

Interview

with

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Mrs. Johnnie Mae Peters
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She begins by talking with Mr. Lockard. Her friend over years whenever need attorney and help out with anything. He worked in politics and NAACP – before Maxine Smith, it was H.T. Lockard it was him working for the NAACP right out of his office on Beale St. We've worked together for years.

Were you involved with NAACP before Vasco Smith and Maxine Smith came back? Yes, I was. Whatever he needed me to do – help write some memberships. Like most of the time, I would be the person who helped with the food when they picketed or did anything. I was always in the background if I wasn't going with them to picket.

So, you've had a really long history of involvement that continues today with the NAACP.

You see, I've never stopped. I always make sure my community and work with people with information they need. Like I'm chair of CCSA. Just about anything people need to know.

When you began your involvement with H. T. Lockard with the NAACP, what were some of the issues going on at that time.

Everything was going on. Then, we had to ride the back of the bus. If you wanted to go in somebody's eating place, you had to go in the back door. You know, it just wasn't open. Like my baby, he was five years old, he didn't want to drink colored water. When we went to Goldsmiths Dept Stores you couldn't even try on hats at some dept stores. It was bad back in that time. People were getting killed and everything else back in that day trying to get folks registered to vote and stuff. You just getting opportunities back in the 60s to get some elected officials that were black. So what we did was help elect most of the white candidates back like in the fifties and leading up to the early sixties until we got enough blacks elected and some whites that would vote with blacks too. Got our first elected officials like Sugarmon, Willis got elected back then. Jesse Turner and Lockard back in the early times. It was just a few blacks getting elected. In seventies, we started getting more people county and city squires at first. Lockard, Jesse Turner served as a squire and in later years county commissioners where more people there. So, got more people on city and county commission. Half of black city council is black now, we have a black mayor, city and county mayor are black. Until 1980s and 1990s you didn't have that. There was nothing open to us. We had to fight for everything we got. That is why there were people going to jail. Maxine and Vasco stayed in jail more than anybody. It was hard back in the early 60s and stuff like that. It was about 54 up until 64 – it was harder then. By the time it got up into 1960s, we had black elected officials and blacks who had influence with some whites. I started working for sheriff's dept in 1962 under Hinds. We got other sheriff's and I worked under them – like Bill Morris. She worked as a school crossing guard.

He told me that he was elected with black support.

That's right. Hinds was too.

So were you doing voter registration work through the NAACP before Maxine Smith came?

I started out with trying to get voter registration with Lockard and on through with Maxine. It was just different getting people register to vote then than it is now. Back then, it was a small amount.

What were your strategies to get people registered to vote at that time?

We were so organized by ward and precinct. We would have street captains. You could always get street captains and say, "You work a street," and I work a street. That's how we built up voter registration back then. You had good street captains. I'm 77. Back then, all those people were real hard to accomplish their goals because they were tired of getting on the back of the bus, they were tired of going through the back door. They were tired of – you go downtown and buy clothes and you couldn't even try them on. They didn't have any blacks working in the stores and stuff like that – you know, as cashiers or salesman or something like that. Just very few people working in those capacities then. Now, if you are educated you can get job anywhere you want. But it took a lot of blood, sweat, and going to jail for that. Because even at Memphis State, my daughter went to Memphis State and they went to jail from MS because teachers out there weren't teaching them like they were teaching the other children when they integrated the school.

When did she go there?

One went to Memphis State and graduated in 1964 and then my next daughter probably went about 5 years later and they still hadn't fully integrated then because they went to jail.

Were they protesting?

Yes, they were protesting and they went into dean's office.

Were they sitting in?

Yeah. Some people couldn't get a job after that because jail record. Yet, they weren't doing any crimes. We were just picketing for our rights. Trying to achieve the things that everyone else had that we wanted. We felt we had a right to be able to go in a front door or go to have a bathroom and not go in segregated bathroom or ride in the back of the bus. You could be seated in a seat half way and a person could ask you to get up. You had to stand up. They wouldn't let you try hats on in 1950s and 1960s because they didn't want you to try on the goods because they felt you weren't a full class citizen, so you didn't have a right to try on. You could buy but you couldn't try it on. Same with shoes.

So bizarre.

But those things happened. People were beat and killed and went to jail and everything just to have rights. Younger people now under 30 just don't believe this. It doesn't sound real to them.

I understand you had like an 18-mo boycott of Main St. Were you involved with that?
We had to have Black Mondays with the school.

What was Main Street like? Why was that chosen as a site of protest?

That was where most people spent their money. Downtown now doesn't mean the same thing now as it did back then. All the stores were downtown. All the stores you see in these malls, they were all on Main St. back then. It was just stores all up and down – Goldsmith's, Lowenstein's, Levy's, all the big main stores were on Main St. That's where people spent money. But you didn't have a right to try clothes on, look at them too much. Like you pick up stuff and hold it up look at it. They didn't want you to do that. If you wanted something, you had to know what you had and buy it. That's the way it was. A lot of people stayed in jail so much b/c there was always something gong on. Marching. People weren't afraid to get out.

Did you go to jail?

No, my children did. I didn't go because you needed to have someone man the office, man the telephone, have some food ready for the picketers when they come in. So me and Mrs. Sugarmon stayed back behind a lot and fixed the food.

You fixed the food?

Of the picketers. She and I worked together a lot.

During this time, you were a volunteer at NAACP office.

Yes, I was a volunteer for just about anything you needed.

So, you were doing that with Lockard from 1954 onward.

Yes, just on and on and on. When Lockard was an asst for Gov. Ellington, they had to integrate juvenile justice institutions. My son was used to integrate one of the white facilities. He worked in the system.

When you did in voter reigsstration in 1950s and early 1960s, did you face any resistance in terms of getting blacks registered to vote?

I didn't have any problem because I lived in this community and this is where I did most of my voter registration in the community. We were knocking on doors and working on streets. You got other people to work on the street. You were doing it through the Civic club, Democratic club and like that.

What were civic clubs like back in the 1950s?

WE had Walker Home civic club that we still have now. People back then. You had lots of folks when went to meeting. We were in county and fighting to get into city. We had to get a high school. Everything you got, you had to put up some energy for it. At that time, everybody went to civic club meetings and Democratic Party meetings because they were things they needed in the community and that was the only way you could get them, to get people elected to X. Then, with a lot of black registered voter... When you belonged to Democratic club, we could deliver you so many votes because you were organized. That was how come it worked so well. Also working together with civic

clubs. So all these leaders working together could make you get whatever you wanted b/c all working together until in later years, up in the 1970s, when different people decided they wanted to be a leaders. So you had different groups in different areas.

Also NAACP.

Yes. You see, everybody was working together for one goal to achieve. We had NAACP meeting every 4th Sunday, we had a Democratic club meeting at a certain time. You have your civic club. Like ours was last night. Every 4th Mon. Others might be on different days. They had a Council of Civic Clubs where all the civic clubs presidents would go to a meeting once a month. People don't work as well now as they did then. Now lots of organizations. Back then civic clubs, NAACP and Democratic club. Those were three organizations. With NAACP, we have a forum with every election. Yeah, had them in 1950s, but now more candidates now than back then.

It seems like back then the SCDC was the main vehicle for political action and endorse candidates.

Different groups would endorse different candidate and esp. if you knew there was a candidate that was going to help black community in anyway, then you endorsed the white candidate. That meant that if you supported the white candidates, you could always ask them to give people a job. Like Bill Morris, he hired policemen. Hinds hired some. Black person in politics could get people jobs.

You touched on this already – what were short term and long term goals of political action, hoping to achieve.

Political action through the NAACP. Educate the voter so that he would know how to select candidates. You don't tell him who to vote for but the information given – know enough about the candidate to know if you want to support the candidate. You don't tell people who to vote for. It's like educating people. You get registered first. Once you get registered, you try to educate you how to deal with evaluating candidates. You have history and background. You know, grading system with NAACP with political candidates. You're grading them on how they're voting on issues. Then, you make your own decision. So, that's what we do with political action – register, educated, let them know how to go about evaluate candidates. That's what political action is all about – to make sure people understand and we may make sure people have a way to the polls on election day. All the people that we register to vote. We keep records. We call them and let them know it's election and tell them to go vote.

Is that what you were doing also in the 50s and 60s?

Back then, they would give each person who was a member names out of your precinct and ask you to be responsible for calling all these members in your precinct.

This was with the Democratic club?

Democratic club and civic club – just about everybody. Like our state legislators would give us the names of most of the registered voters in our precincts because they wanted you to call them to make sure those people get out and vote. So they'd go the election commission and get a list of all the registered voters.

This was being done in the 50s through SCDC?
Yeah.

What do you remember about the 1959 election? Were you involved with that?
Yes. Right there too to help him in anyway that we could and urged people to go vote. That was your biggest problem back in the early time – to make sure people went to the polls and voted. Because sometimes people get the idea, “Well, my vote isn’t going to count anyway.”

So, I noticed that with the 1959 election it turned out to be the largest turn out ever of black and white Memphians. How were you able to overcome the apathy you faced or other challenges in regard to getting people out to the polls?
Well, it’s just like right now. People are concerned about the X that we’re in right now. Some people feel we should never? Some people feel . So, people evaluate the candidates like that. [Unfortunately, I’m not able to make out what she just said.] So when election time comes, they’re going to go to the polls based on what they feel about what Bush’s accomplished and done. Can somebody else do better? That’s really how you get folk out to vote. If they decide they don’t care, then it won’t make no difference, and then they won’t have vote no . . . If you’re satisfied and feel like whoever the President is and he’s doing a good job, then you’re going to vote for him, because I tell you if you stay at home and don’t go vote for nobody. If you don’t like Kerry and you stay at home, you’re voting for Bush. I try to get them to understand that. Try to get them to vote for lesser of two evils. You’ve got to go to the polls and vote because if you stay at home, you’re still voting for Bush. If Kerry don’t get the vote, how can he win? That’s way you do it now. You’re either going to vote for Bush or Kerry, you don’t have a choice. You’re never going to find a candidate that’s going to meet all your specifications so you have to decide who’s best for everybody. [She’s a little unclear here and the tape quality is not so good, but I remember what she said: If you stay home and don’t vote and want someone to win, you are voting for the other person by not putting your support out for your candidate.] So, that’s how you vote. You have to decide – What’s best for all the people? Is Bush better or Kerry and then later find someone to replace Kerry? That’s how you got to think about politics.

That’s how you were thinking about politics back in the 1950s?
That’s how you think about it every election, even when you didn’t have a black running, you had a white. You evaluate the best white candidate and you were going to have people that you believed in like Sugarmon, Willis, H. T. Lockard. You had trust in those men. You went along with whatever decision they made. You have a meeting and they would present these candidates to you and they would recommend to you out of whoever was running who was the best person that we ought to support. If we want to elect this person, all of us have to stick together. Votes is what candidates count. They don’t count all this talk. They want to see votes. They know whether black votes got them in or whether the white got them in. Because without that black vote, that other man might’ve won. So, that’s what elected officials count – what you vote, what precinct you’re voting out of, they know the precincts that vote real good. They know 75-1 is a good one. They

know those are good voting precincts so they're going to put more time, more money in that area to make sure they get the votes out of it. They may have a precinct in another area that doesn't vote as well so they'll do some things in that area, but they're going to put their time in the area they know where people are going to vote and where the leadership is – they know they can depend on a certain leadership to help them deliver. That happened in the 50s and 60s and its happening still now. Now, people are more educated on voting so they kind of know how to do things themselves more than they did back then.

Were you at board meetings of SCDC when candidates appeared and you would decide who to endorse.

Yes.

What did you typically ask candidates?

... You evaluate them against everything they say they're going to do . . . You want to know what they're going to do differently from the people that are in office now. [She goes at length with one or two examples here but it doesn't seem pertinent to 1959. It does demonstrate her political acumen.]

How did you keep politicians accountable who you endorsed and helped elect?

Well, I'll take Vasco Smith. When he was county commissioner, each commissioner had three jobs. He would give me all three of his jobs. If you know I'm going to help you get elected, you're going to give me some applications so some of the children in this neighborhood can get jobs because you want their parents to vote for you and campaign for other people to vote for you. So, like out here, we wanted one of the streets black topped. I got on the city council – we need this area blacktopped.

What made SCDC so powerful in 1950s and 1960s?

It was because you were under an umbrella of leaders. People believed in these leaders and they voted the way these leaders would say. What they would do, they would have all the candidates come and talk to you. Then, they would pick out the candidates that they thought would do the best job and help the black community. So, then what they did was recommend these people like for Gov. or whatever. County commissioner, City council, sheriff, etc. That sheriff would answer to these leaders because they knew they controlled the black vote.

You wrote down some of the leaders – if you could talk about some of them and how they were viewed.

You see, like Sugarmon, he was a person who you could talk to, that you could ask for help, any help you needed for somebody in the street, couldn't pay your rent. They would help you back then. Willis would do the same thing. Lockard was an attorney so if you needed to get small things done that you needed an attorney for you could always say, "Go see H. T. Lockard, tell him I sent you." I could always say, "Go talk to Jesse Turner. Tell him Ms. Peters sent you." I was the person in the neighborhood who was getting all these folks registered and getting them to vote a certain way along with those certain leaders. Whatever kind of help – like with the NAACP. If you had a problem and

felt you werre discriminated against, all you had to do was go and tell Ms. Maxine Smith. "Ms. Peters sent me up here to tell you what my problem is." So, you would get help. Same way with Vasco and Dr. Kirk and all those leaders. They assisted to our needs. Because they remember when anything they wanted done done? We considered them our leaders, so we were going to back them in anyway. So you couldn't come pick us off one at a time. You would have to go through the leadership, because we respected them and depended on them. So, when we asked something we needed, they would deliver because of the fact that they knew who to call on when it was time for election day and they needed to get the black vote out.

How many women were involved back then?

You always had more women than you every had men going to church and everything else. It's always women. Everybody belonged to church. Your minister would cooperate with you and everything. You see, every election, I usually have a big party in my backyard. You know the church will support you. We have some of the biggest parties right in my backyard and have all the politicians over.

In the 50s and 60s did you throw lawn or coke parties?

Oh, you had all kinds of little tea parties. You put all the people you can put in a living room and we might then have 5 or 6 houses, one coke party on each street.

So the coke parties – how many people would typically come to the coke parties?

See like if I have a party at my house, I have 200 people in my backyard. Because the church would bring the speakers and chairs and help furnish the hot dogs. We don't ask the politicians for nothing. We furnish all our own stuff. Back in the 1950s and 1960s, we might have living room coke parties. You have one at your house, I have one at my house, just in the living room and you have about 20 people, something like that.

Did they also serve as fundraisers?

No, we were never trying to raise funds. Most of the politicians had their own fundraisers that they would invite us to.

So these were about--?

These were just parties to get the officials out and get the people together so the people who were running could come talk to them. We served hor'dves and stuff like that.

Were these parties pretty much run by women?

Well, you always had some men back then. You had more men back in the earlier times that had to work with the ladies. Their husbands worked with them. Their neighbors and all would get together and help sponsor coke parties. ().

In terms of SCDC when it started and back in the 60s, how many precinct clubs do you estimate that there were and how many members? I believe just about every ward and precinct that was in the black community was represented back in those days. Because it was the thing where everybody had to work together to achieve anything. You had better

working relationships with ward and precincts back then than you do now. Every ward and precinct seem to have been organized back in those days.

Now, with board meetings, the leaders gave recommendations of who to endorse, but also it was up to the board to vote on these?

Everybody who came to meeting could vote. The board would meet. Sugarmon, Willis, Walker, Lockard, Vasco, Benjamin Hooks all would meet first and come up with a recommendation. When we had a regular Democratic Party recommendation, they would present this to us and we would vote it up or down. Ninety percent of the time you accepted.

Did you also have the opportunity at these meetings to raise issues?

We always did have some input. They knew how to let you take a part on it. They might even call you up in your home because you were a leader in your community. You might not have been with the executive board group, but there were always leaders in the community. They would call you up and tell you what idea they had, so you could think about it and you could talk to your group about it before you even went to the meeting. So you would be together. Like the group at Walker Homes, we would be together before we went to the meeting. I would tell them what they had in mind or what they were thinking about recommending to us. Then, you could sit down and talk about what we thought. When we got to the meeting, if this group want me to speak for them, I said now when I stand up to talk, ya'll stand up.

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All ward and precinct clubs back in 1950s had meetings in addition to board meetings. When you went to big Dem Party meeting, 75-1, 75-2, you went altogether as one group. In the community, you had to be organized at a street level, a ward and precinct level, so that you could make sure you communicated to people in your area . . . We used to be knocking on doors on election day and getting folks out. Sometimes you have a car that you need a ride, we would take you. I used to have a babysitting service here at my house because there was 75-1 over here, 75-2 over there. You see if you need a babysitter, we would have some young ladies here, teenagers that would keep the children while you would go vote or do what you had to do. So, now, they don't even have a babysitting system like we did back in the 1950s-70s.

How were you able to do all this political and civil rights work while being a mother. How were you able to find the time?

By the time it got to be 64 I had children who were 17-18 years old.

So they could serve as babysitters?

Yeah. But on election day we had those teenagers to be here. If you needed to work at the polls or something and you leave your children here.

You were involved with setting up that program?

Yeah. Keep your children for you.

Were you involved with getting transportation to the polls?

On Election Day, I rode in my car all day helping people get to the polls, check precincts. (not sure)

So you served as a driver.

I really don't serve as a real driver, I check precincts seeing if folk being treated right there, if have enough workers working and stuff like that. We checked all the precincts.

What was the impact of 1959 election on black community.

I really wanted to win back in 1959. If your candidates won, you will have worked hard all day. Same with if they had lost. You know up that that point you educated people and had gotten them to the polls.

Obviously, disappointment.

You be disappted when your candidate lost, but you know you will have worked hard, you will have done all you could do to get that candidate elected. When they evaluated how people voted, you could tell in your particular precinct if folk voted good for the candidate. In other precincts they might not have voted as good and that was why they lost.

What would you do with the precincts who didn't turn the vote out as much as other precincts? Would they be targeted in a certain way?

What you would do, you would go talk to leaders in those particular precincts and help them as much as you could to get more people registered and do a better job of educating voters on how to vote.

It's amazing to me the amount of organization you had back then.

It was because people respected leaders back then. On up in the 70s, everybody wanted to be a leader, so they started getting their own groups.

So that's when SCDC broke up?

It wasn't as strong because different folk that had belonged to Democratic club, decided to organize Kennedy Democratic Club, Walker Home Democratic club, North Memphis Democratic club. Everybody had these fractions/factions and you had different leaders doing it. Some of those people who you had respected as one of your top leaders, they had gotten elected and weren't doing as much work in the groups as they had done in early 50s and 60s. So some of these other peoples back then, they formed different groups. Like Melvin Robinson, Frank Kilpatrick, Katie Sexton had own groups. Different groups started getting organized just for their area, so they could say well, "I own my own governor so I can get X for him for my area."

Did this begin in late 60s?

I would say not until the 70s.

Sugarmon told me that with the assassination of King that was heart attack.

People started being on their own. Back then you were looking up to a leader. Everybody decided they could lead. "I want to be it."

You mentioned the role of young people serving as babysitter in the campaign. How else did children and youth play a role in campaigns back then?

Like in this area I was PTA president, all the teenagers knew me and knew what I wanted and that if there was anything that I could do to get them a summer job I could get it for them. So, that's why I had connections with them so if I needed them to come and serve as babysitters I didn't have them to pay them nothing. They would come and volunteer their time. Then, I had teenagers and college students by that time.

You talked about anything they needed you to do at the NAACP office. Could you be more specific about some of your responsibilities, your tasks.

Like right now, I sponsor "Teenager of the Year." You have to raise funds to do that. You write a lot of memberships, actually. I've sponsored them every year and am responsible for writing memberships and do anything I can do with politics in my church.

Were you doing that with your church in the 50s?

I did all the announcements back then. I've been a member of my church 50 years. Now, I'm not a regular announcer anymore. I just do the politics and NAACP and any other announcements that need to be made where people need to get help.

Back in the 1950s, so did you get up in church and announce that there was an election coming up or--.

O. Back in 1950s and 1960s, I made a regular announcement for about 30 years.

Would you talk about who was endorsed by SCDC? Like what words would you say?

Like right now, anything you want to know about politics, I explain it to you. Our church doesn't really endorse candidates, but I will explain to you. WE have a lady running for judge, so many state legislators running, clerks, etc. I try to keep them informed of who's running and that this election is coming up in August and who be running them. Then, I explain to them in November you get a chance to vote for president. You have to let them know because some folk when they go to the polls the first time, they don't think that they have to go back no more. You have to let them know what kind of election is going on now in August and what's going to be happening in Nov.

That was the same sort of endorsement you made back then?

Yes, and bring in [campaign] material that they can pick up. You hand out materials so people know who's running and who they're running for.

So you would talk about specific candidates and what they would bring by being elected?

Yes. Some folks need to know what the responsibilities are of city councilpersons, what a county commission does, etc. Some people ask the Congressmen to do something that really is what the City Council should do.

I asked her to clarify some points.

In 1950s and 1960s, you told people who you wanted them to vote for, you told them why you wanted them to vote for, why it was important to vote. You don't have any black candidates in these positions, so you need to fill some slots with some blacks. So, you don't have to say that now because you got blacks really in every position. Back then, you didn't. You were trying to get some blacks because you felt that blacks would be most sensitive to your needs. Let us take a part in it.

The church, so I heard, was the main line of communication. So, you held meetings at the church, the ministers cooperated with you, because more people at that time went to church than what they do now.

That and the precinct clubs.
Yeah.

Were there any other main lines of communication to the voters. Would you say those were the main two.

You had the PTA, the civic clubs, the Democratic clubs, church, all these different organizations worked together. No matter which one of these you belonged to, you would cooperate with each other.

Through that interlocking network, get voter registration, education...
You see I write voter registration everyday. I keep voter registration and NAACP membership cards in my car all the time. You always find one on my table. My children may bring someone over who hasn't registered to vote. I have NAACP membership cards. I've been doing that for years.

Has that been a common practice since 1950s.

Yes. Back then, PTAs were strong. Parents came to meetings b/c concerned about children's education.

That was another way you could educate people about political process. Mr. Sugarmon told me ward and precinct clubs also used to carry out direct action movement after the sit-ins hit.

We really all worked together.

Do you remember at all candidacy of Roy Love in 1955?

I remember when he ran but I don't think I was supporting him at time.

1959 campaign – was the first one where the black community came together on a large scale?

Yes.

I understand resistance from whites to Sugarmon and get white candidates to thin their ranks?

All I know that I worked real hard and everyone else worked real hard to get him elected. Back then, it was hard to get whites to support blacks. They hadn't come to the

realization that we had supported them all our life. They ought to come and support us and our candidates. Later in the years they got so they supported us better.

In 1959 campaign, did you try to get white support?

My job was to get black folks to vote. That was somebody else's job, people in leadership did more to get whites to vote for blacks. I was trying to get the black vote out.

What did your husband do for a living?

He drove a truck. (). He never did much with politics because he worked at night.

Most black people at that time were working class people. I know that Sugarmon and other leaders were middle class.

Yes.

Did that cause any division at all.

No, it didn't because back then we were like a family. Everyone working together. You needed lawyers then – you didn't have a lot of black lawyers. You needed them. They were real friendly, down to earth. I used to eat breakfast at Sugarmon's house. He would even take me to Nashville with him.

People on grassroots level were working class.

Yes.

And mainly women.

Yes.

In 1950s, much protest or direct action activity going on?

Back then, we were so unintegrated. We had to ride back of bus. You said instances of people trying to get foot in the door and trying to get jobs and stuff.

It seems like direct action became more large scale with sit-ins.

Yes.

What was impact of sit-ins on black community?

They were good because blacks would X where spend money. We buy more clothes, cars than anybody. So, when you start picketing places and don't spend money there, they lose too much money. So, that's why they would come through because of the fact you could close them down . . . Like when they had Black Mondays. When you don't go to school, they lose money. That's the only way you could reach white folks at that time – financially.

What did you think of press coverage of that time?

We had PS and CA and they printed anybody got killed, anybody got shot but anything good we did they would not print it.

What about TSD and MW?

They did good printing all that they could print. (). They did real good.

Were you involved with the Nonpartisan VR comm.. at all?

I always did work with them because the NAACP is nonpartisan. We don't endorse candidates.

Ad hoc committee during campaign and consisted of repr. of NAACP and political clubs?
Yes.

How influential was the Lincoln League?

I never went to Lincoln civic club for people in other neighborhoods.

So, that was more influential in other neighborhoods.

Yes.

Evers and Stanback in 1959.

That was when OZ Evers got his own group and started out with his own group. All the other people at one time belonged to the Democratic club. Then, they went out on in their own areas and got their own group. It was just like, you got your own group, I endorse how I want. Evers in later years never cooperated with anybody. He just had his own group and endorsed his own candidates.

You see that a little bit in late 1950s and then--.

Then they split up. Everybody at one time belonged to the SCDC. Then, when they started getting different organizations, they went into neighborhoods and got own candidates and endorsed them.

Do you think politics or protest activity -- that one had more impact than the other? You were able to get done a lot through political activity but do you think the protest activity was necessary--.

Sometimes you had to protest. At one point you didn't have black officials that much so you had to protest to achieve their goals. Everybody that was elected wasn't going to listen to you because they didn't need you.

Like Black Mondays protest activity was necessary.

Yes. We used to get the old books that white children had write in and used.

What did you think of Henry Loeb?

Well, I guess he was good in his time. He had some black friends that he worked with but he was not the best thing for black folk.

Were there other white politicians that you liked? You mentioned Bill Morris as someone that you liked. Bill M. was a person you could talk to, so was David Harsh and M. A. Hinds. He felt people were human at least. So anytime you found people that could do as much as they could for you, it was good.

I talked to some women who were active in Dem club and they said they experienced some men were sexist to them and that was a problem with getting people together. Did you experience that?

No, I didn't. Because I always knew how to keep men – my grandmother taught me how to keep men a distance from you. You talked to them and you let them know what you mean and mean what you say and they don't mess with you.

A hard line.

That's how to do it.

I think you mentioned the police were brutal back then. Could you talk more about how the police were viewed and what they were like back in the 1950s and 1960s.

I didn't have any problems with the police. I taught my children that if a police officer talks to you, say, "Yes sir" and "No sir." You polite them. Don't ask them a lot of questions. Remember their badge numbers and names and then you talk to me about it. I always had high respect for police officers. You never had a problem.

So you had strategies. Did you hear of any instances of police brutality.

No, I didn't, because I always knew how to talk to a police officer because of my grandfather. My grandfather X (). My uncle was Boss Crump's janitor for a house he had in North Memphis. My grandfather worked with those white people. When blacks started getting to be how they could vote and it was like a cooperation. My grandfather had been a slave so he knew how to deal with white folk. So, no problem.

So, you have a long family history of political involvement.

Yes.

Striking about Mphs--.

So, a lot of people had things to say about Mr. Crump. Mr. Crump paid my uncle \$100 a year for electing () for him. He had a free house to stay in and everything. House grandfather lived in belonged to Mr. Crump.

So, you had a positive view of Mr. Crump.

I found out from my grandfather that if you say "Yes, sir" or "No, sir" to everyone, you won't have a problem saying it to white folk. It was just part of me to know how to talk to people. When you talk to people, no reason to get off on you. You did have people getting smart and getting in trouble.

Was that a reason for a lot of problems of black people?

Back then if people didn't think they had to take stuff. You don't say that. I taught my children the same thing.

Do you think blacks being in public office has been positive for improved race relations? I think it's fair and they have done just as good a job as anyone else, as effective as everybody else.

How much were events going on in other places like Montgomery, Birmingham--. I was in Montgomery, AL, when you couldn't ride the bus. We walked everywhere we went. We went to a PTA convention and everybody in cabs. The people who drove their cars would let you ride. That's when they were trying to get buses integrated. I was there at the time. We were just there for a convention.

How connected were you in Mphs in terms of CRM here with other protest movements going on in other places in S?

Well, I just really dealt with the local government here in Mphs.

It seems to me movement her ein Mphs was locally driven – it wasn't so much like you looked to other cities as to what you should be doing.

The leadership that you had got the info from other cities nad presented to you in meetings what we ought to be doing this week or month. We had leadership.

Can you give me an example when they talked about something national and how it should affect movement here.

Sugarmon, Willis, Turner, Lockard all of them were aware of what went on in other cities and that was how we got our info – through them. There were other leaders but they were the top.

What do you see as difference and similarities between Mphs politics now nad back in 50s na d60s.

Back in 50s and 60s, you followed leadership. Now, everybodyu's a leader. Everybody thinks they know something, so they work in different groups. I make up my mind now who I'm going to vote for – I don't need anybody to tell me.

So people do a better job of educating themselves rather than relying on leadership. Yes.

What were major challenges you faced hten to engaging in political activity. You mentioned one was that people were apathetic.

I was so involved. I didn't miss any meetings. I'm always involved with candidates.

Anything else to add?

Only thing that I can tell you that's different now than back then. Back then we followed leadership. We looked up to leaders. We expected them to bring us the best candidates and tell us all about them. If we needed something from the candidates, they would get it. In this day and time, I talk to candidates myself. I know approx. what each one is going to do. I don't miss a meeting.

So, it sound slike you experienced a personal change.

So, I deal with candidates more now on an individual basis than I did back then. She talks about how after I leave she's going to leave for a political meeting.

As I observed with other people I've talked to active in 1950s and 1960s, your civil rights work is ongoing.

"You see, I still go."