THE MARYLAND HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Oral History Office

WILLIAM L. ADAMS

Interviewed by Charles Wagandt

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

August 4, 1977

Baltimore, Md.

A. Mr. William L. Adams
I. Mr. Charles Wagandt
1519 Pennsylvania Avenue, Baltimore, Md.
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Transcribed by: Jean S. Porter
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I. I am Charles Wagandt and today is August 4, 1977. I am in the office of Mr. William L. Adams at 1519 Pennsylvania Avenue.

Mr. Adams, would you please give us the date and place of your birth?

A. I was borned in North Carolina, January 5, 1914.

I. Why did you leave North Carolina, and at what age?

A. I left North Carolina at the age of 15 years. I was working on the farm and I thought I wanted to change to city life. I had an uncle here in Baltimore. I came to live with him.

I. Were you very conscious of race prejudice in North Carolina?

A. Not to any degree more so than I found in Baltimore when I came here. I had heard about Baltimore and the North being so liberal and what have you, but really myself, I found no difference because I lived in a town called Zebulon, North Carolina -- 21 miles outside of the capitol, Raleigh. I played with the white kids there. We shot marbles together and what have you. I came to Baltimore -- it was no different. I couldn't go to any places here. It was segregated movies here the same as in the South. There, at least, in some of the theaters they had the blacks upstairs and the whites downstairs. We were in the same buildings there. (Laughter)

I. They did that in churches too, didn't they in some communities?

A. I don't know about churches. It was a small town. They didn't do that in Zebulon.

I. All right. Now you were an ambitious young fellow coming along. Did you find doors closed to you that you would like to have had open that stopped you in your progress to advance yourself?

A. Well now you're speaking since I have been here in Maryland. (I. Right.) Well, when I came here just about all of the doors were closed (laughter) except I went to the rag shop. That door was open.

I. What kind of work did you do in a rag shop?

A. Oh, packing the bins and old mail bags that had leather on them, we had a machine that would cut the leather and separate it from the canvas. I made $6.00 a week. (I. Wow!) I was making more than that in North Carolina.

I. You were making more than that on a farm?

A. Oh Yes. I was making more than that working on the farm.

I. Six dollars a week represented how many hours of labor?

A. I really don't recall. It was somewhere around 1930. I believe . . . I don't know . . . I think werworked a half day on Saturday. We worked 5½ days a week then, I believe. It was at least 8 or 10 hours a day.

I. All right. Well, you were coming on the scene about the time of the Depression here.

A. Absolutely, right at the beginning of it.

I. Could you make any comments about conditions here during that period of time?

A. The only thing I could say is that there weren't too many jobs. The only jobs that I would know anything about were people working at Sparrows Point. I lived in East Baltimore and that was the industrial part of the City and people working in industry but it was many, many people out of work. In fact, as I said, that was about the beginning and '31, '32, '33 on it got worse. People really had no work. It was hard that's all.

I. Was the unemployment worse among the blacks than the whites did you find?

A. Oh, I really couldn't answer that but my opinion would be that it's always been that way as far as employment is concerned. It's that way today so I assume it was that way during the early '30's.

I. Were you in any way involved in the youth movement among the blacks who launched this "Buy Where You Can Work" Campaign in the early 1930's? Do you recall that?

A. I recall Pennsylvania Avenue during the late '30's. In fact, I helped to raise funds to pay people who walked the streets up and down Pennsylvania Avenue requesting jobs . . . you know, a place to work if you spend your money there. That was started by a fellow that Mrs. Lillie Jackson was the instigator in bringing here in the '30's.

I. Who was that? Do you know the name of the fellow?

A. I do not know the gentleman's name but he came out of New York here and he had had experience in that field and that is why they brought him here.

I. In other words, you were raising money for this NAACP activity "Buy Where You Can Work" or was it an NAACP activity as you recall?

A. This itself I don't think was an NAACP activity but it was all coordinated through the NAACP. The NAACP had to have something to do with it you know, going back into the '30's but I just remember Mrs. Jackson was head of it -- Lillie Jackson in helping to bring this gentleman here and he organized the people to walk and to picket the stores for employment because on Pennsylvania Avenue here you spent your money but you had no jobs in the stores and this was then a totally black community except for the store owners and the merchants.

I. Right. When did you first become involved with the NAACP or the civil rights movement?

A. Well, I don't think they called it the civil rights movement then.

I. They didn't . . . yeah.

A. That came later. It was just . . . we had one organization and it was the NAACP and there was just no other organization for us even up through the '40's. Except, they did come for the Urban League which worked more or less in another area. They tried to open doors for employment and stayed in that area during the '40's.

I. Did you become a member of the NAACP in the 1930's?

A. Yes. I became a member of the NAACP and in fact, I worked as a fund raiser throughout the '40's and probably into the early '50's.

I. When did you first meet Lillie May Jackson?

A. In the late '30's.

I. What would you say was her primary contribution to the civil rights movement?

A. Well, during the '30's and even the early '40's there wasn't much you could do but speak out. Most of the blacks were afraid to speak out. If it was someone who had a job, was a teacher and what-not, they didn't want to get involved because they could lose their job. In the position that Lillie May Jackson had as Director of the NAACP, she was able to force herself and she really spoke out. That's what she was known for during those years. Other blacks weren't in a position for fear of losing their jobs and Lillie was in an independent position through the NAACP and she was the lady, I guess, that had the will power to do it anyway. It was hard to speak out during those days if you were black. She was noted mostly for that throughout her career -- speaking out. We said "Holler." (Laughter) dBut Lillie would holler. She let the people know that the people weren't satisfied and they weren't being treated right as far as blacks were concerned.

I. What was her period of greatest effectiveness would you say?

A. I don't know how effective really the program was because even though you could holler in those days nobody really heard you too much except in one ear and out the other. But, at least it made noise and let the "powers that be" know the people were dissatisfied.

I. Now she was President, though, of the NAACP from 1935 to 1970; and of course, from 1954 on there were great advances in the area of civil rights. How effective was her "hollerin'" as you call it once substantial progress began to be made?

A. State that question again.

I. I said you mentioned that her role was sort of as a rallying point -- she could give voice where other people were afraid to give voice to the needs of justice among the blacks. But I then noted that from 1954 on through part of the '60's anyway there were great advances in the area of civil rights, so I was saying how effective was her role of hollerin' during this later period -- the period when advances were being made and when the militants were coming to the fore and so on?

A. Well, I think from the mid '50's . . . let's say from the time of school desegregation and all that -- it was a new area and actually forcing your opinion or hollerin' wasn't too effective after that . . . after the mid '50's. Because after the case was won by the NAACP for the school desegregation which I think was in '54 (I. Right.) and that was the national body, naturally, the NAACP that carried the ball . . .

I. Of course we had a local guy very much involved -- Thurgood Marshall.

A. Thurgood Marshall, yes. Well, Thurgood followed Houston . .

I. Charlie Houston.

A. Charlie Houston. He was a great lawyer. Charlie Houston, I'll say this about him, there was a group of us here in Baltimore that wanted to play golf in the '40's and we had one little golf course called Carroll Park, sand greens. Now this was something we started in 1940-41. It was the only place we could play and we really weren't satisfied with the golf course. I say "we" -- a few of us, myself, Mr. Dixon and . . .

I. What Dixon was that?

A. William B. Dixon, an insurance broker and a real estate dealer right up the street here 1531-33. Then there was Arnett

Murphy, Dr. Carl Murphy's brother of the Afro and myself and probably a couple of other people. Really what brought this about, Joe Louis was a good friend of mine and Joe came to Baltimore in 1940 for the Chick Webb Memorial. They were having a Chick Webb Memorial at the 5th Regiment Armory and Joe and I were very close and we played golf. So, Joe wanted to play golf. Roger Pippen called me. I don't know if you remember Roger Pippen or not.

I. The News-American wasn't he?

A. Yes. He wanted, naturally, to interview Joe. So he came out to Carroll Park and played golf with us when it was against the law for whites and blacks to play together. So Roger came out and took a chance on playing with us and he said it was a disgrace, the golf course we had there and he did a story on it. Naturally Joe Louis was very popular at that time.

So that gave us a little push as far as the golf was concerned. We tried to gain our rights to play on the other golf courses.

I. So what happened?

A. So what happened? Let's see. You're getting in the area of 1940-41 . . . around World War II . . . let's say from '41 to '45 . . . well, we went to the NAACP to ask them to take the case and Mrs. Jackson said, "Well, if you fellows are wealthy enough to play golf..(laughter)... you're wealthy enough to pay your lawyers yourself."

I. Oh, really?

A. Yes. So we raised the funds and we employed Dallas Nicholas who was a prominent black lawyer here at that time . . .

I. Dallas Nicholas? How do you spell Nicholas?

A. N-I-C-H-O-L-A-S.

I. Oh, just like it sounds.

A. So, Dallas Nicholas and his associates took the case. We filed a case and we brought in Charles Houston . . . we brought him in for the case. The case was tried in the Federal Court.

I. Who was the judge?

A. I don't recall the judges' name. We got a ruling that until they could give us grass greens, they had to permit us to play on all the golf courses. So, we paid the fees ourselves. Charles Houston at that time was the #1 lawyer for the NAACP. Thurgood Marshall was the young lawyer coming along behind under Houston more or less. We played golf on the courses until . . . .

I. Well, did you have separate days to play? Is that the way it worked?

A. Yes, we had separate days to play. At that time . . let's see . . . Mount Pleasant was a new golf course . . . Clifton Park, Forest Park, and the one that we played on with the sand greens was Carroll Park . . . So, they set up a system where we could play on the golf course on certain days. We had the opportunity each week to play at golf courses. Some days there wouldn't be a person on the golf courses. (Laughter) In fact, during that same period, Joe Louis was stationed at Fort Meade for quite some time. So we would go out to Mount Pleasant. Joe was a good golfer and liked to play the best courses and we would go out there and have the whole golf course to ourselves -- out at Mount Pleasant Golf Course.

Actually what happened -- this was something that really angered the other people -- the white people -- the golf players wanted to play and they said, "My God, if there is any sport that blacks and whites could play together it would be on the golf course." There was plenty free space out there. (Laughter)

I. So what happened?

A. Well, it went on that way. The powers that be still would not give. What happened? We played that way . . . they wouldn't open up and let the whites come out . . . they just had big golf courses with some days nobody on 'em but we'd still go to Carroll Park . . . one day a week we had to go to Carroll Park . . . naturally we couldn't play golf there every day. So, what happened immediately after the Armistice was signed in 1945 I think it was, the City officials got busy as they possibly could out at Carroll Park and put in grass greens and sand traps which it was nothing but sand before -- you had to putt on the sand -- no such thing as a trap -- the fairways was green but you putted on the sand.

So, one morning -- I guess that was '46 because they couldn't get the materials during World War II -- the pipes, the water pipes that you would need to run out to the greens; but anyway, about early

'46 or late '45, without notice except for very little notice in the paper; it was in there that all blacks back to Carroll Park.

I. No kidding?

A. Now they had a golf course that was equal to the others. So, in Court we went again, Federal Court. Now I could be wrong. That could have been the time that we brought Charles Houston in -- '45 or '46.

I. You mean the second time?

A. The second time. That could have been, I believe. I believe that was the second go round, because they only permitted us to play on the other golf courses during the time they said everything wasn't equal but when they put the grass out, they said everything was equal.

So, anyway, I know we went into Federal Court and the results was -- we won the case.

I. Again.

A. Again we won the case and that was the time they decided that they would open up all the golf courses and let everybody play.

I. Oh, really?

A. Yes.

I. So, in other words, the golf courses were integrated. That must have been one of the first things integrated around here.

A. That was one of the first things integrated, and we have not had any problem . . .

I. Do you know what year that was?

A. Well it had to be . . . they put us back in Carroll Park in '46 . . . I know it was no later than '46. The time the materials were available they worked real hard to put in grass greens out there to make it what they called equal. It could have been . . . I don't know . . . we could have been in Court in a year or so . . . it could have been a couple of years. I don't know exactly. It's hard . . .

I. But you think that the golf courses were all integrated by the end of the 1940's then?

A. I believe by the end of the 1940's all the golf courses -- I'm pretty sure all the golf courses were integrated by that time.

I. And the NAACP did not play any role at all.

A. No. No role at all. We did that . . .

I. On your own . . .

A. on our own and it was the first test case and after that, I think the next case was in Atlanta, Georgia and they used our case because even though we were integrated here, that was the Federal Court. (I. Yeah.) It just didn't open the golf courses all over. It made it easy for the other states and I do recall it was much later on after our case but I know Atlanta . . . Georgia opened up their courses and the test case was here in Baltimore of opening the recreation as far as golf courses was concerned.

A. We paid for it. At that time Henry Parks was here. Henry Parks, William Dixon, myself and Arnett Murphy -- we put up $500.00 each and then some other people put in as much as they could -- $10.00, $25.00. I think the fee was $2500.00 that we paid the lawyer, Charles Houston.

I. Was the case appealed by the City? From the local Federal Court

A. No.

I. It was not.

A. No.

I. Did Lillie May Jackson give you any kind of moral support or just absolutely nothing.

A. No. We had no support from the NAACP on that -- nothing.

I. You said that her greatest effectiveness was really through the first two decades -- her regime you might say -- starting in 1935, well, who became the prime mover in the civil rights movement as you see it after that first two decades?

A. Well, the NAACP as a whole, there is no question about it, was the strong organization testing all the cases in Court but that was the National NAACP.

I. Yes.

A. And some of the cases,naturally, was here in Maryland. The first law school was opened at the University of Maryland for blacks. Really, except for testing cases through the NAACP, the civil rights movement did not really get under way until the young people got involved and was determined and started their organizations. That's when things really started with the civil -- in fact, I've got to take a step back . . . before they started, was Martin Luther King on the scene?

I. Well, you hear a lot about him in the 1960's and whether he was active in the late 1950's . . .

A. Well, the kids didn't get involved until the 1960's. It all started in the '60's; and there is no question about it, school desegregation was one of the greatest victories.

I. Well, that really got it rolling.

A. That really got it rolling and it's like anything -- you get something started, you know, it begins to speed up; but I would say that really what got it started was these kids that was fightin' in VietNam and they were coming back and naturally the ones that fought in World War II couldn't do very much because they came back to the same conditions here as it was when they left. But after the school desegregation case was won, I think people as a whole just got more involved. They were determined -- there was a determination among the blacks that they just weren't going to stand still. And the young people -- I give them credit for carrying the ball.

I. In other words, you're saying that somewhere after the school desegregation case that the real thrust of the civil right movement was no longer in the hands of a Lillie May Jackson or the NAACP, it was really coming from the more militant younger blacks, is that right?

A. Right. And the thing that really give it its spark, there's no question about it, nationwide, was Martin Luther King. He, through their bus strike in Alabama -- he was the non-violent type. There was violence when the kids started sitting in around Charlotte, North Carolina, Greensboro and it started around the college down South you know where you had these kids going to college -- like Greensboro is noted for its A & T College and right around Raleigh there's quite a few schools. I think it really started by a sit-in down there more so than it did up this way.

I. Then, of course, we had the Route 40 problem here, if you recall.

A. I remember that very well. I can't recall the years but I know I used to go up and down Route 40 many times and couldn't stop at a restaurant nowhere after you got out of Pennsylvania.

I. How did you feel about that?

A. I thought it was terrible but we couldn't do anything about it.

I. Did you resent it? Personally?

A. Oh yes I resented it. There's no question about it, but it was just one of those things. Even if you were going on the train to New York, up until the mid '50's or . . . if you didn't have an automobile, when you got off the train at Pennsylvania

Station and you were black, you'd be standing out front trying to get a cab and as long as the whites would come out, you could not get a cab.

I. Were they white drivers then? Only white drivers then.

A. Only white drivers then. We had one black company but they couldn't even come to the station because the Yellow Cab I guess had the . . .

I. . . . the franchise . . .

A. . . . the franchise. You couldn't even get a -- you'd feel so bad because at least in Philadelphia or New York you could get a cab but when you were left at Baltimore, Maryland at the station you just had a terrible time getting from the station unless you had someone to pick you up. I do recall very . . . I don't know the year . . . but it stays in my mind very well, it was through the Urban League working with the powers-that-be that brought about the change in the cabs and black cab drivers.

I. How did you feel about the effectiveness of Furman Templeton and the Urban League?

A. Oh they did a wonderful job. They were able -- you know, when Lillie May Jackson came along, I said you could holler. Those people were afraid to holler and she did a wonderful job just by her hollerin' let the authorities that be and other races that the people weren't satisfied. But that's all you could do.

A. However, you take the Urban League with Furman Templeton and another gentleman there . . .

I. Dave Glenn was there for awhile and then there was a man before Furman . . .

A. I'm talking about before Furman.

I. I can't remember his name.

A. I can't remember his name. I think he left here and went to Pittsburgh. They were able to get the doors open where they could sit down and talk to the authorities. When I say authorities I'm talking about the people that own the cabs or whatever industry they were trying to open up jobs for blacks, and certainly, like we're sitting here now, if we were here trying to resolve a problem about something that we had an opportunity to sit at the table and discuss it, we'd probably accomplish more than if we couldn't even get together to talk about it. At one time the doors was closed. You couldn't get in the doors to talk.

I. So you would say that the Urban League was just as effective, if not more in its own way than the NAACP.

A. As far as locally here in Baltimore as far as opening the doors for jobs and getting blacks in, certainly that was their thing. The NAACP was pretty much in another field altogether. They were testing cases all the time in the courts. The Urban League was working for where the bread was -- trying to work on the local level, through the National Urban League and they were able to reach some of the people of big industry and then local could go in. I remember very well how we got the first black salesman into the liquor industry as far as the salesmen were concerned.

I. How was that?

A. And in the business also. How was that?

Well, in 1935 I opened a tavern called the . . . .

I. The what . . . the White . . ?

A. I opened a tavern at the corner of Whitelock and Druid Hill Avenue in 1935 and it was called "Little Willie's Inn". For some reason I was called Little Willie. (I. Right.) That was my nickname so I opened this tavern and it was fixed up very nice for those days. It wasn't about 2 black taverns -- 3 black taverns -- 4 black taverns altogether -- Wilson's, Sugar Hill, Little Willie's -- there were three of us right up there together. One was up on Streeper Street called Sugar Hill, on Whitelock and I was on the southwest corner, Little Willie's Inn, and then there was one up on a little street called Andrews Street on Whitelock and then one of the Wilson's had a tavern at Baker Street. That was all the black taverns that I can recall in those days.

But, that was in '35. We're coming up now into the '50's.

End of Side 1

A. There were no people working on a local level in the whiskey industry or the beer industry. This could be in the early '50's. I know it was during the whole 40's. So, one day (there is a muffled discussion concerning a date. Apparently some tickets are found and Mr. Adams requests Mr. Wagandt to read one.)

I. "Carlin's Park . . .

A. "Carlin's Park. National Boh Carnival Time. Friday, Saturday, Sunday, July 30, 31, and August 1st." Okay?

I. Right.

A. This is a good 30 years or more. At that time, I opened this place downstairs called the Club Casino in 1940. This place has been downstairs 37 years. One day my beer representative from Globe Distributing Company, the brand name beer was Arrow Beer. Before World War II, during the '30's and up to World War II, black people, they drank more Arrow Beer -- they were the backbone of Arrow Beer.

After World War II -- and all the representatives from beer companies was white -- we didn't have no blacks -- even the men on the trucks, the men who helped on the trucks -- we didn't have a black doing anything but in the tavern buying the beer and drinking the beer. So, after World War II, National beer who was National Boh belonged to the Hoffbergers, one day downstairs the representative that had been representing Arrow Beer since the time that I had gone into the business in '35 -- we're talking about 10-11 years later because it was after World War II -- Arrow Beer dipped like that -- it was nothing -- the sales dropped. Blacks stopped drinking Arrow Beer. They started drinking Gunther's Beer, they were drinking Bohemian Beer -- National Bohemian Beer.

I. Why was the change, do you know?

A. From what I understand, what happened is -- and I never was a beer drinker I couldn't witness to this myself -- seems to me it was something about the cork that Arrow Beer had inside of the cap that goes over the bottle -- something that caused the beer to have a different taste. It must have gone on for some time to change all the people from it. So Harry Stone was the fellow I had known from the time I had opened Little Willie's Inn in '35 and down here in the late '40's, he walked in downstairs one day and . He said, "Your people drink all of National's beer, but they don't do this for your customers, I betcha." He handed me this ticket and it was where you could take your people out free as it reads there to Carlin's Park. Do you remember Carlin's Park?

I. Right. Sure do.

A. Okay. I knew that Carlin's Park wouldn't let blacks in -- wait a minute -- this was after -- I'll tell you when this was -- This was the early '50's because we had opened Carr's Beach. I had opened Carr's Beach. I opened that in 1950. That was a public beach for blacks down below Annapolis. It was a commercial beach because the blacks had nowhere to go but to the segregated beaches so we opened two beaches down there -- Carr's Beach and Sparrows Beach.

We had a black organization of tavern owners by that time. This was in the '50's. So, Mr. Stone gave me this. I got over to my man downstairs who was my manager who was Mr. Ross at the time. I said, "Mr. Ross, get on the telephone and call National Beer and tell them that you want your tickets. You didn't get your tickets for your people to go to Carlin's." Mr. Ross got on the telephone, he came upstairs here, he got on one phone, I So, first, the person said, "Well, I don't know why you didn't get them. Hold the line." So then somebody else got on the phone. They said, "Where are you located?" He said, "I'm at the Club Casino and I didn't get any tickets to send my people to this." He said, "Oh Mr. Ross, look, you know, they don't accept blacks at Carlin's Park but we promote the beauty shows down at Carr's Beach and everything" (Laughter) I'm setting there on the telephone.

So, immediately I got on the telephone and called all the other black tavern owners. Harmony Club was opened down the street, across the street, Burns had a place on Madison -- any number of places and starting them to calling and then they realized something was happening. So, they said, "Stop. We'll send somebody out to see you." They stopped talking on the telephone. They didn't want to talk on the telephone. This was National Bohemian. So they sent a representative out to try to explain the thing and why; that they didn't segregate and didn't want it but they couldn't do anything about it.

So then we took it to the Urban League and had the Urban League make contact with National

So, we opened the doors. National was the first one. That was in the '50's. I'm positive of it

for National to hire the first black representative to represent their

I. But you never got into Carlin's at that time?

A. Oh no, we never got into Carlin's but I kept these things since 1950, '51, '52 -- somewhere in there -- 25 years ago.

I. Was the black representive hired by National Boh -- was that before the Supreme Court Decision? Before or after?

A. Oh yes, before.

I. All right, so in other words, some advances were being made before that school desegregation case.

A. Now you see, what had happened . . .

I. And here you were using economic power to bring about change.

A. That's right. And we did the same thing with the whiskey companies. After we opened this we went to who has a and have it in Washington. Mr. met with us at the Urban League.

Blacks drank more liquor than anybody else at that time. If you'd take a survey, they could go around, all the blacks were tied in. In Baltimore City they had the City in districts for the Liquor Board, I'm not talking about political districts as such, but they had all the black communities -- they could tell you how much whiskey from the reports that the controller gets, they could tell you just how much liquor was drunk in black neighborhoods.

I. More whiskey was being drunk per capita than in the white neighborhoods?

A. Oh my God, yes, you'd be surprised. They could even tell the percentage of the population -- we were at that time 30 some or 20 some% of the population and we were drinking 50% of the booze. . . in Baltimore City.

So, Mr. he came over from Washington and had his representatives and through our effort, the first black liquor salesman locally to go around to the different taverns and take their orders was hired through We opened the door on that. We did that as tavern owners and saying that we were gonna boycott.

Further, with the Hoffbergs, they had the harness race track out Philadelphia Road, I think there's a big shopping center there now -- on old Route 40, going to Philie.

I. Yeah. What's that, Eastpoint . . .

A. One of those shopping centers. They had that and they had the harness races. You'd go out there at night. We even broke that down as far as the toilets were concerned.

If you'd go to the races -- they wanted people to go to the races -- they would give you tickets to go out there -- National Boh -- but you would go out to the races -- it would wind up -- you know, they had black men, white men, colored women, white ladies (Laughter) . . .

I. I didn't think they did that in the Baltimore area. I thought that was only on the Eastern Shore -- Southern Maryland.

A. Ah, that was right here in Baltimore.

I. They did?

A. Yes. There's no question about it.

I. When did that stop? The segregated toilet?

A. I really don't know but it had to be sometime in the early '60's or the '50's. Not before.

I. Did the taverns provide a sort of gathering ground for political operations or not?

A. Oh yes. During those days, the taverns played a bigger role than any other organization as far as the political role was concerned; because the people that were involved politically were mostly people that would go into taverns and all. You had . . . up until -- you know religion always played a great role -- churches, even in the mid '50's not until after Martin Luther King came on, you couldn't get a minister to get in the pulpit and say anything about politics --

about people voting. They just didn't do it. I'm talking about the black churches.

I. The black churches had nothing to say about politics until Martin Luther King came along? Is that right? (Simultaneous talking)

A. No, Martin Luther King -- he was the one that really got that started.

I. In other words, so far as the center for black politics it was in the taverns in the '40's? There are what years?

A. I'm talking about up through nearly the mid '50's -- and up to nearly the '60's. The ministers probably didn't get involved until early '60's -- something like that. Not before that time -- no, because they didn't mix politics with religion. No. You couldn't go into a church -- you see, we had no black representatives anyway -- (I. Right.) in office until Harry Cole and that was . . . .

I. 1954. Or was it '50? Which was it?

A. Oh no, it wasn't '50.

I. 1954, yes. 1954.

A. I had a music box place with public address systems and I gave Harry Cole his first public address system to go out and holler' up and down the street when he was running for office. He ran three times before he won. He was a Republican.

I. Yes, I know that.

A. I was always a Democrat but in the primary elections we could not get a candidate on the Democratic side through the primary.

I. Right.

A. This was the only District where we had a chance of ever putting a black in in those days -- right here where we're sitting.

I. This was the old Fourth District, right?

A. The old Fourth District. Yes, but Mr. Jack Pollack had everything sewed up in this District. We were fighting him tooth and nail all the way. So what would happen, a Republican didn't have any hard time as far as the Primary and we would back the Republican in the general election.

It was Harry Cole. That's where we started right there. I was very friendly with Harry when he was a young lawyer. He was my lawyer at the time, and I was the backbone in raising his funds for his campaign.

I. All right, now in those days you mentioned something about fighting Jack Pollack. Jack Pollack, as I recalled, more or less controlled the liquor inspectors.

A. He controlled everything.

I. All right. Well, if he controlled the liquor inspectors and he was coming around to the taverns, what sort of problems did you run into?

A. Well, when you say he controlled the liquor inspectors, I don't know if he controlled all the liquor inspectors because there weren't too many at that time. I'll tell you, the first black liquor inspector was put on by . . .

I. McKeldin?

A. No, I think it was Nice. In the 1930's. Maurice Calloway was an old time Republican.

I. Oh, Maurice, yes.

A. Maurice Calloway was the liquor inspector and a fellow named Johnson. They started under Nice in 1936 or '37. And he was the first one to put on a black policeman -- Tom Butler and a fellow named Scott, Gardner. That was Harry Nice.

You see, in those days the Democrats would do nothing except once the Republicans, when they were in office, they would put some blacks in. All the Democrats would do is just go along and replace -- never any advancements under the Democrats. But the reason I stayed Democrat was because most of the time the Democrats were in power and we had to try to open the doors on that side and in the general elections we all voted for the Republicans any way so we stayed . . . but in the black section, they couldn't work no where but black taverns so it was Maurice Calloway or either Johnson, then when they were out, when the Democrats were in well there were two blacks put in, well that was for the whole City. It didn't necessarily have to be Jack Pollack's inspectors. It wasn't just for the Fourth District. That was city-wide from the Governor's office.

After Nice went out, O'Con or* went in and O'Con or's law partner was my lawyer. I worked for O'Connor in his election and Joseph A. Rogan.

I. How do you spell Rogan?

A. R-O-G-A-N.

[* Herbert R. O'Con or]

A. Rogan, if you go back through history, anybody who wanted a liquor license had to go through Rogan. That was his biggest field. He controlled the liquor board -- Joseph A. Rogan.

I. But didn't Pollack at a later date exercise considerable control over that board?

A. Oh, Pollack had powers that were unknown probably with most of the governors during that time. I don't know so much about Lane*. I just can't recall but he was a powerful man all around.

I. Did you feel his power here in your community in reference to the taverns and so on? (Mr. Adam's answer can't be heard) It didn't bother you.

A. No. It was still all black and we were doing business with black people.

I. Yes, but I used to hear reports that for instance, if you didn't buy insurance from some company that was associated with Pollack that then they would find all kinds of violations in your tavern and that sort of thing. Is that true or not?

A. No. (Simultaneous talking)

I. You say "no" or not?

A. It might have happened with the whites but it didn't happen to me. Pollack never asked me to buy a policy -- no. Now Bill Dixon, the fellow up the street, he was one of Pollack's lieutenants, William B. Dixon. All the way through politically -- William B. Dixon. In the end, his wife was one of the first legislators down there, one of the first -- Emma Dixon.

[* Preston Lane]

I. What about the NAACP? What was their attitude towards William Dixon? And Jack Pollack?

A. Well, they weren't political. They didn't have nothing to do with politics. They didn't get in politics. The Lillie Jackson family didn't get in politics at all until young Mitchell ran for office in '62. That was the first time they stuck their nose in politics at all was when Clarence Mitchell, who is a State Senator now and Jaunita Jackson's son, in 1962 ran on our ticket for the House of Delegates.

I. He ran on your ticket?

A. Yes.

I. All right, getting back now before we get up to this more modern era, do you remember anything about the march on Annapolis in 1942 during O'Conor's administration? There were a couple of blacks shot by a policeman, a white policeman -- a black shot by a white policeman and a couple of blacks shot.

A. I don't recall.

I. You don't.

A. No. I was too busy running my business -- trying to make money. (Laughter) 1942 would be right during World War II. I didn't want to get involved.

I. All right, when did you become active in politics then?

A. Well, I began to stick my nose in it when O'Conor went into office. Just a little. I never was too interested in politics. I helped with the Cause a little, but however, I played a very small role at that time.

But, I had a problem with my liquor license and that's how I came about knowing Rogan. I had to go see Rogan. Somebody told me to go see Joseph Rogan.

I. What did Rogan say to you?

A. Well, after I went to see him, he became my lawyer and when O'Connor came up for re-election and what-have-you, I gave a donation. He wanted some money. I gave $500.00.

I. When did the Republicans start losing their power in the black community and why, would you say?

A. I don't know because that was -- I don't remember them ever being in power except when Nice was in there. I came to Baltimore in '31 . . .

I. No, but the majority of blacks, certainly in the 1920's and the early 1930's were all Republicans.

A. All Republicans, right.

I. Then they became all Democrats -- not all but the majority became Democrats.

A. We have a lot of old heads that would never change to Democrat.

I. I know. You have Archie Jones and you've got the funeral guy -- what's . . . .

A. Most of them are dead now -- Woodlands which were Republicans. They were the backbone of the Republicans, I understand. I really knew nothing about politics, really to be involved until in the '50's.

I. But you have no comment to make as to why most blacks became Democrats.

A. Well, the reason most blacks became democrats I think was because of Roosevelt* (I. Okay.) That's why. Blacks were only concerned about national politics at one time. They don't vote the way they should now, but hell, up until about the '60's, the blacks didn't come out locally and vote the way they should until a general election -- the Presidential election. If they would come out and vote every year the way they do in a Presidential election, we would have had people in office many years before Harry Cole was elected -- 1956 or whenever it was. They wouldn't come out and vote. They said "My vote didn't mean nothing." But, in Presidential elections, you would see how the Precincts turned out. It would be altogether different. So, I'm positive it was Roosevelt that changed it.

I. What did they like about Roosevelt?

A. They thought that Roosevelt gave us bread.

I. Gave you bread. In other words, it was an economic thing would you say?

A. No question about it. He did act as though he cared about people. After all, look at the kids in the CCC Camps that he opened up. That was a wonderful program. Then he brought about Social Security. It was in its infancy but he brought it about. During those days, if you go back, if you had no security when

when you was old, every corner was loaded with people with their hat out. That has pretty much disappeared in the '50's.

I. Well, what made you decide to become more active in the '50's?

A. Because I saw there was a need and financially I was able to help. I was never concerned about being in office myself but I knew that with the large number of blacks without representation we were nowhere.

I. Let's say your desire was primarily . . . .

A. My wife became involved. She was very much concerned. She had been a school teacher and we opened a dress shop, 1811 Pennsylvania Avenue, She came out of the school system around 1947-1948. Mr. Lloyal Randolph who is a representative now -- the first man who introduced me to politics was Lloyal Randolph.

I. Which Randolph?

A. Lloyal Randolph -- the House of Representatives.

I. What's his first name?

A. Lloyal - L-l-o-y-a-l. (I. Yes. Okay.) Lloyal Randolph has been in politics since in his 20's. He got me involved.

I wasn't concerned. The first I ever heard of politics to any degree I guess was 1935 -- Alvin Jones who is about 90 years old now, he was the first black Democratic senator. He defeated Harry Cole. He was a Pollack man. (Simultaneous talking) That was when Pollack began to realize he had to run a black.

I. Pollack, yes. That was in 1958, I guess.

A. Yes. 1958. I was with Verda Welcome at the time. Then we defeated Alvin Jones in '62 with Verda Welcome. (Laughter)

A. She's an arch-enemy politically now. . . if you read the papers about the Restaurant.

I. Yes, yes, yes. (Laughter)

So in other words, you got active in the '50's because of your concern about your people, right?

A. Yes. Now what happened first, my wife, Victorine Adams who is Councilman Victorine Adams at the present time, she started a drive to register the blacks to vote. It probably was the first in the country. I know it was the first here in Baltimore City.

I. What about the NAACP drive to register?

A. They weren't doing nothing at that time. (I. They weren't?) The NAACP came way late, I'm telling you.

I. What? On registering voters?

A. On registering to vote. If you check the history back, check the Pollack-Democratic women. My wife organized the Democratic women in the late '40's. Lloyal Randolph asked her to do it.

I. And she did this in advance of any movement on the part of the NAACP?

A. That's right. They wouldn't touch politics during those days -- the NAACP. I can be quoted on that and prove it if it's necessary. This was in 1946-47. Let's see. All of that started, we had a place -- which we still have a place on the Bay. Lloyal Randolph was renting a house down there for the summer. He talked to my wife about the need for her to get the organization together --

the women. My wife was out of the school system -- this was 1946-47 and so she started an organization called The Colored Democratic Women. They still have that organization. In 1947-48, they were able -- in those days, you registered then in the Court House. They were able to get them to open the polls at night for people to register, and I gave my wife money to pay for busses . . .

I. Open the polls?

A. Not the polls -- to open the registration office to register to vote.

I. Right.

A. Not the polls where you go to vote. It was the registration office -- to keep it open until like 9:00 o'clock at night.

We had one high school at that time -- Douglass High School in Northwest Baltimore at Baker and Calhoun. She made arrangements for the people to be at Douglass at a certain time. They would get on the bus, go down town to register. I think they registered -- I don't want to say an exact figure but it must have been -- I don't know over what period of time -- but I know it was 8,000 or 9,000 people to vote that we registered -- people to vote.

I. This was in 1948 or '49, right?

A. It could have been 1947 or '48 but it was during that time. I say again, you couldn't get the minister in a church to do anything politically. They just wouldn't mix church with politics.

I. Nor the NAACP.

A. The NAACP was doing nothing politically.

I. Then Lillie May Jackson wasn't touching it.

A. No sir. No sir. They weren't involved at all politically. They didn't get involved until probably the early '60's or the late '50's. When they got involved it had to be in the late '50's.

I. Well, what made Clarence Mitchell, III decide he wanted to run for office and what made you decide to put him on your ticket?

A. Well, what happened, Clarence Mitchell, III, I think, was about 22 years old, and this was 1962, and he was working . . . .

I. Can I take my coat off -- it's kind of warm in here.

A. Oh yes, my God, you should have had it off. He was working with a realty company and this guy decided he was going to run for office and Clarence was running on the ticket with him. We had nothing to do with him. We had the Fourth District Organization, Verda Welcome and myself. So something happened between Clarence and this fellow. Evidently the campaign wasn't progressing and Clarence came over to the Fourth District and ask could he be on our ticket. So we took him on our ticket.

by him name being a Mitchell . . . very popular name due to Lillie Jackson so he won and was seated in the House of Delagates.

I. Well, how long were you all close together politically?

A. I never was close.

I. You weren't?

A. No. I never was. Starting with Harry Cole -- now my wife had started this organization back but I didn't bother with politics because I was concerned with business. Politics didn't mean nothing to me except if there was a need for my support financially, but to be a political this or a political that -- no. I was never concerned as far as being in that phase of politics.

Whatever they say in the papers today all came about because, I guess, there was a need and I was concerned. I hardly know how to say "No" to people when it comes to something for progress.

I. Well in 1958, Mr. Adams, wasn't there a split during the primary period between your organization and the Mitchell organization?

A. They didn't have organizations (Simultaneous talking)

I. Well they were running something.

A. . . . . it would be more like '60.

I. Well wasn't there some split between you and somebody in that period . . . '58? I'm a little vague.

A. No, no. Not in '58 because I . . . no. Verda Welcome and myself -- we worked together -- I took the old Harry Cole organization.

I. When he became Judge or what?

A. No, no. When he lost. Harry was in office for 4 years, that's all. He lost. He had a fellow that was very much interested in politics so he came around here and opened a office in the back

His name was . . . I can't think of his last name but he was very dedicated, and Harry had no more interest in politics evidently after he lost. He never was a good campaigner. If he had been, he could have been in office. There was no way in the world that Alvin Jones could defeat him. But he was in office for 4 years, he knew everything, you couldn't tell him, he wouldn't get out and campaign, he ran his campaign from his office on McMechen . . . . .

End of Cassette I

Cassette II

A. Mr. William L. Adams
I. Mr. Charles Wagandt
1519 Pennsylvania Avenue, Baltimore
August 4, 1977
Transcribed by: Jean S. Porter
Cassette II, Side 1, Page 38

A. (Conversation already in progress when tape begins) His name was Harry Cole and I said many times after that, he had the right name -- Cold only he spelled it different -- C-O-L-D but he was C-O-L-E.

I said he had the right name because Harry just wasn't there any more and Alvin Jones won out over him. So Pollack came back with a black so he won it.

In '62 when Verda and I worked together in the Mayoralty I think it was and the way that came about was someone out of -- let's see, who was running for office -- I think it was the 3-G ticket, . . .

I. Grady, Graham and Goodman. That was in '63.

A. Was that '63?

I. Yeah, that was '63. No, no, wait a minute . . . that was 1959.

A. Right. That's when I first -- because when Verda first ran for office, she won as a delegate to Annapolis in '58, '59, '60 -- she started off in '59, '60, '61; and in 1962 she ran for the Senate. She was a delegate for four years.

See, what happened, there's no question about it, Victorine Adams was the first one to get really concerned and formed an organization, politically -- my wife. However, we moved . . .

I. You say, the first in a real black organization?

A. Yes, as far as the women were concerned politically.

I'm talking about Democrats. (I. Right.) I don't know what the Republicans did in the '20's and all, back then. I'm talking about in my era, which she started this Democratic Women's Organization under the guidance of Lloyal Randolph.

We moved to where I'm living at the present time in 1949 -- moved us out of the District which we were in the Fifth District and Victorine couldn't run for office. She couldn't win in the Fifth. She did finally run once in the Fifth District and she only lost by 800 votes when it was nearly impossible

She ran the same time as Verda. She ran for the House of Delegates in the Fifth District in 1962 when Verda ran for the Senate but had we stayed in the Fourth District -- had not been out of the Fourth District, I'm positive Victorine Adams would have been the first black woman elected to office during that era. Being in the Fifth District didn't

Verda didn't get involved in politics until sometime just before she decided to run, really. That was the late '50's.

But we did work together. The question was . . .

I. Why did you split?

A. Why did you split . . . Well, when Verda ran for the House of Delegates, I was not with Verda at all, had nothing to do with her election. Sam Daniels was her campaign manager. You know Sam Daniels?

I. I know the name, yeah.

A. That was the time that Harry Cole . . . that would be the same . . . was she in the House of Delegates when Harry Cole was Senator, I believe . . . or Harry was 4 years before her. She went into the House of Delegates I guess at the same time that Alvin Jones went into the Senate -- that's right. That would be it. And Alvin Jones had been there 4 years and Verda went in -- because Harry Cole went in . . . two Coles went in. You know, when Harry Cole was elected, one other black guy named Cole was elected to the House of Delegates . . .

I. Just because of the name.

A. Just because of the name the two went in. That was the two.

But however, during the 3-G's which was . . .

I. 1959.

A. . . . '59, someone asked my organization and Verda had some type of organization -- they called it Valiant Women or something -- to work together. So we worked together for the 3-G's and from that we started and organized the Fourth District Organization. I had control of the Fourth District Organization, probably still could have controlled the Fourth District Organization, but after Verda became Senator -- my God, she wanted to be the boss, she wanted to be everything. This was the beginning of '62. Well, after 4 years of Verda, we just couldn't take it. I say "we" -- myself, Henry Parks and a few others. They had been beatin' on me that they weren't going any further if I didn't do something. I think we stayed there 'til the next election and it was just before the next election, we split. It was 1969 I guess. We started what we called the Metro Democratic Club of the Fourth District democrats. We've been split ever since.

It was my opinion and other people's opinion that it was impossible to work with Verda because she was just all over the place and all over everything. That was just Verda.

I. Right. Well, perhaps it would be good to ask you, too, about the Mayoralty Primary in . . . let's see . . . in 1971 when George Russell looked like he had a chance to become the first black Mayor of the City of Baltimore and he was running against Schaefer* and then one of the Mitchells . . .

A. Clarence Mitchell for State Senator.

I. . . . . decided he was going to run. Now would you give your interpretation of why this was done.

A. Now you say "why this was done" -- what?

I. In other words, split the black vote. It practically assures the nomination of the white.

A. Right.

I. All right. George Russell went into the campaign first. Is that correct?

A. I don't know. I imagine he could have. I don't know.

I. All right. But why would you say there wound up being two major black candidates?

[*William Donald Schaefer]

A. Because there was dissension -- a different opinion. The Mitchells, they didn't like Russell.

I. Why didn't they like George Russell?

A. I don't know. There was dissension. Clarence, for some reason, thought that he could win, I believe, and there was no way in the world. If you want to know the truth of it, of course, hindsight is always better, but I was very close to George Russell. He was my lawyer and everyone thought that I was the one that encouraged George to run. I didn't want George to run for office. He was a good lawyer -- one of the best brains we had and I didn't ever think he was cut out to politically run for office.

However, I was very close to him. He was lawyer for H.G. Parks Company and so I had to support him. I didn't like the position I was in during that campaign because I didn't think a black could win. I did not see how a black could win. Even if Mitchell had not been in there, George would not have won it. He couldn't have won it. No. But, however, I had to support him. And I supported him but he talked me into running with Louis Grasnick. Ever hear of Louis Grasnick?

I. Yeah, well, he was associated with George Mahoney.

A. Who? Lou Grasnick?

I. Wasn't he at one time?

A. Yeah. When George Mahoney ran for office. Yes.

I. So here you've got a guy who was pushing an ultra-conservative wh was anti-civil rights who then pushes a black. Now, would you explain that?

A. Well, Lou Grasnick was very fond of Russell and I guess we're talking about -- now we're up into the '70's and blacks were naturally winning offices all over the country and Lou Grasnick just thought it was time, I guess, for a black to get in and he knew Russell was an able man. I don't think Lou Grasnick ever held any grudges as far as -- one way or another politically.

I. He just wanted to win an office.

A. He wanted to win office and at that time, they were good friends, Irv Kovens and Lou Grasnick were always good friends. Politically they didn't see things together and I think Lou Grasnick's motive was to try to beat Irv out over Schaefer. Irv Kovens was the fund raiser for Schaefer at that time. Irv Kovens and myself are the best of friends until today, but sometimes you make a decision politically and I go my way and he goes his way. That's the way it works.

But, I had to go with George. You see, the thing about it, most people thought that I had encouraged George to run. I didn't even meet with George before he had announced he would run. He took for granted that I was going to be with him and I had a meeting with George and I told George, I said "Don't ever take me for granted. I'm going to be with you but don't you ever take for granted." All the papers were coming out with articles "Willie Adams this . . ." and"George that . . ." I wanted no part of that. Naturally, I supported him and helped to raise funds for his campaign, but it was not my decision for him to run and if Mitchell had not been in there, he would not have won.

I. You don't think so.

A. No.

I. Now I heard a thesis presented and I'd like your comment on it that Clarence Mitchell ran in order to knock off George Russell's chances, because if George Russell had won then he would have been in control of the City and it would have ruled out a big opportunity for the Mitchells which they would possibly have had at a later date by running and then maybe getting elected Mayor and controlling the City. Is there any validity to that thesis do you feel?

A. Well, I couldn't comment on that because I know nothing about it. To me, that sounds logical because I know there's no good blood there and there has never been good blood there. But George, as I understand, back when they had a lot of black, young lawyers working for the NAACP, George would not cooperate with Lillie Jackson.

I. Why wouldn't he cooperate with Lillie Jackson would you say?

A. I don't know the reason why but he was one lawyer that was. . .

I. Did you feel that many of the black business men and black professionals have remained aloof from the civil rights movement as apparently George Russell is accused of doing?

A. Hm. I wouldn't say that. I think professional and business men all were concerned with the blacks. I wouldn't say that George Russell remained unaware but people have their way of doing things, and I think in the professional field they made a direct contribution and in the business field as far as the black business man is concerned, he's made a contribution. There are people in these movements that are on the firing line and they need back-ups and I think these people have played their role probably with professional know-how and the business man in finance. To campaign you can't do anything without money.

I. Do you feel that some black business men have held back from being as militant as they might like to be for fear that they would not be able to get a loan from say a white bank? That's a subtle question and maybe not so easy to answer.

A. That's a question that I can't answer except in one respect. I don't know if that would have anything to do with a black man getting a business loan. I just know one thing to be a fact -- it's much harder for a black man to get a business loan even today than other races. I know that to be a fact. I've been involved and am still involved with both sides -- whites and blacks. I know I've had to lay more on the line than some of associates that I have been involved with laid on the line to go into a bank and get $100,000 or so. I can witness to that because most of my dealings are in joint ventures where I played a big role as a limited partner. Right now I'm going through an experience of bankruptcy -- one of my general partners went bankrupt and some of the loans that they were able to get before going into bankruptcy through the banks and I know my financial statement was much stronger than theirs. I couldn't walk into a bank even though I've been doing business with banks over 35-40 years, I couldn't walk into a bank and sign my name like they did and borrow money for $100,000 or a like amount.

I wouldn't say that that would be cause for someone being involved in the movement. I think it's just one of those racial things. As far as blacks are concerned, we still have a long way to go, to get the same treatment from the lending institutions in order to be in viable businesses as such.

I. In other words, you're saying . . . well, you still have a long ways to go, you're saying even though many doors have been opened that weren't opened when you started.

A. Certainly.

I. How did you feel and other black business men feel during the days when the young militants were rioting in various cities throughout the United States, because even though in one way they might have been advancing the civil rights movement and calling your attention to the problems of the ghetto nevertheless they were also destructive of property and of course, if you are a business man and you've got investments, that's property.

A. You're speaking about the riots?

I. The riots, yes. Not just here but elsewhere, too.

A. That would not have been my philosophy at all. I've said this over and over since the riots. They burnt here on Pennsylvania Avenue and I went over to Washington, D. C. to see how they burned up and down 14th Street and I've said time and time, I would not have approached the resentment to the extent of burning and riots in the communities that the blacks did. It was their own community where they lived . . .

I. That they were burning down.

A. . . . where they were burning down. My philosophy, and always would have been, if we didn't get the right treatment on Pennsylvania Avenue, use the method that we used in 1930 something to pickett the stores in order to get clerks in there to sell. Now, if you, in '68, you're coming up 35 or 40 years, if progress hadn't been made along the line, and you still thought you were being ripped off by the merchants in the community, just don't buy from them. They would have to sell you the business or go out of business. Then you would have your total community and you'd have the economics of the community going right into the community. That's always been my philosophy. The burning -- no -- I didn't agree with it at all -- the riots. That didn't do anything and I think it's a disgrace that it happened and then what happened in New York just the other day was terrible. More blacks got hurt. My God, there was one black operator up there with the largest black super-market operator and he had over half of his stores burnt up.

No, that would not have been my philosophy at all to do that. I think it was wrong. It wasn't the right thing to do. I look at it strictly from the economics and we gained nothing economically from doing that. All they had to do, if they were young -- you know it takes leadership for all these things and it just doesn't happen. You can get a hothead and you're going to do something and tomorrow you're sorry. Things got out of hand. They burned. I saw it all right out here. My God, I was right in it. I thought it was the worst things -- ripping off all these little stores. Those stores could have still been viable businesses -- now they're nothing. You can still see the results of it except some little shaggy looking places, dim lighted places.

I. What do you think brought about the decline of the militant? They kind of reached a peak by '68 and many of them have disappeared, many of their organizations you no longer hear about such as the Black Panthers and some of the others.

A. Well, I think finances is the whole answer to the whole thing. You know, during the unrest there, when they started the sit-ins and all that, there were monies and grants and all, and then that just kept mushrooming into more money until you had the riots then they really did spend a lot of money.

I. Who spent a lot of money?

A. The Federal Government considerably a lot. It was crumbs in a way but that's when they started giving blacks money to go into business, these little ones and half of them didn't know what a business was. It's right back to where it was again, now. What is it -- 82% or 90% of them fail in business because they had no business background of know-how.

You know, if you dry the money up, that just about eliminates any activity. (Simultaneous talking) It isn't hardly safe to walk on the streets at night, you know, you get ripped off. Right in my own black community.

I. But you are saying that the fall of the militants was a matter of withdrawing money.

A. They weren't able to get the money that they were able to get through different organizations. Absolutely.

I. It doesn't require money to go rioting.

A. No, but that was the riots. But the militants -- I don't really know how to answer the question. This is my own opinion. There were quite a few organizations in the black community and it was a lot of money available -- a considerable lot of money. Now it's not. It's just dried up.

Now I just see it from an economic standpoint that the money is not there and you don't have those organizations any more. I don't know how they got the money going but they were able to get a lot of money and a lot of people contributed to -- they were going through a period there -- in the early '60's. I guess everybody . . . there was so much unrest. They had a lot of support from the other side -- doing those sit-ins and all. A lot of kids came over -- whites.

I. Yes.

A. I think they started withdrawing from it for reasons. I don't know all the reasons for them to withdraw. I imagine the leaders -- some of the leaders that the kids believed in -- all of these people were mostly young -- believed in this thing they had goin' -- like you said, the different organizations, the Black Panthers and what have you and all -- I guess it's just like you go through a generation and things happen like that and then people come to their senses again and say, "Well, that isn't normal." We weren't going through normal times.

I. Did you ever have any fights with Lillie May Jackson on liquor outlets? I gather that she was pretty strong on zoning and liquor outlets and so on, and as you do rent facilities or have real estate where there are liquor outlets, did this ever cause any run-in with Lillie May Jackson?

A. No. It wasn't because that I was a good fund raiser. I was a very good fund raiser for the NAACP when Lillie Jackson was there.

I. You raised money for the NAACP?

A. I think I was one of their largest fund raisers in the early '40's and back then; because I had all the taverns with all the envelopes to gather money; but Mrs. Lillie Jackson, she was bitterly against whiskey and what have you and she felt that those places should not be in certain areas; but there were so few black owners that it really didn't bother too much. We were on a commercial street and there was already a license there but she was bitterly against . . . Let's face it, if a white man wanted to open a place of business, he'd come and put it there -- right in the neighborhood. It wasn't right. It wasn't right. And so, Lillie Jackson was against it. She was right. She was trying to protect the community. What she was doing there against places and the ones she was against, and most of the places that was operated by whites, they didn't care except to take the money out and take the money home. They didn't give a damn about a nice place. Until I opened this place downstairs and Little Willie's Inn, and I'm going back again starting in 1935, the places that the whites had for the blacks in the black community you didn't have a decent chair to sit on. No. They didn't even have black bartenders. It was a nasty rip-off altogether.

I. Did you ever hear any comments about the condition of the houses that she owned in the black community?

A. Oh yes. I heard plenty.

I. What kind of comments have you heard?

A. I heard that she was a very poor landlord. She had all kinds of violations on her properties. They still say that whoever takes care of the property now still has violations, but I don't know. That's what you hear.

I. Because if you asked the Mitchells about this they will usually say that it's political motivation that brings them into court. But, I need to get both sides of the picture on the record.

A. I couldn't comment on it except that I hear the rumors, but I don't know anything about it to be true one way or another.

I. When did you first meet Teddy McKeldin? He's the other person we were studying and even though you don't know him as well as Lillie May Jackson, I'm sure your paths must have crossed.

A. Well, I never did really know Governor McKeldin. He was a Republican and I was always on the other side.

I. You never supported McKeldin?

A. Yes, I supported him for mayor.

I. What? The First time or second time?

A. The second time for mayor. When he ran I supported him. I supported him along with the Democrats.

I. Did you support him when he ran for Governor? He ran against Byrd the second time.

A. I'm sure when he ran against Byrd I supported him. (Laughter) Now, who was he against the second time?

I. Well, the first time when he ran for governor -- gosh -- was that Mahoney? You know, Mahoney has been the Republican Party's secret weapon.

A. No. It wan't Mahoney. Mahoney never did get through the primaries. In 1951 or 1950, whenever it was, Mahoney ran for governor against Lane in the primary.

I. Oh, he ran against Lane the first time. There was a big fight between Lane and Mahoney. Lane won in a very close primary and then McKeldin beat Lane in the general.

A. Yes. That's what happened.

I. That was the sales tax year.

A. That was the sales tax year. Lane was in 4 years but after that, Mahoney ran against him in the primary. I was with Mahoney against Lane.

I. You were, really?

A. Oh yes. I was with George Mahoney. Hell, he was downstairs. I have pictures and everything. He came up . . . no, that wasn't that time. I'm sorry. He was with the Cancer Fund and was running a big show. I had a midnight show down the Theater on behalf of the Cancer Fund and he was head of the Cancer Fund and I helped him out. But when he ran, I was with Mahoney in the primary.

Mahoney won the popular vote and lost the electoral vote and then McKeldin beat Lane.

I. Did you support McKeldin that time or don't you remember?

A. I don't know.

I. Have you had any personal relationship with the man?

A. I never had no personal relationship with McKeldin except we did come to know each other when his law partner, Bill Adelson, represented me a few times.

I. You had a lot of lawyers presenting you. (Laughter)

A. Through Bill I knew McKeldin. I knew him better when he was mayor the last time than any time. I did support him that time.

I. How do you feel about McKeldin in the area of civil rights and black-white relations?

A. I don't know to any extent how much McKeldin was able to do as far as civil rights was concerned except that McKeldin was such a good mixer, he could go to a Baptist Church and be a Baptist. He could go to a Jewish Synagogue and be a Jew. (Laughter) He could go to a Catholic and be a Catholic. He was just the kind of fellow that made himself friendly. He was a hell of a good politician, I can say that.

While he was mayor, I used to go out Route 40 from right here in the evening and get a quick meal out at the Hot Shoppe where Hecht is located on Route 40 -- at Edmondson Village. McKeldin would be in there just about every evening having his meal and autographing for kids there and all.

But, politically what he was able to accomplish as far as civil rights is concerned, I really don't know. I'd rather not comment on it.

I. Is there any white that you would cite as having done the most for civil rights in Maryland during your lifetime?

A. No.

I. No person that you'd want to point to -- McKeldin or anybody else. What about among the blacks?

End of Cassette II, Side 1

A. . . . That stands out.

I. Yes. Above everybody else.

A. Where?

I. In Maryland in the civil rights movement. You know, would you point to Lillie May Jackson or would you point to someone else?

A. I don't have any individual I could point to.

I. In other words, it's a group of leaders that advanced the cause.

A. It was a group of leaders that advanced the cause and there is no outstanding one as I know of.

I. How would you rate Juanita Jackson Mitchell in comparison with her mother as a civil rights leader?

A. There's no comparison.

I. When you say "no comparison" can you be a little bit more definitive.

A. Mrs. Juanita Mitchell supported her mother and she was with her mother every time she went to a meeting. She was right with her mother, but after her mother began to fail, there's no question about it, the Jackson's wanted to continue to control the NAACP but when Mrs. Jackson began to fail they lost control of the NAACP.

I. Who lost control?

A. The Jacksons . . the Mitchells.

I. What period would you say Lillie May Jackson began to fail?

A. Well, I tell you, as far as in the beginning I said that Mrs. Jackson could holler and do all of that and after that, it wasn't anything really effective as far as progress was concerned. . . after that period which ended in the early '50's. The doors were opened to where people would go in and negotiate and begin to talk. You got more that way than you would just blasting off at everybody.

I. She became a little bit of an anachronism then . . . back to another era then.

A. Right. And then, for Mrs. Juanita Mitchell to follow her footsteps, that was a failure altogether. I mean it would be.

I. Why do you say that?

A. Well, Mrs. Lillie Jackson -- everybody knew Lillie, knew what she stood for and such and thought it was a very good cause and all. But, with Mrs. Mitchell, I don't think the same feeling was ever the same in the black community.

I. Any particular reason that you could cite for that?

A. I just think that Mrs. Mitchell, she's goes off half-cocked on just about everything. (I. I see.) If she believes something, I don't care how wrong she can be, nobody's going to convince her, she only sees it her way and she's a lawyer. She sees it her way and no other way. And you know, you've got to work with people -- have followers in order to have any kind of

A. She has a wonderful husband. Everybody compliments him.

I. That's Clarence Mitchell, Jr.

A. That's Clarence Mitchell, Jr. who has been with the NAACP for years in Washington. He's a fine man. He was never active here in the City because all the time he was in Washington as such.

I. You've heard nothing but good things about him, right?

A. That's right. Absolutely.

I. Again, when would you say that Lillie May Jackson began to fade? She began to decline . . . in the late '50's or 60's or what?

A. I would say in the early '50's.

I. Early '50's . . . that soon?

I have also heard it stated, and we are getting close to the end of this interview -- that the cutting edge of the civil rights movement for the State of Maryland in the 20th Century, was a triumvirate -- the churches, the NAACP and the Afro-American. Would you comment on that as to how valid you feel that comment is?

A. I don't understand what you are saying. Would you state that again?

I. . . . That the major thrust of the civil rights movement in the State of Maryland came about as a result of an alliance between the NAACP, the black churches and the Afro-American.

A. I would have to . . . that's up to what period now?

I. Well, of course, I realize that in the '60's the influence was not as strong, but so far as, you know, for most of that period -- the major . . .

A. I would have to go along with that. I absolutely would.

I. Do you have any comments -- these are kind of a few disconnected questions in winding this interview up -- do you have any comments to make on how McKeldin managed to keep the peace in Baltimore in 1966 which was the year that CORE declared Baltimore a Target City? Do you recall that episode?

A. Let me see. That was when they raised hell here, I guess.

I. That's right. (Laughter)

A. Mayor McKeldin was pretty much a mayor that convinced people that it was not right to do this and I think it was through persuasion, and McKeldin was good with the churches and with certain leaders and he got them to cooperate and I am sure it was through the cooperation of the black community because the black community really thought a lot of McKeldin. I don't know how much good he did but they really thought a lot of him.

I. Okay. How did the black establishment . . . I'm thinking of the old line NAACP types, the church leaders, the professionals and the business men, how did they react to the charges of "Uncle Tomism" that were shouted by the younger militants that were hitting the streets in the mid '60's and late '60's? How did you feel about this -- you all that had been out there working when things were really tough?

A. Well, we thought that these kids were definitely wrong. I thought they were wrong and a lot of things they were doing and particularly what they were calling "Uncle Tom's" and all because they never will, never could realize what it was because they weren't here during the 1930's and the 1920's when the lynchings were going on and you were scared to open your mouth. You had to be an "Uncle Tom" in order to get in to find out what was going on. If you want to call it "Uncle Tom". It was just a matter of progress through those years.

It's just like you build a building. You lay one layer of brick. You lay a good foundation and the foundation was started back there for whatever happened in the 60's started many, many years before the '60's. Otherwise, these kids would not have been able to go out there and do the things they were able to do for good or worse. They couldn't have. But, naturally, they were young and they were able to voice themselves. Like I said before, Lillie Jackson was out there hollerin' when you were afraid to holler. Really, everybody who knows Lillie Jackson knows that she would holler back there -- she would talk back to the whites; and you just couldn't find the blacks to do that.

So, these kids would never have been able to do that if it had not been for the progress that had been made. You know, it's like anything else -- you can start something and you project the future of it even if its business. You can say, "Well, we're going to start here, small and we're going to grow just like anything else" but you've got to build a solid foundation all the way. That's what happened and you don't give any one credit. It encouraged the people to go on. When Martin Luther King came on the scene, and what he did down there in Alabama, that just made everybody feel like if that man can do that . . . he was a Godsend -- Martin Luther King -- to help the whole thing because if it had not been for him before these kids got out there, they would not have been able to do a thing with all that we had done.

I. Right. So you give him more credit than anyone else?

A. I give him more credit than anyone else because he convinced the people to the right way -- non-violence and laid the groundwork. He called other people to express . . . people began to express their opinion about things -- I'm talking about black people -- when he came on the scene. Naturally, it was a struggle all the way through. These kids calling others "Uncle Tom". I thought that was the worse thing that could happen -- calling them "Uncle Tom."

I. Do you feel that World War II played a significant role in the civil rights movement? Did it make changes or would you say that it just left just exactly where they were before the war?

A. No. It made changes. Because things before the war -- and the reason I say it made changes -- during World War II, naturally there were plenty employed, people did make -- who had never made any money -- during the '40's people made more money and they had opportunities to -- it was the first opportunity that I could see any blacks as a whole have the opportunity to have a little something. The jobs they had and all . . .

I. In World War II.

A. So that was the change. I guess it takes war sometimes . . . (An interruption concerning whether cars should be moved due to parking restrictions.)

I don't know if I finished the question.

I. We're on World War II.

A. Oh, World War II -- yes, the economics changed and after World War II, naturally there were . . . actually it wasn't long before we were in -- what was it . . .

I. The Korean War.

A. The Korean War and we've been in some kind of war ever since and economically the blacks were able to break out -- they owned their homes, had better places to live throughout Baltimore City. If you go back before World War II, my God -- the blacks lived in East Baltimore from Madison Avenue over to Fulton Avenue -- you just couldn't go nowhere. Of course, once there was a break and the restrictive covenants were removed -- that was an NAACP victory -- nationally -- That was a big thing.

I. Right. That was in the late '40's.

A. So, once upon a time, even if you had money and wanted to do something you couldn't do it, but after World War II there were doors opened where if a man wanted to do some things, he began to have a little elbow room to try to help himself and advance himself. I think World War II made all the difference in the world.

I. Okay, that's very interesting.

Would you comment on what influence, if any, you feel the peace movement had on the civil rights movement -- the peace movement of the 1960's? Did that have a tendancy to sap strength from the civil rights movement or what?

A. I don't know if I understand the peace movement?

I. Well, the peace movement in Vietnam -- there was a great surge of interest in Vietnam and bringing peace there in the late '60's.

A. I would not like to comment on that because I wouldn't know -- I can't comment on that except I think that movement was one time where Martin Luther King stepped a little bit too far when he wanted to go into the peace movement. Well, he didn't have no where to go I guess. That's why he got involved in that and I think he made the wrong move when he got involved. That's the only criticism I could say about Martin Luther King -- but that peace movement, I guess it was good in a way. It's hard to ever -- I don't know who could answer that because you had a lot of Communists involved. If you were in the peace movement, you were a Communist I guess. I don't know. I'd rather not comment on it. I just hoped that today we could have peace in the world.

I. Well, that's a nice objective. Do you have any comment to

I. Do you have any comment to make on Agnew and his change in attitude towards blacks after the riots which, of course, opened the way for him to become Vice-president? Did you hear anything or were you directly involved?

A. Well, what happened, during the riots, Agnew -- now these black ministers, they had supported Agnew all the way because Agnew, you know, ran against Mahoney and he won. It was by the help of the black community as a whole that he won. But Agnew was always -- I get the impression that people didn't understand too well all the way through his career -- his make-up and all, I think that he thought that if you were leader you should be able to control your community and he called the black ministers together, the leaders, supposedly which were the black ministers at that time as far as Agnew was concerned in Baltimore City. During the riots or right after the riots, I can't recall when, he was let down because they were afraid to speak out. I imagine they were afraid to speak out because they were afraid of the militants. I don't know if they agreed with what happened but they were afraid to come out against it and Agnew didn't like that. That quick, he turned on them.

I. Okay, but you don't have any inside information on what was going on in Agnew's administration at that time.

A. No. I don't think I have a comment. I don't think he had his mind at the time when he fell out with the blacks that he had a chance to go to the White House, because that was (Simultaneoue Talking)

I. If he hadn't been so greedy, he would have been President of the United States.

A. Right. But he did that at the time, so it wasn't a move that he was making to become Vice-President. It was too early in him being in Annapolis. You know, Agnew had a way of calling a Jap a name . . .

I. He wasn't always so tactful, was he?

A. Blacks -- we have always been very sensative and we have reason to be sensative because we have been called everything but the right thing, but however, you know blacks, once upon a time, you know, a white speaker would come around. He would say he was running for office. He would say, "You people". That was the worst thing he could ever say. . . "You people" (Laughter) right away, all the blacks resented that because . . . .

I. Would they do that a lot?

A. I would go around white rallies and I would hear the candidate say "You people" to the whites and he was white. But we were so separated that if a white man came into the community campaigning . . .

I. Turn them off, huh?

A. It would turn them off right away if he used that word. So, I'm saying we were so sensitive because after being kicked around so almost all of our lives as a whole, more so than any other race, I guess, in America, we're sensitive and the Agnew thing, I don't think it had anything to do with him going to Washington.

The blacks were just afraid to speak out due to the militants, but I'm sure they didn't agree with what was happening.

I. You're actively involved in the real estate business. Do you remember in 1966, the City Council turned down an Open Housing Ordinance in 1966. Remember, the Fair Housing Act was passed by Congress in 1968, but in 1966 we tried to do something in Baltimore and it was not approved, but nevertheless, McKeldin got an Open Occupancy Policy agreed to by the Downtown Apartment Association. Do you remember anything about that, how it came about, what took place?

A. No, I don't know anything about it, because I was mostly involved in the black community; but I do recall that blacks wanted to move in some of the high rise apartments and they were kept out for some reason and as you said, something was worked out and they got the doors opened.

I. Was there any prejudice shown during the more militant period of the '60's when "Black is Beautiful" was constantly being preached? Was there any prejudice among darker blacks towards lighter blacks? Or was there ever any problem between light and dark skinned blacks during that period?

A. No. The problem before that period was . . .

I. They tried to get lighter, huh? (Laughter)

A. When black became beautiful, it erased the whole thing. Just black -- if you were light like I am you were black -- Black is Beautiful.

I. Well, was there any prejudice shown toward the lighter skinned blacks is what I'm really asking.

A. No.

I. You were never conscious of it. No. So, okay. That's apparently . . . somebody raised that question once and that's why I asked you. But, you have never been aware of it?

A. No.

I. Did you help raise money for say . . bail bonds for the kids that were locked up as a result of picketing on Route 40 or sit-downs or that sort of thing? Were you involved in any way during that period?

A. I was not involved in raising money. I am sure I made contributions myself, but there were people involved. When they were in Cambridge and all through there, they had fund raisers.

a fund raiser, my brother-in-law, right downstairs.

I. Okay. Let's see . . . . I think I'm about at the end, believe it or not. Is there any particular comment that you would like to make about Lillie May Jackson or Theodore R. McKeldin or the civil rights movement? Or where you stand today?

A. Well, I don't know anything I could say about that field that we haven't said. All the comments I could make, I think I've made. I would like to say that during Lillie Jackson's era, she was a great woman and made quite a contribution towards

I would have to say that and McKeldin, I think he played an important role as far as our community was concerned, but I never had the experience of working with him or knowing too much about him, but he certainly stood in good with all the black ministers and as a whole in the black community.

I. Do you think the movement today is sliding backwards or do you feel that progress is continuing to be made in the area of equality and black-white relations?

A. I think as of today it's slipping. I don't think it's being improved any more. If anything, I think it's coming apart. That's my feeling.

I. Where do you feel the major thrust should be today?

A. The major thrust today -- what, as far as blacks are concerned?

I. Yes. Blacks -- in gaining . . .

A. In my opinion in the economic area. There should be more blacks in business and in industry. These areas I think are slipping.

I. Do you have any recommendation to make as to how this could be achieved -- to get more black business men under way? You mentioned earlier that a lot of them got . . .

A. Well, first of all, the black -- to have black business men to be successful, they first must be trained.

I. Training is an important . . . .

A. Training is the most important factor -- to understand, the right kind of education as far as business is concerned. The guy going into business knows nothing about accounting, so he knows nothing about his records, and today, records are very important in any business. In management, there are several phases that you have to understand in order for you to be successful. In most instances, the blacks are lacking in that field. The loaned money that they gave them in the '60's and '70's, why did 82%-92% of them fail? Because they did not even know what they were handling. They were exposed to something and just because they saw somebody else in business, I think it was really a rip-off for half of the loans that were made for blacks to go into business because they had no chance for success in business. It has been said that the powers-that-be said, "Yes. Give them some money. We want them to fail." You don't give a guy -- and all the guys said, "You didn't give me enough money." In most instances, if you had given a guy a million dollars and he didn't have the know-how, he wasn't going to have the million dollars long. The million dollars going to be gone, too; so it's really a training program in getting the blacks and that's where I think the mistake was made in the beginning in trying to put blacks in business. It just happened because of the riots and all. You know, blacks in business -- put them in business. We're going backwards quite a bit, economically as far as business is concerned. No question about it.

I. Just this one last question. What about the Urban Coalition? What did that do?

A. In my opinion, -- nothing.

I. What was it meant to do?

A. I wasn't too familiar with it. I knew several people that was involved in it. I think it was supposed to help blacks in different areas.

I. Such as business?

A. I think so but I'm not too sure. I know some people that was involved in it. I haven't seen any results from it. Economically it never got off the ground to do anything.

I. Do you think the NAACP is still playing an important role?

A. No question about it. I think that will be the only organization that will stand and be counted. Look at most of the organizations you've heard about. They're gone.

I. They're gone.

A. We need a strong organization. I'm 100% behind the organization and I'm hoping the new leader of the organization will carry forward and do the job. I'm supporting him 100% because we need that organization. That's the one organization we really need.

I. How strong are the churches today? Are they as strong as they were 20 years ago?

A. I don't think so.

I. You don't.

A. No. I don't think the generation today care much about the church. They might stage a comeback, though, because people are coming back to earth a bit now. We have been off on Cloud Nine, I think, and we're beginning to come back down and face the facts of life. A lot of these youngsters that were out there in the '40's and all and they look back too and see that things weren't as rosy as they thought they were. It's not going to be that way but I think the doors are open. That's one thing -- you can get in and talk today, and if you get in and get an opportunity to talk to people and you have something really to talk about, -- well, something good can come of it.

I think the blacks still have a wonderful opportunity even though they are sliding back, but I'm hoping that the trend changes and we begin to go forward and make progress again 'cause the doors are open. You walk into the banks and you see a token of blacks working there. You see that. You go into most any office and you see a black face. I appreciate that because I was back there when you couldn't do nothing. You couldn't get inside the doors. I'm saying they have a great opportunity if they take advantage of it -- the blacks today.

I. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Adams. I appreciate this very interesting interview very much. Thank you.

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