

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT**

INTERVIEWEE: Elton Cox

INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff, Jr.

DATE: May 15, 1982

ELTON COX: Yeah. Yes, I got your mail.

EUGENE PFAFF: I'd like to begin by asking you about your biographical background.

EC: Okay. I'm the seventh of sixteen kids born in Whiteville, Tennessee.

EP: And your, your date of birth?

EC: June 19, 1931.

EP: What educational institutions did you attend?

EC: Okay. You want to start with high school?

EP: Sure.

EC: Joliet. I finished--I went to four high schools, but I finished Joliet, J-o-l-i-e-t, Joliet Township High School.

EP: In Danville?

EC: In--no, in Joliet, Illinois.

EP: Oh, I'm sorry, of course.

EC: I'm a high school dropout, by the way. I dropped out for a year and a half and shined shoes at twenty-five dollars a week to help my parents out. And I went back.

EP: What college did you attend?

EC: All right. Livingstone College down in Salisbury, North Carolina.

EP: And you graduated when?

EC: Correct. June 1954.

EP: And your major was--

EC: Sociology. Minor: history.

EP: And why did you decide to enter the ministry?

EC: Okay. I entered the ministry back at seventeen. I had a feeling of the urgency of the call since I was thirteen and got involved in church work and from then on started preaching.

EP: And where did you attain your theological degree?

EC: Okay. One year at Hood, H-o-o-d, Seminary at Salisbury, North Carolina. And I finished the school of religion at Howard University.

EP: What date would that have been?

EC: That would be June 1957. That's Washington, DC.

EP: When did you first become involved in civil rights activities?

EC: Well, non-professionally when I was fifteen at an A&W Root Beer stand in Kankakee, Illinois. And that is spelled K-a-n-k-a-k-e-e. We used to go there after church, youth meetings. They used to serve whites in frosted glasses and serve negroes in paper cups and put a top on it. And that was a sign: take it and go ahead--don't stay, go in your car and drink it. At that time, A&W Root Beer drive-in was the largest in the country and stayed the largest until McDonald's overcame it. And from there to restaurants in Illinois they wanted blacks to come in the back door or come in the front door and take it out, take your food out.

EP: What sort of activities did you engage in against these establishments?

EC: Oh, we protested and walked in front with signs, picketed.

EP: Did you ever experience any violence at this time?

EC: No, not back in those days, nothing but catcalls.

EP: I see. Were you successful in desegregating any of these places?

EC: Oh, yes. They started serving us as other people.

EP: And this would have been back in the--

EC: That would have been back in 1944 and [194]5.

EP: I see. So that was right when CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] was getting started itself.

EC: No. They got started in Chicago in '42, although I was not familiar with CORE at that time.

EP: What activities did you engage in after this?

EC: Okay. After that--well, even in high school, we used to get up and protest this music class singing "Old Black Joe." And we walked up to the superintendent's office and complained about it. And minstrel shows. And he got rid of the minstrel shows and told the teachers that we didn't have to sing the old song called "Old Black Joe." He thought it had some racial connotations.

EP: And these were, of course, in segregated high schools?

EC: No. They were integrated high schools in Illinois. In northern Illinois, the schools were always integrated.

EP: I see.

EC: Southern Illinois is a different story.

EP: When did you first become a member of CORE?

EC: I joined CORE officially in 1961.

EP: Had you been a member of any other organizations?

EC: Yes. I'd been a member of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] since I was sixteen. And during 1960 I served three months as the national youth field secretary of the NAACP. And I traveled around the country organizing youth chapters.

EP: Why did you join CORE?

EC: Okay. When I had that summer experience in '60 with the NAACP and I went back to my church in High Point, North Carolina, I thought that I was halfway successful professionally, so I decided to expand my interests. And at that time, CORE--I had met James Farmer who worked for the NAACP at that time. And I told him I was interested in coming to the NAACP. But at that time, CORE had called him as national director. So he asked me, he said, "Well, come on to a freedom ride training in Washington, DC." He said, "This would be a good experience to see if you really want to go into this." So, I joined thirteen others in that nonviolent workshop in Washington, DC.

EP: Did you participate in the original freedom ride?

EC: Oh, yes. I'm one of the thirteen original--

EP: Well, I've read reports of the violence that took place. I understand there was--the first arrest occurred in Charlotte.

EC: Right, yes.

EP: And were you arrested at that time?

EC: No, no. I was able to make it from Washington, DC, all the way to South Carolina, Sumter, South Carolina. At that moment--I think that was on a Saturday morning--I'd left to go back to High Point to preach Mother's Day. And as I finished my sermon, I got ready to call and find out at what point the bus was. And at that time they had burned it.

EP: So you weren't there at Anniston when they burned it?

EC: Not at Anniston. But I caught it up again in Birmingham. But at that moment no one would drive the bus, so we flew from Birmingham to New Orleans. Then subsequent freedom rides took place in which I was on one from St. Louis to New Orleans. Of course we got arrested in Little Rock.

EP: Were you ever the victim of any violence?

EC: The only violence that I really had was when a tear gas canister was thrown at me in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and it fractured my ankle. And they came and arrested me in a church rally that night. The doctor made me promise that I would not bring him in to court as a witness if--before he waited on me, and made the white nurses put on plastic gloves so they wouldn't touch me. [laughs]

EP: Oh, I see. Well, why did they single you out for arrest?

EC: Okay. I was the national field secretary for CORE at that time, and naturally, I was the spokesman at that rally of four thousand students outside the jailhouse. So, we had a very peaceful rally, but one deputy sheriff got nervous. And he let his finger slip on a tear gas canister. And when he let his go, the other guys took that as a sign to throw the other ones and turn the dogs a loose on us.

EP: So that resulted in basically a riot, police-inspired riot.

EC: That's right. Yeah, that's right, trying to get away from that tear gas. It's terrible.

EP: Was anyone arrested at that time or did the arrests come later?

EC: Yeah. We had others in jail upstairs, and they were hollering out of jail up on the ninth floor to us while we were conducting this rally in the rain, by the way. And after that--I forget how many were actually arrested that day besides myself. I don't recall. But some others were arrested. And we ended up in jail for about thirty-three days.

EP: I've read several accounts of--did you have to go back down there to stand trial at a later time?

EC: About twelve times.

EP: Twelve times?

EC: I've been arrested seventeen times, and twelve of them were in Baton Rouge.

EP: I understand that you were convicted for defamation of character and--

EC: And disturbing the peace and I think blocking the streets or something, but all of that was won on appeal, although the appeal took about three years before it got to the Supreme Court. And I really just won by one justice.

EP: Were these arrests all at the same time or over a period of--

EC: No, over a period of time, over a period of three years.

EP: Were they in connection with the freedom rides or another?

EC: Freedom rides and local lunch counter integration, parks and churches.

EP: I see. The incident about being arrested for defamation of character regarding remarks you allegedly made about the judge and the prosecuting attorney, could you go over the circumstances involved?

EC: You know when I read your things you sent me, the actual remarks did not sound like what I actually said. I was simply complaining about a Presbyterian judge presiding in a Roman Catholic city in a segregated courtroom, you know, and by a prosecuting attorney who is alleged to have negro concubines. And, boy, they just didn't like that down there. [laughs]

EP: So, you were arrested for that?

EC: Yes.

EP: I see. Now when would this have been, in--

EC: That was December 1961.

EP: I see. Now I understand you were convicted of that and there was some shenanigans that went on, at least that's the inference I get from the newspaper--that there was a ten-day period between the time of conviction and when you could file for appeal. And that they had kept delaying transcribing the transcript of the trial--

EC: Right.

EP: And did the time actually run out?

EC: No, I don't think so. But there was a lot of legal maneuvering there. They were trying to just catch my three lawyers--plus a guy in New York--they were trying to catch them unaware of some of the legal technicalities so they can convict me and send me down to the state penitentiary--

EP: Who were your lawyers, by the way?

EC: Oh, Carl Rachlin in New York, R-a-c-h-l-i-n, and then Lewis Eli down in New Orleans. He's still there. And one guy is a judge now. And boy, the other one, I should have had those names in front of me.

EP: Well, I know there was another instance where--

EC: Then I had two at Baton Rouge, too.

EP: Let's see. There was some question of--they placed your fine just below the minimum level for appeal on one of these charges. Does that mean you actually had to serve the time because you could not legally appeal under the state law?

EC: Well, the facts of that--I'm not sure. But I do know they first put my bond at two thousand. Then CORE sent the two thousand, then they raised it to four thousand, and they sent that. Then they raised it to six thousand. They [CORE] sent that. And then they raised it to eight thousand, and they [CORE] got a hold of that. But, when they got to ten thousand, it just got ridiculous. And I think, eventually, they [CORE] had to come up with that, too, I think.

EP: Now when they raised these bonds, was it on separate counts or was it on the same one they just kept raising?

EC: All of them together, as I understand it.

EP: I see.

EC: Yeah. See, they had our phones tapped so they knew how broke CORE was at that time. And they just figured they could get that.

EP: So CORE at some point said it was ridiculous and refused to send any more bond. Does that mean you had to enter prison?

EC: No, I never entered prison, no. They just kept me in and out of jail. About as soon as I would hit the airport and as soon as I put my feet on the ground they'd come out and get me.

EP: Well--

EC: They knew I was coming back to submit to arrest. But they would just do that for publicity to say, "We got this nigger again."

EP: So they were a series of harassing--

EC: Oh, yeah.

EP: Yeah. Well, I got the impression from the newspapers in December that you had actually gone in and served a number of days.

EC: Yes. I think the first time was thirty-three days. Well, thirty-three days one time was in solitary confinement. Another time it was fifty-three days. And the other time was--it may have been three days or it may have been two weeks.

EP: Were you ever subjected to harassment in jail?

EC: No, because my three lawyers checked on me every day. And the FBI checked either on me or through my lawyers. And they didn't want to see that I got hung. Some of the other civil rights workers were beaten and some of the girls were sexually misused. And they also tried to sic lesbians and homosexuals on us. But they respected us for being in there for civil rights. Although one did tell me one time that if I wasn't in there for that he would rape me.

EP: So these were all black prisoners?

EC: Correct.

EP: I see. The jails were strictly segregated?

EC: Oh, yes.

EP: Had you been a field secretary from the beginning?

EC: Of CORE? No, I had started off as North Carolina field secretary. Then I moved up to national field secretary.

EP: Was that within a short period of time?

EC: Yes. I also headed the first CORE chapter in High Point.

EP: How many field secretaries were there at that time?

EC: Let's see. I think we had nine all together.

EP: Did you work closely with Gordon Carey?

EC: Oh, yes.

EP: How could you assess or characterize him?

EC: Well, Gordon, back in those days, he was tired of the racism in the labor unions and in the churches, although he wasn't a church member; his wife was, as I recall. And he just wanted to help bring about that American Dream that is justice for all. And he--I teased him all the time because he was a constant smoker. I told him he was going to end up with cancer. [laughs] And he took a lot of verbal abuse that I don't think I would have taken, being a Caucasian--because they didn't have to do it.

EP: This was before he became program director, is that correct? Excuse me. What activities were you involved in on behalf of CORE up to the Greensboro and High Point demonstrations in the spring of '63? Were you involved in the sit-ins?

EC: Oh, yeah. Actually, when the first students sat down in Greensboro, I led the first high school group in High Point there just two weeks later. So, at that time, they really didn't call it a sit-in; they called it a sit-down. And I wrote a speech on thirteen "ins,"--no, twenty-one "ins." And one of them, called the "mayor-in," really brought in the national publicity, because I got all threatening letters from Korea and everywhere. [laughs] So, I called everything an "in," you know. Pray-in was going to churches, vote-in in every election, play-in every park, swim-in every swimming pool, pray-in every church, you know.

EP: The sit-ins in Greensboro--at least with the lunch counters--lasted, at least according to the newspapers, from February until the end of July, when Woolworth's and Kress here desegregated. Did it last that long or longer in High Point?

EC: No. We were intermittent, on and off. But they were waiting for Greensboro. The power structure in High Point often said whatever Greensboro does, High Point would do. I said, "When it comes to doing right, you shouldn't wait on another city."

EP: Who were some of the officials that you had conversations with there in High Point?

EC: Oh, there was Mayor Carson Stout, I think he was the mayor at that original time. And, I forget the police chief at the moment--Pritchett finally came from Georgia. And they thought, since he had the honor of arresting Martin Luther King and some others down there, that he could solve our problem in High Point.

EP: How would you characterize these individuals? Were they totally unresponsive or--

EC: No, they were responsive. Carson Stout made a lot of liberal statements and took a lot of actions to help us out, although he shot back on a few issues. Pritchett made a lot of good statements. And, also, we found out he made a lot of good statements to his officers saying that they're not to take advantage of us. They had to stop a white demonstrator from bothering us and so forth. And one lieutenant told his officers, according to one officer who reported to me, that he said, "Well, I'm telling you right now that if you draw your gun and shoot one of them who do[es] not deserve to be shot," he said, "I'm going to shoot you." That was pretty good because you just didn't hear statements like that in those days.

EP: Would you say that High Point was rougher than Greensboro in terms of the white response?

EC: Oh yes, yes. There was much more harassment in High Point.

EP: Do you recall any actual violence?

EC: Well, they threw bottles and cursed us and threw paint on us off the top of buildings and tried to run through our line while we were walking and parading.

EP: But you--I'm sorry.

EC: And just the threats, the threats were just tough, you know, throwing ketchup on us and little stuff like that. We had more of what we call poor whites in High Point because of all the mills there. And where you have a lower economic educational class of people, you always have more violence. That's the way they vent their emotions.

EP: I assume you were the victim of harassing telephone calls and hate mail.

EC: Yeah. I was told later on, after the civil rights movement--after I resigned, rather, in December from CORE, December 31, 1965--I was told by one white that my phone was tapped for six years.

EP: By the police?

EC: By the Chamber of Commerce. [laughs]

EP: For heaven's sakes. Did--

EC: Pardon?

EP: I was wondering--were you the victim of any actual violence, that is, cross burnings or--

EC: No cross burnings, but they threw dead cats and leaves and garbage on my lawn because I moved one block, and that had integrated a neighborhood--only one block from where the blacks were originally. And they called me and threatened to get me. White policemen used to drive by my house all the time, but finally the black cops used to drive by also to kind of act like they're driving by.

I slept with two lights on, front and back. And I had two German shepherd dogs and five guns loaded. [laughs]

EP: My goodness.

EC: I'm a nonviolent person while demonstrating. But just for somebody to come around and just misuse me--I don't intend to kill anybody, but I often made it plain that I would shoot where they wouldn't be any good to themselves or anybody else. And some folks thought that was un-Christian for me to say.

EP: I was wondering about any activities between the end of the sit-ins at Greensboro. That summer--the rest of that summer and the fall--seems to be a pretty quiet time in Greensboro, at least according to the press. About the only instance that they report was that you conducted some demonstrations at McDonald's, both in High Point and in Greensboro. Is that correct?

EC: Yes, and several other places in North Carolina. But we did have--we did come over to the county courthouse and protest the segregated tax books, segregated restrooms.

EP: Could you describe that action?

EC: Okay. After my famous speech, again, then I said we had to buy in any neighborhood that we had the money to buy a house. And so we decided one day to go into Greensboro and protest those colored signs in the courthouse, because that's a tax-supported building. So I forget how many of us were in that demonstration that day, so we could just walk into the restroom and flush the toilet and come out and drink out of the drinking fountains.

EP: Well, I recall that in the newspaper that one of the people involved was Wendell Scott and another was Evander Gilmer.

EC: I remember the name but, you know, the personality of that [unclear] not sound familiar. I don't recall who that was actually at the time.

EP: Was CORE--how did CORE formally get established in Greensboro?

EC: Okay.

EP: Was it your initiative?

EC: No, I don't think I started the initial one. And you know my notes are out in the shed. But I think I might have gone over there with Reverend Marion Jones and got things going. But I think also Gordon Carey and Jim McCain came through there on the trips. But anyway, I was involved in it. But, I don't even remember who the first president was, to tell you the truth.

EP: Well, Ezell Blair [Jr.] said that the first--he listed the date on the formal application as May 1962. And he said that Wendell Scott was the first chairman. Then he had to resign that summer, and he was elected temporary chairman.

EC: That's probably so, yes.

EP: And then Bill Thomas was elected permanent chairman in their first official election that fall.

EC: Yeah.

EP: He said that a group of people who were left over from the Student Executive Committee for Justice that had organized the sit-ins--continued to meet as an unofficial group in Reverend Jones's house. And I saw from the correspondence of CORE archives that you

were invited to come over and talk to them about CORE and distribute literature. Does this sound accurate?

EC: Yes, it does. Reverend Marion Jones was very hospitable to us. And, of course, we were in the same denomination at that time, too, so that made a good cohesive relationship.

EP: So essentially, he contacted you because, one, you were a CORE field representative, and two, you were both ministers in the same denomination.

EC: Correct.

EP: I see. Were you instructed by the national office to go and talk to them, or is this totally a locally--

EC: No, it's just a local thing. And then some people would write the national office and said we're interested in finding out about CORE. And then they would send the nearest field secretary.

EP: The impression I get from the CORE archives is that Greensboro was their first official, or at least officially affiliated, CORE chapter in North Carolina. Is that correct?

EC: No, I think--let me see. The first one was at--I thought the first one would have probably been High Point, because that's where I resided for many years.

EP: Do you have any indication of why there was a delay between May and their official submission of forms in December or November?

EC: Now, the real reason I don't know, unless it was just the idea of paying a membership fee or something. Because CORE just operated from week to week. Membership in CORE was never affluent as NAACP. We had envelopes, but we weren't as well organized at fundraising. Most of that came out of New York City and from national and international appeals.

EP: I gather from Elliott Rudwick and August Meier's book, *CORE: A Study in Civil Rights Movement, 1942-1968*, that there was some resentment, at least in some parts of the country, of the NAACP losing these young members from their youth chapters to CORE.

EC: Yeah.

EP: Did you ever experience any of that in this area?

EC: There was always a little friction. Just like with modern church denominations or college and universities, there's a little tension there. Well, a lot of these young people came to CORE because we were more active and moving more rapidly than the NAACP. I'm a life member, by the way. But the NAACP has always been slower; the Urban League is slower to bring about change.

EP: Does that mean that you had any difficulty working with local NAACP chapters?

EC: Oh, every now and then they would take some publicity they didn't deserve--state field secretary or other state president. And basically, he brought me down to Charlotte and we just went to McDonald's--the McDonald's restaurant. The press was there to help us out, because you always need the press to tell your story. But he didn't stay to really protest. We just go there. When they say, "No, we're not going to serve you," he just wants to leave. I said, "No. That's not the way you do it. You stay here and stand in line until they serve you or send other people to other windows or something." Nonviolent direct action is to try to prohibit your opponent from earning money in a segregated way and yet stay nonviolent in attitude, actions, and thoughts.

EP: Did any establishment try to slap a restraint of trade suit against you?

EC: No. They made all kinds of threats, however.

EP: What was your working relationship with George Simkins?

EC: George was quite active and bold, bolder than most black leaders. So he took stands and lost a lot of money out of his office by leading meetings. And a lot of people quit going to him. He was quite liberal, well-trained, a sensible man; he wasn't a hothead. He was like myself. I believed in nonviolent direct action, and neither one of us was what we called a "black powerite," you know, [thinking] just all whites are wrong and all blacks are right. We never went down that street.

EP: How did your association with him begin?

EC: Oh, I guess it initially was the sit-in movement. He was involved. And then when I started the high school group two weeks later, we got to know each other then, through the NAACP. At that time, I think I was president then.

- EP: The newspaper indicates that the two of you had a series of meetings in the fall of 1961, and the suggestion was that you were designing protest strategies for the area. Is that correct?
- EC: Yeah, we often met on that and with other people, too, and because he was a good resource. And he was a sound thinker, he and Major High[?] and a few others.
- EP: Did he operate as an individual, albeit the president of the NAACP, or was the entire chapter here in Greensboro actively involved?
- EC: Yeah. Well, he acted many times. He acted many times by himself until the executive committee could meet and approve what he did because of the necessity of the time and the hour. But, he was a good leader. He stayed president a number of years. I don't know when he actually left, really.
- EP: Well, he is still NAACP chapter president here in Greensboro. What sort of plans did you discuss in these strategy meetings?
- EC: Well, we wanted to, first, avoid as much waste of money as possible, and use every organization in town: the Elks, the churches, the fraternities and sororities and young high school kids, because they're more active and they were freer than people who had to work. Planning strategy like that and making sure that we told the press the actual truth about different things--because if we didn't have the press we would be dead.
- And we wanted to--of course, I'm a man of truth and honesty myself. And so we always wanted to make sure that we were coordinating each other. And we stayed in contact by telephone. But since my phone was believed to have been tapped anyhow, before I was told years later it was, many times we had to meet in his offices and plan. And then sometimes like maybe an emergency had come up with him, or he'd call me or I'd call him.
- EP: What were some of the projects that you engaged in together? I sent you in the questions a list of the ones that were, at least publicly, ascribed to the two of you in the press.
- EC: Well, we planned that county courthouse thing together because we thought those tax books--they could never give us any reason why the tax books were segregated. They could never give us any legitimate reason, and then the colored news sections of the newspaper and stuff--we worked on that, how to protest that. Well, we couldn't get the people to drop the newspaper because people wanted the newspaper. But, we got people to write and call in and ask questions that would prick the conscience of the power structure. And the ministerial alliances, how we could attack them for their inaction and

also talk about integrating churches--churches was the last tactic to get the power structure to do. For example, if a guy owned a restaurant and he didn't want to serve [blacks], and we'd picket him and we'd leaflet him and we got people to send letters and telegrams or if you're connected nationally with a firm. If that didn't work, the last thing was a pray-in with him. Go to church with him on Sunday morning that you may embarrass him in front of his other parishioners. And so we--

EP: Was any of that effective?

EC: Oh yes. That's the most effective thing you get. [laughs] Yeah. Because America claims to worship God and God's name is on our currency and so forth. And then, they had missionaries. Many denominations would have missionaries around the world, and they couldn't stand for the mission field people to find out that that denomination was back home here segregating against American blacks.

EP: Did you have much desegregation of the churches before the mass demonstrations?

EC: The Roman Catholic Church, and every now and then a Lutheran church, might have been integrated. But basically, churches are still segregated in America. Actually, it's the most segregated thing left.

EP: These other projects that I have listed here--were you successful in getting the tax list desegregated?

EC: Yes, indeed. Mostly because I refused, myself--I was the only black that I recall that refused to pay his taxes for a year in High Point.

EP: Were you prosecuted for that?

EC: No, no. They knew that they wouldn't have a ground. Although I didn't have any money to fight them, but I was going to protest it in every kind of way.

EP: Were you willing to go to prison for that?

EC: Oh, yeah. Yeah. In nonviolent direct action training, you must be willing to sign a statement that you're willing to remain nonviolent and suffer the consequences of your actions.

EP: Were you involved in the Asheboro Street project where they picketed a Kroger's [grocery store] to hire black cashiers?

EC: I don't know if I recall, but I do know I picketed Kroger in High Point. I'm not sure if I was in the Asheboro thing in Greensboro or not.

EP: I get the impression that McDonald's desegregated first in High Point. Is that correct?

EC: That could be--what was the first one? All I know is that Ed Blankenheim, who was the field secretary, and I went all the way to Chicago and met with the guy, the head of McDonald's, at the Palmer House across from the Greyhound bus station. And at that time, there were twelve McDonald's in North Carolina. I don't know the first one to go. But I do know that we couldn't get them to integrate. And then I said, "Well, I'll call Roy Wilkins, NAACP, and King, Southern Christian Leadership Conference [SCLC]." And he said, "Just a minute." Then he called San Jose, California, spoke to a guy there who evidently owned the twelve ones, the twelve ones here in North Carolina. He said, "In two weeks we'll have them all integrated." And, as I recall, they were.

EP: Well, the sequence of events that I have from the newspaper here is that McDonald's desegregated in High Point. And you conducted several picketings of the three McDonald's here in Greensboro--and I gather, without success, in '62. But then with the event that started the mass demonstrations here in Greensboro was the picketing of the McDonald's on Summit Avenue on May eleventh. And on the fifteenth, McDonald's sent to North Carolina a representative to announce that they would desegregate. Were you involved in that?

EC: I don't recall if I was. But nine times out of ten, if I wasn't physically involved, I was verbally and by consultation and so forth.

EP: Did you consult closely with the officers of the Greensboro CORE?

EC: Not in particular, unless they invited me over there for something. We never went in the city without consulting them, so sticking with them in every meeting. No, I don't recall sitting in no more than three meetings actually.

EP: Was that after the mass demonstrations had begun?

EC: I don't know whether it was before or afterwards.

EP: Did you have enough association to form any opinion of some of the leaders? I'm speaking both of their adult advisors as well as the student officers themselves.

EC: Well, some were more conservative than others, like Tony Stanley was quite conservative. But Patterson was conservative, but he was for a movement--Pat Patterson. And--

EP: How about Bill Thomas?

EC: Yeah, yeah. He was pretty good. Yeah.

EP: Was he conservative or you would say not quite?

EC: Aggressive.

EP: I see. How about Lewis Brandon?

EC: You know, I've forgotten Lewis Brandon at the moment, how he looked. If I had a picture of him here before me then things would come back.

EP: I see. How about some of the adult advisors such as Elizabeth Laizner, James Bush, John Hatchett, do any of these stand out in your mind?

EC: They don't hit me at the moment at all, no.

EP: Were you aware of any conflict or difference of opinion on tactics?

EC: Oh, the people would call names at meetings over the telephone and tell us about who was conservative and didn't want us to move too fast, you know, take one step at a time and all that. Because I had told them it would take eternity to do that--that kind of foot dragging. Or someone's afraid of getting fired, or cross burning, or kids may get hurt--you get those kind of foot-dragging statements.

EP: Do you recall any specific instances?

EC: Not that's outstanding here, twenty years later in my mind's eye. No.

EP: I get the impression that some of the people who were more activist, wanted to do things right away, passed away from the scene. I'm thinking of such individuals as John Bush and John Hatchett. James Bush, I beg your pardon, John Hatchett, Lois Lucas [Williams]. Were you ever aware of any of that?

- EC: No. No, I don't recall it at the moment. Now if someone probably could cite some examples to me [of] who was involved at that time, it brings my memory back.
- EP: Do you recall, if not the specifics, perhaps the broader nature of some of the things that the people who were more aggressive wanted to do that the conservatives were opposed to, and vice versa?
- EC: Well, they were for taking some action like lying down in the street and stopping traffic and that sort of thing that we didn't quite go along with.
- EP: Was that not a usual part of CORE strategy?
- EC: No. Well, now, sometimes we did that but that was sort of a last resort. But we also had to make sure we had enough liberal whites in town who would also try to prevent those folks from running over us. Because when you got people involved, you surely don't want them physically hurt, because then they wouldn't be any good to you.
- EP: Well, do you think there were such people in Greensboro?
- EC: Oh, yes. Some, some of the kids get angry and mad at the world and say, "Well, this stuff what you [are] talking about is not working, preacher. We got to get"--every now and then we would find a guy with a knife on him or something. Or we had to collect a gun or two during those days before we'd go out on a demonstration, because people got tired of being mistreated. But we had to remind them that the Gandhi philosophy and the King philosophy was to take it and not show it.
- EP: Did the Greensboro CORE pretty much follow the guidelines of the national office or did they act autonomously?
- EC: I was never ordered to go over and correct anything that was drastic. So, I guess the answer would be yes. They pretty well did.
- EP: You mentioned that one important thing was to make sure that there were sympathetic whites in the power structure, at least in the community, that would help ensure the safety of the demonstrators. Do you think there were such people in Greensboro?
- EC: Oh, yes. The Quakers were a great resource. And the Jews who were willing to come out and let it be known they were Jews would feed us information. And there were always liberal whites who would feed us information.

EP: Does McNeill Smith ring a bell?

EC: Yeah, yeah. He wasn't a hothead. But every now and then some of those would have to make some statement and let the whites know that they weren't totally giving in. But they made a lot of liberal and open statements during those days.

EP: Were there meetings held with these individuals?

EC: Yes. But in Greensboro, Simkins did more of that than I did.

EP: I see. So, he was more or less in charge of that.

EC: Yeah, and High and the other lawyer there.

EP: How about in High Point?

EC: In High Point we had Bob Brown, Sammy Chess, and myself. And then we had the American Friends Service Committee [AFSC] office. I served on the school desegregation committee when we integrated the schools in '59.

EP: How did the American Friends Service Committee become involved?

EC: Okay. They've always been a humanistic group around the world. And they got us together in '59 in High Point and said, "Well, we came from Greensboro over here. And we want to see if we can help turn this town around in particular in the field of integration of public schools." So, we met for several months and got thirteen kids to apply. And the school board decided to only take two. And they took two from my church to shut my deep mouth, so the statement was made. Those two girls made the honor roll, by the way. And they refused to print the honor roll for two years.

EP: Do you remember any of the individuals in the AFSC that were working with you?

EC: Bill Bagwell. And then, oh boy, what is the black guy? He lives in Greensboro now. He's retired. He ran the pilot program there for a while. Oh, Charles Davis. He worked for them. And Sarah Herbin, H-e-r-b-i-n, and her sister, who lived in High Point, served on the committee with them.

EP: Does the name Richard Ramsey ring a bell?

EC: No, not at this moment.

EP: It's my understanding that he was secretary of the AFSC in charge of college chapters and he served in that capacity to recruit students to participate in demonstrations.

EC: No. It doesn't, it doesn't ring a bell.

EP: I see. How about Harry Boyte?

EC: Boyte?

EP: B-o-y-t-e.

EC: Yeah. I remember that name. But what he looked like or anything that stands out, I don't recall at the moment.

EP: There seems to be some confusion in the press. They mention his father, Harry Boyte Sr. being with the SCLC. And then there was a Harry Boyte Jr. who was arrested in the Freedom Highways project in Durham. But you say these are not clear enough memories.

EC: No.

EP: I see. I know that some of the statements you made in the press attracted some adverse publicity.

EC: My life was threatened eighty-seven times. I got them all out here in my possession now. I should have written a little pamphlet or booklet years ago when it was of interest to people.

EP: One of the more dramatic episodes was, as you mentioned, the speech that you made in regard to marriage. And it was my understanding this was made at a Seventh Day Adventist Church. And the church a day or so later disavowed the speech and refused CORE to use their church anymore. Was this a white Seventh Day Adventist Church?

EC: No. You know I don't recall the church. But where I made that statement several times--but it brought on adverse publicity every time I made it. But I don't recall a black Seventh Day Adventist Church in Greensboro.

EP: Well, perhaps it was white because the church refused--they said they didn't believe in intermarriage and they refused to let CORE use the church. Apparently, the meeting that CORE held there was arranged by Reverend Marion Jones.

EC: Yeah, yeah.

EP: Do you recall this incident?

EC: I don't. I don't. To tell you the truth, I don't. I read your notes. I said, "Boy, I don't remember a Seventh Day Adventist Church. But it's a possibility that I was, because I spoke in so many churches. And--but I've even had people tell me don't say anything about marrying. They said it disturbed too much feeling. I said, "Well, you can look at me and see something has been going wrong for three hundred years. Because I happen to be brown in color and [have] black wavy hair." So I used to use that as an example. People would laugh, you know.

EP: One of the campaigns that you were involved in that made the papers here in Greensboro was that you had advocated that maids boycott employers that wouldn't let them use the bathrooms in the house. Was that primarily for publicity sake or did you actually--

EC: No, no. There were white homes where they had black maids. And the black maids had separate restrooms. My landlady in High Point, for example, had separate restroom in the house of her boss. Her boss was owner of the telephone company. And I went to pick her up a couple of times. And she showed me the restroom that she could use. [laughs] And--

EP: Was that a very widespread campaign?

EC: No, no, because it was difficult for a maid to tell you the truth--whether she had a private restroom or not--for fear of being fired.

EP: And I guess the court attitude was that a private residence was different from a public business or something like that.

EC: Yes. You get all those statements, yes.

EP: You've mentioned the formation of the CORE chapter and that you only attended infrequently. Are you aware of the negotiations that took place in Greensboro with what appears to be an ad hoc group of businessmen led by Mr. Guyes of Prago-Guyes [women's store], here? And CORE was identified as early as February 1962 as one of the participants. This seems to conflict with the statements in the CORE archives that the chapter was formed in, in May 1962. Do you have any knowledge of whether CORE was actually operating as an identifiable CORE chapter as early as February 1962 in Greensboro?

EC: Oh, boy. I don't remember the formation date. But that gentleman's name comes back to me somewhere. I think I remember him. I think he was Jewish. But I don't know when, the exact date, CORE started. But High Point was first. And then Durham and Greensboro was somewhere close on behind.

EP: Were there many CORE chapters in North Carolina?

EC: Well, we had--at one time we had seven that pretty well stayed going. We had some spasmodically, you know [that] would come on the scene and die fast because the guy's family or kids were harassed or he was fired from a job, and they just scared the daylights out of folks.

EP: Was there much competition with the--well, you've mentioned the NAACP and CORE in North Carolina--did SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] or SCLC maintain much of a presence in North Carolina?

EC: In the eastern part of North Carolina, they had more influence there. CORE and NAACP had the central part of the state. And then the NAACP had a scattering of a few chapters. As far as Asheville, although we got one going in Asheville and Statesville--

[End of Tape 1, Side A--Begin Tape 1, Side B]

EP: --SNCC and SCLC more or less restricted themselves to the eastern part of the state?

EC: Yes.

EP: Was there a reason for that?

EC: Well, there are more blacks in the east, and they got more college kids involved in the east--SNCC did. The NAACP, of course, was all over the state. But CORE, from Durham to Winston-Salem, was sort of like our playground. Although the Winston-Salem chapter was poor in response in many respects, because the field secretary of the NAACP was there, and many people thought that we were duplicating his efforts in the local branch.

EP: Did you have much contact with the various CORE chapters in North Carolina?

EC: Oh, yeah, yeah. Being field secretary, I would get invited and help organize and help revitalize it sometime[s] or re-inspire them because I was known pretty well as a pretty

good organizer and a speaker. I could fire up an audience quicker than anybody in the state until Floyd McKissick got going and he was pretty fiery, too.

EP: Was there--what was the nature of the organization in these chapters?

EC: Okay. We would, we would want people to try and have as many as twelve people going, but sometimes the three or four of them what kept the group going. But CORE was more like a mass movement type thing, like SCLC developed later on in the years. You get an issue going. You involve people behind closed doors, and you make it known to the public. Then you call a public meeting and explain what you're doing. Then you go out and attack it. And then people would basically support you, whether you needed a mass demonstration or a letter or telegram or a call-in, telephone call-in.

EP: Would you say that given the--you admitted sometimes there was tension between the NAACP and CORE. Would you say they worked pretty well together in most communities, or did it vary from community to community?

EC: It would vary from community. Down East, they would be slower to work together. In Piedmont North Carolina, there was good cooperation. Yeah.

EP: Would you attribute that to any one individual like George Simkins or--

EC: George Simkins and Dr. Hawkins in Charlotte, North Carolina. And Kelly Alexander and I got along pretty well because I was a former field secretary, youth field secretary. But his was basically--they wanted the NAACP to get credit for everything. And I think it had those little tensions every now and then.

EP: There are some instances of where there seems, through CORE internally-generated memos, that there was some conflicts with Reginald Hawkins and Kelly Alexander over, I guess, who would get credit and the sharing of expenses. Do you recall any of that?

EC: Not any overt conflicts. But Kelly was more conservative than Hawkins, and Hawkins would sometimes get more aggressive than I am, [laughs] and that would be bad news. But, I recall something about finance down there that Hawkins submitted a bill and--to somebody, and they didn't want to pay it or something. But the real incident I don't know.

EP: I see. Were you involved in two fundraising events that stand out pretty much in the press, or at least in my mind, of the lecture tour of James Baldwin and the sale of the freedom song records? Do you recall?

EC: Yeah. No, not really, although I was involved in Chicago when Baldwin came there. But there was mostly Gordon Carey staying in--what's the boy? Rich, Marvin Rich--he usually followed through with that because he was our main fundraiser. Yeah. Money I never get involved in, because I can't count. [laughing] Even in church work, I stay away from it. I always require they pay me by check.

EP: Basic--I'm sorry.

EC: I don't recall any charges of misuse of funds or anything.

EP: How did the local CORE chapters raise funds for these campaigns and--

EC: Well, the membership, local membership, but mostly church contributions and organizational contributions. For example, many people never say a thing about freedom in public, but they would write a check or give you a few dollars in a public meeting.

EP: Now you're talking about white individuals and organizations?

EC: Yeah, and black, white and black.

EP: I see. Were most of the legal fees paid by the NAACP or CORE?

EC: NAACP picked up on most of the legal fees, yes, because of the Legal Defense Fund.

EP: I see.

EC: Yeah. They raised a lot of money, too, you know. A lot of things the NAACP used to raise money for they were not involved in. SCLC and CORE and SNCC were involved in. But they raised the money, so we demanded that they fight the legal bills, because they had the lawyers.

EP: I see. Concerning this flush-in at city hall, was that basically a one-shot deal?

EC: Yes, yes. To tell you the truth, we just wanted to prove to them that the urine and the feces were going down the same drainpipe. It's like they're just separated here by a wall. And we just wanted to show them how stupid and silly they were.

EP: Was any incident connected with that or--

EC: I don't recall any arrests from the flushing itself, no. It was just a matter of--a lot of times we find the restroom locked, however, when they knew we were coming.

EP: Did you ever do it in any other buildings in Greensboro?

EC: Oh, restaurants and apartment buildings, yeah. But mostly the local people did it. My big bang was to show them how to do it and start with a tax-supported building.

EP: Did you meet frequently with James Farmer, Jim McCain, and members of the national office?

EC: Oh yeah. Yes, oh yes.

EP: Could you characterize them or--

EC: Well, McCain did a good job in South Carolina. Then he was promoted to national field secretary; he moved to New York then. And then Tom and I have known each other since back in the sixties, '60 itself when I first formed the committee. But he recalls me at Howard University, when he came down there, but I don't recall meeting him then in '55 or '56. But Jim Farmer's a very humble guy, still is. I talked with him last year over the phone in Washington. Bone cancer, I think, has eaten up one eye or something. And McCain was hotheaded but he wasn't--he was hotheaded because he was aggressive in that sense, but he was not hotheaded in demonstrations and things.

EP: Did they often come to North Carolina, or were most of your meetings in New York?

EC: For my speeches, they would basically come. McCain would come for workshops and things, yeah. But then he didn't make field trips regularly because of the expenses.

EP: Did you conduct workshops and training sessions?

EC: Oh, yes.

EP: Frequently?

EC: Oh, yes, I did.

EP: What was the, the nature of these? Basically, how to do demonstrations and how to be nonviolent?

EC: Start off with the American Dream. You know, we came here as slaves, and everyone was not a slave and every white didn't own blacks. The American Dream says liberty and justice for all. Justice is not in these certain area schools. I mean in education, recreation, public accommodation, and housing and so forth and churches. And we must get busy and fulfill Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman's and other peoples' ideas. And we can't sit down and wait on somebody else when we see a problem. And then we'd talk about Gandhi's nonviolent philosophy and when they broke the back of the British Empire, how he used nonviolence in thought. If you think wrong, you're just as bad as your opponent. You must not look in a wrong fashion. You must not give a gesture in the wrong fashion. And you must not, of course, act in the wrong fashion.

And we would go through demonstrations of how you overcome these problems: We'd pour water or pour ketchup, slap a person and knock him down, kick him slightly, roll him; and pick at the girls, call them all kind of names; and the whites, we would call them nigger-lovers; and then we'd call the blacks niggers. Get them accustomed to what was going on, what possibly would take place.

EP: Were there ever any people who simply couldn't take this?

EC: Yes. They would break down and cry. And we'd send them into another room or send someone out there to counsel them, to befriend them. And some of them dropped out because they just couldn't take it. We spit in the face. And that's about one of the nastiest things you could do to a person. It's to see if they could take it.

EP: Were CORE chapters generally pretty small or were there any sizeable ones in North Carolina?

EC: They were bigger, of course, in the big cities, like Miami and New York and Baltimore and Washington, D.C., and Chicago and places like that. They were larger in those cities. But CORE, CORE chapters were basically under twenty-five folks, real active individuals.

EP: Did you participate in the freedom highway workshop for two weeks in late July of 1962 at Bennett [College]?

EC: Yes, indeed. If it happened in North Carolina, I was either there physically or by phone or by letter.

EP: Do you know how it came--I understand originally it was scheduled for Miami, and then it was changed to North Carolina.

EC: Yes, North Carolina was looked upon then as the most liberal Southern state. Tennessee was rated second. So, many things started in North Carolina that would not have taken hold in other states. Yeah.

EP: Do you recall why Bennett was selected?

EC: Because of the liberal attitude of Piedmont North Carolina. And of course, being a black institution with a Methodist relationship. And, at that time, that was the largest Protestant denomination that had blacks in it.

EP: Did you participate in the training session and the actual demonstrations against the Hot Shoppe here?

EC: Yes, the Hot Shoppes in Greensboro there and also--I'm getting Hot Shoppes in Washington, D.C., and Maryland mixed up a little bit, too, in my remembrance--but, yes. I'm trying to think about what speeches--I'm sure I just talked about nonviolence--but the actual planning of it, I don't recall what actual role I played at that time.

EP: Do you recall any--according to the newspaper, apparently the Hot Shoppe picketing went on for about four days to a week, and then Hot Shoppe desegregated.

EC: Yeah. Yeah. They came through quite easily for some reason. I don't recall whether it was an outside influence or their national organization or regional or what it was.

EP: Do you recall any conversations with the manager, Clyde Erwin, or their legal representative, Armistead Sapp?

EC: Yeah. Yeah. Those two names come back to play all right, Sapp, especially.

EP: What kind of conversations or association did you have with him?

EC: Well, I think, if I recall, we just talked about the legality of the thing. And we didn't want to turn Greensboro into a Holocaust, so to speak. We got a good reputation going here. We want to keep it going. That sort of thing--we would go along that line.

EP: Were the conversations actually at the site of the demonstration, in his office, or by telephone or--

EC: I don't know. I don't know whether we had to sit down in the lawyer's office or in the office of one of the restaurants. They were not in Simkins's office and they were not in Major High's office. I don't recall where they were conducted.

EP: Was he fairly objective as a legal representative, or was he emotionally involved?

EC: Yes, as I recall, he was. But he didn't want to move too fast, you know. One step at a time, as I recall the idea.

EP: Do you recall the actual steps or plans for integration? I mean, did he say, "Well, on such-and-such a day you bring, or so many CORE members or black patrons come, and gradually we'll increase it," and that sort of thing?

EC: That happened so often in the seventeen Southern states, so I'm sure that was a process they had, too. By two weeks this would happen, and send them [to the protest] well-dressed and that sort of thing.

EP: Why--

EC: In those cases we would usually send maybe one male, but mostly we sent females because the segregationists, whites, always accepted black females easier than a black male.

EP: Do you know why that was?

EC: Oh, the idea to respect the womanhood. We are closer to a motherhood than we are the manhood. And then again, the white man has always gone with the black woman, from the time we came over on the ship up until now. But they do it in private, whereas that's why they attack white ladies, black men folk, because they're more open with their lust or love life.

EP: Why was the actual freedom highway project shifted to Durham?

EC: Because along that highway [Interstate] 85 there, most of the Howard Johnsons were located. And Floyd McKissick had a good nucleus of University of North Carolina students involved over there. And things were pretty well popping in the Durham, Raleigh, and Chapel Hill area.

EP: Did you participate in any of the--did you talk at all with [mayor] David Schenck or any of the city officials here in Greensboro?

EC: I remember one conversation with Schenck in a meeting. And I don't know what that was about or what. But he was fairly liberal in his comments, too, as I recall. He was not a hard-nosed racist.

EP: Could you characterize Floyd McKissick?

EC: Yeah. Floyd is a very active guy. Self-appointed, in a sense, that if you didn't go along with him he'd go out and do it on his own anyhow. He got his whole--his whole family was involved. So he came from an orientation of being progressive in that sense, or moving. And I guess that's why he became the first black student to go to the University of North Carolina law school, I believe.

EP: Did you participate in the activities in Durham, Statesville, Charlotte, and Raleigh?

EC: Yes, yes, I was often in. Charlotte was the least one that I visited because that was--we looked upon that as sort of the NAACP territory, because of the state president belonged there, Kelly Alexander Sr.

EP: What sort of strategy and planning was involved in terms of the goals and the tactics chosen and that sort of--

EC: Well, naturally, the first thing was to hit cities where there was a large black population, where there was a liberal white clientele also, and make a little progress there and get a foothold. Then you move out to the smaller towns. And the strategy was basically the same in our training--that segregation is wrong, the American Dream must be brought about, and you got a role to play in that because we all benefit, you know. And we pick out a liberal store, mainly one that was nationally hooked up, so they would get embarrassed nationally if they refused to change their policy. Then we'd pick on the local guys that were closer to the black community who lived almost ninety percent or a hundred percent off of black income. And we would pick on them later.

EP: Do you recall any of the principal members of the task force such as Jerome Smith, Hunter Morey, Isaac Reynolds?

EC: Yeah.

EP: Who amongst these would you say was the most effective?

- EC: Jerome Smith, yeah. He lives in New Orleans now. He's a field secretary. He was most effective, because he had the Gandhian philosophy wrapped up better than any one at that time. And he could talk it and speak it. He had a speech impediment, but you could see the sincerity just bubbling out all over him. And then he'd break down and cry sometimes. And because of what he had gone through and seen other people go through-- Jerome Smith was by and large the most effective.
- EP: I know that--did Hunter Morey work with you in High Point?
- EC: Yes. Yes, quite a bit. And he traveled around. He was a nice, young, timid white male. And he did what he was told to do pretty well. And he was effective. And he helped to influence some blacks who got a little shaky and scared, you know, by his presence, you know. He didn't have to be there, but he was there because of the American Dream and [spirit of] come on, let's get together.
- EP: There was a memo by one of the members of the task force while they were here in Greensboro that suggested Hunter Morey was alienating older members of the black community in High Point. I think some of the charges listed were he called some of the more reluctant ones [Uncle] Toms. And it seems kind of strange, but this person said that some of the young black students got the impression that he was anti-white. Do you know anything about this problem?
- EC: No. But every now and then a white person would call black leaders Uncle Tom. But in the nonviolent philosophy, you were not supposed to do that, and that would excite folk. And, of course, naturally, if you were called Uncle Tom by a white person, that was an almost unforgivable sin. They'd take it from a black but for a white person to do it, the next thing they want to do is get that guy out of town. He's doing more harm than good.
- EP: Why, for instance, did some members stay in some towns and some in another? For instance, I gather Jerome Smith and George Raymond and Isaac Reynolds stayed pretty much in Greensboro. And, as you say, Hunter Morey was with you in High Point.
- EC: Yeah. Yeah. It would depend upon how much you needed a black or a white field worker, or a black or white volunteer. Many of those whites and a few blacks were not actually hired by CORE, but they were volunteers. We would take care of their expenses and meetings and things. And local people would help house them and feed them. So, it depends upon the town. If you've got a town where the blacks are really dragging their feet on integration, then you would get a white person in there to show that this white person doesn't have to be here but he's here to try to help us. And that he would be a symbol. Yeah.

EP: George Raymond, apparently, tested the barbershop that was connected to the bus station here in Greensboro and was refused a haircut. And apparently he sent a letter of protest to the ICC [Interstate Commerce Commission?] on recommendation of the national office. Do you know anything about the result of that?

EC: No, I don't. At the moment I can't picture George Raymond in my--as I say, my mind's eye.

EP: Well, how about Moon Eng. Do you--

EC: Yeah. Yeah. He was a young Chinese boy, quiet, but he got involved. And to tell you the truth, I don't recall what city he was from.

EP: I believe it--some place in upstate New York. He apparently, when Greensboro CORE picketed the S&W in October and November here, he was singled out for arrest. He was taking the names of people, and they got him for aiding and abetting.

EC: Yes.

EP: Was he particularly effective? Do you recall any--

EC: Well, a lot of time we need witnesses. And it was nice if that person was a Caucasian or another race to account and take pictures, sometime, of the thing. But most of the time just to be there and to be able to retell the story.

Sometime in taking a camera out, then some of the anti-demonstrators would attack you, because they wouldn't know whether you were from the press or where. But the camera wasn't much of a problem, but sometimes it was. The main thing you need is someone to stand there to watch and observe and then tell us in our next training session: how we act and whether we were non-violent or what we should have done here, or who to watch here. Sometimes they also watch the top of buildings if we were picketing and demonstrating. People get on top of buildings at night and throw things off, and it was hard to see.

EP: What was the role of the task force members?

EC: Well, the task force went around to help train and to help plan strategy for attack on racial discrimination.

EP: Did they bring directives or orders from the national office, or were they just to suggest?

EC: Yeah, sometimes they did, especially if--sometimes national chains would say they had difficulty making people do, and they'd share that with CORE. And CORE would tell us who needs to be contacted again and apply a little pressure.

EP: There were some memos that indicated that they restructured the Freedom Highways project. [They] felt that maybe they had spread themselves a little too thin, had taken on too many cities at once, and were moving the task force members around too frequently. Do you recall any of this criticism and what was done?

EC: Yes, we often pulled back ranks and re-evaluated and re-planned, mainly because of personnel money. And then again, we still wanted to stay in states where we had some liberal support and didn't have to spread ourselves too thin.

EP: I gather that Statesville stood out as a particularly difficult city.

EC: Well, it did, but because it--also, we picked on Statesville, also, because its city theme was the city of progress. And--

EP: What was the particular difficulty with Statesville?

EC: It's a ruralistic town, not many poor whites, but many--but some. And it was on the interstate highway, too. And then we had a strong NAACP chapter there. And also we had the liberal ministerial support, and we had a black funeral director there who was very wide-open in support of us.

EP: The Freedom Highway project was listed, or publicized, as being primarily a summer project. Did it drag on for quite some time?

EC: I don't recall how long. But--

EP: Longer than--was it--

EC: It was more of a summer thing because that's when you had the kids out of college who were willing to come and get involved in civil rights.

EP: Were there any cities that were selected for freedom highway projects that just didn't work?

EC: A New Bern, North Carolina, I recall. And nothing really got going there in Jacksonville.

EP: What was the reason for these failures?

EC: Lack of black support--and then they were so far down east. And then the eastern part of the state just had a bad reputation of racism. You could get yourself tied up down there and not have any city nearby to give you some moral support; then you have to use a lot of traveling time. I did very little work in the heart of eastern North Carolina. Gordon Frankly[?], SCLC field secretary, we pretty well let him have that as his territory. But we were used on several occasions, though, to come in and help out.

EP: Were there ever any field secretaries that were members of the task force that just didn't work out? I know there is a citation that two women had to be sent back home. I think one was Claudia Lull, and another one was--I can't recall her name at this time. But they were sent back home.

EC: I don't recall what the incident was. But every now and then whites couldn't take it or they might--blacks and whites might have gotten personally involved, and we didn't want too much of that. We didn't mind interracial dating and that sort of thing. But if you spent more time interracial dating, we discouraged that because that would only bring on more tension in the community. Yeah. And so some girls, I'm sure, were chastised or sent away because of that.

EP: What were the most important cities in North Carolina in terms of demonstrations?

EC: Well, that would be, of course, Durham and Greensboro. High Point and Charlotte and Winston-Salem would come in there later on.

EP: Were they--

EC: And Raleigh.

EP: Were they--what was--why was North Carolina so important to national CORE?

EC: Because of the liberal stance. Governor [Terry] Sanford started what was called the Good Neighbor Council. And he also started the first OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] antipoverty program. It wasn't called that; it was called the North Carolina Fund [of 1963]. And President Kennedy [sic-President Johnson] copied off of that idea and proposed the Office of Economic Opportunity and Anti-Poverty Act. So again, I say that North Carolina was looked upon as the most liberal Southern state, with Tennessee being second, before the Civil Rights Bill[Act] of 1964.

EP: How about Greensboro's importance vis-a-vis other North Carolina cities, in terms of the numbers arrested, the size of demonstrations, and so forth? Did Greensboro figure prominently, or was it always primarily Durham?

EC: No, Greensboro figured in there pretty good. Mainly because after the sit-in movement, those four guys just set the world on fire.

EP: So it remained a symbolic thing?

EC: That's right. That's right. Because they started something that involved more people across racial lines to fight for the American Dream than any other one incident.

EP: You've mentioned yourself and Floyd McKissick, of course, as principal CORE individuals in North Carolina. Were there others?

EC: Hawkins down in Charlotte--

EP: Was he with CORE?

EC: Yes. Well, he was with NAACP, too. But he was more aggressive, so he jumped on the bandwagon of CORE. And let's see. I guess, Floyd McKissick and myself and Hawkins were--might be the trinity of the more aggressive of CORE people here in the state.

EP: Were there any people that you worked better with than others?

EC: Oh, yes. You always had that fluctuation, yeah.

EP: Do any individuals come to mind?

EC: Well, I got along with George Simkins and the lawyers there in Greensboro. And the dentist in Winston-Salem, he was NAACP president. But he had me over there more so than he had the field secretary to speak. He lived in Winston-Salem. And, of course, George Simkins often invited me over there, especially after the first freedom ride. I spoke with King. And then the black mortician in Raleigh that later on became mayor of the town [Clarence Lightner]. And, of course, Gordon Frankly, I had a good relationship with him, although he was more aggressive than I ever would want to be. He pulled off more stunts. He was SCLC field secretary.

EP: Did you have any input into the planning of the strategy once the mass demonstrations began in Greensboro?

EC: No. You know, leading and trying to show them of my experience on how you conduct them and so forth, that's about it. Yeah. But I was not in on the first sit-in. I just got involved two weeks later.

EP: Did--in other words, Bill Thomas and the others, they didn't clear what they were going to do with you first or ask your advice?

EC: Oh, many times I was consulted, yeah.

EP: Did you come over and participate in any of the demonstrations?

EC: Oh, yes, yes.

EP: Do--

EC: Particularly picketing and supervising, you know.

EP: Do any particular nights or demonstrations come to mind?

EC: Picketing restaurants and talking with labor people about integrating and the [?] and so forth. And let's see what else. I can recall at the moment. That was about it. And then, of course, those restrooms, the flushing and things.

EP: Were you consulted with the, about the--when, when they picketed the S&W and Mayfair [cafeterias] in, in November of 1962?

EC: Yeah. I remember that, too. Yeah.

EP: Did you have any suggestions for them about what they should say in their demands or their conversations with representatives of these businesses or anything like that?

EC: A real sense of what I might have said, I don't recall. But my remarks were basically the same. We're here, nonviolent[ly], to demand equal service.

EP: A number of the goals of CORE were tied in with broader goals of the black community. Did you help define these goals and specific demands?

EC: Just in general terms. And then if I was confronted with a question or a tactic, I would give them the Christian nonviolent approach to it.

EP: Did you work with planning the legal strategy once the mass arrests began?

EC: No, no; I didn't get involved in any legal things unless I was just asked, you know, by someone. I, of course, I had spoken at many fundraisers to try to raise legal money, however.

EP: What, locally at various churches and that sort--?

EC: Yeah. And also, across the country.

EP: I see. Did you work with Major High and Kenneth Lee here?

EC: Oh, yeah. Yes.

EP: In what capacity?

EC: Oh, advisors and planning strategy and what was going to happen next, and using their legal talent and such. Most of--of course, High donated most of his. But he gave a lot of advice. And, of course, he made quite a bit of money off the NAACP because he was the NAACP attorney.

EP: I see.

EC: But none of them got rich off of it.

EP: One thing that I'm particularly interested in, there was a picketing of the Cinema Theatre on February first at the showing of *Porgy and Bess* in 1961. And the paper mentioned that SNCC was conducting such a program statewide--I mean throughout the South. Do you know if the specific picketing here in Greensboro was part of that? And did CORE work with SNCC on that?

EC: I do not recall that action at all.

EP: I see.

EC: Because I wasn't even in Raleigh at that time when they formed the SNCC at Shaw University. I forget where I was at that time but--

EP: There was one particularly important strategy meeting held by CORE on October 10, 1962, at the St. Joseph's Church in Durham. And it was billed in the memos as the most important strategy meeting of the year. Do you recall what was discussed and what kind of plans or problems discussed?

EC: No, I don't--at the St. Joseph's AME Church, I recall, though. I remember the minister, too. But I don't recall what was the hot nature of that meeting.

EP: I was wondering why it stood out as such an important meeting.

EC: Yeah. Yeah. It doesn't click with me at the moment.

EP: I see.

EC: It could be in some of my memorandums to the office.

EP: There seems to have been a very strong memo that came out from the national office because of Greensboro CORE's attending a couple of rallies on behalf of the Monroe Defense League and Robert Williams. Why was CORE so adamantly opposed to having anything to do with that?

EC: Well, at that time Robert Williams, I think, had gone to Cuba. And I remember pulling him off the floor at the NAACP Convention Center in New York. They thought that one or two of the whites who were communists and we just couldn't get contaminated with those folks, although I'm sure a lot of people who helped us during the civil rights days had communist influence or might have been communist member, party members. But we discouraged that relationship all together.

EP: Would these include the Bradens [Anne and Carl]?

EC: Correct, yeah. Although I think Braden was truly not [?] on to them--were not communists, but a lot of people classified them as communists.

EP: And that was the nature of this discouraging it--because they didn't want to get branded as communists?

EC: And also, because basically the blacks who were involved were Christians. And there's really no companionship between the two, although I would follow a rattlesnake to

freedom. But you still didn't want to lose friends and be influenced by people by messing around with communists.

EP: Do you recall--the only instance in Greensboro that I recall of this was when Mrs. Alice Jerome was accused of being communist. And she didn't specifically deny it. And her--she had written articles for the masses. Do you recall that controversy?

EC: No, I don't.

EP: There was one memo that was written by Gordon Carey in October 1962 in which he referred to friction "with certain members of the national staff of another organization." I assume that was the NAACP.

EC: Yes. We were having some conflict that they were raising money on CORE activities. And even on the Freedom Highway project, they were raising money for that. Now, of course, I said that we made it clear, though, that they may be raising money in the name of CORE or for the freedom struggle, and they were getting the benefit. But we were definitely planning to get them to foot the legal bill, because we did not have a staff of lawyers like they did.

EP: So that was the nature of the controversy?

EC: Yeah, as I recall, yes.

EP: Were things going on in High Point at this same time?

EC: Oh, yeah. We kept something going on there until the day I resigned. Yeah, one thing after another. There was even cemetery integration.

EP: I see.

EC: And the newspaper used to have a section called colored news. And we used to raise the devil about that. They thought I had horns. One white lady came up to me when I was there [on] Martin Luther King's birthday in January. She said, "You don't know me, but this is my husband," she said. "But I want to say, when you were here, we thought you wore horns." [laughs] And I thought that was pretty good.

EP: So CORE was pretty much chronically financially strapped, is that correct?

EC: It's always--it's always been, yeah.

- EP: I gather that--you said there was already a CORE chapter formed in High Point. But, once again, referring to a CORE generated memo, it suggests that there was some antagonism between the youth that wanted to leave the NAACP and join CORE. And Carey went so far as to suggest that maybe they should first form a neutral organization that could later be formed into a CORE chapter.
- EC: That might have been. I don't recall that incident. But I do know that once I got involved in CORE, then naturally, we got one going there because I--the NAACP was slow to move, even though I revived the chapter one time and got the first office of the NAACP there--and telephone and things. Then when I got involved in jail and I came back, the telephone was closed down and the office hadn't been used. So it's just--you had those little conflicts every now and then.
- EP: There was one incident in one of Isaac Reynolds's field reports that he said he was going to attempt to hold meetings with A&T students, "under the guise of the SECF [SCEF] and the AFSC auspices." Do you know why that he felt he had to use this, this subterfuge?
- EC: No, I don't. No, I don't recall what that was.
- EP: Was there a reluctance on the part of CORE to work with the Southern Educational Conference Center [Southern Conference Educational Fund]?
- EC: Yeah. Everyone had questions about that group because they'd been pointed out as being anti-American and so forth. But, as I recall, later on a lot of that was proved to be false according to press reports. Yeah.
- EP: I also saw that you and Hunter Morey traveled to Durham to talk with McKissick about initiating a suit against the Paramount Theater because the building was leased by the city.
- EC: That's right.
- EP: What impelled you to proceed with that suit even though there was some reluctance on the part of the national office to go ahead and--
- EC: Well, money for one thing. And picketing was not bringing about the desired results, because it was connected right with city hall. The building was right into the city hall

building. But as I recall, we finally resolved that though, because we had threatened to picket during the Furniture Market. And we always used that as an ace in the hole.

EP: Does that mean that the suit was not actually filed or was it dropped?

EC: I don't recall whether it was filed or not. But I do remember the theatre was integrated. Yeah. I don't know whether we actually filed one or whether we threatened to file one or whether it was filed and it was thrown out later on because it was--we had integrated the theatre.

EP: Were you upset by the decision of the national office not to fund this? That there was some memo sent back saying that since this was locally generated, it'd have to be through local funds and the national office couldn't finance it.

EC: No. I don't remember getting disturbed about it at all, because if we ever asked for national funds, it was easy. You almost knew before you asked it wasn't coming--unless we had a good fundraising project going at that time, you know.

EP: Returning back to Greensboro, did you work with members of what came to be formed [called] the Coordinating Committee of Pro-Integration Groups?

EC: No, no, I don't recall ever meeting with that group. I noticed that in memorandum here, your question somewhere there. And I started thinking, now, what in the world--

EP: It was composed of--I think Lewis Brandon said at the insistence of CORE itself. And there were about thirty-five members, and they included members at large of the black community, CORE, the Ministerial Association, and NAACP.

EC: No. I'm sure if it took place, I was aware of it, but I just don't recall at all. But there were a lot of groups trying to coordinate and pull together groups. Many people didn't want to come under the flag of the NAACP. They didn't want to come under the flag of CORE. And they would come up with some local group. And I would work with them, because you were still trying to get something going.

EP: Would you say that Greensboro demonstrations had an influence on CORE, subsequent CORE strategies used elsewhere and throughout North Carolina?

EC: Yes, a little bit. But basically the action was about the same, however. But people, as I say, blacks and whites--but more particularly whites--looked to Greensboro, looked to Durham, looked to Charlotte and looked to Winston-Salem and Chapel Hill for a pattern.

EP: Well, apparently the big dramatic moment in the Greensboro demonstrations was the sit-down in the square. Were you present at that time?

EC: No, no, no. I don't know whether I was out in the field somewhere or where.

EP: Would you have approved of such a tactic, or did you disapprove generally of that kind--

EC: No, I would approve of any. If it came down that you were not moving at the conference table, then we would take direct nonviolent action--as long as it did not hurt a lot of innocent people who were, let's say, who may be semi-liberal towards you.

EP: Did you continue in the other CORE activities after the outbreak of major demonstrations in the spring of 1963?

EC: Oh, yeah, yes. I stayed active until the last day in '65, wherever I was called--

EP: Would these have been primarily in North Carolina or outside?

EC: And then they would have me around the country at fundraisers because of my speaking ability as a minister.

EP: Why did the tactic of mass demonstrations generally die down after '63?

EC: After '60, really, because they sort of [saw] the civil rights bill pretty well coming. Many people integrated. For example, like Knoxville, Tennessee said, "Okay. We're not going to integrate one bit thing at a time. We're going to integrate hospitals, neighborhoods, restaurants, service stations, everything at one time." So we were really moving during that time. So mass demonstration was not necessary in most towns, because you could negotiate.

EP: Do you think that the activities in CORE in North Carolina primarily achieved their goals? Would you say they were largely successful or only a mixed success?

EC: Well, we think that we were largely successful, because we went out and got more whites involved than any civil rights group. Congress of Racial Equality. And we just, we just dwelled on that. To tell you the truth, if CORE ever got some decent officers in there now, I would form another chapter wherever I reside, because I like the name CORE. Yeah. We involved more whites and Jews--I mean more whites than any group. The

NAACP had more Jewish support because of its longstanding history in the New York area.

EP: Well, how important--well, you've mentioned that North Carolina was important because it was perceived as the most liberal of the Southern states.

EC: Right.

EP: Why did--there seems to have been a fairly rapid decline in CORE and CORE influence and activities [from] '63 to '65, such that it was virtually non-existent but--

EC: Yeah. Largely because of Stokely Carmichael's comment down in Mississippi on black power. Many people just didn't swallow that. When CORE swallowed that, I began then pulling away. And that was one of the reasons in my resignation and at my news conference on December 31, that I could not swallow the philosophy of black power: that whites could not lead anymore but only follow and give finance. Well, I couldn't go along with that. I'd follow anybody down the street toward the American Dream to freedom.

EP: What--had the, the effectiveness of nonviolent direct action more or less passed away to negotiations? Did that contribute to the demise of CORE?

EC: No. Well, a little bit. It slowed down a wider participation. But the nonviolent thing is always there. But the black power hurt CORE worse than anything.

EP: Do you think that there were limitations to the effectiveness of nonviolent direct action?

EC: No. No, I really don't, because it is best to negotiate rather than demonstrate.

EP: What sort of activities--just by way of summation--what sort of activities did you participate in for CORE up until you left--

[End of Interview]