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Interview

with

MARY MOORE

August 17, 2006

By Sarah Thuesen

Transcribed by Karen Meier

The Southern Oral History Program
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TRANSCRIPT - MARY MOORE

Interviewee: Mary Moore

Interviewer: Sarah Thuesen

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START OF CD:

ST: Today is Thursday, August 17, 2006. My name is Sarah Thuesen. I am interviewing for the Southern Oral History Program, the Long Civil Rights Movement Project. Today I'm talking with Mary Moore in Birmingham, Alabama at the Pickwick Hotel. Thanks very much for taking the time to talk with me.

MM: Thank you for calling and extending the invitation.

ST: Well, it's a pleasure. I thought we'd first just talk a little bit about your background and learn a little bit more about your earlier history, then talk some about your career both at the VA Hospital and in politics. Where did you grow up?

MM: I was born in Birmingham, Alabama. I grew up in Birmingham, Alabama. I went to school, elementary--during those days it was elementary, first grade through eighth and then high school. After I finished high school I got my undergraduate degree at Tuskegee, then Institute, slash University now. When I graduated from Tuskegee Institute, went on to UAB in medical technology.

That was the beginning process--the federal government had had problems integrating that school of medical technology. They, every year, came to different black

universities to see which ones of those students that were interested in medical technology to see if they would apply to UAB. Prior to that time black students in the State of Alabama, if they wanted to get a degree in medical technology, the state, because of the segregated laws, would pay for them to go to other states to do their internship in medical technologies. At that time, and I guess maybe two or three years prior to that, there was an attempt to integrate the School of Medical Technology for UAB which had failed because the students would apply to the school but they were harassed and ended up dropping out of the program and going to other schools outside of the state to complete their internship for medical technology.

After that I started working at the VA Hospital in Birmingham, got my MBA degree from Alabama A&M University. Growing up in Birmingham that was during the time we had segregated schools. You had a few schools for blacks, many schools for whites. The black community most often you had more elementary schools. When I first entered elementary school in '54 the only high school for the City of Birmingham was Parker High School. Later on, we got one high school that came into the city, Jackson, only because they became annexed into the city. We had Ullman High School. During the early '50s I think there were many articles written that Parker High School was probably the most populated high school in the United States. That was the basic high school for blacks in this city. By the time I finished elementary school, because of segregated issues to desegregate, the schools had heightened. Then what the city thought they would do is build a new high school, which was Carver High School, to relieve the overflowing of Parker High School and at the same time satisfy the black community that now we're providing more high schools. So you don't have to worry about trying to

integrate our white high schools. We're going to give you a spanking brand new high school for you to concentrate on. Then after they built Carver they came back and they built the Hayes High School. Ultimately the situation developed that they had to integrate the high schools anyway.

That took part during my ninth grade year in high school. Some of my friends and church members that were in the tenth grade, a young lady, Patricia Patton was one of the first students, outside of Reverend Shuttlesworth's children, that was trying to integrate the then Phillips High School. They all were a part of that initial effort to integrate schools in the City of Birmingham. Past that point a few blacks, once the school was integrated, would attend Phillips and some of the other schools automatically. Prior to that we had a few-- the Graymont Elementary school was all white school. There was an attempt to integrate that school. I think most of the young children, the parents of those children eventually, so people up in the North asked us, they had such a hard time in the school if they could take their children out of the state of Alabama for protection. That's what ended up happening to those children. Many of those young people that was a first in integrating the high schools in the City of Birmingham, once they finished high school, they left the city. Because of the mental impact was not able to come back and settle in the city. During that same time, during the '60s, '63 was when Dr. King sent his plea out to children to become a part of the movement. Early on we were just going to movement meetings at night to hear what was going on.

ST: Were your parents involved in--?

MM: During that time most of our parents were afraid. The rationale was that when their bosses learned that they were participating with the Movement, then they were fired. In many cases the parents would encourage the children to go to the Movement.

You had some, quite a few like the ministers. In that time it was no danger for many of the ministers because they got their basic pay from their congregation. They didn't have to experience the threat of being fired because their living was paid for by their congregation. You had a lot of ministers that was active in the Movement then. Young people. A lot of people that was just brave people during the time and were going to defy the segregation, the segregated structure regardless. There were many of us at night, after school we walked from one side of this city to the other trying to get to a Movement meeting. Then once the decision was made by Dr. King that it would be better to use children to take the Movement to the next step--and I always remember that night. Because after the decision was made--usually when we would go to the movement meeting adults were the ones to sit down--children stood up around the walls, in the balconies of the church. On that particular night Dr. King asked the adults, "Why don't you step back and let the children come forth?" His message that night was to the children.

ST: You were present at that meeting?

MM: That was at Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. We were always in the balcony, I mean, a proud moment. Here it is Dr. King telling the grown people step back and let the children come forth because his message was for us. He preached that night about our role and how it relates back to biblical times when things were hard, in many cases, children were used in order to propel the spiritual message that got out then. That

was, to me, a proud moment. After he finished talking to us that night they divided us up according to where we lived. I lived in North Birmingham so they had selected--. I lived in North Birmingham plus I went to Carver High School. The major schools that they could draw children from at that time was Carver High School on the north side, Parker High School in the center, Ullman High School on the south side. Then they pulled from children from Fairfield and surrounding cities. Miles College is located in Fairfield. So students came in from Miles College. That night he explained to us that the night before we were supposed to leave school that we met at one of the churches close to the school. We met at St. Luke AME Methodist Church. During that particular meeting they gave us our signal. At that time I think Julian Bond was a young man that was probably at Howard University at that time. Several other ones was out and they explained to us when the people on the back side of the school saw these people out on the campus you know that that's going to be the signal for you to get your classmates and leave the school. Many of your teachers, they were threatened also by the board. In many cases the teachers would even open up a book and start reading--I don't see what's going on. We quietly got up, left the school, proceeded to downtown Birmingham and, mind you, it was already determined that some children would be arrested. That was already decided that some would be arrested; some would just keep the marches going. Once we left school and got downtown Birmingham, during that time, they told us the students from Parker High School weren't leaving. You have to understand what was happening with Parker High School because that was where most of the elitist children went to school. I think they had some with second thoughts. If they were identified as marching then what will happen to their parents who were the teachers and the business professional people in

the city. They divided us up at that point and asked some children to go to Parker High School because the adults knew they couldn't go in. The children could go in and rally them to come on out, which we did. Some went to Parker. Some proceeded on to Sixteenth Street Baptist Church to start the marches. They had a list of all the children that would potentially be arrested once we got to the park. Some of us, only thing we did everyday was go and keep the marches going. People like my brother got arrested two or three times.

ST: What's his name?

MM: His name was Rayfield Moore. Several members of our football team, my brother Rayfield, Clarence Byrd, and there was another young man that was killed during the Vietnam and his name is--that was killed--I always could see his face, never can remember his name. I know he was one of the football players because most of them had committed that they would be arrested. Part of the thing that they were looking at was that you needed enough young men to be arrested because there was uncertainty as to what would happen to the young ladies. They were going in for a two fold purpose because of the movement and also to look out for the young ladies once they were arrested. They herded them all on buses and hurried them to various places in the city. Used to be called, it's still called the Fairground where they housed a lot of the children. That was during '63. We got through that faze and went on eventually to integrate the schools. Later on after I finished high school in '66 they more or less stepped up the integration process after then. Like my younger brothers, they decided that even though they had been zoned for Carver High School for years, but we lived close to Phillips High School, so many of the children would have to go to Phillips. Then, when it got to point

that some of the children didn't want to go, they started giving children options. The ones that want to go can. The ones that don't want to go you can go back to whichever high school you normally would have attended.

ST: You graduated from Carver in '66, right?

MM: '66.

ST: Were you ever arrested?

MM: Never arrested, thank god. My mother always told us we could march as long as we wanted to, me and my sister. But because of her lack of trust of the law enforcement at that point in time, she told us we could march all day. My brother could be arrested because he was a boy. She just was never certain as to what could possibly happen to a young lady. We marched and marched and marched and marched everyday. Just like we were going to work until the marches were called off. Every day we got up, went to the church, got out there and marched, ran from the policemen, look around the corner to see if we see Bull Connor and his white tank. Once we could get past, then zoom back into the park we go. When the police started chasing us we'd run them and run to some place of safety to hide out. Once they would give up we'd come out and run right back into the park again. It was a lot. The thing is to have lived through that time, during the time when they put the dogs on children and to know your friends--. I met a young lady while I was campaigning; I met a lady this year. She was telling me, "Yeah, I was in that park." She was hit by the hose in her chest. She said, "I never recovered because the pressure of that hose on my chest has resulted in a lot of medical problems." It was a dangerous time but I could see where Dr. King was coming from. It's like today, children think they going to live forever, nothing can hurt us because we are children.

We're strong. We've been promised life. We are fearless. I think that if it had not happened like that some of the changes that occurred in this country and even around the world would not have taken place, if it had not been for children.

ST: I'm sure your parents must have been really worried about you at this time. What did they do?

MM: I think most parents during that time--you have to realize the black community during those days, highly religious. Their thought process was that God was going to protect us anyway. That we were doing something that was to help everybody. They felt certain at the end of the day, we were going to return home and get up another day and start all over again. I don't think the fear was there even with parents. With them and their religious background, this is something that had been ordained by God to be done. Dr. King was his messenger to get it done. Dr. King said this is the way we'll have to do it, through peaceful protests, then that was the way it was going to be. No parent thought that their child was going to go out and be hurt. Even when they brought out the dogs and the hose pipes, it still didn't affect them that way because through them they believe we'll continue to pray. This is what we've got to go through.

ST: What did your parents do here in Birmingham?

MM: My father worked at one of the plants in North Birmingham. My mother, during that time, my mother was a maid at the Thomas Jefferson Hotel. Most of the time, like I said, during those days women, in my neighborhood for the most part, some of them had to work, we were all poor. Men worked. Women stayed at home and took care of the children until they got to be a certain age. That's when most women would move

out and go to work in different places. Prior to then my mother was a stay-at-home mom until all of us got in school. Once all of us got in school then she went out to work.

ST: What plant was your dad at?

MM: Birmingham Tank Company. It's located now in Pascagoula, Mississippi. They build these huge tanks that go underground for different things. I guess for water, oil or whatever.

ST: Was your dad ever involved in labor organizing?

MM: Yes. My daddy was union. My daddy was union and the thing is when they unionized his company, when they said strike. He struck.

ST: Which union was he--?

MM: I don't remember the local but it was a part of AFL-CIO. They unionized. A few companies managed to get unionized during those days. Like in North Birmingham, you had Sloss Industries and Sloss was unionized. Birmingham Tank Company was unionized. ACIPCO [American Cast Iron Pipe Company], which is still one of the major companies, never unionized. Their company was thoroughly unionized. I remember the strikes when they went on strikes for better pay, better conditions and things. You just go up and take him his lunch while he sitting on the picket line. They make their little fire and sit there days on and days in. Originally, when they would start having to--before the food stamp era in the South--people in the neighborhood just help you out. If your father worked at one of the companies and it was a unionized company and those companies went on strike, people in the neighborhood made sure you had food to eat. We all kind of merged together. All of us was in basically the same economic condition which we didn't know it was poor at that time. From a child's perspective,

everything was going okay. People in the neighborhood made sure that you didn't go hungry. Somebody always stepped in and made sure the rent was paid. The union did as much as they could then. Everything from a child's perspective was okay.

ST: Do you remember you dad talking about why union membership was really important to him?

MM: During that time when you realize that most jobs, blacks had never been supervisors. They always had to do the hardest part of the job. His thing was it was an opportunity. First of all, unions came in and if you are in a unionized facility you could get better pay. You can get better pay. You can have the opportunity that the union would eventually fight for you to get a better position, even though during those segregated times it was difficult. The union, in its own way was a part of the Civil Rights Movement. What the union did, it made sure that whether you are black, white, pink or blue, you share a similar income. That was one of his things. He was die hard union. He could see the advances made as far as pay and working conditions once the union came into his plant.

ST: Was his union fairly integrated in terms of--?

MM: During that time, even though it was fairly integrated, you still had the white bath house, the black bath house. All of them stood on the picket line. All of them built that one little fire that they all sat around because everybody was in the same situation. When you go back and you look, that probably was the most integrated part of American life, was those members of the union. They all were fighting together to improve their quality of life. It seems as though it broke down color barriers.

ST: Getting a little bit more into your own experience with labor organizing, tell me a little bit about when you started working at the VA Hospital.

MM: At the VA Hospital. When I went into the VA, at that point in time, when I got there, they had a union of sorts.

ST: What year was that?

MM: I went to work in '71. They had a union of sorts. I mean from the perspective that they had gone through the process of petition. You have to understand, our bosses is Congress and the President. They had already, with the help of the AFL-CIO, gone ahead and petitioned Congress and the President for them to have the ability to form a union. Normally what ends up happening, if a place wants to become unionized they got to get--. AFL-CIO will first come in and you contact them and say we're interested in unionizing our work place. Then what has to happen after that is they have to get so many signatures of the employees to say that we want to become unionized. We are petitioning to be allowed to have a vote, the employees to determine if that was going to happen. That had already taken place at the VA when I got there. That was the early days of the union.

To say that it was a union of a sort, we were recognized as having a bargaining unit. AFL-CIO was our bargaining unit for us. Any time we needed to have wage discussions or better working conditions, they were the ones that sat at the table for us. To date, probably AFGE, that's American Federation of Government Employees, probably still one of the younger unions when you consider the United Mine Workers, the United Auto Workers, and those types of unions that have been around for a lot longer. As we matured and finally got full union status of being American Federation of

Government Employees and establishing the various locals and the various departments of the government, even though we still come under AFL-CIO. In many cases they are still there to guide us in whatever we are doing. We still have our president. We have our national president, our national officers, our local officers now. That took some years of growing to get to that point.

Early on, being a union member at the VA Hospital, it was very difficult. A lot of times management would harass you. You were given the toughest job and given orders to do things that was just totally unreasonable. As we grew in strength and when employees finally saw that through the suffering of union members, conditions in the workplace got better.

To give you an example of how we matured, there used to be a time in the VA Hospital--if you in nursing, well, anything in a hospital--it could be a twenty-four hour shift. That's one thing that in any hospital with the staff. Early on we worked under strict military rules. Everything we did was according to military time--everything in the operation of the hospital was military oriented. As we got more and more into being recognized as a union and could get to the bargaining table to say that we are civilians and we've got to come up with some different guidelines that's--. Even though many of the workers still at the VA are people with military backgrounds you still have civilians that are working there that don't come under the compass of the military. Those types of things--hours to work. They could come in and tell you, well you put in eight hours you got to work eight more hours. You could put in that sixteen hours, you need to work a little bit longer until you are just about to fall on your face. The conditions were extremely rough. You almost had no voice. As our union grew and as we got to a point

that we were recognized as the bargaining voice of the workers, then the conditions started to change. To give you an example, I'm a medical technologist working in the lab. For years the government didn't recognize my degree or anything nor was the pay comfortable to the degree. Through the efforts of the union eventually degreed employees other than nurses were recognized and their pay status and position in the facility upgraded. The union changed working conditions and it helped everybody.

It got to a point that you couldn't work but so many hours straight unless you volunteered to do that. We went from the mandatory overtime 'til if it was overtime needed, whether it was a emergency situation, first line that management was supposed to do was to post it and allow people to work it. I might have worked in a department all day where I've been on my feet, death could have been on the line all day, where a patient could have been in surgery. I could have been in blood bank all day cross matching blood. Then you come back and say I need you to work eight more hours in this and this. At that point my ability to detect a problem with a patient is minimized. I could cause that patient some harm. Over the time it just got to a point that rather than having mandatory, that in a hospital setting especially--Social Security covers under the same local that we do, the Department of Defense--then it got to the point that we could demand better working hours and let the employee, when you needed that extra work or people didn't come in, then you can always allow them to volunteer first line. If you got no volunteers to come up, then you try to come up and decide on a rotational basis who would work. We did it according to seniority. You come right down the seniority list and decide one person work overtime this day because nobody would volunteer. Then

the next day you go and you keep a record of it. Other things that happened in the work place--when I went to work for the VA all management was white.

ST: I was going to ask you what--.

MM: All management was white. Most blacks worked midnight shifts or evening shifts so you didn't see us period. Most of the whites worked day shift and went home. We took up when 3:30 came in, when the evening shift started then you saw the few blacks that worked at the hospital. When I went to the VA in '71 you could probably count the number of black nurses we had. In the laboratory I think we might have had about five blacks working in our laboratory counting me. I think we had a staff then of maybe forty or fifty people working there. Even down to dietetic service, very few blacks worked in dietetic service. Very few blacks worked as custodians. In fact, very few blacks were patients at the VA Hospital in Birmingham. During that time the majority of black veterans were sent to the Tuskegee VA Hospital. The majority white came to Birmingham or Tuscaloosa, some of the other VA facilities. There was a desegregating effort to take place there.

Black doctors were unheard of. Black doctors were unheard of. We saw some of our first black doctors, like Dr. Rick Ranson is still working in the Birmingham area. They came through as interns and residents and just made us proud to see black doctors. A lot of integration took place. Slowly what ended up happening, many of our white nurses disappeared. The white there were custodians and building maintenance. Many of them disappear. Our engineering department, when I retired in 2000, still had a significant number of whites still working in the engineering department. They're the people doing all the instrument repair. They call engineering a lot of stuff nowadays. In

our dietetic service, mostly black. In the custodial services, mostly black. In the laboratory, maybe fifty-fifty turned out.

We began to see more blacks in management. They would bring them is as--never director of the hospital--but one of his assistant directors. Most times they going to put them over something like personnel or they would be assistant to the person who was over personnel. When I left we still, we never saw a black over nursing service. You never saw a black over laboratory services. So, as far as getting into upper management, that still did not exist in the VA hospital.

During the time that Clinton was president, he was a godsend for us because some of the things he allowed to happen in the VA helped everybody in workplaces regardless of the country. Clinton put in the Family Medical Leave. If your child or a close family member is sick you can use your sick leave time to be off to take care of them. If you didn't have the sick leave time--your annual leave is our vacation leave--you could use that to start staying at home. It was a godsend when it happened because I knew of employees that was fired because their mother might have had a stroke. Their father might have had cancer. They had to stay at home or come to work late. They would be so intolerant that they wouldn't even allow an employee to come to work late after they got their parents situated. They would fire those people because your job is most important. Your family don't count. I think Clinton added some human qualities to the union and in efforts that the union had been fighting for years. The time--and I always remember him making the statement that as president if his daughter needed him to come to school for a program he could go. That should be given to the everyday worker. That helped a lot of parents out. Parents want to go to see their children perform in school.

They like to have the opportunity to take an hour or thirty minutes off and go and just be there for support. That not only helped in the federal sector but that helped in the civilian sector also.

ST: When you started there in '71 you must have been part of a relatively small number of black employees then?

MM: Small.

ST: Yeah. What was it like working in a mostly white work place at that time? That wasn't so long after the '60s.

MM: I tell you during that time one thing that's--. We were treated pretty well in the work place because the average white would come and say, "You are not like the other blacks." "Why are we not like the other blacks?" "Because you got employed." "Well, there are some other ones that like to be employed, too." "You are college educated." The sad thing about it, I had to be college educated in order to get my job in the laboratory. Four years at Tuskegee, got a BS degree in Pre-Med, math and science major. The average white that was working in the lab, high school diploma. Some relative knew somebody and they brought them in and trained them. Once they got--. Some did have degrees. It turned out most of us with degrees would have to continue to train those that's been there for years before we even got there.

Another thing that stood out at that time that Medical Technology, as far as females was concerned, was a position for white women whose husbands were in medical school. They would understand the process better. That was one of the problems that you had to face, that this is a position for white females whose husbands are in medical school or white males who are thinking about becoming doctors. Prior to medical

technology doing all the lab work, your doctors did it. Medical doctors, your interns, your residents worked in the laboratory. Dental students worked in the laboratory. Like when I did my internship, that's all I saw. When I got to the hospital and realized they were the ones who had to perform the test before the discipline matured. We were treated pretty well. We were put on that midnight shift and the evening shift so no one would see us. When the majority white patients came into the hospital to have lab work or if they had to see a nurse, they saw white.

ST: Did you work the night shift for how many years?

MM: I worked the nightshift for so long. I was on nightshift almost twelve years. Little by little, during that twelve year cycle, they started putting more and more blacks on dayshift. The thing they told me when I went to work there was that you know the people that work evening and midnight shift, they have to work all the holidays. All the holidays? I'm coming out of college, all the holidays? I don't get any time off. Their philosophy lasted until the union matured enough that you just can't make these people work all the holidays. In some cases that meant that if on the holidays you'd have no patients coming into clinic, I might have to come in and work midnight and not get off until four o'clock the next day. I worked the dayshift because the whites stay at home enjoying Christmas or Thanksgiving or Fourth of July and you work. We might end up doing two shifts. Things changed through the union efforts. They got it to the point, first of all more of us was able to work dayshift then.

Little by little, the challenge through, not only union now, but EEOC. You had the equal opportunity act that required them when they started posting managerial positions that you open the doors up for blacks to apply for those positions, too. We had

a lot of EEOC complaints. One of my major ones, because at one point in time I was a union steward and the union representative to sit on the EEO committee. During that time we realized that the hospital was paying black nurses a different salary than they were paying white nurses.

ST: About what year would that have been?

MM: That was like the late '70s, the early '80s. Then what ended up happening, we started looking more and more at the EEO records that the hospital was sending into Washington. The question that I had to ask on those records then was it had down there that we had blacks in administration and nursing service. I started going around asking the nurses. Can you identify the black nurse that is also an administrator? Nobody could find them. I think that was one of the major turnovers in the VA Hospital. Through the EEOC and union efforts they had to eventually start promoting black nurses to administrative roles. Originally started by making them supervisors, naturally on the nightshift. It eventually got to dayshift. Whereas the head nurse or chief of nursing service might have been white or some other minority other than black, they would have a black assistant and numerous black nurses that would fall under. Then the next phase that we had to fight was that most of the black administrators were females. Then we had to fight to get males, the male nurses. Because a lot of our nurses, male, were nurses in the military.

ST: Was there some reason that you think management was more inclined to hire black women than black men?

MM: They had to hire most of the black men because they were military. Then surprisingly enough, many of our black female nurses were military. I think it's always a

safety net to say it's better to put a black female in that position because if I'm a white male or white female I feel less threatened if I've got a black female in that administrative position. She stands less of a chance to challenge me if I say something that's not quite right, that female might take it and say, "I can deal with it." Whereas that black male might say, "No, that's not right" and challenge. I think it just was a safety net.

ST: Did you join the union right away when you first started working there?

MM: I joined the union maybe a year or so after I started working. The reason why I joined the union is one of the young men that worked in the nursing service, any time he would come in the lab he would say, "Well, Mary I just see you working all the time. Are you ever off?" I kept telling him they told me, working the shift that I'm working, I've got to work the holidays. I've got to work overtime. When in reality what was happening with me was different than what was happening to some of the blacks in the laboratory.

To go back to the educational process, when the federal government asked for recruits to come and integrate the School of Medical Technology there was six of us from different schools. Two of us came from Tuskegee. A couple came from, at that point in time, Alabama A&M didn't have a program. They would, the junior year, their students went to Long Island University. Then they would do their internship there. After they finished their senior year, they recruited some of them to come and be in their program. Out of the six that was in the program, one young lady, Angela Finley, had started at UAB, one of the first blacks that started UAB in medical technology. They felt pretty comfortable with Angela. But then you got five blacks that was not a part of UAB to

come in. The philosophy was that if I went to a predominantly black university I should not be able to compete with whites. In many cases they harassed you to death. From the point, when I saw the other four disappear, and I'm saying, "Why did they drop out of the curriculum?" When my day came, I would be called to the administrator's office and they would make statements like, "You know black women are made to have babies and not to be in a curriculum like this. This is too difficult for you." The quarter that I was supposed to take chemistry, they would call me in everyday.

ST: These were administrators of the Medical Technology Program?

MM: Right. They had a way of not ever being able to say Negro. It always came out "Niggras" are not mentally able to do well in science courses. You getting ready to take you chemistry: "You won't do well because you just don't have the mental capacity." My thought process was this: I attended Tuskegee Institute. My chemistry instructor was one of the top chemists from Germany. If I could pass Dr. Gierach's course, there was nothing at the UAB that even came close to her. She was one of the top scientists there that came here on a fellowship. When I took Parasitology, it was one of the top doctors in that field that came from Mayo Clinic. Now, you going to tell me little old UAB that's got a School of Medical Technology over the Dew Drop Café where we listen to country music everyday, smell all the greasy food, going to tell me I can't pass your chemistry courses. You're Parasitology, your biology. I told them that--I had to explain to them. They thought I was crazy. I said, "Look, I'm far superior than anybody that you'll ever have come through here." I said, "As a ninth grader leaving eighth grade going to ninth grade, do you not know that I was on college campuses then?" During the segregated eras they had programs where if you excelled in science or math, during the

summer months you could spend it on college campuses throughout this country, doing additional study in science. In some cases, if you did well in English, they had programs for that. I'm saying, "Look here. You're just getting off the ground and I've had taken the courses through the few quarters I've been in and now you want to say that mentally I'm not able to do this when everything you presented to me was on a high school level compared to what I had at Tuskegee." They would do things like that. Then what they would do is if I made an A or a B on a test they would tear it up in front of the class. Then all the white students would laugh. The instructor would come by and say we can't let this slip by that a Negro was able to do better on the same level as whites. You had to endure that type of mental thing and take your mind to a different level to accept it and say, "I'm not going to allow you to tear me down."

When I got to the VA Hospital after I--. They couldn't stop me from making it through the course and doing my internship. They blackballed me. UAB blackballed me to every hospital in Birmingham and probably in the state of Alabama. Whenever I went to get a job, when I got close to graduation, and started putting in my application, people would say I don't care what you are qualified to do, we've already gotten your name and we're not going to give you an application. No hospital would give me an application. My second thing to do was to call Washington and call Central Office. You all recruited me. You asked me to come to this school along with other students to help integrate it. Now you all got to do something. Technically they hired me from Washington, DC.

ST: What was the agency you were dealing with in Washington?

MM: The Department of Veterans Affairs. They govern the VA Hospitals. They were the ones that were educationally seeking more students in Medical Technology that was black.

ST: They had also recruited you to do the program in the first place?

MM: They were the ones. I called and said, "Look here I can't get a job here. I've done what you asked me to do. I've been successful. Now, where do I get a job?" They technically hired me from Washington. All I had to do was report to this VA. You have to understand that the VA Hospital and university just like this. They did everything in their power to discredit me. Even to the point that they falsif--. Only vacation that I had, when I first started working, they would not even let me take vacation. After about two years or so I managed to get vacation time off. Went on vacation, came back. I was hit with a charge of turning out a patient's result that was false. I'm saying, "How did I do that?" The people that did it didn't know that I didn't show up for work that night because I had already signed up that I would not come on midnight shift. I'll start my vacation because we had enough people to cover. When I got back they were saying, "Well, you know you misdiagnosed a patient. You wrote down his lab work in hematology which showed that the patient had Leukemia because you misidentified the cells." I said, "I misidentified the cell. I don't think so." I had to go through that process. Finally showed out I was not at work that night. You need to find out who it was that did that. It was one of the white supervisors. I had that to happen all the way up to maybe a few years before I retired. Even to the point when Bush daddy was president I had to write him everyday on the things that was happening to me from being expelled from the laboratory.

ST: You wrote letters to the White House?

MM: I wrote letters to the White House everyday for his whole four year cycle to tell him they put me out of the hospital because they said that I was a negative influence on the other techs because of the things I said and did. They wanted to speak up. They didn't want that to happen but they couldn't come up with charges of me not doing my job. In the research wing of the hospital, that's where they set my lab up. I had to do all of the syphilis tests and things of that nature. No tech was allowed to come in there. Supervisor would bring my work load in, in the morning, and put the work load there. I would do it, put everything in the computer. In the evening they would come back with the--we were going through the transition of actually still having the paper copies going to the floor plus computer copies. I stayed in that situation for about two years. Then when Bush father left the White House someone called the VA Hospital to ask--and I was writing Senator Heflin. Senator Heflin was the senator from Alabama. I wrote both of them. At that time something broke about the mistreatment of federal employees. *60 Minutes* was interested in doing a story. Somehow or another, in order to cover their butt, they say, "Well we've had someone that's been keeping on top of this." They showed them the letters that I had written. People started calling my--my bosses started getting upset, "Why would the White House call us like this to find out what's happening to you? We had to tell them you're one of our best employees and stuff." I told them I've been writing them everyday telling them of the things that you all would do to me. I mean to put me in an area completely by myself. Then when they brought me back into the laboratory they told my coworkers, "If you speak to her more than two seconds you'll be written up for insubordination." My coworkers' friends were afraid to

say anything to me. Like I said, I guess I came through, because of the Civil Rights era, was able to deal with that level of pressure. Maybe three or four years before I retired I had to deal with this the whole time just because I was one of the first blacks to integrate that school of Medical Technology. For the majority of thirty years at the VA Hospital I had to endure situations that other employees didn't have to do.

One of their last great efforts to discredit me was I came to work one morning and this supervisor say, "Here's a unit of blood that they need in intensive care unit. All you need to do when the nurse comes down is just give it to her. You don't have to check the paper work. You don't have to do anything." Common sense and the discipline in the profession says, "Don't do that." When I pulled the paperwork out, pulled the patient's card, two different types of blood. Now that supervisor knew that unit was the wrong type of blood. They would rather sacrifice that patient getting that blood in order to discredit me. What ended up happening, nurse came to pick up the blood. I said, "Give me a few minutes. I detected an error. Let me double check the unit. Then I'll bring it to the floor." I took that unit, put it in my locker. I cross-matched the correct unit, took it to the floor. Nobody double checked to see what had happened. About three o'clock that day they said, "We're going to have to put you on leave without pay." I said, "Why?" "Because you gave a patient a unit of blood that was the wrong type." I said, "No, I didn't." "Yes you did and here's the record where the patient had a reaction." They had already done the paperwork to say that the patient had done had a reaction. I said, "Well, no that's not true. But whatever. I'm just asking you to go ahead and have my hearing as soon as possible," which they did within the same week. I went to my locker. I got the unit of blood. I said, "Here's the unit of blood." The signature is the midnight shift

supervisor. That patient never got this unit of blood, never got it. I said, "It was a set up." I mean, the director and everybody just went haywire. I said, "Well, all of you have been a part of this." It's just that my history told me don't--and especially with this particular supervisor. She and I was in the same Med Tech class.

ST: Back in the late '60s huh?

MM: '70s. I went to Med Tech school in '70-'71 at UAB. She was in that class. Racist. Would never sit next to a black person, even if it meant she had to sit outside the door. She wasn't going to sit next to the blacks. Some of the whites in our class used to make jokes. What they would do is everybody would take up all the seats and leave one seat where she would have to sit next to a black person. She was just--. Everybody would just fall. Over time, like I said, most cases we got along, the students did. The problems came from the instructors and the administration.

That was their last ditch effort to try to discredit me as far as my ability to work in the lab. Then at some point in time, little by little, they saw that all of the directions for every department, be it blood banking, chemistry, hematology, microbiology, parasitology, whatever. I had rewritten the directions and procedures for all of our test procedures. When they looked in there to try--they said, "Why did she do that?" When I would be on midnight shift I was tinkering with the procedures. When I got to dayshift, I learned to call the different laboratories, research labs, "What have you done that is different to make this test better?" In the process of me going to my supervisor they really didn't pay me that much attention. I would say, "Look here. I'm contacting so and so lab. They think they have a new procedure." "Well, you go on ahead and work it." That meant that that kept me occupied and I didn't have the opportunity to have an

impact on the other technologists. After that, I spent my last few years at the VA just basically union. It had gotten to the point then I was the executive vice president of the union, worked my way up through the ranks, spent more time just handling the union cases.

ST: Getting back to your union activity just a little bit. When you first got involved with it who were the lead organizers? Who recruited you?

MM: The man's name was--his last name was Parker. He was one of the people on nursing service. He was the one that told me they are mistreating you in this laboratory. You need to go and talk to your union official. At that time the union president was ill. The vice president, at that time, was a black guy that worked in dietetic. His last name was Tucker. He was the one--. Even when I went to him, even though we were unionized '72, '73, his bosses--. At that time the bosses still kind of had a hold on our union people. A lot of the meaningful cases that they should have been addressing, the bosses would make it so hard on them that they couldn't get the official time. Even though I had made my complaint you have a window there of opportunity. Once Parker said, "Well, you need to make your complaint." He had me to file a complaint to the union official as well as EEOC. That's what pulled me into EEOC because of my own personal complaint. Once I got that satisfied then I became--. The union said, "You've had more dealings with them. You were successful so we'll make you our representative to EEOC." Basically, I had to--because the union president's supervisor limited his time that he could talk to me. I ended up having to learn union procedures on my own to fight my own situation.

ST: Were the union leaders white or black?

MM: At that time they were about fifty fifty. In fact, it might have been more white than black mainly because the hospital was mostly white at that time. You only had a few blacks there that was brave enough--. We were already being discriminated against, the handful that was there, by having to work the late shifts all the time. One set of rules were for whites. One set of rules were for blacks. The majority of the people that spearheaded it was white.

In fact, one of our most dedicated union workers lost his job, basically because he had won several major union complaints and was just set up by management. In fact, they promoted one of our most dedicated union stewards to be over our laboratory. They did that because they figure Linda knew the union rules and regulation. She knew where the weak points were. She learned those weak points from this guy who was her best friend, one of our union officials. They figured if they could break his back it would break the union. When they fired him on drummed up charges she called him to her office on day because a mediator--he was supposed to have an arbitration case. The arbitrator supposedly called her office to find him. When he couldn't find him he was going to return the call to her office. He went to the office, was standing in the door when I saw him on the phone. By the time I got back, went on my break came back ten minutes later; they said he attacked the supervisor. I said, "Well that's not true. He talked on that telephone in the doorway." That was one of the weakness of the union was that. Anytime a manager say that you attack them they would believe the manager over you. As far as that manager was concerned she was still our chief tech when I retired. I never went into an office with her, never. She used to would stand and cry in front of the laboratory. "Mary doesn't trust me. She refused to go and talk to me in my office." I

wouldn't do it. I've seen what you've done to your best friend. If you want to speak to me you are going to have to speak to me in the middle of the laboratory, I mean the dead center of the laboratory, so people could see you from every department. Every department was just separated by a glass wall. It would help at night that you could see what--. The one or two of you that were in the laboratory could see each other.

ST: Were race relations pretty--? How would you characterize race relations?

MM: Race relations, when I retired--.

ST: I was thinking actually, first of all, within the union in its early days.

MM: Within the union in the early days race relations were fairly okay. You had a few whites that felt that the union was for whites only. To give you an example we had an asbestos case that went on for several years. One of the union officials that signed on to that asbestos case was white, extremely racist. When the government finally settled the case he was the one that they called in to negotiate the settlement for VA employees. He went in and got a settlement only for white males that worked in engineering. The government, being the way that they were, they knew that that wasn't right. They accepted that as the settlement for our asbestos case. They knew that a handful of white men working in the engineering department were not the only ones that had been exposed to asbestos. They took that and closed that case out. When I left we were still trying to reopen that case.

For the most part, most of them--. I tell you this. One reason we had many whites that accepted blacks real well was that a lot of those white men especially were people from up North. Met their wives either in the military or while they were on duty at one of the military bases in the South and married and moved south. Even with the

white females, many of them were whites that were not from the South. They were the ones who were more union minded. Alabama's a right-to-work state. They fight tooth and nails to keep union activity down in this state. Those people came in and as they migrated south they were the ones that were some of the spearhead--. Richard Jefferson was the young man that they fired because of his union activity. He was one of first people, came from Pennsylvania or somewhere up north. He came from a union city where they had plants and things. His parents were union members. When Richard came, whichever place he came from up north, he was just union oriented. He was one of the people that spearheaded the VA getting a union.

ST: I'm curious, when you were involved with the union in the early '70s, did you see this as an extension as your civil rights activism or by that time did you think the Civil Rights Movement was over?

MM: The Civil Rights Movement will never be over. I always told them, because I was a child of the '60s, that my union involvement was because of injustice, didn't matter who it was being done to. The Movement had taught us that any injustice, if it's happening to you, if I don't speak up about it, eventually it's going to come to me. You got to realize even in the workplace you had racial issues. You had issues with females because many of the managers were male. There were women-oriented issues also that you had to fight. The union to me was just one of the categories that came under the Civil Rights Movement. Even though the union is what helped motivate the Civil Rights Movement when you look at A. Philip Randolph in his battle with the porters on the railroad train, the trains, and things of that nature. That was a part of the Movement together.

Even now, as an elected official, I try to explain to people that rather than being a politician I'm a community activist that's really fighting for people to have the best quality of life they can. Even though my concentration, most times, is centered around blacks, because I see the hands of the clock being turned back and many of our black elected officials have just painted themselves in this closed room where they can't see it. They just say, "Well, oh it's because of this. It's because of that." They've adopted some of the theories that were put out during Jim Crow era.

ST: What theories are referring to?

MM: I'm referring to the fact that, "Most blacks are lazy." When you look at this country, prior to the depression who did all the work? I say that's black and white. When they want to bring it out and tell the truth about what was happening in this country, who was working? Then after the depression the scope of this country changed where more whites had to be put into the work force. You went through hundreds of years of slavery where they just sat on their front porch, under the veranda or some place while we did the hard work. A lot of people have bought into the only reason that black person hasn't achieved is because they don't want to achieve.

Nobody, even when I was a school board member, it was hard to get the superintendent and other school board members to understand. For instance, I went to a school one day. Young lady came to school late. Automatically the assistant principal sent her home. I said, "Why are you sending her home? You haven't even learned why she was late." It turned out with that young lady her sister was pregnant, went into labor that night, the night before. Parents refused to go to the hospital with her. So she went. Her sister delivered by four or five that morning. She stayed there until everything was

okay, got a cab, went home, took a bath, changed clothes, came to school. Now you going to punish her? She did have the will to come to school.

ST: Right.

MM: But you are going to send her back home for some unspecified number of days and say, "Oh she's just being lazy and shiftless. She don't want an education." Never checked out the story. You hear this story now many times, they'll say, "The reason we got Mexicans coming in is because they are doing the jobs that blacks don't want." Tell me the job that a black person don't want. We got black men riding around here with lawn mowers in the back of they car so they can mow somebody's lawn. We got them around here with ladders strapped to car to find somebody who want them to paint their house. So tell me the jobs they don't want. The only job that I see that nobody would want is that if you take me into a job--and I've seen this happen in Birmingham--where they'll tell a black person I can only--. I know minimum wage is five dollars and whatever but I can only pay you four dollars. I can get some Mexicans that'll do it for three dollars. It's like they had a guy on TV yesterday evening. He said I'm working a job trying to make do, earning five dollars an hour. The apartment that me and my family live in is $400 a month. I got to have transportation to get to that job. I don't even earn enough money in a day to buy the gas to go in my car, to go to the job, so how do you expect me to be able to pay high utilities, high gas for my car, high gas to cook and heat in my house, and then pay the rent or the house note, then buy food. We bending to that "Oh they don't want to work." No, if it's going to take me more money to get to the job and at the end of the day I don't have any money to take care of my family, that's the only job people don't want.

ST: You were saying you've been a little disillusioned by some black officials promoting these theories?

MM: Some of them have bought into that concept. I take it to be in some cases they are out of touch with their communities. What happens when you become an elected official? Same thing that happened to me when I went to the VA Hospital and the first white person came up to me and say, "You different from the rest of them." How am I different? You get into a whole new world being elected official. You see everything different. You have the opportunity to go to places maybe some of us have never been before and exposed to different thing. Then somewhere along the line somebody convince you that maybe you need to move. If you living in and inner city community like I do, "Well, maybe you need to move to the edge of your district where the community is better." It's a controlled community because the streets are a certain way. Everybody is of a certain classification or professionalism. Pretty soon you don't go to that part of the district where you've been.

Many elected officials, black and white--I have to put accountability more on blacks for the struggle that we've gone through and the Civil Rights Movement is what made it possible for us to get where we are--you realize that those of us as children in the streets fighting were children of poor people. Therefore we sacrifice so that someone whose child had a greater chance of getting a college degree or a better job, their children took the advantage of our struggle. Many people don't even know we exist. They've completely forgotten about what happened to the children that was in the Movement. If your parent won this or your--. For instance, one of my best friends, her brother was one of Dr. King's first hired staffers. I have to tell her a lot of times, "The reason your picture

is in the Civil Rights Institute here is because your brother was Dr. King's first hired staffer. He left Birmingham with Dr. King."

ST: Who was that?

MM: His name is Reverend James Orange. He's still big with SCLC. Go to Altanta, do you know Reverend James? Yeah, I know Reverend James Orange because of his relationship with Dr. King. I have to tell her all the time, "That's why your picture--" What happened to your classmates whose brother was not a part of the movement? Whose parents were not a part of the Movement? Nobody knew about us. We are just here. Most of us, many of those children never were able to take advantage of the freedoms that they were able to get and the changes that they were able to make in this country. Many of them were never able to take advantage of it.

ST: What would have made it possible for more people to take advantage of the victories of the Civil Rights Movement?

MM: What actually happened was, I guess, the white establishment realized that we are going to have to make some concessions to blacks. They established a comfort zone. To give you an example of that, I read this book once called or dealt with Clarksdale, Mississippi. That's where Epsy was from that was over agriculture for Clinton. The book starts with the depression and it comes all the way up. It talks about conversations that was held with the white establishment. They said, "You know we've got to make some concessions to the black community. In order for us to do it we just can't let any black take these positions that'll come open because it could be a threat to us." What normally they did was looked out in the black community to see which black person out there is more comfortable to us. We'll open the doors for that person. We'll

let that person ride the course as long as they can. We got to indoctrinate that person that those other blacks out there are going to challenge you. They are going to be jealous of your position. You got to keep an eye on them for us. What they did--. I could look in the city of Birmingham and like I tell people, I'm not the norm as being elected official because for someone to be elected, educated, from the north side of town is unheard of. Even our first black representative from that area now, Jerome Tucker went to the University of Alabama. He's not considered to be the norm. They selected him. That was the first representative. Then the second one to come out, Mr. Spratt, worked in a pipe shop all his days, retired, and managed to make it active with the Jefferson County Citizens Coalition. That was one of the largest and most active political organizations in this state, above some of the older political organizations, when Dr. Arrington was its president and founder.

For a person like me, first of all I grew up in North Birmingham, participated in the Movement, you can count the elected officials, even now, that participated in the Movement and came out of the area of their particular cities or counties that was mostly black. A lot of our elected officials came from what was termed the elitist black communities. They were the ones that were more or less hand picked or singled out. "That's a good person right there. We don't feel so threatened with that person because being an elected official they'll know their place is to sit, be quiet, nod their head. When we tell you to show up you show up."

ST: Did you foresee that some of these patterns would develop that you're describing, even in the late '70s or were you hopeful at the time, say, when Arrington was elected as mayor that things would really change?

MM: I was a child of the '60s in all respects. Many of us that went to those Movement meetings, many of us that sacrifice and went to march in those parks and to demonstrate and even to do whatever we had to do for the movement, many of us believe that if we could turn this country around and allow blacks to be in key positions, elected officials appointed to different boards and agencies, because of our existence in this country, we could show everybody that we could do a better job, that we know how to treat people fairly. That's what we fought for. We knew to give a person credit if that credit is due. We could treat you equally. We would be the spokespersons for people receiving the best quality of life and the quantity of life, to deal with the health care, the education, all of those things that we were denied. I always remember my granddaddy talking about they were sharecropping and when his mother got sick the only thing the whites said was, "You know we love Sally but we can get us another Negro maid." That was it. I was sure as a child that if the doors open up where I can have the opportunity to get an education, have an opportunity to come back to my community and could see blacks as mayors. Then we had the commission form of government in Birmingham but we changed to the Mayor Council form. When I see blacks serving on that council or blacks even in the mayor's position, that was unheard of until Dr. Arrington came up out of the ashes. Then, as far as in a city like Birmingham, I always thought we would do better, that when the world looked at the United States and the accomplishments of blacks in this country they would say this is the country that we need to emulate. I feel now that one of the reasons that we are not respected around the world is because the world sees us as better than we see ourselves. There was no way that you could made me believe that I would see a black mayor that is really not for black growth like we have

now in the city of Birmingham. The city's dying and our mayor can't even see it. It's dying. The population is steadily dropping off. Never could you have told me that if I saw a black that was head of personnel and I walked in to put in an application that that person would discriminate against me more than somebody that was white, wouldn't even allow me to put in that application. Never would I have believe that if you had a black earning X number of dollars that all of sudden they felt as though other blacks were beneath them.

When I grew up, the doctors lived in my neighborhood, if there was a black doctor, a black lawyer. And all of us was poor. His house might have looked a little better but we all were together in whatever we were experiencing then. There's no way you could have told me that our mindset would be the way it is right now. I could not believe. I would never have believed that we'd have black children that are so disrespectful that their parents can't manage them. I would never have believed that in the black community that education was not a priority because that's what I grew up with. Education is the way for blacks to get out of the situation that we're in even though laws might be changed to open the doors. The only way you are going to be able to step through that door is you have to be the best educated to go through it. You have to be the best qualified. That's what we were taught. Our grandparents taught us that. Our parents taught us that. That you have always got to present yourself in a fashion, that by the way you carry yourself.

When I was young and they had the little civic clubs, they used to teach us how to walk, young ladies how to walk, young ladies how to dress. We had to put the book on our head. They would have oratorical contests to teach you how to teach before a crowd.

That happened in our little communities, even though during the Civil Rights era, our commissioner, Bull Connor, shut those centers down so that we wouldn't have a place to congregate. We wouldn't have a place that we could advance ourselves. I would not have thought it. Even in this day and time, it's hard for me to grasp it. I guess that's why in most cases, the average elected official in this state, in this city, if you mention my name, she's a renegade because I believe what we fought for in the '60s can still happen. It's just that so many things have taken up--. The level of hopelessness that we had then don't even compare to this. Now, we are on a different level because--coupled with that hopelessness because of racial situation--the hopelessness now is that I've got to fight somebody that looks like me.

I just talked to Charles Steele, president of SCLC, last week and I was telling about an incident that I had in Atlanta with Delta. It was a black man. I told him, "President Steele, whether you want to face it now and whether the black community want to face it, we're dealing with internal racism that I equate to the same problems that they are having in countries like Africa where one tribe want to cleanse it and kill off other blacks or in Afghanistan or any other country where you got one group of people that say, 'We are the pure and you are not. Therefore we need to do some racial cleansing.'" I equate what we are going through in America as a race that's basically what we are going through. I believe the white establishment loves it because that puts them back in their comfort zone. They got internal strife among us. When they killed Dr. King the whole focal point was he's a spiritual leader. What they made the black community believe, you don't need anybody to lead you.

ST: Do you see class divisions as more significant now than racial ones?

MM: I think they are hand in hand and they have equal footing because of blacks wanting to be accepted in what's called a white man's world. They have developed more class division because of that. It's nurtured everyday by the media, the *Birmingham News*, all of our TV stations they show it. They are quick to say if you--they'll say, "A murder in North Birmingham." Well, North Birmingham is anything from downtown Birmingham going north, going northeast, northwest. That's a lot of territory. Where exactly did it happen? Then it gets blacks to say, "Well, I earn a certain income and my white friends accept me. I don't want to be a part of that so what I'll do is move to an area that's predominantly white. I'll be safe from those violent Negroes." I think they are hand in hand. One won't be solved until the other one is solved.

ST: What do you see is the most promising arena for solving these problems, electoral politics, the Labor Movement?

MM: I think it's going to have to start with education first. Education first because we're going to have to do it there. We are going to have to redefine families and once we can go through an educational reform or revolution then I think we've got to go through some type of revolution as far as what is a family.

ST: What do you mean by redefine families?

MM: Families, from the perspective now, parents will go to work and they strive to mimic acceptance. I've got to earn enough money so I can live in a certain neighborhood, have X number of cars, live a certain lifestyle and in the process of doing that, even those working families don't have time to spend with their children. They've been blinded by the media that say the only children that are not disciplined are those children coming from public housing or single family homes, when a single family home

could be a grandmother raising a grandchild. It could be an aunt raising a niece or a nephew. It could be a father raising his children. That's the card that they were dealt. I think we have to redefine families and stop saying it's wrong to be from a single parent household. I'm a single parent. My son is not a discipline problem. He finished college, working on his masters, wife, baby. He's still plays with his friends or hang out with them, no different.

Let me get some water.

ST: Sure. [brief break in the interview]

ST: You were saying that you're a single parent.

MM: Yeah, I'm a single parent. It's just that when I decided to be a single parent I raised my child. I made sure that he was actively involved in school, did his work. And he was disciplined. I think when the media comes back and society defines--. [Interruption] Let's see if I got a Kleenex--

ST: Sure.

MM: Now we can start again. I forgot what I was saying.

ST: Talking about single parents.

MM: I think when society came up and they started saying the only children that are doing so and so and so and so, single parent household. Then single parent household was defined black female. It didn't encompass no other race of people. Everything negative happened in our society is because of all of these black females are out here having these babies and they not disciplining them which was not the truth. I think from that perspective we've got to go back and redefine families and try to help families. I've come across grandparents and whatever happened and they had to raise their

grandchildren. Many cases, they had lost some of their parenting skills. At one point in time, when I was on the Birmingham Board of Education, we had a program for that that could help grandparents, young parents, whomever to regain and learn parenting skills. I think that we just have to--.

Once we can get the family unit back together then I think it was corporate America that had done an awful lot to destroy our family values from this perspective. When they tell a family member we are relocating. You got to move with us. If it's a two parent household, they both might not be able to move. Or you could stay here in this community for a while then we'll move you to another community. You didn't get the opportunity to acclimate to where you were to feel that you had ownership or stability. I think corporate America destabilized family values in the process of people trying to earn a living, to provide quality of life things to their family. I think we have to go through education system in the processes of us saying it's not kosher for white children to be in a classroom with black children. Then what we fall for, as far as school desegregation, was that every school system should be equal. I question now, you have public schools--. When I was in school I wasn't required to take all these standardized tests to find out where I am. Now, children feel combative in the school system because you are constantly being tested to prove who you are. I don't think that's necessary when at the same time and as a state legislator, I continue to ask the question, why are public school children tested to death? Children in private school we don't even know what kind of test they take, if any. Homeschoolers aren't tested at all. Yet, tell me the university denied that private school child or denied the homeschool. But you'll deny admittance to somebody from public school because most of the public schools are

occupied by black children, especially in the South. I don't know necessarily how the make up is in other states but here you'll be hard pressed going through, except for one or two of our schools in the city of Birmingham, to find a white child, very hard pressed. On the south side you got Ramsey High School and a couple of elementary schools, yeah. Leave there. Go east, go west, go north. The education system has got to be corrected.

I think ultimately if the message given from elected officials is different. If you could see us more unified and standing up that everybody deserves that same opportunity regardless of where they are. We fight, the years that I've been in the legislature, on just funding public schools. On one side we got Republicans and one of the most outspoken ones was this Judge Ron Moore that did the Ten Commandments. I had to fight him tooth and nails on the house floor for making a statement that black children don't deserve education. Here you are, people hallelujahing your name because of the Ten Commandments, yet you're sitting here saying one race of children don't deserve public school education. I think the message has got to change from Congress. I tell people all the time we really going to have to make Congress more accountable because you got to realize Washington DC is in the South. It's below what was called the Mason and Dixie line. You got to understand that the reason many of the Jim Crow laws existed was because of Congress. Subconsciously they still nurture that concept because instead of renewing the '65 voting rights act why didn't they say that this is something that's a part of our Constitution forever. That outcry has never come up. That filters down to your state legislatures, same thing. We might be present but I see everyday when we in session if issues that's going to help blacks and poor whites, our Republican counterparts plus what I call a Republicrats, those Democrats that want to be Republican but their

district is still a Democratic so they still run for office as a Democrat. They'll kill it. They will kill it everyday. I asked one, one day why is it your party claims to have a monopoly on Christianity, yet when bills are presented that are going to help working class people regardless of their color in this state, you will fight hard to kill it. That man told me, "Our Christianity exists outside of the walls of the state house. When we come in here it don't have nothing to do with god." I said, "I sure wish I had a recorder so I could tape this and take it to the radio station." I think it's going to be full pronged attack, the home, the church, education process. Above all people who are elected to positions have got to change the message that they are sending out. The public needs to demand that.

ST: Do you think the Labor Movement's always going to have a role to play in this election?

MM: Always. Because it's going to be the--. I think we are most integrated or unified in the Labor Movement.

ST: I realize we are getting close on time here. We probably should wrap up. How do you anticipate that people are going to remember this period in history, that is the post-'60s generation that we've been talking about?

MM: I think they are going to remember it as a state of confusion. There's no hard line message or thing. They'll remember the Jim Crow era. They'll remember the Civil Rights Movement era as they want to term it. Then once it gets to this phase, I think they'll remember that it's a time of confusion and fear. That's what this is marked by. There's no clear message coming from anybody. Everybody's afraid.

It's like I went to the Democratic leadership conversation in Denver. People were just beating around the bush on what it--the cultural aspect and role of culture in the Democratic Party. They said everything. I just stood up and said, "Look here, we got to understand. In this country they use two phrases. You're liberal or you're conservative. Be honest. Liberal means a white person that is too close to a black person. That is the buzz word." I said, "Because if it meant anything else a white person wouldn't be so fearful. If it meant that you did not go to church, well you made that decision you wouldn't be so fearful." Historically in this country, the greatest damage or penalty that any person of the white community has had to play is that they were penalized more when it dealt with people from the Middle East or if it dealt with people of Chinese descent or blacks. When those different groups were not accepted they experienced more fear by joining up with those different groups. That's what I told them. At the end of the meeting this lady came from Minnesota and said, "I'm glad you made that statement because it hit me right at home. I want to get out there and be vocal about issues whether it's dealing with the black community, Hispanic community." (I told her I got problems with them coming over illegally. The president did that on purpose to cause the confusion.) She said, "I'm afraid to speak up." She said, "You telling the truth because when they say liberal to me and I look at what I've done. The only thing that I've done that some other white hadn't done is I might have more black association. I might be speaking up more for the injustice that's being done to them." I had blacks and whites and people of Indian descent from India. One young man whose family were oriental and Asian descent, they came to me throughout the thing and they said, "We're glad you said that because it's the truth and none of us want to face it."

I think that they are going to remember this era as one where this country focused more of fear and more on confusion. I think that is by design. The people who designed it are the people who are in Washington and the people in these major corporations designed that level of fear because while we're doing that we can't focus on what they are doing. Over charging us on gas, we know it's hurting us but I can't think about it everyday. I can't think about the fact that my school system is going down because they got me worried about whether I can take a soda on a airplane or not. I think that's what's going to come out. It's like the McCartney era, during the '50s. People don't talk about much else. When they talk about, fear. That's all they talk about. I think that's what we are going to be remembered for also.

ST: I hate to end on a pessimistic note but is there anything that you wanted to talk about that I haven't brought up?

MM: I think we've covered the basic information real well.

ST: Thanks so much for being generous with your time.

MM: I appreciate just the opportunity for somebody to hear it. That's been one complaint of mine is that there is so much history for this country that needs to be uncovered so that for generations in the future somebody can look back and say, "Oh, this might fit this puzzle. It's probably one of the missing links." I think if we deal with the whole history of this country and our ups, our downs, our weaks, and our strengths, we can start correcting, if we have the will, that imperfection that is bringing this country down.

ST: Thanks again.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Karen Meier, October, 2006