

This is an interview with Mrs. Rita Jackson Samuels, coordinator of the Governor's Council on Human Relations, State of Georgia, conducted in Atlanta on April 30, 1974, by Jack Bass and Walter De Vries.  
Transcribed by Sarah Geer.

Samuels: ... It was located at the time I worked with them at the Community Council of the Atlanta area, which was a social and welfare planning agency. And it doesn't exist anymore. So now the Information and Referral Department was moved over to the United Appeals office, which is the same thing. United...

W.D.V.: But your office, this office here, is called what now?

Samuels: This office?

W.D.V.: Yeah.

Samuels: Oh, this office is the Governor's Council on Human Relations.

W.D.V.: And you're the director?

Samuels: Coordinator.

W.D.V.: Coordinator.

Samuels: Yeah.

W.D.V.: Did Governor Carter establish that, or was it here before that?

Samuels: He established that. But he didn't hire me. See, he did not hire me as coordinator of the Governor's Council. That's why I was... I was trying to tell you something about my background. I was working with the Information and Referral system, and they wanted me... well, they gave me a title as Assistant for Human Resources, to

come into the Governor's office and handle consumer calls, you know. Because that's what my experience was in. I didn't work in the Governor's campaign. I didn't know him at all, and I had no idea I'd end up in Jimmy Carter's office. I didn't. I just... my only involvement in politics had been working with a voter registration drive. I did some work with Mr. Hill, Jesse Hill, who is president of Atlanta Life Insurance Company. And he was the chairman of the All Citizens Registration Committee, and I used to do volunteer work with him. And I had been involved a little bit in Andy Young's campaign, but, you know, United Appeal is non-partisan, so I really wasn't even supposed to have been involved in politics. So I didn't work in the Governor's campaign, and I didn't know him. The way I got involved in his office, when they got ready to send out the invitations for the Governor's Inaugural Ball, I was on my vacation for two weeks, and Reverend Fred Bennett, who is a member of Martin Luther King's... Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr.'s church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, had been involved in the Governor's campaign, and he requested that I come to help them organize a black statewide list of invitees to the Governor's Inaugural Ball. And so I just volunteered and came up here three days, and they had all the offices set up on the third floor. And I met the Governor's aunt, the Governor's mother's sister, and she just walked me work in the office and wanted to know where did I work, and so I explained it to her. And she said, "Ooh, I'd just love for you to work in Jimmy's office and I'm going to have to tell him about you." Well, I thought absolutely nothing about it, you know, and I guess two or three months passed and then Hamilton Jerden, who

at that time was the Governor's executive secretary, called and asked that I come down to talk with him and the Governor about possible employment on the Governor's staff. And, you see, I just... I didn't think very much of it, because no Georgia governor had ever had a black person working on his personal staff. And I just thought that they, you know, would discuss it and that would be the end of it. And I came and talked, and they wanted me to come to work the next week, and I had to give a two weeks notice on my old job. And so I came to work. And then for a while I did the consumer calls. I just would handle consumer calls, whether it was a telephone call or just a walk-in off the street. Welfare problems, eviction notices... W.D.V.: You mean you handled the whole caseload, not just consumer complaints, but welfare and everything.

Samuels: Oh, no. That's right. The whole thing.

J.B.: In effect, Citizens' Complaint Bureau.

Samuels: That's right. And it was just really getting to be too much for one person, and then they brought a man in. I don't even remember his name. Who stayed here for almost six months and then he left. They just kind of wiped out the part... the little office that we created. Because beside doing that, I had to spend a lot of time with Hamilton trying to orientate them about certain people in the black community, you know. Like I arranged to have Andrew Young come in the office and meet Hamilton Jerden and meet the Governor. They really didn't know any black people at all, and they had never really... because most of the people on the Governor's staff, with the exception of a few, had worked in the Governor's campaign, but they had never been employed, full time employment, so they had never... they didn't really

have a good working relationship with people, because they hadn't had to really deal with people. And then there were a lot of things that I just would have to, you know, leave to go and talk to Hamilton about who Jesse Hill is and how important it is that we try to find out how the Governor can be involved in the black community. Because the Governor impressed me, from being in staff meetings and from questioning me about certain things, that he had a genuine interest in having black people participate in the operation of state government. And I knew that if that was to be so that he really had to establish a good working relationship with key black people. You know, not only in Atlanta, but throughout the state. So they were... so I... and then it shifted, you know. It shifted from the consumer type things, because we did a survey to see how many states had bi-racial councils. And, I think of the southern states, Alabama and Mississippi were the only two southern states that didn't have them at the time. And Georgia. And so the Governor decided... this was after Governor West had already created his bi-racial council by executive order. Now, Georgia... that's a commission now. But the Governor created by executive order in October of 1971 a statewide Governor's Council on Human Relations that had fifty-fifty black and white participation. Six black and six whites who pretty much...

J.B.: Who's the chairman?

Samuels: A. B. Padgett is the chairman, who is director of Community Affairs for Trust Company of Georgia. And we needed somebody who knew something about foundation money, because at the time we didn't know where the money would come from for the Council. And we could



have a \$20,000 grant from O.E.O., and we operated on that for a year.  
And...

J.B.: Has any effort been made to give this Council here commission status, statutory status?

Samuels: Senator Warren instituted a bill during the last session that, you know, got killed in the committee.

W.D.V.: How about appropriations? Could you get a state appropriation now?

Samuels: You mean how we operate now? Well, it's very difficult. We don't have a separate budget. We still have a twelve member board, but the staff is on the Governor's personal staff. See, when I was first hired, I was paid from the Governor's budget, and then when we created the Council then they transferred my salary on the O.E.O. grant. And then when we abolished that, we kept two staff persons, Joyce Moody and myself, and we just transferred over to the Governor's salary. Now, when we have to pay for travel expenses for the board members, then it all comes out of the Governor's budget. So the Governor's office is...

W.D.V.: So it's not a separate appropriation?

Samuels: No.

W.D.V.: It's all part of his operation.

J.B.: How does the office function. I mean, what does it... what has it done so far?

Samuels: Well, so far we have... well, we have in Georgia about forty-nine, or possibly, I guess, forty-nine bi-racial councils. There are 159 counties in Georgia. And we have offered technical assistance in

creating those councils. Now, only about twenty-five of the forty-nine are active councils where they actually have a monthly meeting and they act as a complaint bureau, and they... you know, they are more active than others. And, I mean, that's kind of... well, the kind of activities that they are involved in are not handling discrimination employment kinds of problems, and discriminatory problems that might happen in employment. They really act more as an information source for the community, people who have problems. And if there's a school problem, if there's any kind of racial problem in the community, then they allow both sides to come in and talk with them, and they act as a mediator. So, I mean, they are... it's just... I guess it's the kind of tool that's been able to open up a lot of communications in Georgia that we simply did not have before.

W.D.V.: You don't have any enforcement powers...?

Samuels: Well, no. I don't know of any in Georgia that have enforcement power. Even the one in Atlanta doesn't have enforcement power. And they're talking about it now, and I understand there's a lot of opposition to that. So...

J.B.: Primarily, then, a mediation and conciliation type of function.

Samuels: Persuasion, yeah.

J.B.: Is it effective?

Samuels: Well, see, I can't answer that yes or no, because you have to really understand the problems not only in Georgia, but problems on local levels. And if, you know, if you open up communications where you never had black and whites talking together before, then that's accomplishing something. So, you know, I... that's not a yes or no answer, to a question

like that. I think there's some that have been. I think that all of them could be more effective if they had enforcement powers, if they had a budget, if they had adequate staff, you know, if they had more credibility. But, you know, I think that they are doing some good.

J.B.: Have you done an employment survey for the state government?

Samuels: Well, the Governor's Council employs a consultant to conduct a survey for the Council because we didn't have adequate staff. And I'll give you a copy of it before you leave. It's right there, on the side there.

J.B.: When was that completed?

Samuels: It was completed...

J.B.: December of 1972.

Samuels: Yeah.

J.B.: That's fairly recent.

Samuels: But also the August of 1972...

J.B.: Oh, yes. Through August of '72.

Samuels: Yes.

J.B.: Has anything happened as a result of that study?

Samuels: Well, no more than the Council members made some recommendations to the Governor about some things that are being implemented now. One was the Council felt that most of the problems with getting minorities and females involved in state jobs are in the state merit system. And they... you know, you can not reach certain people, because they have to go by the rule of five. They choose the top five from the register. And we have made a recommendation that a proposal be established and submitted to the Civil Service Commission, to see if

we can go from five to eight. And a proposal has already been established and it's already gone in to the Civil Service Commission and the Governor endorsed it. The other thing is, they have established in the state merit system an Employee Relations Division. And it is their responsibility to assist each department head in designing an Affirmative Action plan. Now we don't have a master Affirmative Action plan for all the state government. But the Employee Relations Division have a very close working relationship with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which is physically located here in Atlanta. And they go over in the office, and people in their office come over, and they review all of the Affirmative Action plans that have been submitted. And the report would also indicate the number of departments who have already completed Affirmative Action plans and the ones that have been acceptable to the Employee Relations Division. There are only twenty-two departments in state government.

J.B.: How many of them have submitted accepted...

Samuels: I think at the time that the report was completed it was about fourteen.

J.B.: Do you know if the rest have submitted them?

Samuels: I think that the rest are working on that. Well, you know, I'm not so impressed with Affirmative Action planning, because while you are designing Affirmative Action plans, you might have three vacancies next week. And, you know, unless you are committed to promoting females and trying to bring minorities... and I mean to... you know, the law states that you have to deal with minorities, but I'm concerned with black people, so I need to, you know, let you know

that. I'm not... but you know, I don't think that there are very many department heads in state government who are really committed and want to make change as far as employees are concerned. The state Highway Department - the new name of the re-organization is Transportation Department - have some 9,000 employees statewide, and they have one black at a payrate of 18. Just one. I mean, now, when you look at things like that and you go and talk with department heads... 'cause I went and talked to a department head and I said, "I understand that in February you will have eighteen new vacancies, and ten of them are professional positions. Would you consider, you know, really doing an active recruitment effort to try and get some blacks in?" And he just completely avoided the question . But, now, that's not to say that it helps to have them...

J.B.: When was that?

Samuels: Oh, it must have been six months ago. It was before '74.

W.D.V.: When did this Council start?

Samuels: In October, 1971.

W.D.V.: '71?

Samuels: Umh-hmm.

W.D.V.: As you look back on that period, is there progress?

Samuels: Well, I happen to think that it is. I mean, the Governor's Council. You see, I refer to myself as the Governor's Council. And I think that I'm the reason... you know, it depends on what you mean about how much progress. In what areas are you talking about?

W.D.V.: Well, I asked you what you think. Do you think there's been progress?

Samuels: Oh, I... most definitely.

W.D.V.: How do you measure it?

Samuels: Well, I measure it by department heads being aware that they are violating the law when they don't establish an Affirmative Action program, when they don't hire... when they don't establish an active recruitment program. I mean, at least they know it. When I first started working in the state government, they didn't even know that they were violating the law. Some of them really didn't know that, you know. And... and... and, you know... Martin Luther King's portrait is in the capitol, and the capitol is 84 years old and they never had a black portrait in the capitol before. And two others will go up before the end of this year.

W.D.V.: How important is that portrait?

Samuels: Well, it's very important.

W.D.V.: Why?

Samuels: Well, it's important because when I was in the sixth grade and high school and living in Forsyth, Georgia, which is fifty miles south from Atlanta, I visited the state capitol in a school group, and the same things that I saw in the capitol then, I see... I saw then. I mean, there's absolutely nothing in the state capitol building, including the employees - I'm the only black that ever had an office in the state capitol - that blacks could relate to. And if you don't see anything that you can relate to, you don't feel welcome, you don't feel like it's anything that's working for the benefit of whatever problems you might have. And I do think it's important. I think that when school groups visit the capitol - and the schools are integrated in Georgia now, and so you do have black and white kids coming at the same time -

that black kids should be able to see something, not only that they can identify with, but something that they recognize. And I guarantee to you that nine kids out of ten made up of both black and white would recognize Martin Luther King's portrait before they would any other portrait in the capitol. With maybe the exception of Lester Maddox.

W.D.V.: So hanging this portrait and your having an office here are symbolic of two important things.

Samuels: Oh, I think that it is. I really do.

W.D.V.: Would you measure that in terms of... as part of the progress since 1971?

Samuels: Well... well, now, what do you mean by 1971?

W.D.V.: Well, since the Council was established.

Samuels: It took that long to get those things accomplished. The portrait didn't go up until the first of this year, but, I mean, that was a project that had to be worked on and, you know, and...

J.B.: When did that idea originally come? That's what I... that was my question. Was it your idea originally to get Martin Luther King's portrait hanging in the capitol?

Samuels: Well, I just said to the Governor that I thought that Martin Luther King's portrait should go up in the capitol and I'd like for him to think about it and give me an answer. I didn't push him for any answer, and I didn't get an answer the first time I asked him about it.

J.B.: When did you first mention it to him?

Samuels: March of last year.

J.B.: And then when did you hear... when did you bring it up again?

Samuels: Well...

J.B.: Or did you bring it up...

Samuels: Well, see, I meet with the Governor in the weekly staff meetings every Monday morning. And I guess maybe two or three months passed. And he... I put in in the form of a memorandum, and he had not responded. And so I asked him and he said he thought he answered and I... I... you know, the memo had got lost. But he just said he'd be more than glad to do it, but that he thought it would be more important to put up more than one black portrait, that maybe we should be... put up more. And that it probably be best to establish a committee and have a committee make recommendations to him and then he would choose. And that was the way we did it. Which took a lot of time. It took about four months.

W.D.V.: What was your rationale for hanging the portrait? What was your argument for it?

Samuels: The state capitol was paid for with tax money and it was not just white tax money. And that, I mean, there's nothing in the capitol that black people relate to. Blacks don't come here to have any kind of meetings at all. A group of blacks came here following the Attica situation in New York, or wherever Attica happened, and it was a group of Atlanta University students. They came up here during the session, and they wanted to have a meeting upstairs. And when the Governor's office was contacted, they said a group of blacks are on their way over here to take over a room. And before they got here, all the state troopers were here. Now, the Governor, you know, sent the troopers away, because he just felt that they have as much right to use a meeting



room in the state capitol than any other group. And all the time you see blacks coming, they are not coming to riot, you know. They're coming to have a meeting. And... and, I mean, if you act like you get scared every time you see them coming, then, you know, something is wrong. But I'm just saying that I think that it was a... I still think that it's important that where they have the information booths in the state capitol, they should have both black and white staff working from behind those booths. Where they have elevator operators operating the elevators inside the capitol, they should have both black and white doing that.

J.B.: Do you have black pages?

Samuels: The only blacks that you see in the state capitol are the blacks that keep up the grounds or the gardening, and the maids that you see working in the restrooms, and the porters that you see running

[errands].

you can't have that kind of...

J.B.: And you have legislators.

Samuels: Well, but you don't see legislators until during the session.

J.B.: During the session, are there black pages in both the house and the senate?

Samuels: Since I been working here. The first year I came there was not one.

J.B.: Getting back to the portrait, though, you said a committee was appointed?

Samuels: Umm-hmmm.

J.B.: Just a committee consisting only of blacks?

Samuels: Oh, no. We had the Secretary of State on the committee. You

have to know how to put together a committee like that so that... you know, I just decided it was...

J.B.: Have the other two been selected?

Samuels: They have been selected.

J.B.: Have they been announced yet?

Samuels: Yeah, they were announced when we announced Dr. King.

J.B.: Who...?

Samuels: Lucy Laney, who is a black woman from Augusta, Georgia.

Richmond County. Are you all... where are you all from? You're not... you need to tell me so that I won't just assume that you ought to know.

J.B.: I'm from South Carolina.

W.D.V.: I'm from North Carolina.

Samuels: Okay. Well, Richmond County's in Augusta, Georgia. And she was responsible for the first kindergarten program, back in the 1800's in Augusta. Was really in education. And the other person is Bishop Henry MacNeill Turner, who was a very outstanding bishop in the A.M.E. Methodist Church, and he also served in the Georgia legislature in the 1800's for like... less than a year.

J.B.: Was that during the Reconstruction period?

Samuels: Yes.

W.D.V.: How did you feel about the opposition to hanging that portrait?

Samuels: I didn't even respond to it. There're some things I don't...

W.D.V.: Listen to it?

Samuels: ... fluster my mind with at all. No. Why should I have listened...?

W.D.V.: Wasn't it a very important issue in the legislature?

Samuels: No.

W.D.V.: No?

Samuels: Wasn't even spoken... the legislature didn't have anything to do with what's hanging in the state capitol. You didn't have to put it in the form of a bill. The Governor is the one who can... and this is under re-organization. Before re-organization, the Secretary of State had authority over what would happen to the state capitol building. And since re-organization, it was the Governor's authority to say what would happen. And I went to him and I asked him and when he told me that we could do it I didn't respond to Lester Maddox's statement, I didn't respond to anything. And I had press people come and ask me about it, and I just said, "I have no comment on it one way or another, because the portrait is going up." And it will never come down. I mean, I understand Lester Maddox made a statement and said that when he's re-elected that Martin Luther King's portrait will come down. But it will not come down. I just think that there will... I don't even think he was serious if he said it. I didn't hear the statement, so I'm not sure he said it.

W.D.V.: So we've finally got the story of the portrait. We've been trying to get it for all these days...

Samuels: Oh, have you? Well, what were you getting? What did you get? Absolutely nothing?

J.B.: No, we were really... we'd been hearing about Maddox's comments. Finally got that too, a copy of a newspaper story on his comments about the portrait.

Samuels: See, the only... the only...

W.D.V.: Is it symbolic of something else other than just the fact that you've got black and white portraits hanging in the capitol?

Samuels: Well, it's symbolic because of who it is. Martin Luther King, Jr., as far as I'm concerned, as the president of black people on a national level, and, see, you know, had legislators said anything about, "Well, you know, he was not a statesman." I would have been able to deal with that, because I disagree with that. Martin Luther King is more responsible for the voter's rights bill than anybody else that I know of, you know. And I think that he's also responsible... you see, it was not Martin Luther King, it was Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael who were saying were saying "Burn, baby, burn" and, you know, really inciting riots. Not Dr. King. And I think that Dr. King made it as comfortable for Lester Maddox to be in the capitol four years and not lead blacks up here to stage demonstrations, because that would not... you know, he was not that kind of person. You know. So I think that... that he is as much responsible for the progress that we have been able to make in Atlanta and in the state as well, among both black and white citizens. I mean, black people are talking together and... I mean, black and white people are talking together, they are doing things together and it's... and as a result of that, you can see a lot of progress in a lot of different areas, not just, you know, voter registration, and not just voting, but there are other areas as well. And I... you know, because of who he is, he is the one who should be in the capitol. And I had no... I never thought for a minute that when they turned in five names to the Governor and Martin Luther King was one

of them, I knew that Martin Luther King would be chosen, you know. And I knew that the Governor would be criticized for it, but the Governor, see... one other thing, when people, you know, ask, "Well, where does the idea come from?" And I say, "Well, you know, I mentioned it to him." But I didn't have any authority at all to put it up, and had Jimmy Carter not really wanted to do it, he wouldn't, you know. Because he really got some nasty letters about it, you know. But I think that he felt the same way I did. Because we discussed it in detail, about why should it be Martin Luther King rather than other people, George Washington Carver, you know. And we discussed it, and I think he felt the same way. And the Governor is the one who made... who decided that it would be Martin Luther King, Lucy Laney, and Henry MacNeill Turner. Don't you think that it's symbolic?

W.D.V.: Well, we're going to ask you the questions.

Samuels: Okay. Well, I...

W.D.V.: It... it... some say that it's symbolic of the changing role of the black in Georgia. In other words, that represented in many ways progress that blacks have made both in terms of social progress as well as in voting. That...

Samuels: I agree.

J.B.: Let me ask you this question. Why do you think that... how do you explain the fact that there are no women... no white women in the Georgia legislature? There are only two women in the Georgia legislature and both are black.

Samuels: Well, now, I don't think that you can address questions like that to me and expect me to come up with answers.

J.B.: You're a woman.

Samuels: Yeah, but...

J.B.: You're a woman and you deal with... and part of your role is to deal with discrimination and the role of women, and I just wondered how you...

Samuels: But I'm really not into that a whole lot.

J.B.: Okay.

Samuels: I mean,...

J.B.: Do you have any theories on it, though?

Samuels: No, I just think that white women ought to be more aggressive and they ought to go ahead and run. You know, they might feel that the representatives that they have are representing them well and are really being fair. But I think that you might see some change since the Equal Rights Amendment was defeated in the upcoming election in November. You'll probably have some women running for a lot of different positions, probably. I don't know. You can... or think you only have one, or you had, so you don't even have her any more. But it used to be a white woman in the house. We have two black women in the house, so, you know, I don't know. You know, I'd like to say that... I don't know, you know. I just...

J.B.: How do you... what... you know, what's your feel for what's going on in rural Georgia? You came from a small rural county, right? Where'd you grow up?

Samuels: In Forsyth, Georgia, in Monroe County, where there's 10,000 people. And I went...

J.B.: You grew up on a farm, or...?

Samuels: No, I didn't grow up on a farm. I grew up in town.

J.B.: What town?

Samuels: In Forsyth, Georgia. That's the metropolitan area for Monroe County.

J.B.: What'd your parents do?

Samuels: Well, my father worked for General Motors for a long time. He commuted for years and years. And my mother was a nurse's aid. And my grandmother farmed and did domestic work. And I have a brother who's a brick mason, and I have a sister who is a beautician, and I have another brother who's been in the Army working at the Post Office, that kind of thing.

J.B.: Do you go home often?

Samuels: I was at home last weekend.

J.B.: All right, in visiting your home, and I presume for your job you get out around the state some too...

Samuels: Not a whole lot.

J.B.: Well, what's your feel for what's going on in rural Georgia among blacks, politically?

Samuels: Well, in my hometown, we have a black deputy sheriff, we have three black policemen, we have a black city councilman, we have a bi-racial council, which I assisted them in establishing, that's composed of eight people - four blacks and four whites. There are more blacks who have businesses in Forsyth than ever in the history of Forsyth. They had a demonstration in Forsyth about five months ago which I participated in, and was right up on the front line and reported to the Governor on Monday morning that I had participated in a demonstration.

They organized an NAACP chapter here in Forsyth, which I never thought I would see, so I think that...

J.B.: What was the demonstration about?

Samuels: Well, it involved a police brutality case, where a white policeman had slapped a black woman who drove up to a gas station and ordered a dollar's worth of gas, and the attendant gave her two or three dollars worth. And she refused to pay the extra money, and they called the policeman in who, you know... I was not there, but I understand that this is what happened. And they got in an argument and then he slapped her and locked her up and left three small children in the car. And it was like three or four hours before they realized that had happened and they wouldn't allow her to make a telephone call. And they staged a demonstration on it and they presented a list of grievances to the mayor, and the policeman was discharged and, you know, things are running smoother now. But I would like to... if I... you know, I would not mind going back home to live. There was a time when I never thought I wanted to go to Forsyth again.

J.B.: When was the time... when did you leave...

Samuels: Well, the time was when... I left in '63. I left in '63. I went to school in South Carolina. I went to *Clafin* College in Orangeburg, South Carolina. And then my father was living in Atlanta, at that time, and when I first got out of school I came to Atlanta, and I worked at Business College, which was located on Ogburn Avenue. It was a permanent job. And I volunteered and worked with voter registration program. Mr. Jesse Hill - that's when I met Mr. Hill. Started meeting people in Atlanta. And I did



some volunteer work at SCLC, so I knew Dr. King. I have to admit I didn't stay there, but I used to work at SCLC. So, you know... and I got through. I was in Selma when they had the Selma-Montgomery march, so, you know...

J.B.: Where... were you on the bridge then?

Samuels: I was on the bridge.

J.B.: Did you get hit?

Samuels: No. But when you really think about that, I really didn't understand what I was involved in that time. I really didn't.

J.B.: You understood what you were involved in in Forsyth five months ago, didn't you?

Samuels: Oh, yes.

J.B.: What would have happened if they'd done that same demonstration under similar circumstances in Forsyth ten years ago, twelve years ago?

Samuels: Well, first of all, they... it just would not have happened. People were scared, you know. I mean, I was... it was always something about . My grandmother reared me more than my parents, and, you know, I grew up playing with white kids, and I was never afraid of white people. I never was. But there were blacks in Forsyth who were afraid of white people, afraid to speak, afraid to talk back, afraid to do anything. That demonstration never would have taken place in Forsyth ten years ago.

W.D.V.: What has changed so much in ten years that now you're willing to go back there and live, when ten years ago you wouldn't? That's really a drastic change, isn't it?

Samuels: Well, I think that I'm... I'm more knowledgeable about politics,

I'm more knowledgeable about government and how it operates, and I feel like because of the experience and background that I've had living and working in Atlanta, and working in the state government, that I could do pretty much what I wanted to do in a little town like Forsyth.

J.B.: What does your husband do?

Samuels: He's a general contractor.

J.B.: Do you... would you like to get into politics on a candidate type basis after you leave this job?

Samuels: I've had a lot of people encourage me to, but, you know, I've been married less than three years, and I need to have a baby and I need to decide if I'm going to be a wife or... you really can't do both, you know. So...

J.B.: That sounds like a very old-fashioned idea.

Samuels: Well... well, but that's... you know, I'm not into Women's Lib as much as you might think I am. I'm really not. See, when your grandmama raises you, you've got a lot of old-fashioned ideas about life, and, you know, that's how I have operated on the job, just being completely honest with the Governor about how I feel about anything, you know...

J.B.: What was his reaction after you told him that you participated in that demonstration?

Samuels: Nothing. Not one way or the other. I just said, "Governor, you know, you might get a report, so I'd just like for you to know that I was on the front line in my home town Saturday in a demonstration." And he knew about what had happened in Forsyth, because I had a group of people come up here and talk to him, you know. And he just didn't react one way or the other. Because, you see, I... I feel that I am

loyal as far as the job is concerned. If there's anything that I disagree with the Governor about, I will go to the Governor and tell him. There are some people on the staff who refer to me as a hell-raiser. And I really don't... you know, I'm not proud of their classification. I just think that... that, you know, that people are very phony, and I'm not like that.

W.D.V.: So you are the first black in the state capitol, the first black on the Governor's staff. When you took that job, how did you feel? Did you think it was going to work out this way?

Samuels: I thought it could work out this way, but I thought I had to be, and I was, I was very careful about how I worked... I mean, how I started off working. The timing is so important in politics, and, I mean, the Governor will do some things because it's politically expedient for him to do it. The Governor will do some things because he just feels that he'd like to do it. And there're other times, if the timing is wrong, the Governor will not respond at all. And so, you know, I did not participate in community meetings, you know. I was not completely honest with the community about the kind of influence that I may have had in the beginning, because I didn't want anybody to say, "Well, you know, if you recommend me for this board appointment, I will get it." You know. And I didn't try to come up here and represent the black community. No one black can do that, no two blacks can do that, you know. I'm just one black person. I was very concerned about getting other blacks on the Governor's staff, and we got a black to work in the secretarial pool downstairs. There were other vacancies in the Governor's office where I recommended that they look at some blacks. You know, I just made it very clear to the Governor that I

did not represent the total black community, that I was black and I had my own background, my own training and experience. And whatever answer I gave to him would be based on all of those things. And the way I thought that we should work would be to have me call up some people, you know, and get advice on how we should go about doing certain things.

W.D.V.: How were you received by the rest of the executive office staff? On the staff meetings on Monday mornings?

Samuels: Well, this probably will seem like a very, very conceited answer, but I think that all of them just loved me to death, for a lot of different reasons. They got to meet Hank Aaron because of me the other day, and they got to take pictures with him because of me the other day, and they got to shake Andy Young's hand because I know him. And whenever he's here he stops by to see me. And they got to go to Claudine's premier last week, the movie Claudine. And they got to meet Dianna Carroll and Gladys Knight and the Pips and people like that because of me. So, I mean, you know. They... you really have to ask them, you know. Because I don't know. But they treat me fine. They cooperate with me on whatever I'm working on. We're getting ready to organize a salute to Hank Aaron, and, you know, I don't go out on the outside and get other staff. There will be some staff in this office who will assist me in doing that. The Governor's press secretary assisted me on Dr. King's portrait, so, you know.

J.B.: Do you... have you noticed any change in the Governor himself in his attitude and sensitivity toward black people and the problems of

black people?

Samuels: Well, I have, but I don't think that it's because of me.

I just think that it's because he's had more experience dealing with black people than he ever had before.

J.B.: Where are these changes?

Samuels: Well, I think the Governor understands that, you know, blacks have not always felt welcome to come to the capitol and accomplish something. And whenever we have visitors day in the Governor's office and we have that once a month, that anybody can come in and see the Governor without an appointment, and I try to encourage blacks to come, because, you know, it means something for a black person to be able to go back and say to other blacks, "I met the Governor today", you know. And I think he realizes that, and he might, you know, he might be more sympathetic to some things that may have seemed like absolutely nothing, just a matter of policy.

W.D.V.: Any regrets?

Samuels: About the job? Oh, no.

W.D.V.: About being the first?

Samuels: Oh, no. I guess, you know... I just happen to think that you really have to be a very strong person to work in a job like this one, and because it is a public position and there are blacks who don't understand... I don't want to say that... well, there are blacks who don't understand about the problem of timing, as I mentioned to you, in politics. There are some things you just can not do, and I think that by working on this job I have been able to be more patient about things. You know. But it's just... you know, I thought

that... you know, like I had been invited to participate on a lot of radio programs, talk shows, where people call in questions about my job. And I turned almost all of them down, because I felt that if you throw yourself out there for a lot of unnecessary criticism, that, you know, you create that for yourself. So the best thing to do is try to participate in the kinds of programs so that you really can make people more knowledgeable about what happens in an operation of state government, you know. And there are approximately 122 state boards and commissions in state government, and when the Governor took office, blacks served on three of them. And blacks serve on about 48 of them now. And they are not just blacks who... are not blacks who are not qualified, you know. There's a black on Public Safety... on the Public Safety Board who is an attorney. And when you talk about "Why don't the state have more black state troopers?" you know, the Department of Public Safety takes their directions from the board. And so to me it was more significant to put a black on the board who was and qualified and who could make recommendations that hopefully could be implemented. And realizing that one black would be in the minority, from my experience working on this job, I still thought it was important. Because I have said too many things in certain meetings, since I've been on this job, and had certain people to respond and say, "Oh, well, we didn't think about that, you know. We didn't know it." And so I think it's important to have blacks on there.

J.B.: You say there's 48 blacks on the 22 boards and commissions?

Samuels: No, no, no. It's 48 different boards that blacks serve on.

Some... you may have three blacks on the Board of Human Resources, and that's a fifteen member board.

W.D.V.: Of the 122, Jack, 48 boards and commissions have blacks.

Samuels: That's right. I got some information... I didn't know whether you all wanted to take a look now. (Interruption in recording.)

... for the black community is that when the Governor took office, no other governor left any real track record for the Governor to compete with as far as having blacks participate in the operation of state government. But the next governor coming in will certainly have some things to look at.

J.B.: He will have to deal with what's been done.

Samuels: Oh, yeah. That's right. Governor Carter did it.

J.B.: So that can't be undone?

Samuels: No, it cannot be undone. We had one senator (?) for the Governor took office, and we have eight now. You know. So, I mean, if one governor can come in in four years and get one, and one governor can come in in four years and make sure that you have... you know, I think five was what we said, but we do have eight. You know, I just... I just think that... that those are the kind of things that a governor has to do in order to make it better under the next governor and under the next governor. And you don't see the kind of progress as quickly as most blacks would like to see it, including myself, but at least I understand more from working on this job how certain things take place. And I do think that we are making progress, and I also think that we will continue to make progress, even if Lester Maddox is elected again.

J.B.: Do you think he will be?

Samuels: Haven't even thought about it, hardly.

J.B.: Did you have any other questions?

W.D.V.: Nope.

J.B.: Anything else you wanted to ask?

Samuels: Have we got time? (Interruption in recording.) Governor Carter has shown, I think, the utmost respect for me and what I've done since I've been in this office. And, you know, the other staff look at the way I'm treated as far as the Governor is concerned, and they really don't have the choice. Now, that is... you know, it's probably not a real fair answer, but I think that they feel that I am respected by the Governor, and so, you know, they wouldn't want me to think that they were... that they didn't respect that kind of respect that's shown by the Governor. So, you know, they're always cooperating.

I'm  
W.D.V.: / just thinking back to 1962 (?) we appointed the first black woman to the governor's staff in Michigan as the assistant... (Interruption in recording.)

Samuels: Well, I'm just going to see what's going to happen with Jimmy Carter. Wherever he goes, I would like to be his assistant. So, I mean... I'm not ready for... because I respect him so much. I don't think that a lot of people... (Interruption in recording.) And I think he's open-minded. I think he's a very smart man, and I think he's going places. And, you know... (Interruption in recording.) That's the kind of thing that I need to be into, you know, if I'm really going to concentrate on being a good wife. And I do think that there are certain things that you have to think about. My husband is in Miami now. He's out of town a lot. He never interferes



with any... I was in Washington last month, you know. He never interferes with anything that I'm involved in. He's just...

(Interruption in recording.) the telephone will ring for me alone...

(End of interview.)