

TRANSCRIPT: SAMUEL B. HOLLIS

Interviewee: Samuel B. Hollis
Interviewer: Elizabeth Gritter
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Transcriptionist's Note: When the time is noted in brackets it indicates an inaudible passage and [sp?] indicates if the spelling is unclear.

START OF INTERVIEW

Elizabeth Gritter: This is Elizabeth Gritter interviewing Samuel B. Hollis at his home in Memphis, Tennessee, on June 14, 2004.

[Some noise and incidental conversation while recorder is set up] All right, I was wondering first of all how you came to be Mayor Orgill's executive assistant.

Samuel Hollis: My family was in the retail appliance business, and I had just come out of the Korean War in 1955 and got married in '57, and we decided to--. We owned the property where we were and my father was retirement age, and I decided I'd stay in the family business, so I was unemployed because we had leased the property and done something else. I had known his daughter, Catherine--she and I are the same age--all our lives, I guess. She was at Randolph Macon when I was at Washington and Lee, and through her I knew Edmund. I'd just read in the paper his assistant had resigned. I had been involved in campus politics at Washington and Lee. I was president of the

student body and was sort of interested in politics, so I went down and applied for a job and he hired me right on the spot. We were married with no children and I had time, you know, we were young and didn't need much money, had one car, and I think the job paid four hundred dollars a month in those days. I didn't know where it was going to lead, but I admired Edmund Orgill. I admired him a lot, so it was a great experience to go to work for him.

EG: What did you admire about him?

SH: Well, he was a businessman who stuck his neck way out in politics, which you have to--. In fact one of the books I've got here that I thought you might be interested in borrowing for your research, you've probably heard this before, but Boss Crump ran this city for years and years and years until he died. He died in '58, as a matter of fact. [Crump actually died in 1954.] So for about forty or fifty years E.H. Crump was a political boss and ran the city. And there was a small group of local people that decided to buck the machine and in those days that was very courageous because the machine went to every precinct and every business. He was in the insurance business and my father for instance, his closest friend was in the insurance business but Dad always put a little bit of insurance at E.H. Crump and Company, and that's just how it worked. His tentacles were--. You didn't get elected to any office, no matter how minor, without Mr. Crump's approval, everything from the tax assessor to the--. In those days we had a commission form of government, had a mayor and four commissioners. People that worked in the wards as poll watchers were all tapped by Mr. Crump. It was a very, very effective, powerful political machine. In fact it influenced the whole state. You didn't run for a state office, governor or senate, without Mr. Crump's approval.

A small group: Edmund Orgill; Ed Meeman, who was then editor of the *Press-Scimitar*, the afternoon newspaper, which no longer exists; and Lucius Burch, a very prominent attorney; a guy by the name of Bill Barr; a woman by the name of Frances Coe; I've drawn a blank on some of these others. A very small group of people, and what got them together--. I think the common thread that pulled them together was *Union Now*. There was a fellow whose name--I'll come up with his name in a minute--who advocated after World War II, had been advocating, the Atlantic Union, and he wrote a book. Gosh, what was his name? I'll think of it in a minute. *Union Now* was the big cry. Estes Kefauver was a Senator, I guess running for the Senate, and Estes Kefauver espoused *Union Now* and that pulled this group together, and they got behind Estes Kefauver. Gordon Browning was the governor and he jumped on board, and this was all the anti-Crump machine group. It was a very courageous stand. Edmund was president of Orgill Brothers, which is a very prominent local wholesale hardware firm. It's still in existence, still going very strong, and still run by a member of the Orgill family, Joe Orgill. That would be a grand nephew of Edmund.

So this group just called themselves--I think they called themselves the Good Government League. It had some name like that. They prevailed on Edmund to run for mayor as the first non-Crump mayor in something like forty or fifty years. You asked what I admired about him: mainly that he's very smart, he'd been a successful businessman, and was one of the leaders of this group, and very courageous. He's a very religious man. He was an Episcopalian, very strong Episcopalian. So I became allied with him. At the time I had not become allied with Democrat or Republican, but he was a very--. This group was all very strong Democrat. Of course in those days in the South,

most people were Democrats. There were very, very few Republicans in the '50s in Memphis. So I went to work for him and did that for two and a half years and thoroughly enjoyed it, got to know a lot of people that I still have contact with after all these years, and represented him at meetings and helped coordinate stuff, just as a general executive assistant. In those days--. Now an administrator or executive assistant is a bigger role because government's gotten bigger, but it was not--. It was a functionary. I mean I would substitute for him at meetings and speeches and coordinate the office and that sort of thing. Then he ran for governor, and I think this button was the governor's race. That's the only thing I could find. You can have that. I found two of them.

EG: Oh, thank you.

SH: That was an interesting time. That was 1960. Let's see. I went to work there in '58. Yeah, that was in '60--'59, I guess it was. There were still remnants of the Crump machine around the city. In those days you had the chairman of the quarterly court, county court, and his name was Dave Harsh. He was a Crump man. Then you had the city commission, the mayor and four commissioners, and the commissioners were all former Crump people, the police commissioner, and the public works commissioner, and public service, and there's one other, four or five of them. So he was sort of isolated. I can remember times when he was sort of left out of stuff because these guys were all former Crump people and had known each other and worked with each other for years. Two of the commissioners had grown up in the police department together and known each other for twenty or thirty years.

So it was an interesting time because there was a real transition in power, because Mr. Crump died in '58 and left this huge vacuum because you had all these--. Most all

the city and county appointees were all appointees under Crump. The city attorney, Frank Gianotti, was a Crump person. He ended up being a very fair and good man and he ended up being a good friend of mine. But Edmund had kind of people pecking at him all the time, this whole group around him that had gone back for years. One example, the city and the county conducted a railroad study. A firm by the name of George Heft out of New Orleans was a railroad expert, and the city and the county-- I think the whole study only cost fifty thousand dollars. Each put up twenty-five thousand. When they presented the plan to the city and the county, the mayor endorsed it. If you notice, we have a railroad track running right through the heart of this residential area. I don't know if you've noticed or not. But his recommendation was to take that railroad track out at Bailey Station, which is halfway between Germantown and Collierville, and cut it through the [11:20] Bottoms over to the new Frisco Yards that had just been built in [11:26], and that would open up a huge amount of industrial land for development and use this right-of-way for a major east-west expressway, which we needed. It was a very forward thinking thing. Well the county poo pooed it, put it on the shelf, and it never got anywhere. That was just sort of the atmosphere. Things that should have happened, progressive things, got stymied because-- And Edmund himself was a very outspoken, used to business and handling things in business and not really a politician, so he kind of ruffled a lot of feathers because he was so outspoken and didn't always act like a politician ought to act. That was one example of something I thought in the last forty-five years what a great thing that would have been, to have gotten rid of that railroad track. We would have had a huge, nice right-of-way for an east-west expressway. The downtown would not have deteriorated as it did.

But this same group, I might mention, during this reform period advocated the elimination of the poll tax. You used to have to pay a poll tax to vote. They advocated joint city-county planning. We still have a city-county joint planning commission, so you plan for the whole county. The city is in the center of Shelby County. Shelby County surrounds it on all sides, so it's a very logical thing. In fact we worked real hard, some of us, on trying to consolidate city and county government. But the health department got consolidated, the planning commission got consolidated. We got voting machines in. So the group, really this small group of people, accomplished a lot, and I was on the fringe of that and got to be friends with all those people because Edmund was with them a lot and had a lot of meetings with them. It was a group that I admired very much. They again were a very progressive, very courageous group of people.

EG: Was this the Civic Research Committee?

SH: That was it.

EG: Okay.

SH: The Civic Research Committee.

EG: And then later it became the Good Government League?

SH: That's what it was. It started off--that's right. I think the first issue was voting machines, I believe.

EG: I remember seeing that in the literature, that that was one of the--.

SH: Voting machines and then the joint city-county--. The Civic Research Committee; that is right, yeah.

EG: Okay. And you said you were involved with his gubernatorial campaign?

SH: Yeah, I traveled with him and was very much involved in the governor's race. That was kind of fun and interesting for a young man to get across the state and meet a lot of people. Memphis, because of Mr. Crump, after he died, and as he began to lose power, the rest of the state was very jealous of Memphis because it was the biggest city and Mr. Crump exercised such power. So there was a lot of jealousy and hard feeling and not much interaction between Memphis and the rest of the state. And if you grew up here you knew more about Little Rock, Arkansas and Jackson, Mississippi than you did about Nashville or Knoxville or Chattanooga, although I went to school in Chattanooga. I didn't put that on there. I went to prep school at McCallie School in Chattanooga before I went to college, so I'd lived in Chattanooga and had some friends through that connection. But generally Memphis just didn't have much connection with the rest of the state, so that was fun when he ran.

He didn't lose by much. He was dubbed an integrationist. I didn't mention that about what I admired about him. He took a very strong stand in appointing the first blacks to commissions. I think the first black he appointed was to the school board--not the school board, to the hospital board. [He tried appointing J. E. Walker in 1956 but withdrew his name because of local outcry.] He had a lot of friends in the black community. There was a black Republican leader named Lt. George W. Lee that Edmund became friends with. Edmund was very progressive in his race relations, and as a result in those days feelings were beginning, because of the school desegregation in '54 and all that, there was a lot of racial tension. He had crosses burned in his front yard and he had a lot of rancor toward him because of appointing the first black to one of these city

organizations. That particular group were all progressive in that regard in terms of race relations. Ed Meeman was very progressive in terms of race relations.

EG: Did he come out in '58? Did he say, "I'm for integration?" because when I looked at the campaign coverage of 1959 when he was making his re-election for mayor bid, he said, "I'm for using all legal means to preserve segregation." On the other hand, he did these racially progressive things, like you were saying.

SH: He did say that?

EG: Yeah.

SH: I'm surprised, because he certainly caught--. I don't remember that, because he surely caught a lot of flack for being an integrationist. That doesn't follow, because Tip Taylor was one of the candidates--Buford Ellington, Tip Taylor, I think there were three candidates.

EG: Yeah.

SH: I think I'm right. Tip Taylor, Buford Ellington--

EG: That's what I remember from the literature.

SH: --and Edmund, and he was definitely pegged as the integrationist of that three. In fact, we found out later that Edmund used to be real active in what is now Rhodes. It used to be Southwestern. There was a meeting where--. Who was the head of the NAACP in those days?

EG: Was it Gladney or Cunningham?

SH: No, that doesn't ring a bell. It was one of the Universal Life people. I can't remember offhand. But there was a picture taken actually at Rhodes at a meeting where there were blacks and whites together. They reproduced that and passed it down in West

Tennessee out in the rural areas where segregation was still a big issue. They passed that picture around when people were standing in line to vote. Some precincts we didn't get hardly any votes. Edmund was tagged as a wild liberal and integrationist, so I'm really surprised at that quote. I wish you'd go back and recheck that, because that doesn't sound right at all.

EG: Yeah, because I remember seeing [in] the article that he said, "I am for segregation and using all lawful means," and also that, "We have the best lawyers in the city who are for defending us against the bus integration suit," and so forth. But I found that puzzling too, because I wondered maybe if he didn't really believe that but he needed to say that in order to be elected.

SH: Well he wouldn't do that. He wouldn't do that. That's what--. I don't understand that, because that was what I admired about him. He would not say something just to get re-elected. He just wasn't that way. He was very outspoken and very clear and was castigated for being an integrationist, so I--.

EG: That's interesting.

SH: Yeah, that doesn't--. You need to recheck that--

EG: Sure.

SH: --because that doesn't sound right. That doesn't sound like the Edmund that I knew. I mean I heard him make all his speeches, and that was not it at all.

EG: Yeah. I wonder if maybe because he had gotten so much flack from the governor's campaign for being an integrationist that he felt like in 1959 he had to say that in order to be re-elected for mayor, or--.

SH: He just--that wasn't Edmund. That's why I say I'm shocked at that quote, because it just doesn't sound like Edmund.

EG: Sure. Were you involved with his campaign to be re-elected as mayor?

SH: Yeah, somewhat, because what was happening is I had to run the office while he was running for election.

EG: Sure.

SH: And that was also true during the governor's race. I traveled some with him but he was gone so much that I had to run the mayor's office and keep things going, you know, keep correspondence moving and stuff happening, so I didn't get as much involved as really I would like to have. And then of course he had that stroke. It was a carotid blockage, and so he had to withdraw from the main race.

EG: I saw that. And then there was the Dedicated Citizens Committee that was formed?

SH: Yeah.

EG: Were you involved with that?

SH: Yeah, Stanley Buckman--wasn't that Stanley Buckman?

EG: Yeah. He was someone who ran it.

SH: Yeah. He was quite a guy. Stanley Buckman is another very outspoken, courageous businessman. He took his stand and you knew where Stanley--. That company's been very successful, Buckman Laboratories; it's still going strong.

EG: What was campaigning like in those days in the city? In looking at the newspaper coverage I saw that there were a lot of lawn parties and it seemed like people were really engaged politically.

SH: Well that was going back to Mr. Crump's days, because he had ward workers in every ward and precinct, so to run for a city election you had to get into each ward and precinct and have your supporters in each precinct to offset the Crump machine. But you're right, it was a very--. It was the days before television, you know, and so you had the radio and newspaper and it was all I'd say as much, as you say, lawn parties, little small neighborhood group gatherings, and that sort of thing.

EG: What was his--? You talked about how he and Meeman were friends.

SH: Yes.

EG: Did he try at all to influence newspaper coverage, or do you think that the *Press-Scimitar* gave fair press coverage to Orgill?

SH: Oh, yeah, more than fair. They were very pro-Orgill. In fact--Streit was the guy, *Union Now*, S-t-r-e-i-t. It just came to me. They had a conference in London. Was it in London or Paris? This was about 1958, late '58, early '59, and Edmund went as a representative, and you might have seen this in the news coverage.

EG: I think I saw a picture.

SH: He would send back reports and Ed Meeman would run those reports on the front page every time Edmund would send a report back of what was going on at the meeting. Ed Meeman would run that on the front page. Yeah, he was very pro-Orgill.

EG: Yeah, interesting. Do you think that if Edmund Orgill hadn't dropped out of the race that he would have won against Henry Loeb?

SH: I don't know. Henry Loeb was a real politician. Henry was this tall, handsome, pipe smoking, hand shaking--. I used to laugh. Henry was a friend of mine but I used to kid him, "Henry, you make a speech and everybody claps and then we walk

out of the room and we don't know what you said." He was one of these imposing people but he didn't really have any program or any principle. I don't mean he was unprincipled. He just didn't have the substance that Edmund had. Edmund had some basic principles that he lived by and basic philosophies, and Henry was just this tall, handsome, good looking, hand-shaking politician. So I don't know. That's a good question. What you said sounds like what Henry Loeb said.

EG: Okay.

SH: I really wish you'd go check that, because those words you spoke sound just like Henry Loeb.

EG: Yeah. Well I noticed when I looked at the press coverage that Henry Loeb really came out as a segregationist.

SH: Yeah. What you said were Henry Loeb's words, I think, not Edmund's. I really believe.

EG: Sure.

SH: Because he was definitely thought to be, in those days, extremely liberal, and known, and didn't hide it, and made appointments to boards, and attended meetings where blacks were that other politicians didn't go, and that sort of thing.

EG: Yeah, and like you said before that must have been really dangerous--.

SH: Oh yeah. He had crosses burned in his yard, and once some appointment he made upset a lot of the white supremacists and they tied up his telephone for two days. They would call and his wife would answer and they would just put the phone down and keep his phone tied up for about two or three days. So that's why that quote just doesn't --. I find that difficult to believe. I bet that's Henry Loeb. It sounds like Henry.

EG: Yeah. Did you think there was more resistance after the Brown v. Board of Education decision was passed?

SH: I'd put it this way, the emotions got stronger. Up to that point it was kind of a way of life, and you grew up as a youngster and I just didn't think anything about. There were no blacks in my school. I went to a county school. You just didn't think anything about it. Blacks had their school and whites had their school. Blacks sat in the back of the bus, and you just grew up that way. And all of a sudden Brown v. Board of Education focused attention on the inequity and how it really needed to be changed. But then you had to choose sides. Up to then it was not a matter of choosing sides; it's just the way it was. After that either you believed in integration or you were a segregationist, and that's where the two extremes really just clashed.

EG: So did you believe in integration like Mayor Orgill in those days?

SH: Yeah, I did. In fact where I first got my exposure--I'll never forget--the first black college graduate I met was at OCS. I went through OCS in 1953, Navy OCS, and the number one guy in our class was a graduate of Williams and he was a black guy. I'd never known a black college graduate. I mean that's just the way--. In the South there just weren't many. So that kind of--. Well by then in the Navy I was exposed to all sort of different people and different ideas. I spent some time in California and then overseas and came back. I remember coming back--maybe I was even in college--my father had his own business and he had quite a few black employees. I remember coming back and shaking hands with them. That was the first time a lot of them--. A white man just didn't shake a black man's hands. That's how different it was. The black guys were sort of shocked when I'd come back and shake their hands.

EG: Sure. One of the things that struck me about the '59 election was that there was this campaign of the Volunteer Ticket of Russell Sugarmon and Ben Hooks and so forth running, so there was this unprecedented black electoral effort, and I'm wondering what you remember about that campaign.

SH: I remember I got to know A.W. and Russell real well, kept in kind of touch with them over the years. I don't remember a lot about that campaign where they were concerned. I know that they were afraid of their lives. They were very courageous. There was a lot of potential violence. I remember A.W. saying one time, he lived on Mississippi Boulevard, which is a heavily black area, and he said, "I can afford to live somewhere else but I'm living here so my children will grow up in this area and this neighborhood and see what it's like rather than moving out to a white neighborhood." White neighborhoods were getting to--there were blacks moving into white neighborhoods gradually, not very much but some.

EG: I saw one of the things with the campaign is that there was a movement to get some of the white candidates to drop out of the public works commission race to prevent the chances of a Sugarmon victory. Do you remember at all what white people were saying?

SH: No, I really don't.

EG: Yeah, I thought that was--.

SH: Henry was public works commissioner while he ran for mayor.

EG: Right.

SH: But I don't remember who was running for public works commissioner behind him.

EG: It was like Russell Sugarmon was running but also William Farris and Will Fowler. I saw in the literature William Farris ended up winning, but there were like six white candidates and eventually two or so dropped out.

SH: And then Farris went on later to run for mayor and never did make it. He was city personnel director when I was with the mayor.

EG: Right.

SH: Yeah.

EG: What were some of--? You said Edmund Orgill was a man of principle. What were some of his principles that he really stood by? You've talked a little bit about some of them.

SH: Well integrity in government; treating blacks fairly, having them in positions, appointed positions, of power; he was a religious man, as I mentioned; he was very fair minded in all his dealings. Those would be the main things.

EG: Sure.

SH: And Atlantic Union, that was a big issue with him, is *Union Now*. Clarence Streit: that was the guy.

EG: Okay. Did this Dedicated Citizens Committee that was formed with the '59 election of Orgill supporters, did that continue on after the election?

SH: Yeah, Buckman continued that for a good while, and I don't know that it ever --. I wound up going in the real estate business with Billy Galbreath. In fact the lawyer for Billy Galbreath, Al Rickey, was part of that--I didn't mention him in that original group. Al Rickey was part of that original group of liberal, progressive people, and because of that I got to know him through Edmund. He's the one that put me in touch

with Galbreath, and when Edmund didn't run for re-election I went into the real estate business. So I got involved in a new career and a new--. I was not that involved in politics for a couple of years there because I was so busy getting started in my career, although Billy Galbreath was chairman of the school board later on when busing came along. That's when I had a lot more--. I had some additional contact with Russell and A.W. in those days because we were trying to keep the town from blowing up when--. Busing was another real crucial time.

EG: And that was in the later '60s that that took place?

SH: Yeah.

EG: Yeah, because I saw that the school integration started in 1962 with a few black kids going to the white schools, but then it really heated up with--.

SH: With the busing.

EG: Yeah.

SH: It's unfortunate, busing was very unfortunate, because Billy was a very--. He was a Republican and conservative but he was very progressive as well, and as chairman of the school board they developed a plan. They were integrating the teachers first. Once they got the teaching staffs integrated then they were going to integrate one grade at a time. So in twelve years you had some children growing up being used to having blacks in class and after twelve years it would be just accepted. Well busing just blew that all to hell. It got everybody's emotions and it got everybody so mad and all these segregationist schools popped up, church schools and all kind of private schools popped up; whereas if we had been allowed to do it gradually we wouldn't have destroyed the public school system like busing did.

EG: Why do you think that people were so opposed to busing or to Orgill's actions in the 1950s?

SH: Well it just wasn't the way people were brought up. It was just so different. And it becomes economic too, let's face it. You had a great underclass here that propped up the next level. The poorest blacks were not as poor as the poorest whites, and the poorest blacks took all the grunt jobs and common labor jobs, so that gave better jobs to the whites. A lot of it was purely economic, plus the emotional, just having grown up with segregation.

EG: Yeah. Let's see if the tape is--. Yep, doing fine. [Laughter] So when you were on his gubernatorial campaign and working for him as an executive assistant, did you have to talk with a lot of these people who were really upset with him about his policies of being friendlier towards blacks?

SH: No, I don't remember many confrontations. I really don't. I remember one or two times I represented him and the audience was kind of cool to me. They weren't rude, and nobody said anything, but I don't remember any real confrontation.

EG: Sure, sure. And you said too that the South back then was heavily Democratic.

SH: Yeah.

EG: When do you see this turn toward Republicanism in Memphis, and this rise of--?

SH: Well I can give you some names. A guy named Millsaps Fitzhugh was a Republican back then; Lewie Donelson, who's still alive, and a lawyer, and kicking; those are two. Prior to that the Wellfords--. There's a family, Wellfords, quite a number

of Wellfords were Republican. But prior to that the Republicans were all black, George W. Lee and all that crowd. They were the--. Lt. Lee used to go to the Republican National Convention as a delegate. There were hardly any Southern whites at the Republican convention. They were mostly black. When did it change? I think Eisenhower probably had as much to do with it as anything. What was that, '52?

EG: Yeah.

SH: I think, yeah, in fact I'm sure of that, because there were a lot of Democrats that voted Republican for the first time because of Eisenhower.

EG: What did they like about Eisenhower?

SH: Well he was a hero, a war hero.

EG: Oh, yeah.

SH: From the Midwest and a plain old kind of guy that had helped win the war. In fact he was offered the--. He could have been the Democrat or the Republican nominee, and he chose the Republican. I think that was the turning point, nationally and also locally, because people for the first time had never gone to the voting booth and voted for a Republican, so that got them at least turned a little bit.

EG: Do you see the Republicans--? In the '50s it seems like they carried more weight in Memphis in terms of national elections and less in local?

SH: Yeah. That's an example, Eisenhower, but the very fact that people, even though it was a national election, voted Republican for the first time, broke the ice.

EG: And when do you see the Republicans having more power in local elections in Memphis?

SH: Well since that time--that was '52--I'd say--. I don't remember whether there was any particular turning point. When we changed the form of government in Memphis from commission form to council form I think Jerry Blanchard was one of the council members who was a Republican. Lewie Donelson--. I've forgotten the date of that, but that election probably brought out more Republican interest in a local election than we'd had before.

EG: In 1967, I think it was.

SH: I've forgotten exactly when it was.

EG: Was that when Henry Loeb ran for mayor the second time?

SH: Well, let's see. I've forgotten really. Henry was a Democrat even though he was a conservative.

EG: Oh, right.

SH: But I don't remember the exact time when we changed the form of government.

EG: Yeah. You said you got more involved in business after you stopped working for Orgill, so.

SH: Right. I wasn't that involved in those days.

EG: So it seems like the extent of your political activity, it seems like the most took place in the 1950s.

SH: Well, except Al Rickey ran for the senate and I was his campaign manager.

EG: Okay. When was that?

SH: Oh, gosh, when was that? It was in the '60s. It was after I went with Galbreath, so it was sometime in the mid-'60s. And he got elected and served one term

and he didn't like it. We'd go to a shopping center to shake hands and he'd stay in the car and I'd get out of the car and shake hands and hand out his literature.

EG: Oh, really? [Laughter]

SH: [Laughter] He wasn't a very good politician. He didn't like doing that. I worked for two guys like that. Howard Baker was the same way when he ran for the Senate the last time. Lewie Donelson and I would take Howard to shopping centers wherever we were, and I could hear Howard ask Lewie, "Lewie, do we really have to do this?" [Laughter] But I was just involved in helping other people get elected, not so directly.

EG: Sure. Were you involved at all with the Democratic Executive Committee and so forth?

SH: No.

EG: Okay, sure. Let's see what other questions I have here. What do you remember about the workings of the Dedicated Citizens Committee in the 1959 election?

SH: Well I know I went to a lot of meetings, usually at Buckman Laboratories. Stanley Buckman was a workaholic. He took a nap every day after lunch and he worked until 9:00 or 10:00 at night. Well they were just an organizational--. I remember just getting organized for the election, to try to get Edmund re-elected, but I don't remember any details.

EG: I saw that they offered a Unity Ticket that Orgill supported, of candidates. Do you remember anything about that?

SH: No, I don't.

EG: How influential do you think newspapers were back then, like the editorials of the *Press-Scimitar* and the *Commercial Appeal*?

SH: Well the editorials in my opinion are not that influential. People who read the editorials usually have their mind made up, or at least not enough people read them. As I mentioned earlier, Ed Meeman plugged Edmund on the front page every day if he could, and that's where the influence was, on the headline and the front page. Ed Meeman did that a lot, so it was very influential. And I guess the editorial position was somewhat influential, because the *Commercial* was conservative and the *Press-Scimitar* was liberal.

EG: Did you know Meeman personally?

SH: Yeah.

EG: What was he like? He's someone I've read quite a bit about.

SH: Very kind of small in stature; never been married, a bachelor; really kind of shy; he was not a very outgoing kind of person; very smart and courageous. He would take some really unpopular stands.

EG: One of the things I noticed too was that blacks had a long history of voting in Memphis, and you mentioned too that one of the things that Orgill worked on was eliminating the poll tax. Do you think that that was out of the goodness of his heart, or also because of the city's image of wanting to be democratic, or a combination of various reasons?

SH: I think it was more about a principle. He thought people ought to be able to vote.

EG: Yeah, because I saw too--and I thought that was really interesting with the work of the Civic Research Committee and so forth--this emphasis on--. In looking at the press coverage about democracy and making sure people know about voting machines and so forth and voter registration.

SH: Yeah, that was Lucius Burch and Bill Barr and all that crowd were very high principled on making sure everybody got a right to vote.

EG: How involved were women at the time in terms of political organizations, campaigning, running for office?

SH: Frances Coe and Gwen Awsumb, those are the two that come to mind, were very active. Generally women were not that active but those two were very active. There was somebody else. I can't remember.

EG: I think sometimes when you look at history the history talks more about men who were involved in the '50s and so forth. It doesn't talk about the women's involvement, and I noticed when I looked at the press coverage again of some of this time period, quite a few women's names were mentioned as running for office or in office, like Frances Coe and so forth.

SH: Who else--? Oh, Mrs. Seessel was on the school board.

EG: Oh, okay.

SH: Yeah, Ms. Seessel was on the school board, and Frances, and Gwen Awsumb. Gwen was on that first city council. She was a Republican. Frances Coe was a Democrat and Gwen was a Republican.

EG: Do you know, did these women experience any sort of sexism, or were they just treated like they were any other--?

SH: I never saw it. I think they were--. They were so intelligent and they were not in-your-face kind of people. They were very genteel I guess I would describe them. They were strong in their opinions and they were hard working and very intelligent and I think they were very well accepted.

EG: Yeah. That's interesting. Let's see here. How do you see Memphis politics today as different or similar than it was back then?

SH: Oh, God.

EG: I noticed that there are a lot of continuities between the past and the present yet a lot of changes, not just of Memphis but--.

SH: Well the biggest thing is the influence of the blacks. I mean back then blacks had very little influence. [Break in recording] --their constituency and be more concerned about their constituency than the city as a whole. Prior to this everybody was elected at large so they had a much wider view. They didn't have a little local constituency. So we end up with haggling and petty--. The school board's the same way. The school board, city council, county commission, they're all--. We don't have any of them elected at large. Well, there may still be one or two elected at large, but the majority of all the bodies are elected by districts, so there's this infighting about I'm going to protect my little area instead of broad thinking. It's a very notable difference and it's hurt the city. It's a lot of petty bickering and you don't get as many people thinking about what's good for the city as a whole.

EG: So you were more in favor of having the city commission form? You see that as--?

SH: No. The first city council was majority at-large. It was a very good-- I was involved-- Al Rickey was on that committee that wrote the charter, and I was not on it but I was involved with the debate. It was very well thought out. There were thirteen councilmen, seven at-large and six districts. And part of that was tossing a bone to the black voters because in those days it was very difficult for an at-large black candidate to get elected, so it was done to give the blacks a chance to have a voice in government. So there were six districts and they were not all black districts. It was pretty well assured that [a] certain [number] of them would be elected by blacks, like Fred Davis was on there a long time. It was a good compromise, but you had a lot of bickering among the six. You at least had seven that were elected at-large. There was somebody up there thinking about the city as a whole. Now they're all elected from districts.

EG: Yeah, and I think it was-- Was it the black community that was more behind making it more of a district form--

SH: Oh yeah, oh sure.

EG: --so more representation?

SH: Absolutely, no question about it, because they saw that they had more representation, and that's also hurt us. We've had two votes to try to consolidate the governments and both of them passed in the city and didn't pass in the county. Now I'm not so sure it would pass in the city even because now the blacks have such a franchise and so many blacks have been elected that they don't want to give up their offices if we merge the government. Nobody wants to give up their position.

EG: One of the things that I find interesting about the '59 election and so forth was--I know you don't remember so much about the black candidates in that election in

terms of their campaigns--but it was overwhelmingly the black voters supported the black candidates and the white voters supported the white candidates, and how you see this racial polarization still today in Memphis politics. Why do you think that is? Why do you think things are so polarized?

SH: Just natural prejudice. I mean you know it's just hard to overcome. Well, I've said this for years. Every other minority has been integrated into the population. We haven't quite seen whether the Hispanics are going to be totally integrated, but every other minority has been integrated, and why haven't the blacks: because they're black. I used this example, I said, suppose one of my children was sick and had to have surgery out of town and the surgeon was this wonderful person who did all this stuff and saved my child's life, so they happened to be coming to Memphis and I was having a dinner party, and I had a lot of my friends there, and I said, "We've got this wonderful doctor that saved our child's life coming to dinner," and they say, "That's wonderful. We'd like to meet him." But he walks in the door and he's black. That's the first thing you see. You've got to get through that. If he's Irish or Greek or Italian or even Hispanic or Oriental--Oriental is probably a little bit of, because of the physical--but black, he's black, and it's not just the South; it's anywhere if the person is black. So you've got to get through that to say this is a wonderful doctor who saved my child's life, and he ends up being very smart, very intelligent, very charming, and when the evening's over, it doesn't matter. But that color is just--. This friend of mine used to debate that. He's dead now. We used to stay up late debating political things and religious things. He said, "Race will no longer be an issue by 1970." And I said, "Whit, race will be an issue as

long as there are blacks. The only way race won't be an issue is if we all intermarry and we all end up being a hybrid."

EG: Are there other ways you think that we can overcome that?

SH: I don't think so.

EG: Why not?

SH: Just because of the color. I mean--.

EG: You think the racial prejudice is so instilled--

SH: Sure.

EG: --among whites that it--?

SH: Yeah. I just don't--. I mean even a person that's brought up and doesn't think about it and supposedly doesn't have any racial prejudice, they still sit in a room and when somebody walks in the first thing they see is they're black, they're different.

EG: Yeah. And also you mentioned too the tradition, like you thought Orgill in the '50s got a lot of flack for being an integrationist because people were so ingrained in what they were thinking, and you said too about the economics of it.

SH: Well, and I'm not minimizing that to this day. You go right out here in South--. You can look at Southaven, Mississippi, and the reason Southaven exists is white flight.

EG: Yeah. That's another striking thing that I found in looking at Memphis, and you see it across the South, and in the North where I'm from too, there's white flight to the suburbs.

SH: You go straight out East Memphis--. Of course the river, it's natural that it would grow this way, but the booming areas are the areas out--. And what's happening is

because the population of Memphis is such high percentage black you now have got the blacks--. Whitehaven is now black. Whitehaven, think about that name. It's Whitehaven. Well it was the white haven fifty years ago. Now it's all black, and it's moved over to Hickory Hills and to southeast Shelby County. And so what's happened, they jump the state line and go to Southaven, and Southaven is now the Whitehaven of fifty years ago.

EG: And too it's interesting with school integration how now there's all the private schools and so forth where blacks are in the inner city schools. You had mentioned busing and how you thought that--. Were you opposed to busing?

SH: Yeah.

EG: Because you thought the gradual integration was a better way?

SH: We had it made. We had the best plan in the United States. I'll give you an example, integrate those teachers. We had friends of ours in the public school, and he'd come home--he was in the first grade--and he, "Miss Jones," this and, "Miss Jones," this. They heard about Miss Jones, and Miss Jones did this, and she told us this. So they had a parent-teacher meeting one night and they went and Miss Jones was black. The child didn't know. It was his teacher. And if we had integrated a few blacks in that first grade, and the teacher's black, and the second grade, by the time they're in twelfth grade we would have had it--it would have been accomplished, and you wouldn't have destroyed--. What you did, you destroyed the public school system.

EH: Because, playing like--because I know people in the NAACP would say, but the gradual integration, that's token and that's--.

SH: Well they were impatient and they were very--. I mean if I'd been black I'd have been that way too. I'd say, "Why are you waiting? We came as slaves and two hundred years later it's time for us to get moving. Let's move on." I'd have been that way. But they now admit they were wrong. Most black leaders will tell you that busing was not a good thing for them either, because it destroyed the very system that they wanted to be part of.

EG: By the white flight to private schools and so forth.

SH: Sure, yeah. See you still have black schools and they're not as good as they would have been had they stayed intact and gradually integrated. You would have had more parental support.

EG: Do you think that would have worked though, that people would have accepted integrated schools if they had gone the gradual integration route, or do you think it was just so ingrained--?

SH: Well I think it would--. Let's put it this way. If you hadn't had Brown v.--if you hadn't had the federal government involved, we wouldn't have changed. People are not going to change unless they have to. But the federal government had to do what they did, and without that pressure we wouldn't have integrated. Yeah, it wouldn't have been ideal, but you still would have had--. You wouldn't have destroyed the public school system. Look at every inner school system in the country. There are very few where there are any black population at all that have prospered.

EG: Yeah. What about--? It's interesting to me that black voting was accepted in Memphis, and still is, but yet school integration isn't accepted. Why do you think it is that people in Memphis accepted voting here, because I know people in Mississippi

didn't accept blacks voting, but here there didn't seem to be any resistance to blacks voting?

SH: That's an interesting question.

EG: And yet people really were against school integration.

SH: I guess it's one thing to be philosophical and say, well they're human beings; they have a right to vote. But it's another thing to say I don't want my child going to school with them or going in the swimming pool with them. I mean that's--. It gets down to personal things, I guess. I hadn't really thought about it. It's hard for me to believe, really when I look back, and the blacks of course are impatient, but when you think about the progress in the last fifty years. I mean here I grew up never knowing a black college graduate, growing up going to a filling station and seeing, "Men," "Women," and "Colored." They weren't allowed to use the restrooms. They couldn't drink out of the water fountain. They couldn't go to the soda fountain in a restaurant, couldn't stay in a hotel or motel, I mean you think about--. It's almost hard for me to believe that that existed. But it's also hard for me to believe that we made that much progress. I ran into a black judge the other day. We had dinner at a little restaurant nearby. He's been a judge for twenty years. There he was sitting in a nice East Memphis restaurant. "Hi, Judge, how are you?" Fifty years ago that just wouldn't have been. Look at Condoleezza Rice. You've got the top security advisor of the United States is a black woman, a young black woman. So I mean huge progress has been made but there's still the prejudice. But there's prejudice against Jews still, prejudice against--. The biggest prejudice right now in the South is the blacks against the Hispanics, and it's economic.

EG: Oh, in terms of jobs.

SH: Sure. The Hispanics are taking the jobs. They work harder and they work cheaper and that's a big--. I'm involved with the Boys and Girls Clubs and we have had a study done recently on Southeast Memphis, part of the county, Hickory Hills. We need a club out there and we're going to have a fundraising drive and try to raise twelve and a half million dollars next year, and one of the big things is put this new club in. We did a study. It's black, but there's one pocket of Hispanics in the middle of this black area. The Hispanics, the jealousy and the violence against the Hispanics is unbelievable. They say the Hispanics all get paid in cash because most of them are illegal and they don't want any records, and the black gangs know the day they get paid and come rob them. You got this constant conflict in this area, right here in Memphis.

EG: Yeah. There isn't so much--. The Hispanic population, I've heard, isn't so big in Memphis, but maybe it's growing?

SH: Oh, it's growing, yeah.

EG: Yeah, because I know in North Carolina it's really grown.

SH: Well in Atlanta, I think Atlanta's fifteen percent Hispanic now.

EG: Yeah. You said before that you really thought that there needed to be the Brown v. Board of Education decision for racial progress to occur. What do you think about federal intervention in terms of things like affirmative action?

SH: Same thing. If there hadn't been some federal pressure it wouldn't have happened.

EG: Yeah.

SH: It wouldn't have happened. Inertia just--. It's too easy to just keep doing things like we've been doing them, so I think some affirmative action was necessary.

EG: Yeah.

SH: Yet to a point--and I know there have been lawsuits about this--it gets to be reverse discrimination where there's so much pressure to recognize diversity or do certain things that some people are left out that wouldn't have been left out. So it gets to be--. It's a tricky thing, but I think it had to happen. I think we had to have some affirmative action, I really do.

EG: Yeah. It's interesting to hear you talk about Orgill and how racially progressive he was in the '50s. That seems really--.

SH: Yeah, that quote still gets me.

EG: Okay! [Laughter]

SH: Because that's why--. He was. He was vilified for it. He was very--. That whole group was very progressive in race relations, Lucius Burch and Bill Barr and Frances Coe, and all that crowd, Al Rickey, they were all very progressive.

EG: Yeah, because I think I read somewhere that Frances Coe supported school integration and so forth.

SH: Yeah.

EG: Why do you think that was, that they were--?

SH: Well she was a Vassar graduate. She didn't stay in the South. She went east to school. That's been my theory, that she got out of the South and went to Vassar and became enlightened, I guess is the best way to put it.

EG: Do you think that this other group of people too, like you mentioned Barr and Orgill, were they all highly educated people?

SH: Yeah.

EG: That was part of it?

SH: Yeah, all of them were well educated, and most of them from families with--I don't mean wealthy, but families with means. Now Bill Barr might have been kind of a self-made man, but Ed Meeman was well educated, Frances was well educated, Lucius Burch. There's one name in there that I've been trying--. The name of his company was Film Transit and I cannot remember his name. He had a son who's still around and I've been searching for his name, in fact I pulled some books out to see if I could see his name in there. You've probably run into it. He owned Film Transit. Interesting quick story, Malco Theatres, as you know, is named for M.A. Lightman. You've run into Malco Theatres here in Memphis?

EG: I've heard that name, yeah.

SH: M.A. Lightman Company, he started Malco. That's what Malco stands for: M.A. Lightman Company. And this guy--[1:04:02]. God, I can see him. At any rate, he got the contract from Malco Theatres to transport the films, and they'd transport them in air-conditioned trucks because the film couldn't stand the heat and cold. I guess it's still true. It would affect the film. And so Malco was expanding all over the South, so this guy's sole business, he made a lot money moving those--.

EG: Just transporting the films? [Laughter]

SH: Transporting that film. And the name of the company was Film Transit. God, what was his name? He was one of the group. That's pretty essentially the group. There may have been one or two others on the fringe there that I can't remember.

EG: So a lot of people who were businessmen and--.

SH: Yeah. Barr was in the paint business, and this guy was in film transit, Orgill in the Orgill Brothers.

EG: Was the city really concerned back then about its image to the rest of the South in modernization?

SH: I've been going to Atlanta since 1945, '46, and my wife, Jane, and I met in the Highlands in 1946. I was in McCallie School. So I've been going to Atlanta off and on, and my impression of Atlanta leadership--. I said this: Atlanta leadership had a little bit of the Texan in them. For years you couldn't find anybody, a businessman, to say anything bad about Atlanta. Jane's father was a Buick dealer there and so I knew business people as well as young friends, and nobody said anything bad about Atlanta. I'd come back and, hell, people couldn't say anything good about Memphis. Our image-- we've had an inferiority complex forever, and I don't know why. We've got a lot of natural resources. We've got a lot of successful businesses here. But we're our own worst enemy. When I was involved in the chamber of commerce--I was president of the chamber of commerce in '77--we had a campaign. I was looking at it. I'm going to let you have this if you haven't seen it.

EG: Oh, great.

SH: I want you to bring it back to me.

EG: Sure.

SH: But we had a campaign and--what did we call it? But it was to--. We had "Future Memphis," that's mentioned in here, and "Future Memphis" was supposed to be sort of a pump the city up, do good things for the city. But we had a chamber--. "Believe in Memphis," that's what it was. It was in 1973. [Quoting from document] "The Memphis Chamber of Commerce instituted a community wide program called 'Believe in Memphis,' a campaign encouraging men to take pride in their community and sell Memphis at every opportunity." Imagine having to do that, but I mean that's--.

EG: So that's--. I haven't run across that yet. People here just didn't like Memphis?

SH: Well, we didn't think about--. Atlanta--. I think it was because of Mr. Crump. I hate to--. A lot of us have blamed a lot of things on Mr. Crump but I really do think that it was a paternalistic environment. Mr. Crump made all the decisions.

EG: Yeah.

SH: And if Mr. Crump said that's the way it was going to be, that's the way it was, and so people didn't use their intellect, didn't think outside the box. They thought in the box, in Mr. Crump's box, and they just didn't think. That's where Edmund Orgill and these others, they thought outside the box. This group of people in Memphis [1:07:57] about *Union Now*, I mean, God, they thought people like them were crazy because they're thinking outside the box. But imagine having to have a program to believe in Memphis. I want to lend this to you because it's about Frank Norfleet. You've heard of him--.

EG: I haven't, actually.

SH: Well that's good, because then you need to see this.

EG: Okay.

SH: He and his family, they had a big impact on Memphis. This guy's still alive. He's eighty-four. You might want to interview him because he served on the quarterly court, he and Ned Cook. One of the things I mentioned in here, I checked in here, these guys were picked by Mr. Crump but they later--. They were very enlightened. They were well educated, went off to prep school and college and all, then they were World War II veterans. In those days, that's what Mr. Crump did. He found young, bright guys like that and said, "I want you to run for the county court." They said, "Sure, we'll do that." So they served on the county court. But Frank is very enlightened. He's got a little group now of retired CEOs called a focus group. We get together about once a month, looking at the problems of Memphis and what we can do to improve them. But there's a lot of Memphis history in here--

EG: Oh, great.

SH: --and I thought you--.

EG: I appreciate that.

SH: You really ought to interview Frank.

EG: Yeah, yeah.

SH: You can use my name.

EG: Oh, great, great.

SH: This is another one, if you haven't seen. That man had such an impact on Memphis. This is just pictorial stuff about Memphis that I don't think you--. This is primarily for 19--. Well you might want to look at that.

EG: Okay.

SH: This is an old book.

EG: Oh, good. I've actually been in contact with him a little bit over email.

SH: Who's that?

EG: John Dougan.

SH: Oh, you have?

EG: So, but I had no idea.

SH: This is an old book, *Memphis Down in Dixie*, by Shields McIlwaine. He was a professor at Rhodes, at Southwestern. You're welcome to look--I mean, that's old. That goes way back.

EG: Sure. Oh, thank you.

SH: But you can borrow those and get them back to me when you get through.

EG: Sure, great.

SH: Well, you're going to get wet.

EG: Yeah. But that is striking to me. I have been doing some research on Ed Meeman and looking at his editorials when he came and how he was the really outspoken voice--

SH: Yeah!

EG: --against Crump and saying this is ridiculous. This is not a democracy here. This is tyranny. This is one-man control.

SH: Right.

EG: So, yeah.

SH: You know, look at the rise of Hitler. I mean if you think about a dictatorship and people getting used to it, and things are pretty good, and they don't have to make any

decisions, and the guy seems to make more right decisions than wrong decisions, and people go along with it.

EG: What were the major business areas here in the '50s?

SH: Cotton and lumber.

EG: Okay.

SH: Cotton and lumber were the two big things for a hundred years.

EG: So this was the cotton capital?

SH: Yeah, and lumber, hardwood--the cotton capital and the hardwood lumber capital of the world.

EG: Sure.

SH: In those pictures you'll see some of the timber. This was virgin timber that these guys came down here, and these big plantations that exist today--you may have heard of places like Wilson, Arkansas, the Wilson Plantation--and they cleared this virgin timber and a lot of the foremen, the superintendents, would buy the land that was left that had been cleared for fifty cents an acre, and that's how these big plantations were put together. But they originally were these hardwood virgin forests.

EG: Wow.

SH: So cotton and lumber. We had some industry. Going back fifty years you had--. But again it was lumber. Bruce Flooring [sp?] is no longer in business; Nickey Brothers Sawmill and Flooring [sp?]. But there was no manufacturing here until after the war. So it was a plantation--. A guy by the name of--. One of the editors of the newspaper once told me this. He said, "Memphis suffers from plantation mentality." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, from a white standpoint, if you make a little

money, you don't invest it in the community or in charities or you don't have any--. You buy more land." That's why we go by the term in the South, "land poor," because a cotton farmer has a good cotton crop, has the cash, what does he do? He doesn't give it away to charity or start another business, he buys more land so he becomes land poor.

EG: Okay.

SH: That's the white part of the plantation mentality. The black part is: I'm dependent on the man in the big white house. So the blacks grow up being paternalistic, taken care of. I can go back with friends of mine and my own parents who had black servants. You paid the doctor bills, you took care of them. You didn't pay them anything, hardly, but you took care of them. So from the black standpoint, the man in the white house became the man in the White House in Washington, and the welfare system had continued this plantation mentality without--. Some blacks, as we said earlier, do break out of it, but a lot of them--. [Referring to his family's domestic servant] Savannah, a wonderful person, with us twenty-five years, has an eighteen-year-old granddaughter expecting her second child; unmarried; doesn't have a high school education; gets a welfare check. Savannah's done everything she could, and we have too, trying to get Jessica to get an education and get a job, but she gets a check. The more babies she has, the more checks she gets. It's this dependency on the man in the white house, and this editor of this paper pointed it out to me and I'd never thought about it. It's not--. There are people who've been able to break that cycle of poverty, but unfortunately not enough of them.

EG: Was this Frank Ahlgren of the *Commercial Appeal*?

SH: No. Frank Ahlgren was--. Mike Grehl was the guy that told me this, G-r-e-h-l, Mike Grehl.

EG: And who was he associated with?

SH: The *Commercial Appeal*.

EG: Oh, with the *Commercial Appeal*. Was he an editor after Ahlgren?

SH: An editor after Ahlgren, yeah.

EG: Okay.

SH: See Ahlgren and Meeman were editors at the same time--

EG: Right.

SH: --and had a totally different approach. Frank Ahlgren was very social oriented. He played tennis every day with Kemmons Wilson of Holiday Inns and Herman Umphries of UMCO, and Alan Morgan, head of the First National Bank. Ed Meeman was not in that scene at all.

EG: He seemed to be someone who was more into conservation and using the newspaper for public service, and so forth.

SH: Yeah, exactly.

EG: I noticed--and I know you said you didn't remember so much about the black campaign in 1959--that the White Citizens Council was really against black candidates winning, like the chapter in Mississippi, and they sent postcards to Memphis businessmen and said if a black is elected to public office we're going to boycott your businesses. Would that have been a really--? I was wondering how powerful that was, for the White Citizens Council to send it. Would businessmen blow that off, or would they take that really seriously?

SH: It probably depended on the business. If it was a tractor dealer that sold tractors to farmers they probably took it very seriously, or an automobile dealer that sold a lot of trucks and cars in Mississippi probably--. But if it was like Billy Galbreath, who had real estate in Memphis, it probably wouldn't. Some businesses would be sensitive to that, I'm sure.

EG: Yeah. I noticed too that the White Citizens Council and the Ku Klux Klan weren't really big here at all like they were in--

SH: Oh, Mississippi and Arkansas, yeah.

EG: --Mississippi and stuff, and I was wondering why that was?

SH: I don't know. I can't tell you why. I'll say this: Mr. Crump, he probably would have discouraged the Ku Klux Klan for political reasons, because it would be a political entity that he couldn't control. This is a theory, now.

EG: Yeah.

SH: I've never thought about this, but I can see why he would--. I mean, Mr. Crump, you didn't get elected president of the Rotary Club unless you were a Mr. Crump man.

EG: Wow.

SH: Or the Kiwanis Club, or the Elks, or the VFW.

EG: It extended that far.

SH: Yeah. Henry Loeb was commander of the VFW--that's how he got his political start--and you didn't get elected commander of the VFW if you weren't a Crump man. [Laughter] I mean he was incredible. So I can see why he might not want a power base like the Ku Klux Klan that might get out of hand.

EG: Yeah, yeah.

SH: Because he didn't want violence. He wanted things to move on and be quiet and keep the town under control.

EG: Sure. Well, two questions that come out of that is that one thing I really noticed was the extent of civic clubs here and neighborhood associations in the '50s and--

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SH: Very powerful.

EG: Yeah, if you could talk about that, and also the key interest groups during this time in politics.

SH: Well I do know that the civic clubs were very powerful, and Mr. Crump controlled them all. You didn't get elected--. My mother was active in the Red Acres Civic Club and it was very obvious--I mean she talked about it--if you didn't have Mr. Crump's stamp of approval you weren't an officer in that club. As I mentioned, Rotary, Kiwanis, all of them were Crump people.

EG: Wow.

SH: It went--it was just highly controlled.

EG: In the '50s, did that--?

SH: Yeah.

EG: Was it still all Crump people?

SH: Yeah.

EG: Even after he died?

SH: Oh, no, I'm talking about--. He died in '58. I'm talking about the early '50s.

EG: Early '50s, yeah. What about--?

SH: Well, I mean it spilled over, because those people were still around.

EG: Yeah.

SH: I mean like I said the city attorney was a Crump appointee who turned out to be a good man, Frank Gianotti, but those people were still in power. Dave Harsh still was chairman of the county commission in the late '50s, early '60s. He was a Crump man.

EG: Yeah. What did you think--or what about labor during this time? How influential was labor?

SH: I don't remember. Edmund--. Labor was sort of--and I'm trying to remember--it seems to me there were some labor leaders that got involved with that group, that civic research group, because again they were sort of progressive and liberal minded, but I don't remember any specifics. Labor was not a factor, not a big factor, because you had no manufacturing to speak of. I mean there just weren't any labor unions.

EG: That's interesting, because when I looked at the press coverage of the election I saw quite a bit of labor and them endorsing different candidates.

SH: Well, when is that, '59?

EG: Yeah.

SH: Well, you had the Brotherhood of Electrical Workers because of light, gas, and water. They were unionized. They had some power. But really I can't think of any strong labor unions.

EG: So maybe they got press coverage but weren't as powerful as it looks from looking at the press coverage.

SH: That probably was Ed Meeman playing up endorsements for Orgill.

EG: Yeah, probably.

SH: [Laughter]

EG: Yeah, because like you said before about Orgill getting prominent press coverage, I know [I saw] so many smiling pictures of him on the front page.

SH: No doubt about it.

EG: I can just tell that they were really close and friends.

SH: Sure, oh yeah, no doubt about it.

EG: Yeah, very interesting. In the '50s, what did the civic clubs do, and what were their main activities?

SH: I can't tell you. I guess if there was some problem in zoning or a neighborhood problem or something like that, I don't know.

EG: And too it was interesting to look at the press coverage, because when I grew up in the '80s in Grand Rapids, Michigan, there just wasn't this sort of civic involvement with city elections. People didn't talk about it. But it seems like here when there were city elections, from looking at the press coverage, that there was a lot of interest citywide in it. Am I accurate with that? Is it something that people--it was a common conversation topic?

SH: Yeah and still is. I'd say that local elections still carry a good bit of conversation, a good bit of interest.

EG: Yeah, because I saw with the '59 one it was the highest turnout ever of black and white Memphians. It was a high percentage that turned out.

SH: Well that probably had to do with the various racial factors that the whites turned out. They were afraid the blacks would turn out so the whites turned out.

EG: Yeah, that's exactly what I found with looking at it, that it seemed like the whites felt so threatened that a black would win that they turned out in large numbers to defeat [the black candidates] and there were all these attempts, particularly from Loeb--.

SH: Well this happened with a recent election, Willie Herenton. Whites were scared to death that one of the Fords was going to get elected. You've heard of Harold Ford and the Harold Ford machine?

EG: I've heard of the Fords, yeah.

SH: Well that's a political--that's the nearest thing we've got to a political machine in Memphis now, is the Ford family. And Willie Herenton bucked the Fords, and I'm a supporter of Herenton's, and we figured if he could get eighty-five percent of the white vote and only ten percent of the black vote, because blacks--Ford's a demagogue; he can really get the black vote out--that he'd win. Willie Herenton is the mayor today because of the white vote, not because of the black vote.

EG: You said you were for Herenton?

SH: Yeah.

EG: Okay, yeah.

SH: He's been a pretty good mayor. He's made a few boo boos, but he's been a pretty good mayor.

EG: Why do you think that with '59 whites felt so threatened by the possibility of blacks in political office?

SH: Well the same old prejudice, just racial. They never had had blacks in those positions. Well, you know when you think about it, and the way I grew up, never having known a college graduate, all you knew were the garbage man, the yard man, the cook, maid, chauffeur, common laborer, and you didn't want one of those running the city, and that's all you knew. So the average person said, "Wait a minute. I don't want one of these ignorant folks that I've been dealing with all these years running the city," you know, on the city council.

EG: And that too, it seems like what you were saying before about plantation mentality, that blacks were more subservient--

SH: Yeah.

EG: --in their attitudes and so didn't let on maybe if they were more intelligent, because they were used to being real deferential to white people.

SH: Well of course again I think, as I mentioned that, but also there's still the economic threat. I think there's still, among the blue collar workers. You can see it, for instance all the bus drivers in Memphis used to be white; now they're all black. So what are those people that were bus drivers, that were smart enough to pass--? You know that's a pretty responsible job. You've got of people's lives in your hands and you've got to know the city streets. I mean you've got to have some intelligence to be a bus driver.

EG: Yeah.

SH: Well now where are all those white people? Well they're agents at the airline. I mean I'm just surmising.

EG: Yeah.

SH: But they got pushed up because the blacks came in and took these jobs, well they were all of a sudden hearing of new jobs being a counter agent--what do you call them?--at the airport. So there now, because they've got blacks in there now too, but initially those were all those bus drivers. I'm sure there were other jobs like that.

EG: Do you think that things will continue to move progressively and in the future we will see blacks holding equal economic status with whites?

SH: Yeah, I think so. I think the more successes you have, like--what's her name?--Condoleezza Rice.

EG: Oh, uh huh.

SH: The more successes, the more role models you have of people like that who are obviously intelligent, who do a good job, who don't use race--who are non-racial, who don't use race on their sleeve. What hurts--and it had to happen--but the Jesse Jacksons hurt, in my opinion, because everything's racial. Jesse wants to go--. I'm surprised he didn't want to go run off to the prison in Pakistan. I mean he's off running all over the world, stirring up trouble. I mean in this community we've got examples. Odell Horton was a wonderful judge here. He was a friend of mine and I supported him, and he was even-handed, didn't use race as a tool, and he just was an intelligent lawyer and became a judge and was a good judge. Well the more--a lot of people would say this is a racial prejudice of mine--but I think one of our problems is that the black leadership does not do the job they need to do to set standards and role models. There are too many successful black politicians, like Jesse Jackson, who are demagogues, who stir up and who keep people stirred up so they keep their position of power and they can keep getting elected instead of, like Odell Horton is an example, and A C Wharton, and Willie

Herenton. We've got other examples of people who haven't used race and keep their people stirred up, who do their job and have been very responsible and a good role model. We need more of them.

EG: One of the questions that I'm asking many people that I interview is that I've looked at the papers on the rise of black electoral officials, and the question is what's the impact of that? Does that have any sort of change of consciousness among whites when they see blacks in political power and holding office, and you somewhat answered that.

SH: I think it's getting to be more and more accepted. I hear people knocking Willie Herenton now and then because he's black, and I've got one lifelong friend that just won't ever change. I mean, a nigger's a nigger. I mean I don't usually use that--. I'm sorry I'm [1:28:53] for the record, but that's just the way they think and they're not ever going to change. You can't--. As far as he's concerned, he grew up in the lumber business and all the blacks he knew were these sawmill workers that were ignorant and would get drunk on payday and they'd come borrow money the next day, and that's his image of a black person. And you've got to have all those people die off and younger people like you come along who see a different--. And we're getting more and more middle-class blacks in this community who have responsible positions in companies, and lawyers and doctors, so I think that's moving in the right direction.

EG: Have you had other friends, or yourself, who've experienced a change of consciousness as a result of seeing blacks in political office and holding positions of leadership?

SH: Yeah, a few, particularly some that are originally from Mississippi that came out of the Mississippi culture and have moved to Memphis. One of them has lived in Washington for a while. I'd say that he has come around, to some extent.

EG: Yeah, because you were saying you really experienced that when you met the black people when you were in the Navy.

SH: Yeah.

EG: Yeah, with the interaction and the diversity.

SH: Right.

EG: Yeah, that's very interesting. Let's see.

SH: You've really done your homework.

EG: [Laughter]

SH: Because you reminded me--. You brought up things that I'd forgot all about.

EG: Well I have been working on this for a little while, and my last academic year we have to pick a topic and work on it basically all year, and so I've been looking at Memphis politics and particularly the racial dimension of it.

SH: Yeah, a lot of that stuff I just haven't thought about in years. I've been so involved in business and kind of lost contact with some of it. But I remember Russell Sugarmon and A.W. Willis really well. They were two outstanding men. They really were.

EG: Yeah, I had the opportunity to interview Russell Sugarmon.

SH: He's a charming guy.

EG: He is. [Laughter]

SH: He's a charmer.

EG: Yeah, he's quite a person.

SH: Yeah.

EG: I guess is there anything else that you want to add to what we've talked about or haven't covered?

SH: I don't think so. As I said I thumbed through those books to try to jog my memory, and I remembered everybody but that one fellow at Film Transit that I can't remember.

EG: Oh--were you going to say something?

SH: No, go ahead.

EG: Okay. Two questions, one is how do you think Memphis is similar and different from the rest of the South?

SH: Well I think it's unique in that it really ought to be part of Mississippi and Arkansas. I mean the culture of Memphis is not the culture of any of the rest of Tennessee. You've got Nashville and the plateau that's--and Knoxville. I mean you get east of Jackson, Tennessee, the percentage of [the] black population is very small. Nashville is like thirty percent, I think. Knoxville is less I'm sure. Chattanooga may be a little bit more. But we're so different from all the rest of them. Chattanooga is on the border of Georgia and has had sort of that influence, but it's sort of a mountaineering town, a mountain town. Knoxville is definitely a mountain town, a university town. Nashville is more sophisticated, and the plateau, it's all--generally Middle Tennessee, Nashville, is Democrat, East Tennessee is Republican, and the swing part of the state is West Tennessee. If the blacks get out and vote they mostly vote Democratic. If they get out and vote then it will swing the state Democrat. If the blacks don't get out and whites

get out it swings to--. [Break in recording]

EG: --and similarities between Memphis, and you were saying the rest of Tennessee--.

SH: Yeah, compared to the other areas of the state.

EG: Yes.

SH: They said for years that the Mississippi Delta begins in the lobby of the Peabody Hotel, because Memphis--. I mean I've grown up knowing more people in Mississippi and in Arkansas than I have in Nashville or Jackson, Tennessee. We're oriented toward this direction, the south and the west. So that makes us--. And having been in lumber and cotton, it's been agricultural. Everybody I knew growing up's family came off a farm or their family's still on a farm. It's been an agricultural city until the last thirty--until after World War II. And of course I compare it to Atlanta. As I said earlier, Atlanta has had some very progressive leadership, and one of the things that--. A crossroad in Memphis, we had Southern Airways here, and when Delta merged--. Delta Airlines started as a crop dusting outfit in Louisiana, and when Delta merged with Southern there was a question whether they were going to be headquartered in Memphis or Atlanta. Mayor Hartsfield, Bill Hartsfield, who was a friend of my father-in-law's, saw the importance of an airport and pushed the Atlanta airport. At the same time, Mr. Crump had a son that died in an airplane crash and he discouraged the Memphis airport. He didn't want anything to do with flying. He wouldn't fly; took the train. He would never fly.

EG: That's interesting.

SH: And so he had no--. His power in the city ignoring aviation and Atlanta at the same time was pushing aviation. So when they merged we lost Southern Airways. Southern Airways was headquartered in Memphis. We had an airline; it moved to Atlanta. The airport in Atlanta had a lot to do with its growth. I think the Atlanta business community is just a little bit more sophisticated. [Phone rings] Jane may not be here, if you'll excuse me.

EG: Sure.

SH: I think they're just a little more sophisticated. Nashville is maybe a little more sophisticated because it's the capital. It's had two life insurance companies. Chattanooga's had two life insurance companies. I think Nashville as sort of the banking and life insurance center caused them to be a little more sophisticated. Plus banking and life insurance company has a lot to do with the growth of a community because life insurance generates capital and it's a center of money where people get mortgages and invest in businesses. It's a big factor. We had one little company here, Cosmopolitan Life, that never did do anything much. [Phone rings] Excuse me. [Break in recording]

EG: It's interesting you said that when you went out campaigning in 1958 that the rest of Tennessee was isolated from Memphis, because I would have thought the opposite since Crump had so much statewide power.

SH: Jealousy, jealousy. They were jealous of Mr. Crump. We ran into a lot of that. People would say we're never going to elect a governor from Memphis. The first time we ever had one was Winfield Dunn. A guy by the name of--. Yeah, we had one from West Tennessee years ago. Austin Peay was from West Tennessee, but up to

Winfield Dunn we'd never had a governor from Memphis. It was just jealousy and I think just going back to Mr. Crump.

EG: Yeah. What influence did the black electorate have in the 1950s? You said before you didn't think it had very much.

SH: Well, I wouldn't say it didn't have--. I mean Edmund Orgill got a lot of black votes, and he got a lot of black votes in that governor's race.

EG: Did he do a lot of campaigning in the black community?

SH: Yeah, oh yeah.

EG: With Lt. Lee?

SH: Yeah, he had a lot of support within the black community. But the rest of the state just killed us.

EG: How was the NAACP viewed at that time among whites?

SH: At that time probably not very favorably.

EG: Yeah.

SH: Probably not very favorably. The NAACP came into its own I guess after *Brown v. Board of Education*. We had some good leadership at the NAACP here.

EG: Did people in the white community think highly of Russell Sugarmon and Maxine Smith and other black leaders here?

SH: Oh, I don't know if I can say they thought highly. Maxine developed some respect over the years but if I had to characterize it I would say most white people, unless they were pretty enlightened, kind of looked upon them as the troublemakers. Yeah, and they were people challenging the status quo, and people don't like to have the status quo challenged.

EG: Yeah. So you were a Democrat back in the '50s and became a Republican?

SH: Mm hmm.

EG: Why did you decide to switch to the Republican party, and when did you switch?

SH: Well I guess it was where I was working because Edmund was a Democrat, and then Billy Galbreath--. Billy, I don't know that he was a Republican but he was conservative. I guess Billy influenced me somewhat. But I think--. I voted for Eisenhower. I know that. And then I began to--. Well my lawyer and closest friend was a big Democrat, but I just--. I mainly picked individuals. Bill Brock was Senator you know, and a fraternity brother of mine. He was one year behind me in college and one year behind me in prep school, so I knew Bill. I guess Bill had an influence on my becoming a Republican, now that I think about it.

EG: Sure. Well, I'll ask you again if there's anything else you'd like to add? I think I've exhausted all the questions I have.

SH: I think you've exhausted me. [Laughter]

EG: [Laughter]

SH: But that Frank Norfleet book will jog your memory, I think, on some things that maybe you haven't covered. Plus, Frank would make an interesting interview.

EG: Yeah.

SH: Because he served--. Again he was a Crump appointee--I mean not appointee, he was elected, but he was named by Mr. Crump. He's been involved in everything in the city: chamber of commerce, and "Future Memphis," and back in the

'50s--. I'm trying to think. I guess Frank was on the quarterly court back in the '50s, so he would give you an insight in the county, the problems of the county.

EG: Okay, yeah, because the important interest groups during that time were business and so forth.

SH: They used to say Mr. Crump maintained the political power and Mr. Hale maintained the economic power. Have you heard the name E.W. Hale?

EG: I have, but I don't know much about him.

SH: He was the political boss in the county outside the city.

EG: Oh, okay.

SH: And he and Mr. Crump were just like that and they worked everything out. But as I said E.W. Hale was a smart businessman. He got acreages put together and friends of his got the right acreage to do things. They said he knew how to make money out of being the political boss and Mr. Crump didn't. Mr. Crump made money out of his insurance agency and has never been accused of any fraud or any payoff, anything like that.

EG: Sure, sure. I thought of one follow-up question to what you said: when was Al Rickey's campaign?

SH: Oh, gosh, it had to be in the mid-'60s, but I don't know exactly when.

EG: And he ran for state--?

SH: State senator.

EG: State senator. Did he--?

SH: Elected to one term.

EG: Left it to one term. Okay, sure.

SH: Didn't like it, didn't like politics. It must have been around '64, if I had to guess.

EG: Sure, sure. Okay. [Laughter]

SH: The other thing that you ought to pursue--I know it's not back in the '50s-- but consolidation; we've had two votes on consolidation.

EG: I saw that was a big issue in '59 and still is a big issue now so, yeah.

SH: Big issue and it's something that ought to happen. I mean we're one of these cities, luckily, with just one county. It would be a relatively simple thing to do.

EG: Yeah, I thought that was, you know, it was strange. I've never had that before, when I got off the plane at the airport, "Welcome from mayor of Shelby County and mayor of Memphis," so.

SH: That's right. It's really crazy. We ought to do that. But I'm afraid that we've gone so far--. Herenton's pushing it real hard, but I don't know if the rank and file could get really very--. [A C] Wharton and Herenton would both have to push it real hard and you'd have to get a lot of--. And now that there's so many blacks in the county --. See the county would defeat it because they know the city is majority black. You're talking a racial issue.

EG: Yeah.

SH: See the county is still predominantly white, so they're usually opposed to consolidation because of the predominance of blacks in the city.

EG: That's interesting, [11:02].

SH: Well I've enjoyed it. You prompted a lot of old memories.

EG: Well thank you really very, very much. I'll turn this off.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

Date: April 13, 2009