happened to run into you outside of the meeting place, whether it was a church or some other place, he spoke—he knew you. We have some people that don't see you (laughs) outside of the group meeting.

Richardson [00:32:42] What was the NAACP's role in securing equal accommodations during the late fifties and early sixties, especially with the restaurants and motels along Route 40? That was a big issue back in the late fifties, early sixties.

McMillan [00:33:03] Well, the NAACP always came to the rescue of some of the persons who had the nerve to attempt to be served there. In fact, some of the NAACP folks were those who believed in their own gospel enough to test it out with whatever it might bring—police brutality, jailing, sentences, and what have you. So the NAACP was on the ball in that respect.

Richardson [00:33:49] How do you view the participation of Black women in the civil rights movement?

McMillan [00:33:55] Black women have played a major role. They have walked the picket lines; they have raised funds to make it possible to fund the movement; they have written to congressmen and others, to pass laws that would be effective. Whatever they found needed to be done, they have been willing to do it. They've shared their monies, they've shared their time, and they have submitted themselves to the hazards that were incident. When a judge—when a person was nominated to become a judge and they believed he was prejudiced, they have participated in the necessary activities to prevent his confirmation. I don't know what else they could do (laughs).

Richardson [00:35:32] As a Black woman, over the years, have you felt discrimination more because you're Black or more because you're a woman or both?

McMillan [00:35:42] I think more because I was Black than because I was a woman. In fact, the discriminations due to race and color were so predominant, that you tended not to be aware of discrimination that was based on sex. Of course, it did show up some. But, you know, if you're getting half of the pay of what the whites are getting, the difference between the (telephone rings) sexes is minimal. And it's not until that big difference has been taken care of that you finally become aware of the fact, "Well, here, I'm qualified as a principal but the men are getting the jobs."

Richardson [00:36:29] Where do you mean by here?

McMillan [00:36:30] I'm talking about right now, about Baltimore. That was typical of other places. When I came to Baltimore in 1935 I had a degree in administration and supervision with seven years experience as a principal in an accredited four-year high school. When I came to Baltimore, most of the principals were men. Vivian Cook, I think, was about the first secondary school principal who was a woman. Now, they did have some in the elementary schools. Of course, the fact that I was never made principal of a school high school here in Baltimore stemmed more from the fact that I was an aggressive colored person than it was from the fact that I was a woman. And that was a big surprise that I got came here. As president of the State Colored Teachers Association we were spearheading the movement to get equal salaries.

McMillan [00:37:49] And I'll never forget—At the end of my first year, I made my report and address to the group. And, of course, it was the initial session of the association and a representative from 25th Street was on the program to extend greetings. And I brought them up to date on what had happened and made a plea for court action. And the representative from 25th Street went back to 25th Street and told them that I was a radical. And the (unintelligible) for being a radical—as what they call—was that they never made me principal of any school. They picked all around—picked folks who didn't have any experience, who didn't have any training in the area, and, of course, we had to serve a year's probationary period. And at the end of the year, Dr. Francis Woods was Director of Colored Schools and he recommended permanent status for me, along with about a half a dozen other Blacks who came in the same time, and that recommendation was ignored. Nothing was done about it, we went straight on through.

McMillan [00:39:18] That went in in the spring. We started work in the fall. That went in in the spring—nothing happened. The summer went through, the fall went through, and finally, I had a conference with Dr. Wood about the matter because I was getting less money—just \$100 less, but \$100 less than I was making down in Charles County and they were supposed to have equal pay here. We received \$1100 then as a probationary teacher. And, of course, I was getting the big sum of \$1200 down in Charles County for services that I performed in connection with the teacher's home there, where we housed teachers and students who live too far. There wasn't any bussing for them. The whites were bused, but there was no bussing for the Blacks, so it was too far for some of them to stay. They didn't have any school for Blacks at all in St. Mary's County. So a number of those youngsters stayed in our teacher's home, so I got my board large and free for performing that service—running it.

McMillan [00:40:30] But when I went to see Dr. Woods, he told me, "You go to see them at 25th Street and tell them that I sent you. But you were recommended quite a while ago and the delay is over there." So I did so and it happened that I got over there after—it was in December after we'd had our teachers' meeting in the latter part of November. And when the assistant superintendent looked, he said, "Oh, when I looked and noticed that you were on my agenda for the day, I was glad, because I understand you're trying to stir up something." And I said, "Stir up something?" He said, "Yeah." I said, "I don't know what you're talking about." I really didn't. He said, "Aren't you president of the State Colored Teachers Association?" I said, "That's right." And he said, "Don't you all have a salary?" I said, "Oh, is that what you're talking about?" I said, "No, not a matter of trying to stir something, I'm trying to get equal justice." I said, "We, the Black teachers of the state—colored we were called—are doing the same work, meeting the same qualifications. In fact, we do more work than the others because we have to look after transporting the children and many other things that the whites don't have to do, and yet we're getting one-half of the pay. I said, "Are

you telling me that you disapprove of that?" He said, "Well, I remember Baltimore has equal salaries." I said, "But that's a state association." He said, "But you're a Baltimore City teacher." I said, "But we are a part of the state—not a direct part of the state system, but we are part of the state of Maryland." And I said, "In those counties, they don't have those opportunities." So he said, "Well, I believe you came in to see about your salary adjustment." And I said, "I did." So, I said, "Dr. Woods tells me that we were recommended last spring. He told me to come over to see." He said, "Well, I don't think any of the folks who came in when you came in had been made regular." I said, "No. Look through the minutes of the board very carefully and not any of the colored who came in with me have been made regular." The inference was very clear, and they didn't like that. So I remember (telephone rings) I finally became vice principal of three different schools, but never principal. But if I had to do it all over again, I'd do it the same way.

McMillan [00:43:10] Somebody has to pay the cost for securing justice and opportunity. And I'm happy I happened to be one of the folks who had the backbone to do it (laughs). I could've used that money—And there again—May I point out something that's important? He said we had equal salaries. When we were made regular our pay went from \$1100 to \$1450. The next step was \$1600. The raises were all made then, the 1st of January. We weren't made until around about March. The whites went in when we were made, they were made regular in September. They start out with their \$1450. When January came, they went up to \$1600. We were made \$1450 round about March. We had to go for a whole year before we reached \$1600. When we reached \$1600, they were reaching \$1700. We never caught up with that other group. There are so many ways of evading the law and really failing to provide equality. There still are loopholes and ways of evading.

Richardson [00:44:44] Could you tell us why Baltimore was selected as a target city in the early 1960s by various civil rights groups?

McMillan [00:44:55] I don't think Baltimore was selected as a target city. I think Baltimore decided they wanted changes. They selected themselves, they tackled the job. There wasn't anybody whose job it was to decide where we're going to move Baltimore, under the direction of Dr. Lillie Jackson, said, "Here's a need! Let's go after it." And that's what actually happened. In fact, in some of those early cases, they didn't have money coming from the national office. Take that housing case, for example: if money had been forthcoming from the national office for these cases at that time, Baltimore could have carried its case on to the Supreme Court and had restrictive covenants declared unconstitutional. So Baltimore made this decision.

Richardson [00:45:51] What was the relationship of the NAACP with, for example, the Congress of Racial Equality?

McMillan [00:45:59] Back in those early days, CORE wasn't doing anything. I don't know that it existed. If it did, a lot of us didn't know it existed. And later on, they got into the movement (telephone rings). We really had enough to do on our agenda without seeking a group to help. We were kept very busy. Of course, during the 1960s, some of the civil rights groups attempted some of the same goals that we did. The main difference was they said that "The court was too slow. You need to take this thing in your own hands." So we were called "Uncle Toms" back in those days. We weren't militant then. They were the militants. And while they did serve a purpose—there was some violence and a great deal of demonstrative activity—most of those groups have faded out of the picture and the ole NAACP is still going on, working within the framework of the government, within the establishment. We don't think we've got to overthrow it. We think we've got to change some laws and we have to implement a lot of the laws. But we're still working at it and as I've frequently said, the NAACP is the most American group in America. It is that group that has

said to America, "We have a constitution that we are not adhering to. We have a preamble that we are disregarding. Let's get on with the job and make this a real democracy. And that's what we've been working on for 67 years. Unfortunately, we haven't finished the job, but we're still working at it.

McMillan [00:48:06] Many people, Blacks and whites, seem to feel that we have finished the job so they are not supporting as they should. Blacks have good jobs—a number of them. Nice homes, attractive cars. So they look around and say, "Well, if the rest of the gang wants to make it, they can make it like I did." They're rather selfish. Many of them have gotten excellent jobs and the fact that others haven't is not too much of a concern. But believe it or not, when they get in trouble, they soon find out the number for the NAACP, either the office number or the telephone number, and they get in touch with us in a hurry. But when you ask them for memberships, they say, as the Reverend Jesse Jackson said, "Oh, we have our civil rights now. We have them on the books." But there are many times that those rights are being denied. It would be lovely if they were being implemented. It would be nice to be able to go out of business (both laugh).

McMillan [00:49:21] But right now we can't afford it because all of our goals have not—I would like to mention one thing, though. The Baltimore branch is aware of the fact that the reason we haven't achieved all of our goals is not due solely to the establishment or the white community. There are many things that we must do for ourselves, and so we do have our positive action program, which emphasizes the responsibility of the Black community to do certain definite things, and to be specific, we have better school buildings and equipment than we've ever had. But unless the Black community is able to inspire our youngsters to stay in school, to stop dropping out, to attend regularly, to do their work when they are there, and to cooperate with the teachers so that not only they will learn, but they won't interfere with the learning of others, we're not going to secure maximum results. That's just one area.

McMillan [00:50:28] I'll take the area of crime. It's true that the police are primarily charged with the responsibility of preventing crime and doing something about it when it does happen. But we too have a responsibility. The police can't do it by themselves. We've got to be willing to testify and cooperate with the police. We sometimes are going to have to be willing to inform the police when something is going on. And we're going to have to take an attitude that, "You are here to help us and we've got to help you." And what's true in the area of crime and education is true in many other areas. Working with first offenders; our juveniles get—and adults, too, but they usually start as young people—get in the criminal justice system, and we divorce ourselves from them. We start divorcing ourselves before they get in the system. That's the reason so many get in the system. Parents divorce themselves from troublesome children. They expect the school to do this or somebody else to do it instead of accepting responsibilities themselves. The result is they get in the system, then we say, "No, we don't want any community-based facilities here. We don't want those folks around." But when they are finally released, they come right back to the community. You have them whether you want them or not. And it would be so much more profitable to work with them instead of alienating ourselves from them. Recreation—right straight on through. You name it, it's there. We have a very definite responsibility. The biggest job is to change attitudes so that folks accept the responsibility. And a change of attitude is always difficult, but it's essential.

Richardson [00:52:40] How has the civil rights movement changed from the early days of the NAACP, the church, and *The Afro-American*, into what we've seen in the late sixties and into the seventies? And where do you think the movement's going into the future?

McMillan [00:53:06] I don't see a drastic change. We still get our most dependable support from the religious community. It's not a change, but an expansion. Hopefully—It's not the expansion that we would like to see. For example, the end of the NAACP, for many years, has worked on the matter of getting people to register and vote so that we could participate in the electoral process. Participate not only by voting but by holding office. And because of that participation, we do have a number of Blacks serving as mayors, city councilmen, state legislators, and even in the Congress. We don't have as many as we should have. Even where we don't have Blacks, because we register and vote, we're able to choose whites who meet the criteria that we set up for ourselves. So we are having an impact.

McMillan [00:54:21] But, coming to our Positive Action Program, now that most of the barriers have been removed from legislation—the old Grandfather Clause and interpretation of the Constitution, and so on and so forth that had for their purpose the disenfranchisement of Blacks—now that they have been removed, we're not taking advantage of the opportunities. Less than one out of four of the registered voters in Baltimore voted last fall, and that's horrible when you think that many nations of the world would give their bottom dollar to have the privilege of choosing their governors and what have you—those who would govern them. When you stop and think that Blacks and whites are giving their lives for this opportunity and that the only way America can be a government by the people is for the people to vote. And yet, we are not participating.

McMillan [00:55:28] So we have right now a massive effort; we're calling it a "Voters' Crusade" to get people not just to register, but to vote and vote intelligently. We're having our Vote-a-thon kickoff tomorrow at noon down at the Hopkins Plaza. We're having a press conference today at 2:00 up at the Urban League office. The NAACP and the Urban League and the A. Philip Randolph Institute are working together to mobilize the entire city. Every element: the religious, the educational—that's the school system—the PTA's, the neighborhood groups, the fraternal groups—you name it, we're trying to get them involved in a massive get-out-the-vote effort, not only for the general election but for the primaries as well. And we are urging people to become intelligent, to take advantage, for example, of the information that the League of Women Voters provide us with. It's a nonpartisan thing; they give us information about the candidates running for office and how they stand on different issues. Take advantage of that and vote intelligently. We believe that one reason some of the people don't vote is because they don't know what it's all about. They don't know the candidates. They don't know the issues. That's only one reason. There are a number of others. So, I think it has been an expansion, not a change, from support from the churches and so on. Not the expansion to the extent we would like to see it, but, hopefully, to a greater extent so that it will be effective.

Richardson [00:57:41] What was your reaction, and maybe, if you know this, Dr. Jackson's reaction to Governor Agnew's speech following the riots here in Baltimore in the late sixties?

McMillan [00:57:58] The reaction in general was unsatisfactory. That speech wasn't what we would have hoped for. It placed the entire blame on the Black community, and that is just a part of the story. There were factors that rested upon the white community and then the entire community that really helped to cause some of the things that happened. And to pass the entire responsibility over to the Black community wasn't exactly fair. And of course, there were some people who, after Agnew tendered his resignation as vice president, said, "Uh-huh. You had it coming to you." (laughs) Of course, he wasn't the only one who had it coming to them. It's nice to talk about law and order, but when law affects you, why, it's a different thing, and you don't hear much about law and order anymore. When those folks who were so-called proponents of law and order—when they found they were breaking the law so much, it sort of became a dirty expression (laughs).

[00:59:26] *pause in recording*

Richardson [00:59:35] What is your impression of Dr. Jackson as a businesswoman?

McMillan [00:59:48] Of course, I'm not certain that I understand what you mean "as a businesswoman."

Richardson [00:59:52] Well, I believe she—in addition to her civil rights activities, she managed or owned a real estate firm here in Baltimore City. And I'm wondering how she found time to run a supposedly successful real estate business and also devote time to the civil rights movement, too.

McMillan [01:00:15] I know she owned quite a bit of property. She and her husband had a little motion picture business going whereby they did show pictures in churches and other to other groups. She was often the orator and there was singing, and that did help to build up funds that made it possible for them to purchase properties. I don't know what else they did, but I know that had to help some. (telephone rings) So that business was certainly successful and they took advantage of (telephone rings) an opportunity there because many of the motion picture houses were not open to Blacks, and some of them that were open, there was segregation. So they were wise enough to take advantage of a market that was not being utilized. And I know that she did own—they did own quite a bit of property. I didn't know that they had a firm as such, but they owned the property and they managed it successfully financially. But that's all I really know about it. It was a successful venture.

Richardson [01:01:43] Do you know the types of property she owned?

McMillan [01:01:47] Most of them were houses or apartments. I don't think—I'm not qualified, I could be wrong—that they owned business properties. I think they were mostly residential.

Richardson [01:02:02] Do you know anything about the area in which her properties were located or their physical condition?

McMillan [01:02:11] They were mostly in the inner city. And that's understandable because, at the time that they were purchasing them, that's the only place you could buy; Black folks could buy properties in the inner city. If you bought properties outside—most of the time you couldn't—but if you could, then you couldn't live there. I do recall when Eutah Place was opened up, some Blacks began to move in there. They still had trouble getting the properties financed. So what she did was, she secured money on the Druid Hill Avenue property and then she moved up on Eutah Street. If she didn't pay cash for it, why, she'd paid enough so there wasn't any problem getting it financed. She couldn't have done that otherwise if she hadn't owned some of these other properties. I'm really not familiar with the condition of the properties. I know some folks did fuss about it. You usually find people who are displeased with the condition of the properties, but usually, the renters take care of that. People will not pay more than what they deem the property is worth. So I really am unable to address that question intelligently.

Richardson [01:03:40] Why do you think Blacks left the Republican Party in the forties and fifties?

McMillan [01:03:46] Because the Republican Party was the Conservative Party that was unwilling to change its philosophy and practices to meet the needs of all the folks who were engulfed in a depression, but repeatedly say it's not the business of government to do this and that and the

other. So they had to turn to the party that met their needs—their economic needs, which were paramount. And then, incidentally, following the economic needs, some of the political needs were met also. So it's just a matter of turning to the group that meets your needs. The fact that the Republican Party was the party of Lincoln held a number of them for many years and it still holds some. But many Blacks felt that the debt of gratitude had been paid, and it was time for some more action.

Richardson [01:04:55] Do you think Baltimore City has been deserted by upper and middle-class Blacks?

McMillan [01:05:04] By and large, the upper and middle-class people, period, have deserted the city. And, of course, now they're attempting to get them to return to the city. I happened to be on a committee that met just a second time yesterday, dealing with the problems of downtown Baltimore and the Retail Merchants and so on, and some long-term, as well as short-term planning, aims to bring the middle-class folks back into the city. It's necessary for many reasons. First of all, those individuals in the middle-income bracket have more to offer the city economically. They help to increase the tax base, they help to bring in more income taxes. We can't have a first-class city with folks who are at the bottom of the economic ladder—with them alone. We've got to balance it out. And the new homes and apartments that they plan to build in the Inner Harbor, to house faculty and students and so on, hopefully, will be one device bringing about an increase in the number of middle-class people and, hopefully, a slowing down of the outward movement. If Dr. Julian Emerson's bill that would require public officials from now on who get jobs to live in the city, if that is passed, that too will help retain some of the middle-class folks. And it does seem quite unfair to me for folks to come in from the counties, (telephone rings) take a big hunk of the economic pie out, and pay their income taxes to the county (telephone rings), and, of course, the real estate tax also goes there. We come up on the short end. This would help to remedy that. I hope it's passed (buzzer rings). We have a lot of work to do.

McMillan [01:07:36] (whispers) It's nothing.

McMillan [01:07:41] So, Blacks have been along with the whites, in the movement. It has been an effort to have better housing, better opportunities, to get away from the criminal element, but the criminal element has gone right along with them. So, perhaps they'll realize that if the city is good enough to earn your living in, it might just be good enough to live in (laughs). Maybe we can make it good enough.

Richardson [01:08:18] What is the relationship of the NAACP with the Urban League, both in the past and at the present time?

McMillan [01:08:28] The two organizations have worked together rather closely. Slightly in different areas. The Urban League has sought to emphasize the employment aspect of race relations: getting people qualified to hold jobs and seeing to it that the jobs are provided. We, for example, don't provide—for the most part in most of the chapters—we don't provide any job counseling, and so on, so forth. The Urban League does that. We don't try to seek jobs for citizens. If jobs are being denied because they are Black, then we will get into it; we are concerned about the civil rights aspect of it. But we do work together. We refer cases to them when there is no discrimination, and there are many, many, many cases where there's no discrimination, it's just the fact that there's no job there, and they work with us.

[01:09:39] *pause in recording*

Richardson [01:09:50] What do you think are Dr. Jackson's major contributions to the civil rights movement?

McMillan [01:10:01] I think she demonstrated very well that where you have a legitimate goal you certainly can work and achieve that goal. And she demonstrated that in a number of the areas of civil injustice, set your goal and go after it, and you can always find somebody, if your goal is legitimate, to go along with you—to help you achieve it. I think the courage that she displayed and the faith that she had in the American way of life was the secret of her success. Courage and faith. And her's was an active courage. You know, we have a lot of people, who have a lot of courage when it comes to talking, but you give them an opportunity to act, that courage flees. But she had an active courage that was based on faith that, in the long run, right and justice would prevail.

Richardson [01:11:30] Was the governing board or Board of Directors of the NAACP ever at serious odds with Mrs. Jackson over any policy or goal?

McMillan [01:11:43] No, I think what happened—Those of us who tended to be at odds stopped going to the board meetings.

Richardson [01:11:51] Was this recent or—

McMillan [01:11:53] (speaking at the same time) Oh, way back.

Richardson [01:11:54] —in the beginning?

McMillan [01:11:55] Well, more in the middle period.

Richardson [01:11:56] (speaking at the same time) Or in the forties and fifties?

McMillan [01:12:00] I was active on the board for a number of years, and then I finally decided that I would just not attend board meetings. And a lot of folks decided the same thing because you were a bad fellow if you disagreed. And I felt that the benefits that the NAACP had to offer were more important than any particular issue. So I worked in the membership campaigns right straight through all the time, but I stopped going to board meetings. I was told one time that "When you don't come to board meetings, we have nice meetings." And that was insulting to me. I felt that, as a member, I had earned the right to have an opinion, and I felt my opinion was just as valid as other folks' opinion, and I didn't think I should be branded a bad fellow because I chose to express it. I can recall on one occasion one person who had been a very diligent supporter of the NAACP, but who was unable—he was a physician—he was unable to attend board meetings, and the Baltimore branch had had an Executive Secretary, and we lost them every time. And he called me and said, "I'm trying to find some Board folks who will stand up and be counted at board meetings so we don't lose all of our Executive Secretariat, and I believe you were one of those folks." And so I told him, "Well, that's the reason I didn't attend board meetings because I would stand up and be counted if I had a belief." (laughs) So, the last few years I was active in the board again, she was not as aggressive as she had been, as she aged some. And I became active in conducting spring membership campaigns, so I started attending board meetings again towards the last (laughs).

Richardson [01:14:27] Was this a friendly conflict or was it something more serious? Was it basic policy or more of a personality clash or—?

McMillan [01:14:40] It was basic policy on not the most tremendous issues, but on some issues. It's very rare that a group of people all agree on all of the policies. But, generally, you discuss it and then the majority would rule. But for the minority or an individual to be branded because he chose to differ was something that I couldn't tolerate. In fact, I felt that that defeated the purpose of the NAACP. The NAACP is an organization that works for minorities. And if there's a minority in the board, that minority should be heard, just like the minority population of Blacks should have the opportunity to be heard, and express its opinions and will.

Richardson [01:15:43] And often this minority was not heard?

McMillan [01:15:47] As I said, most of the time the minority stopped going. I heard more than one person say their names were on the board, but they didn't go. They said they really wasn't any point in they're going, which was an unfortunate thing. But when there's an important program, I think too often people insist upon their will being carried out or else they won't cooperate. I cooperated, right straight through. The only year I think I didn't take an active part in the campaign was the campaign just before my son was born. I was active right straight through. And securing members is a very important part of the NAACP program.

Richardson [01:16:51] Did this conflict on the Board hurt the NAACP and its development seriously? Do you think it did grave harm to the movement?

McMillan [01:17:05] I don't think it did much harm because we were all in accord with her general goals. And there were some people who said, "Well, if she doesn't do it, who's going to do it? Who else is interested enough to spearhead it?" So they said, "Whatever she wants to do, as long as she keeps on fighting for these civil rights, it's all right with me." That was an attitude on the part of a number of folks: that the cause was greater than any other thing. Now, sometimes I think there may have been some personality conflicts, but, for the most part, I would think it was a question of method—how you go about doing things. We all agreed upon the goals, but, um—And that wasn't a characteristic peculiar to her, many leaders are domineering about the whole thing. Goals, and methods, and everything else: "This is it. This is the way we going to do it." (laughs) So it didn't do much harm. I think there could've been even greater community support if everybody had felt at home if you understand what I mean. I know, no matter what is done, usually, if more people lend their support—all-out support, not just memberships—why, more can be achieved (background noise).

McMillan [01:18:48] She did get the NAACP in the habit of listening and following, so much so that I have a hard job to get folks to come up with ideas of their own. They wait for you to propose and say how it's to be done. To me, that's one handicap in a democracy. If folks are accustomed to somebody else telling them what we should do next and how we should do it, it's very difficult to get them to do constructive thinking, if you understand what I mean.

Richardson [01:19:28] I think I do.

McMillan [01:19:29] (laughs)

Richardson [01:19:33] How were Dr. Jackson's methods different from the minorities' methods of achieving the goals that you had set for yourselves—or set for the movement?

McMillan [01:19:47] I don't recall the specific differences. Of course, I recall quite well a thing that we disagreed upon—the National had put out some Christmas seals. And at that time I was

President of the Maryland State Conference of NAACP branches, and I felt that seals that were sold to branches outside of Baltimore—the credit should go to the state conference and not to the Baltimore City chapter. Out in Rockville, Montgomery County, or what have you. We took issue on that, and so they told me when I didn't come to board meetings they were a very agreeable thing, so I decided to let them agree (laughs).

Richardson [01:20:46] Was this during the fifties or—?

McMillan [01:20:51] Let's see, it was 1935—This was probably during the forties.

Richardson [01:21:03] Do you think there's been a rise in militancy in the last few years in the civil rights movement?

McMillan [01:21:15] Maybe it has been, but I see so much apathy until—I have no way of measuring it, let me put it that way. Following the successes in the sixties, when we really got all of our rights on paper—just about all of them—apathy set in and we haven't gotten out of it. We're struggling against that right now. Maybe there has been an improvement the last couple of years—I mean, a decrease in the amount of apathy. I'm not too certain.

Richardson [01:22:07] Who is on the frontlines of the civil rights movement today and for the foreseeable future?

McMillan [01:22:19] I don't see any individuals on the front line like Martin Luther King, or Lillie Jackson in Baltimore, or A. Philip Randolph, and so on. I don't see anybody. Jesse Jackson is working hard in an economic area and so is Leon Sullivan, and so on, but because the issues are not as widely accepted, the goals—For example, let me be specific: one of the things that we work on quite a bit is school desegregation, but the goals are not as clear-cut as the goals were back in the forties and fifties. And when the goals aren't as clear-cut—and when I say clear-cut, I mean the majority are willing to accept those goals—why, you have the problems. In some areas, the group will accept this, and in another area, the group will accept that, and sometimes it's even in the areas—This morning, for example, I attended a breakfast meeting that is being sponsored—a series of meetings—by the National Conference of Christians and Jews. They have five meetings. This morning's meeting was the fourth one. The fifth meeting and the last meeting in the series—all on desegregation in the schools—will be next month in May. We had a member of the School Board there this morning who presented facts as she saw them, after which there were questions and answers and comments. The time ran out before I got to mention my concern and comment, but I did speak to her afterwards, and I ask her, "The second phase of the desegregation trouble in Baltimore has gone off much more smoothly than the first phase of it." And she attributed it to the fact that there was more community input. The reorganization of schools into regions helped to facilitate that, but there were other things. And I certainly agree with that, but I felt that that wasn't the only thing that made it easy. I felt that the board itself was more committed to its own decisions. At the launching of the first one, the board agreed on certain things, then you'd have a group of folks come in from this community and they were displeased, and the board would rescind its action and do something else. I feel that the board now endorses its own program more wholeheartedly, and she agreed with me. She said, "A part of that lack of cohesiveness on the part of the board was due to the fact that they really didn't have time. They were pressured into coming up with a plan before they were really ready, and they had more time for this other one."

McMillan [01:25:54] Now, coming back to the groups, now, of leaders: I see the role of the NAACP, one, of getting people to analyze the issues and come up with workable plans. And you

don't go all out to get people to see the way you see it. It's an educational process if you understand what I mean. And we had been pressured—the Baltimore branch—into making decisions on certain things. I would make the headlines if I did it, but I think it would be perfectly stupid because the extent to which even the NAACP is agreed on those policies, sometimes it's minimal. Let me be specific: when they were working on this matter of the frisking and the gun control bill here in Baltimore, it was a hot potato. And there were folks who wanted the NAACP to come out against it. And I can remember one of our legislators said to me, "Well, when's the NAACP going to take a stand?" I said, "We're not taking any stand."

Unidentified [01:27:25] (unintelligible)

McMillan [01:27:25] Thanks.

[01:27:26] *pause in recording*

McMillan [01:27:26] Oh, um—isn't taking any stand. I said the Baltimore community is split right down the middle on this issue. I said, "We have discussions in the board meetings, we have had a public meeting, we've invited folks on both sides, we have tried to let the community see the possibilities on both sides, and they are going to decide, we're not going to decide for them." What would happen, whatever side we took, we'd have about half the folks opposed to us. And I thought, in a case like that, I wasn't too certain myself what I was in favor of. There are so many reasons for this, so many reasons against it; who knows how it's going to work out? So we try to give them the facts and let them make their own decisions. And I think a number of the problems that we're running up against now are more sophisticated. They're not so clear-cut, and that makes it more difficult to have a goal that's generally accepted. That was a virtue of the program back then; those goals were clear-cut. And there wasn't any question, either you do disfranchise these folks or you don't. But some of these others are much more sophisticated and not so easily decided upon. (laughs)

[01:28:44] *pause in recording*

Richardson [01:29:06] Mrs. McMillan, could you tell us something about Dr. Lillie May Jackson's two daughters and their relationship to the NAACP here in Baltimore?

[01:29:15] *pause in recording*

McMillan [01:29:18] For a number of years, Mrs. Mitchell was head of the Legal Redress Committee. Dr. Carl Murphy was chairman for a while, but even then, he was not a lawyer and she handled the legal problems of the branch. They were usually referred to her—all of them. Of course, Mrs. Kiah is an artist and, naturally, she was concerned with the NAACP's program. I'm not too certain that she was too involved in the day-to-day and month-to-month activities. Much of the time, she didn't live here in Baltimore. Her husband was from the Eastern Shore, and then he became president of an institution in the South and she went there.

Richardson [01:30:22] How was your relationship with Mrs. Mitchell?

McMillan [01:30:30] It was satisfactory. I didn't have any legal cases, and so we didn't have too many contacts.

Richardson [01:30:41] I'm going to stop—

[01:30:41] *end of recording*