MARYLAND CENTER
FOR HISTORY AND CULTURE

OH 8118

An Oral History of Dr. Chester "Chet" L. Wickwire
Conducted by Michael Louis

Title: An Oral History of Dr. Chester “Chet” L. Wickwire
Interviewer: Michael Louis
Description: Transcript, 11 pages
Interview date: June 15, 1976

Abstract: Dr. Chester "Chet" L. Wickwire (1913-2008) was a civil rights and peace activist. After receiving his doctorate from Yale Divinity School, he was hired as the Executive Secretary of the Levering Hall YMCA, located at Johns Hopkins University. He later became the University Chaplain from 1968 to 1984. In this oral history interview, Dr. Wickwire discusses his involvement in the desegregation of the Northwood Theatre, located in the northeastern section of Baltimore, Maryland, and the Gwynn Oak Amusement Park in Baltimore County, Maryland. Other topics of discussion include the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), the civil rights activist Walter P. Carter, the Black Panthers, and Martin Luther King Jr.

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.

An Oral History of Dr. Chester P. Wickwire
June 15, 1976

Dr. Chester Wickwire was interviewed on Thursday, 15th of June, 1976, by Michael Louis. This interview took place at Dr. Wickwire's office at 8214 Bellona Avenue, in Towson, MD. At the time, Michael Louis was a student in a class in Oral History held at the Maryland Historical Society (now Maryland Center for History and Culture) starting in January 1976.

Louis [00:00:00] This is an interview with the Reverend Wickwire for the McKeldin-Jackson Project of the Maryland Historical Society on June 15, 1976, at his office. The interviewer is Michael Louis.

Louis [00:00:22] Well, perhaps you can begin by telling me what made you become an active person in the civil rights movement.

Wickwire [00:00:32] Well, I think this is probably a little bit difficult to do—why I became an active person in the civil rights movement–

Louis [00:00:47] Mhm.

Wickwire [00:00:47] Shortly after I came to Baltimore, in this position at Johns Hopkins University, I was approached by people around Morgan State who—students who were not permitted to go to movies over at the theater near them in Northwood and—So I suppose that was my first response to working in the civil rights movement, at least in Baltimore, Maryland, and that doesn't account for why I did it. But in any case, I did begin over there. I think that it's—We probably have—I had some feelings about social justice. I did my Ph.D. in the area of biblical ethics at Yale. And it may be that it was some of this, you know, studying, meeting the prophets, and working with people like Richard Niebuhr and Liston Pope, and other persons who are very much into the field of social ethics and Christian ethics that, you know, I felt that I should be concerned and should be involved in whatever way I could, so that maybe has something to do with it. Now, I think as I went along, my greater involvement came about, in part, having gone to—In '61, I went to the Middle East and I went to the Soviet Union and I got a feeling there—it was also in 1962 I went to the Soviet Union and took a group of students and stayed there for the whole summer—and during that period of time, our students and I were put on trial, and it was a people's trial, but it was a traumatic experience and it was frightening to everybody. I think that coming back from that experience, it made me more determined that I would do what I could in America. I became more aware of—and more appreciative of the United States—but also more aware of the flaws in our system, and I think more concerned, perhaps, to try to do what little I could to help, you know, take seriously and implement some of our ideals about justice and equality and liberty and all of this kind of thing. So I think that perhaps heightened that particular thing.

Louis [00:03:23] So what role did you play as a civil rights activist?

Wickwire [00:03:29] Well, here in Maryland, as I said, I early was involved with attempting to desegregate the Northwood theater. So that involved meetings with the theater owners and things like that and demonstrations and working with people, especially around Morgan. And then actually in the early sixties, attempting to desegregate places of public accommodation. So that—I was involved in a number of activities where we would go and demonstrate, you know, whatever—It would be at restaurants or whether it would be, you know, where it might be—It might be going down to Ocean City to try to get those people to open up swimming facilities and the use of the beaches and meeting with officials down there or here in Baltimore City. Now, I worked very much with CORE at that time. Now, I don't know whether you've heard of Walter Carter, who was one of

the—probably the most significant civil rights leader during this period of time. I think he died about in 1971, but he was the key civil rights leader, I would say, in Maryland. And, the—.

Louis [00:04:51] (unintelligible).

Wickwire [00:04:51] Go ahead—

Louis [00:04:53] Yes, even compared to Mrs. Lillie Mae Jackson, would you say?

Wickwire [00:04:57] Well, I would say that Walter Carter, of course, was a much younger person and the role that Walter Carter played—I suppose depended in part upon his capacity to relate to all kinds of people, whether it was to militant individuals—very militant—or relate to the mayor of a town, or to be able to relate and to, you know, to witness and to give leadership. So that I would suggest that Walter Carter's role in terms of organization and leading was probably very key during this period. Now there are other leaders, of course, and that— because I knew Lillie Mae Jackson well, and, you know, the family and like the—Now, I don't know what you want me to go back a moment? I know I digressed a little bit about my own involvement, but in the early sixties—I don't know whether you want me to say a little bit more about this.

Louis [00:06:02] Yes,— (speaking at the same time)

Wickwire [00:06:04] Alright well, I've indicated our concern with public accommodations and in '63 I was involved with CORE and then with the clergy in the integration of Gwynn Oak Park. Now this park was the only amusement park in the area and, I guess, it was the only one of—the major one—in the state of Maryland, and Blacks were not permitted, you know, to use this park.

Louis [00:06:29] (speaking at the same time) Yes—

Wickwire [00:06:29] So that was a—an event that—

Louis [00:06:33] But if I interrupt—

Wickwire [00:06:34] Go ahead.

Louis [00:06:34] In the 19— yeah, that was in 1963—

Wickwire [00:06:37] That was in '63.

Louis [00:06:39] But, I think, though, national attention was directed—

Wickwire [00:06:44] (speaking at the same time) Course.

[00:06:44] (unintelligible) —by another local clergyman.

Wickwire [00:06:46] Yes.

Louis [00:06:47] Why was this place selected? Or why was Maryland selected? Was there any particular reason why Gwynn Oak Park was selected?

Wickwire [00:06:56] Now, I've got documents that would explain how all of this happened. And I—you know, I'd need to look that up—but I think that the National Council of Churches probably was ready at that moment, and looking for some spot on which they could focus attention. And there were some of the individuals here in Baltimore that were alert, and I would say especially in CORE, that got in touch with the National Council of Churches. And then it worked out this way. I think that the time was right for them and Baltimore was a kind of a choice location. There had been a few demonstrations; some of us have been demonstrating out at Gwynn Oak Park before this happened, and then it was possible to, you know, simply to indicate that this would probably be an ideal spot to test things out and to go for it. And CORE was, really, very active in the activity.

Louis [00:08:00] Can I just take you back, one—

Wickwire [00:08:01] Go ahead.

Louis [00:08:03] You mentioned something about Walter Carter and his ability to relate more or less to a whole community. Does that suggest that Mrs. Lillie Mae Jackson could not relate to the community as such?

Wickwire [00:08:19] No, I'm not suggesting anything like that, because undoubtedly the contribution she made to human dignity in the civil rights struggle was, you know, was very significant, very enormous. I think what I am saying is that Walter Carter probably, as a very active young man, was giving, you know, this very dynamic leadership and moving, you know, at various levels that—and that's all that I'm saying. And my contacts were, you know, with a lot of people, but especially with him, with Walter Carter, and was working both with Blacks and with whites, so that this was—And he was extremely able, and, as I've said, in terms of his capacity to relate to persons and—All over the city, you'll find people today that really came up in a way—I mean, they derived a great deal from his inspiration and from his leadership. And many of them are in key spots in different kinds of agencies or schools and the like in Baltimore today. Go ahead. You may have some other—

Louis [00:09:31] As a clergyman, would you say there was any difference in approach to civil rights between the white churches and the Black churches in Baltimore?

Wickwire [00:09:36] (sighs)

Louis [00:09:46] Or did they work together?

Wickwire [00:09:50] Yes, they did work together, although I would say that the Black churches gave more leadership than the white churches did. Now, at this particular time—I don't know who else you're talking to—but key individuals in the Black churches, the leadership were Marion Bascom, Frank Williams, and Robert Newbold. Now, Newbold is no longer in the city and neither is Frank Williams. These are clergymen that have gone elsewhere. But in a major—these people gave very basic leadership. Vernon Dobson was a leader, but these other three men, somewhat older, were at that moment very key persons. Now, you had other church—you had, you know, other persons that were active, and not everybody in the Black church is going to go into the streets or going to demonstrate. I think that you're aware of that. And actually, one of the phenomenon about the whole thing here is that, when Martin Luther King came to Baltimore—He was not always in touch with the Black leaders that were really doing the civil rights activity. I had gone to the Civic Center when he spoke there, when there wasn't a one of those three major Black leaders on the platform with him. Now, there was some communication problem, but I'm giving

where the major leadership came from, I mean in terms of the Black clergy. Now Walter Carter, as I said, I stood somewhat alone here, but he worked with the Black clergy. With the white churches, they would work with him. Now as far as the white clergy are concerned, key leadership was given by a Father Joseph Connolly in the Catholic Church. And, I would say—I'm trying to think about some of the other rabbis that were pretty involved, but Lieberman was—Joshua Lieberman, he's now deceased. And other persons that worked some, like Schusterman, who's still alive, and various other individuals. But the persons I've spoken about were key individuals in terms of leadership. You had others, and I know I'm not naming all of them, but persons like Harold Dobson, Brother Vernon, and—there were, you know, a lot of persons. Now, I don't really want to move on to the next thing, but—

Louis [00:12:24] I will just ask you one question—.

Wickwire [00:12:26] Go ahead.

Louis [00:12:26] —and it is whether these people are working with the NAACP? These black clergymen you just mentioned—

Wickwire [00:12:34] Oh, yes, they work for the NAACP. Sure. And I think that the NAACP is highly respected here. And we know the tremendous kind of contribution that has been made by Clarence Mitchell over in Washington and everything he had to do with the civil rights bills that—certainly they worked with him. And the legal people, I mean, like Bob Watson, others, the lawyers that worked so that there was cooperation. And people made agencies or groups made different kinds of contributions. So, uh—now, I was going to mention the 1964—'63 was the integration of Gwynn Oak Park and I think that was the March on Washington with Martin Luther King. That was the big—Now in '64, we worked on trying to stop Wallace. I was co-chairman of a group to stop Wallace when he came up and ran in the primaries. Brewster was the one who ran against him in the state. Brewster was not a strong candidate, but, in any case, that was an interesting experience. We brought a truth squad up from Alabama, actually, my office. We brought—there was Amelia Boynton from Selma, Alabama. She's a (unintelligible) that's really before Selma was on the map. And then we brought a person up from SNCC and we had a truth squad, and we followed Wallace around. Now we—That was, as I said, an interesting struggle. The other thing that summer that I spent almost all of my summer on and some nights; when I was at least three nights up all night with this. The segregationists, the whites, had gotten together petitions and got like 22,000 signatures to try to keep Maryland from having a public accommodations law. We did get a federal law, we wanted the state law. So they had gotten to, you know, to see that we didn't have a state law. So we—some of us spent the summer—and I was cochairman of this thing with Frank Williams, to—

Louis [00:14:51] Of which thing?

Wickwire [00:14:53] Well, of a committee that—Committee to Uphold the Public Accommodations Law: CUPAL. So we trained about 300 people. We used a computer, we had lawyers, we had a handwriting expert, and we went through—we went down to Annapolis and spent some considerable days xeroxing copies of every one of the signatures. Then we took them, we trained people, we went into every political subdivision, to the voter register, to check the names against to see whether they were false or if they were—if some, like one person, had written a lot of names down. We found a lot of things. So that was a whole summer, this job. We did it right here in this area—then, this was a different area—but we, as I said, we trained 300 people, and the outcome—we were not able to get into court, but—We would have gone into court if we'd lost on the ballot.

But we'd won—it was question (unintelligible)—we won. So it was a victory. So those were two things in '64, this particular involvement and—We had a good cross-section of persons, you know, involved in this activity. It was training using Fortran sheets and all of this stuff and then some us working with a computer.

Louis [00:16:26] What was the governor, Theodore McKeldin, doing at this time?

Wickwire [00:16:30] Well, see, McKeldin—at that time, the governor that I had most dealings with was Tawes. And I would say that I knew McKeldin primarily in his capacity as mayor. I knew him in the other capacity, but I didn't have too many dealings with him. And, you know, I met him many times. And I think that McKeldin was a genuine believer in civil rights and that he worked for civil rights. I don't think there's any question about that. There were some instances where there wasn't too much that he was able to do in '64. I'm just trying to think of what his particular role was then. Tawes—I can remember going to meetings with Governor Tawes. He was very old when he was in office and the—I didn't have, you know, dealings with—any particular dealings with McKeldin when he was in the governor's office. But I do know that he played a significant role in civil rights.

Louis [00:17:47] Coming back to the role of the churches, what were the attitude towards militant groups who rejected a nonviolent approach?

Wickwire [00:17:59] Well, I think that probably most of the churches were afraid of them. I'm sure they were. Persons who would work with them, persons like Walter Carter—If you take the ____(??), and I'm not saying that was so militant, but— If you take the Black Panthers. Probably most of the churches would have been cautious about relating to them. This would vary from, well, I would say, from clergymen to clergymen and to church to church. There's a fair amount of conservatism, as you know, in the churches. And I can remember when in 1964, I set up meetings in the churches in East and West Baltimore, and I know that there were clergymen in the churches, especially in some of them, that were—they wanted to be sure, for instance, that I was not way out on the Left or a Communist. They weren't letting somebody come in that was going to—you know, all I was trying to do is to set up a meeting so that they could listen to Brewster. And I'm just saying that there was a fair amount of conservatism that was in evidence. So, the—Not everybody, not all the clergy in the Black or the white churches responded in the same way. And the white clergy, they found it more difficult, undoubtedly, to move along and to come into participation. I can remember some occasions when—It was clear that there was a fair amount of struggle and soul-searching going on with the white clergy, especially now.

Wickwire [00:19:52] One of the things that probably helped in '63 in the Gwynn Oak Park is that some key people came down—bishops, you know, and I remember Bill Coffin came. I can't remember the name of some of them, the people from New York State, but—Oh, yeah, well, let's see—the Presbyterian, who was head of the National Council of Churches, came down—Eugene Carson Blake—as I recall, came down so that they helped give some kind of a tone from the national level to say to clergymen, "Here, come on." And it gave some encouragement to the local clergy to participate when you had leaders from elsewhere that would come in and walk with them in this experience. So this was helpful. But many of them came reluctantly. But this was a kind of a fortuitous choice, I think, with Gwynn Oak Park—I know I'm going back. And it did get a lot of national attention and helped to get things moving in other spots. And, by the way, I spent a little time in jail at that time, on some weekends. And in fact, I was taking summer school at Harvard, so I was flying back and forth to my classes and then spent a little time in jail here on weekends—part of the time—or other weekends with meetings, then, with the Human Relations Commission and with the then County Executive, Agnew, up in the county. He was the person that threw us in jail.

Louis [00:21:32] Yes, well, I'll come back later him later. But thinking now of your protests and your arrests: what significance do you think this had on the whole civil rights fight? The whole fight for equality?

Wickwire [00:21:40] Well, I think that, probably, it was the exposure in the press and the media that—when it became clear to persons in the community that, you know, there was a feeling on the part of different individuals that what was going on was wrong, the discrimination was wrong, and that persons were willing to pay a bit of a price for it. I think that it had an effect on the public and I suppose that, I would think, was probably significant. I think that, also it gave impetus in terms of—if some people took a position that other persons, you know, came along, and took a stand or were willing—and it probably helped move the whole picture along. Now, I would say about the integration of things down at Ocean City—I was involved with Walter Carter and other persons in a number of meetings with officials from there. Now, in Ocean City, there was fear on the part of officials that CORE and other groups would come down and close the place down in the summer. You know, in the winter, it's maybe like a thousand people there, and then in the summer, 100-120,000. And they were afraid—and probably the strength of the civil rights movement was not nearly as strong as they thought, because I have gone down on occasion and maybe there would be two carloads of us, and we were sort of a pitiful looking crowd. You know, what could be—But they didn't realize that we didn't have all of that strength. And they really moved well and opened up. So I would say that another result—not only encouraging people to take stands, but also encouraging the government, maybe, to make moves and to support, you know, desegregation and to get those persons who were violating, you know, the rights of other humans, also to open up. And then there was the fear element of it, that, you know, if a pretty big crowd could be collected to demonstrate at Gwynn Oak Park, what if people did come into the other things, and so it had this kind of an effect, I think, of making, you know, groups and firms more willing to respond and open up to the civil rights movement—to desegregate.

Louis [00:24:23] You mentioned Governor Agnew awhile ago.

Wickwire [00:24:26] Yeah.

Louis [00:24:27] Now, I know following the death of Martin Luther King, there were about three or four days of riots in Baltimore. And then he blamed all this on the Black leaders.

Wickwire [00:24:38] Yeah.

Louis [00:24:38] But I think he was suggesting a while ago that you were active then.

Wickwire [00:24:42] Yes, that's true.

Louis [00:24:43] Is it that he was not aware of what was going on?

Wickwire [00:24:47] That Agnew was not aware?

Louis [00:24:48] Yes.

Wickwire [00:24:49] Well, Agnew, you know, he got to be vice president almost out of that speech he made to the black leaders. But Agnew did—I'm sure he realized what he was doing, but he was a pretty insensitive person in many ways. I've been at lots of meetings with him where if anybody

disagreed with him, he'd get up, his face apoplectic red, and walk out of the meeting. And he couldn't stand any kind of disagreement. As far as his attitude here, I think in a measure he had some knowledge of what he was doing and that to abuse and harass verbally, you know, the people that have been really trying to help the situation—This is what was so infuriating about it: that the guy comes in and chastises men who'd been working day and night to try to see that there wasn't a lot of bloodshed. And it was such a stupid thing, you know, from the point of view of morality and what was right. And yet for him, it paid off, making people think he's tough, he's able to handle situations or something. So it sort of helps catapult him into the national limelight and that's part of the outcome now. I was the chairman of a group then. We took out one time—we took out full-page ads against Agnew. Got a lot of people. It cost us quite a bit of money. I'd have to check back on the details because we did this more than once, but *The Sun* papers would not take our ad. You know, they later apologized about this ad against Agnew. They wouldn't take it, but the *Afro* took a full-page ad and the *News-American* would take it, but *The Sun* paper—

Louis [00:26:32] Not *The Sun* papers?

Wickwire [00:26:33] No. No, I have some of that stuff else—I don't recall exactly, but—Let's see. I'm just trying to think, under what? Because we had a committee for political responsibility. I think that this was the group that—and I also happened to be chairman of that and we had also tried to—supported—but this is a little bit later, this is working with the Black Panthers. That was a little bit later.

Louis [00:26:59] Was that committee, mainly religious leadership?

Wickwire [00:27:05] No. Lawyers, political scientists, and anybody that was a concerned person, you know. No, it was not mainly religious—

Louis [00:27:16] Does that suggest this committee was fairly radical, would you say?

Wickwire [00:27:21] _____(??) Committee?

Louis [00:27:21] Yes.

Wickwire [00:27:21] No, I would say—Which committee—you're talking about the committee that did which now? You talking about us—?

Louis [00:27:27] The one you told me—

Wickwire [00:27:28] —with the Black Panthers?

Louis [00:27:29] Yes.

Wickwire [00:27:29] No, that was around '70 or '71. Well, it was—I don't know exactly what you mean by radical, but we tried to see, for instance, that the police didn't go and shoot up the Black Panthers. There were some nights that we had people down in front of their place all night. And I went down a few times, you know, myself in the middle of the night, maybe at three in the morning, and we got some press coverage and got some exposure. I think we did help avoid a lot of bloodshed here in Baltimore. Now, the police commissioner was, of course, highly incensed by what we did. And I know he publicly bragged about having taped me—had conversations of mine with the Panthers. He bragged about that over at a meeting of the Black leaders of the *Afro*. And at

least six people came later and told me that he had said that and that, you know, I should watch out that he's out to get me. But, no, I would not say that that group was especially radical. I thought they were responsible people. And we came out with a statement about what we thought ought to be the case in terms of—we tried to play a mediating role here and, you know, to prevent, you know, bloodshed and harassment. It wasn't that we condoned violence, we made that clear that we didn't. But we wanted to see that justice was done and that something didn't happen here like happened in Chicago or the West Coast.

Louis [00:29:04] If we go back about 1963, for example, I notice that students from Morgan State were very active in things like sit-ins. There was another group, I think we should call it the civil integration movement?

Wickwire [00:29:23] Yeah.

Louis [00:29:23] It does suggest that people are dissatisfied with the traditional civil rights leaders. Or was it part of a continuing movement?

Wickwire [00:29:35] You mean the fact that there was a separate organization over there?

Louis [00:29:38] Yeah. Or how closely were they associated with that?

Wickwire [00:29:42] Now, I think at that time it was a young man by the name of Burrows that headed up—it was called Civic Integration Group, I think. And there were some other leaders that I knew all those people pretty well now. No, I just think that you had people of different levels that worked best, perhaps, with their, you know, their peers, but this was simply—they were sort of natural groupings. And when we would have, you know, demonstrations, often, you know, the representatives from all of the groups that would go that were involved, so it didn't mean—it meant some dissatisfaction, undoubtedly, and they'd probably dissatisfaction with the clergy. Maybe a feeling they weren't moving fast enough. Now, I can recall, for instance, some—At the integration of Gwynn Oak Park, after we'd gotten an agreement with the owners of that place to, you know, to stop discriminating, now we gave them a very short period of time in which to settle things up and to clear the decks so that they could absolutely go for this. Now—And then I can recall that there were some of the younger—a very few people did—

[00:30:51] *pause in recording*

Wickwire [00:30:51] All right. Well, what I was pointing out, is that there was some disagreement about tactics on occasion and this is an example of such an occasion. But on the whole, I would say that people worked together, you know, quite well, you know, coming from different levels and—although, perhaps some of the younger generation felt that the clergy didn't move fast enough. And as they said, they probably didn't. Not all of them. Some of them were willing and spent a lot of time at this. And the other thing I wanted to say is that the fact that Morgan had been—had a tradition of trying to open up that Northwood Theater, you know, to people, meant that they had people who'd been accustomed to doing some picketing and, you know, demonstrating.

Louis [00:31:44] Would you say these Black leaders appealed to, what you would call, the man in the street? How well were they aware of what you were trying to do? Say, how well were they aware of what Mrs. Jackson was trying to do?

Wickwire [00:31:58] The people in the street?

Louis [00:31:59] Yeah, what one would call the man in the street. Did he know of Mrs. Jackson and what she was trying to do? Do you think?

Wickwire [00:32:07] I doubt if they knew that much about what was going on. No, I think that probably the person in the street was not that aware. You know, if they followed things in the newspapers they would—or hear it on the radio, television—Yes, they must have—They had to know something about it. But there was not an involvement, really, you know, and—So, no, I don't think that they were aware. And again, who (unintelligible) by the man on the street. If these are persons that like wouldn't be touched by the churches much, I mean, or—These are persons that—at a economic level where they are—or on a social level where they wouldn't have much chance to discuss—you know, wouldn't be discussing things like this too much.

Louis [00:33:05] Yeah, that brings me to my next question. Most of the leaders so far we have mentioned, Carter—.

Wickwire [00:33:11] Yeah.

Louis [00:33:11] —or Mrs. Jackson, were closely related to the church. Did this, sort of, hamper them in their effectiveness as leaders?

Wickwire [00:33:22] Well, let me mention Carter as a better—I mean as an example of—I don't think so. I think that, now especially with Carter, while he was tied in with the church he was also very critical of its failures and flaws. He was very aware of them, and yet he was able to relate to the churches. But a person like Carter was relating, you know, with people that were concerned, that felt they had a stake in the thing. He was able to relate to them. And if you take, you know—I don't know if you would—well at whatever stages, someone—_____(??) who ran the Soul School, if you take all of the people that ran CORE at different times, Jim Griffin or whoever it might be, whatever the white people, whoever, they might be involved with it. And Carter was able to relate them whether they were part of the church or not. And somebody like John Roemer, whose now the head of ACLU; John Roemer was very active with Walter Carter and a young white person, at that time. I don't think they were hurt, these people like, you know, Lillie Mae Jackson or Walter Carter, by identification with the church. I think it was whether people felt that they were honest and, you know, sincere and concerned. That was what was important, I think: whether they gave leadership and put themselves on the line.

Louis [00:34:59] What about the press, the *Afro-American* press during that period? How effective would you say it was? Well, it's frequently carry some by the headlines, right?

Wickwire [00:35:16] Yeah.

Louis [00:35:18] But, would you say this helped the cause?

Wickwire [00:35:21] I'm sure it did. Oh, yes, I'm sure that it did. I think that it was very important. Although I recall trying to get—I don't remember now exactly what I was trying to get to do, but at the time—just thinking about the press—At the time that we were trying to get Wallace defeated in the state—that was in '64—there were people in the church in Selma—I still have those, probably, the petition signatures—they got together and, really at risk to themselves—these are Blacks—200 or more of them signed a statement telling us what Governor Wallace was like and sent that up to

us. Now, I went both to the *Afro-American* and to *The Sun* papers, and almost on my knees, begged them to do something with this material, and give some support.

Louis [00:36:20] The *Afro-American*?

Wickwire [00:36:21] Yeah, and I don't think that they did. And I'd have to check this.

[00:36:30] *pause in recording*

Wickwire [00:36:32] I'd want to check back on it, but I can remember—and especially with *The Sun* papers—You know, these people signing that statement down there at, you know, risk to themselves and we were trying to give them some kind of coverage up here. Maybe give them some support and help and I can remember going to the editor, getting to see, day-of, the editor of *The Sun* and pleading with him to do something with it. And I went to the *Afro* and, as I recall, neither paper would do anything with this. But I would say on the whole—

Louis [00:37:06] Why wouldn't the *Afro*, for example, take this?

Wickwire [00:37:10] I don't know. I don't know, maybe they didn't realize the significance of it at the time. That's before Selma, Alabama, really became important in King's thing. And I was spending, you know, most of my time on this sort of thing and like—well in the summer of '64 I spent my whole summer on this thing. And there were three nights I stayed up all night with the computer. And we're trying to get our stuff ready and, you know, raising money and (unintelligible) training people. So I was very much caught up with it. But, on the whole, the *Afro* played a very important role in keeping people aware of what was going on. And I'd say that during the summer of '64, when we were going through this thing on the committee that pulled the public accommodations law, we got a lot of coverage in the papers: what progress we're making, what's being discovered about fraud, and all of that sort of thing and documents, and I would say that the paper played an important role. There was something else I was going to mention, which isn't too significant probably, but in '63, the integration of Gwynn Oak Park, I can remember spending one night in jail when Schwerner—he was one of the three persons that was killed later down in—you know, the three young civil rights workers who were killed down—Was that in Alabama when they were put under with a bulldozer? I don't remember. You know, I can remember that that was at the Gwynn Oak Park thing, and Schwerner was there one night with us. It was an interesting mixture of persons. Again, I didn't mean to digress, but in regard to—I think the press probably did quite well in terms of, you know, helping with the whole movement.

Wickwire [00:39:06] You know, they didn't always do things that I think, you know, might have been done, but—You mentioned the NAACP, I think that of the lawyers and their readiness to bail people out and to come to support—there was a good cooperation with people and agencies and organizations playing different roles. One thing I was going to say, in '68—this is going back to the year Martin Luther King was killed and the deserters in the city—cause what Blacks said, to those of us who were white at that time, was "Stay out of the city. You go out and try to change the attitudes in the suburbs." So we began a school out here, that summer. We called it Response.

Louis [00:39:55] Where was that? Right here or—

Wickwire [00:39:55] (speaking at the same time)—Hopkins Campus—Yeah, it was out of our office we began this school. We had five or six other people in it and I suppose about 50 classes. And we had really good people teaching them. We were trying to do that; to get to change the

attitudes of persons in the suburbs. And also we would train, in this same group we had (unintelligible), we'd train guys to go out and speak in the churches, you know, in the suburbs and to try to make them more aware of what was going on. Now, during that whole period of time, we carried on a tutoring program. We'd been running a tutoring program in the city, see, for about 13 years for elementary-age kids and, like ordinarily, at least now, we would be tutoring 150 inner-city kids that need help and reading 150 volunteers. An awful lot of the groups in '68 stopped tutoring—about 25 of them that were doing it—but when disorders occurred and other things, lots of them—most of the groups, stopped the thing. Now, I don't know, I'm going to have to go to this meeting shortly, but I know that you're going to come back again sometime. Or maybe this is all.

Louis [00:41:08] Except if I could ask you just one last question.

Wickwire [00:41:12] Go ahead, yeah.

Louis [00:41:12] You mentioned you selected Carter, I think, as the prominent Black leader during that period in civil rights. Can you see any prominent white civil rights leader during that period? Would you select McKeldin or who would you?

Wickwire [00:41:27] Well, McKeldin was never active like organizing and doing the spirit I'm talking about. He was in another category. He was playing his role, you know, and I think sincerely and so on, but he was not, in a way, the man for all seasons; something to get out into the streets and to go and to be able to shift gears and to adjust and do that kind of thing. So I would not say that McKeldin was playing the same kind of a role as Walter Carter. And of course, there was no white person that could play a role like Walter Carter could play, you know, as a Black, and, as I've said, you had clergy that played more important roles, too, but—In many ways, Walter Carter's life began after he got through with his regular job, so. It was a after four or four-thirty, whatever it was. But again, met McKeldin—I had a great deal of respect for McKeldin. It's just that he didn't play the same kind of a role that some of the other people did. I don't know whether this—this is of some help to you, is it?

Louis [00:42:43] Yes, it is. Well, thank you very much.

Wickwire [00:42:46] You're welcome. I enjoyed talking with you. I did most of the talking, I guess.

Louis [00:42:49] (laughs).

Wickwire [00:42:49] Thank you.

end of interview