

TRANSCRIPT: CHRISS H. DOSS

Interviewee: Chriss H. Doss
Interviewer: Kimberly Hill
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START OF CD

Kimberly Hill: Hello, this is Kim Hill. I'm in Birmingham, Alabama, on June 22, 2007, interviewing attorney Chriss H. Doss at his home.

Chriss Doss: The activities and achievements of the so-called civil rights era has had some negative results that bother me. A good example: if you go downtown to real downtown Birmingham along 4th Avenue north, going from about 18th street toward west for about three blocks near the Masonic temple and the original site of the Gaston funeral home and A. G. Gaston financial world, you're made aware that there have been some things lost. Now maybe they had to be. I'm not sure. And what I'm talking about-- Along 4th Avenue, in that area, there were numerous well established profit making businesses owned by blacks. Almost every one of those is now gone, because as things opened up-- the market broadened--the customers moved to a broader market, and that meant the demise of a lot of these black businesses. I look at a number of our black schools—a good example is Talladega College, a fine school.

KH: I was just there yesterday.

CD: Oh really? That school had a wonderful history. Well, it still has a

wonderful history. But it is doing everything it can now to struggle to stay alive. And maybe that has to happen. I don't know, I really don't know. I don't see—and I'm pretty close to a lot of these people in one way or another—I don't see Tuskegee any longer occupying the level of significance that it once did. And you would hope that it would move up and take its place, but it seems to be, in many respects, spinning its wheels. So, I don't know, this bothers me. And is it that you have to have some sacrifice to get to a bigger, better situation? And maybe that is true, or maybe we are simply working our way through and this thing will right itself. I just don't know. But I point this out to point out that there was a negative side. Because there were a number of black families that had businesses that were doing well that are no longer able—and this has been for some time—no longer able to maintain the businesses they had. So, I don't know what this will mean.

Many people look at the cities that the blacks have moved into and are now in control, at some of the confusion and controversy and chaos that seems to exist in those. That doesn't bother me, because if you go back and study those same cities when the Caucasian element was trying to get those cities established with them in control, it was to a great extent the same thing. It may have had a little different flavor. It certainly was the case here in Birmingham. Of course Birmingham is a young city. Birmingham was incorporated in 1871, and it's really-- That has changed--what I'm fixing to say has changed in the last quarter of the century, maybe a little more than that--in that we have now a well-known university here with an unusually outstanding medical center. And which I believe now is the largest employer in the state, replacing what used to be US Steel. So, some of these things that people look to and say, "Oh, this is an example of

how terrible it is," I do not see that. I see it being more the trappings, or the symptoms, of becoming involved and adjusting to the--. [Speaks to someone else] Maggie, come here, hon!

KH: Hello.

CD: This is Ms. Kim Hill. And this is my granddaughter Maggie, who is a high school student. And if you want to listen, you may listen, or whatever you want to do, hon. [Maggie speaks] Huh? You watch the phone. You get over there and catch the phone, but in the meantime you can listen.

KH: You can even talk if you want. [Laughs]

CD: So be sure Ms. Hill keeps plenty of cold water. So, I have been somewhat concerned—. Now there are two efforts afoot at this time of new biographies of Bull Connor. Now, I knew Mr. Connor. Knew him pretty well, and I'll tell you some about that later. And he was somewhat of a rascal. However I think we do ourselves a tremendous disservice when we talk about how bad he was, and how evil his efforts were, and drop it there as though that's the story, never getting around to pointing out that Mr. Connor was able to behave the way he did because his antics and his behavior found fertile soil in a receptive constituency with which to grow. And you can't have bigots, and you cannot have these terrible things happen, without a constituency postured in some way that's favorable to such. And of course I'm sure you know the story that he started out as a legislator, as a reformer.

KH: I actually haven't heard much about his career before being police chief.

CH: Well, he was in the state legislature, and he was considered a reformer. He was for progressive things, and then after he became police chief, he still was fairly

progressive. Relatively speaking, he was progressive. But then his own personal life involved being involved with his secretary, and this became known, and he was forced into a situation of, you know, struggling to survive politically, and that's when he pulled the race card as his trump card. And of course that set him on a course that became more pronounced the rest of his life, really. And in public he played it to the hilt. But in talking to him in private, he wasn't nigh as full of venom and hate and that kind of thing as he projected when a TV camera was by, or a microphone was by, or a reporter was interviewing him. And he could--. Nevertheless, he gave cause, and he gave sense to a very damning and damaging attitude. But, it really was a reflection of the community in which he lived and served.

KH: I've heard that perspective from--I think it was Tommy Wyatt. He was--. I met him at the office, I think it's the civil rights office, on 4th Avenue. He was telling me how he considers extreme racism just a form of insanity, and--.

CD: Well, I would say that his extreme racism was to some degree unusual, but I think it really was a careful thought out ploy that he felt would sustain him through the mess he had gotten himself in. And the irony, or the uniqueness of this, is once he got on that treadmill, there was no way to get off, see? If he had ever given the impression that he was softening up, or that maybe he wasn't as pronounced in his views as he had been articulating, many of whom who liked his position would have turned on him as a turncoat. Now it's interesting, there was one leading attorney here—and you'll get some of this out of the book called—. [Pause] By McCullough—. Oh, the girl's father was an official here with--. And I have it.

KH: Is it--?

CD: "Take Me Home."

KH: "Carry Me Home?"

CD: "Carry Me Home." [by Diane McWhorter, published in 2002] That book will reflect some of what I'm talking about. But there was a leading attorney here who ranked very high, so high that in the '40s when Senator John Sparkman from Alabama first ran for senator, this state senator ran against him, and they had a terrible fight. And that senator was a reformer. He was the one that did many progressive things. He helped design and got through the legislature a personnel system that we still use. And as a county commissioner—head of it for a period of time, but he served in that office for twelve years—it's basically the same system we now have. Now, it's kind of gone to seed in some areas, because-- And the race issues have impacted it, and frankly they've not been able to adjust to that, and that has caused difficult problems and is still causing them.

KH: Why did the city need a new personnel system?

CD: Why does the city--?

KH: Why did he need to make a new personnel system?

CD: It had none.

KH: Oh.

CD: It had been the spoils system, and of course you can imagine a lot of the politicians were very displeased. And he was for other progressive things that large interest groups within the county were opposed to. But in many things, he was a mentor to Bull Connor. Bull Connor looked to this man. This man was a graduate of the Vanderbilt law school, a very capable person. So, Connor just didn't start out as a rabid

bully redneck. There was more to it. And, you know, I'm not at all sure—now this in no way mitigates the evil involved—but I'm not at all sure that when he first employed the race card, that he ever dreamed how strong that would be. And you see, this all takes place when the Dixiecrat element is having its heyday here in the Deep South. So, when you put all of that together, you can see that Connor wanted to survive. And, he did whatever he had to to survive. And no doubt it was his conclusion, or those who advised him's conclusion with which he concurred, that his troubles were such that he had to use or employ everything he could. If the race card didn't work, then he was in sure enough trouble! [Laughs]

KH: In your opinion, how long did the race card work for Bull Connor?

CD: After he initiated it, from then on until he died. Because you see after he left the police commission, he became president of the public service commission, which is the commission that sets hour rates and controls, to a certain degree, all of the utilities, and the railroads, and the buses in those days. And so, what had worked in Birmingham, worked well state-wide. And it used to be said, and some of the politicians that I listen to and still have high regard for their observations, used to say, well Bull is running again. He's going to probably win. And running is an easy way for him to greatly enhance his financial wellbeing through campaign offerings, or gifts. Now, it was also said-- And he was, on a day to day basis, in getting the job done, taking care of routine and ordinary complaints, he was pretty efficient. And he took the service element in that situation very serious. And he took great pride-- And then, these were for political reasons, but it showed that not only did he play the race card, he did other things. Like, you still occasionally run into an older person that was fairly active when Bull was in office, and

he or she'll say, "You know, when my mother died, I got the sweetest sympathy letter from him." Or, "When Jim, my husband, and I had our 25th wedding anniversary, we got the nicest letter from Commissioner Conner." So, I think that to just dismiss him as being crazy would be a little bit less than realistic.

They tell a story that back when the Liberty Bowl—that was a football bowl that started in, I think—I was living in Philadelphia at that time—and I think the plans were that they were going to do a take off on the Liberty Bell, and have this football bowl in Philadelphia. Anyway, they had it there for a few years and then it moved around, and I don't even know whether it still exists or not.

KH: I don't know.

CD: But they tell the story--. Alabama was one of the competing teams the first year in Philadelphia. So, the University of Alabama leased an entire train to carry folks to Philadelphia for the game. Well, [Laughs] there was a couple on there that were Alabamians but had lived in California for, I don't know, many years, but they still were loyal to the big "A", and they would come back here during certain football games that they enjoyed and watch those. It so happened that they were on this train. Somebody, a big contributor to Alabama, invited them, and they were on the train. And it's about lunch time, and people are going to the dining car. Well Bull Connor, who I think was more Auburn oriented than Alabama—but I don't get into that rhubarb, I don't have anything to do with it, but I think that he was more Auburn than Alabama. Anyway, he started out early in life selling fertilizer, so you would think the agricultural school in the state, the leading one, would appeal to him. But anyway, he comes along and sees somebody, some prominent person from the University of Alabama and he says—and he

could clown it up, and he could be very charming—he says, “Have y’all et yet?” And he went on down being funny, and the man of this couple from California turned to somebody next to him and said, “Who in the world is that?” And they said, “Oh! You didn’t know? He is head of the English department at the--” [Laughs]

KH: Oh no!

CD: But anyway, I had a little experience that I think is somewhat reflective. My wife had decided to open her own office as a psychiatrist at Roberts. She was on the faculty at the medical school here at UAB, but she decided she wanted her own office. She would still have privileges at the university, but she wanted to be independent. There’s some stories there that I won’t get into this morning, because they don’t really have anything to do with what we’re talking about. But it turned out that she had rented her office, moved in her furniture, had her stationery printed, everything ready to go, and the telephone, the employees of the telephone company, went on strike. And I called some of the union officials and said, “How long is this going to last?” And of course I should have known they weren’t going to tell me a whole lot, and what they were was probably going to be shady in a certain way. But they told me they could probably be out for two or three months. Well, I talked to some of my friends in the phone company’s administration and said, “Well I hear it could be two or three months.” And they said, “Well we certainly hope not, but yeah it could be.” The stakes are pretty high, and I guess that was in ’67. And up to that point, Bull Connor was just somebody in the newspaper to me. I had moved back here from Philadelphia in ’64. Now, I knew about him from the media long before, and before I left here in the mid ’50s I knew about some of his carryings on. So, he was not a total stranger, but I knew him strictly through the

media. Well, my wife was distraught and said, "What am I going to do? If I could just have one phone so my patients can get through. Don't need the network activated, just one phone." I said, "I don't know what we can do, but let me talk to the Alabama public service utility chairman and see what he says, because he's the man that controls all of this." And I don't know who to turn to, so I called him. Now it just so happened—and I should have thought of this, I didn't. I was still young and green about a lot of things. He knew me because I was the executive director of the state Democratic executive committee, and I worked directly for Robert S. Vance, who was later a federal judge that was blown up, killed, in December of 1989—and I'll tell you more about that if we get to it.

KH: Sure.

CD: He knew that. When I told him, I said, "We're not asking that the whole system be activated, if she can just have one phone, she'll try to get by." So, from that he said, "Well now a doctor's got to have contact so the patients can get to them," and I said, "That's the idea, Mr. Connor." And he used this term that I despise, because it was a little demeaning, I thought. He said, "Chrissy boy, you just don't worry till you hear from old Bull." Well I felt I had struck out again. This politician is greasing me up to let me fall. He said, "Somebody'll call you this afternoon or early in the morning." Well sure enough, about 3:00 the secretary said, "Mr. Connor is on the telephone." I picked it up, and he said, "Chrissy boy, your wife will have a telephone in her office either late this afternoon or first thing in the morning, and if that doesn't happen, you call old Bull at this number," and he gave me a number. Well, about 4:30 these two junior administrators of the company show up. And my wife already had a secretary working there in the office

getting everything prepared for the practice to start there, and she said that these two men were just grumbling and raising a fuss and one of them said, "I wonder who in the hell this person is? They must be important for them to tell us—." And it was two junior officials of the company they'd sent over to install that one line. Now, he did that. I mean, there was no money involved, or anything.

Now, it did turn out that we became frequent callers after that. He'd call me, just talking about anything, and I kept thinking, why? Why is he doing that? But anyway--.

KH: It was the political connection.

CD: Huh?

KH: Was it the political connection?

CD: Oh yeah, yeah, and something more. See, I had been a law librarian, I had an advanced degree in library science from Drexel University, which was pretty highly regarded, and I was a pretty good researcher, if I admit so myself, and he had learned this on his own I'm sure. He said, "You love history, and you're a good researcher, Chrissy boy." He said, "I want you to do me a favor." "Yes sir." He said, "I want to find out how many Indians there are in Minnesota." And he first asked me if I knew how many. I said, "Mr. Connor, I don't have the slightest notion." "Well how many tribes are there?" "Mr. Connor, I don't know, I don't even know what the tribes are." "Well, you could find out, couldn't you?" Yes sir, I think I can do that. "Well, let me ask you, do old Bull a favor, and see what you can come up with." Well I knew at that point that he definitely had something in mind, and it was pretty clever. This went on. I would call him, if not every day every other day, and point out that this neophyte had come up with something that I had found interesting that I wanted to share with him. I'm still trying to figure out

where we're going. So, he one day said to me, he said, "You reckon Hubert Humphrey--". No, he says, "You reckon Hubert Horatio Humphrey knows any more about the Indians than you do?" I said, "Mr. Connor, if he doesn't, and the Indians are depending on him, they're in bad trouble." But I knew at that point where we were going, because Humphrey was the candidate for the presidency in '68 on the Democratic ticket. I had been working for some time--. I had left the position as law librarian at Cumberland and gone to work for a time, by this episode's occurrence, with Robert S. Vance. So I knew then. And I kept feeding him stuff and kind of upgraded what I was feeding him and the quantity of it, but I didn't want to help him too much. And then he just said to me one day, he said, "I guess you've been wondering why I've been asking all this." I said, "I sure have, because I didn't know that you had any interest in Indians." Well I, you know, I really knew that there was something else, but he said, "Well you're (such and such) right, but if I can get a lot of statistical data I'm going to embarrass that Humphrey." And that's what--. I had already concluded that. Well, we worked on it, but as often was the case with him, he got off on something else and that went by the wayside.

But anyway, up to that point we, our relationship, had been on the telephone and a few letters or notes that had gone back and forth. His assistant was a fellow with whom he had served on the city commission whose name was Jabo Wagner, Sr. And he, Jabo, is now deceased. His son has been in the state legislature, continually I believe. I don't believe he's missed any terms since I guess '66. And he served several terms in the house and then moved up to the senate. He switched to the Republican party, and now I would say is one of about three key spokesmen for the Republican party. But Mr. Wagner, Bull's assistant, was just as accommodating. So, there were some positive

things about the man, and of course I think he attended church pretty regularly.

KH: He taught Sunday school.

CD: And the folks say, well he just did that for political reasons. I would not want to be that judgmental. I'm sure they were a factor, his attendance was political, but I think he was doing this before he was in office. And I think he saw that as a component of being a leader. But as it went on our paths frequently crossed, and in May of '68 we had the Democratic primary. Now Judge Vance had said to me, they were having a black gathering, a rendezvous, out in an area here in Birmingham called Collegeville. And he said, "I want you to go out there tonight and make a speech. I can't go and I want you to go in my stead." See, Vance was chairman of the state Democratic executive committee. Normally, that was the position held by the governor, but in the primary two years before, in '66, there had been a showdown—no in '64. In '64 there had been a showdown between the national oriented democrats and the Wallace democrats. And you had a bunch of young men here that used some good political strategy and formed a coalition, so to speak, or a slate, and they got out and worked hard. And most, many, of those men were driven by sincere convictions that the race situation was wrong and needed to be substantially addressed, especially in the south or in this community where they lived. And so, a majority of that element won the seats on the committee, which meant they voted for somebody other than the governor, who was George Wallace. So Vance was the challenge, or the opposite, of George Wallace, and he prevailed. And that was one of the few things at that time that George Wallace didn't control, and it created a very high level of tension and feeling. And you know it was pro-Wallace, anti-Wallace. That's what it came to be, which really it wasn't that to start with, but that's kindly how it settled

in. And of course Bull Connor was elected statewide as the national committee man from Alabama. Each state had such an office.

KH: Okay.

CD: And they also had a national committee lady. Well, Vance told me to go out to Collegeville and make a speech and I said, "Well look, what kind of a gathering is this?" He says, "It's a city wide gathering of the black Democratic neighborhood organizations." Don't know that I knew at the time, and really I'm not sure it ever did have a real formal name, but it was a collection of a number of groups. [Spoken to Maggie] Don't let Sarah get away, I want her to meet Ms. Hill. [Maggie replies] Sarah. I don't want her to leave until she has a chance to meet Ms. Hill and Ms Hill has a chance to meet her. Is she working upstairs, or where is she? [End of part one]

CD: I asked Chairman Vance, I said, "Well what am I to achieve by going out there? What do you want me to do?" And he said, "I want you to tell them this: that when the voting is over in May, we will have an integrated delegation to the 1968 presidential convention in Chicago. And, also tell them that the new Democratic executive committee will be integrated." Up to that point it was all whites. I said, "Chief, that sounds great, but how are you going to do that?" He said, "You go on out there and tell them that's what we're going to do, and I'll talk with you about how I'm going to do it later." Well, I thought of course he was the boss, and I liked what he was saying, but I didn't have the faintest notion of what we were going to do to achieve what I thought was good. So, I go out there. They met in a Methodist church where one of the leaders was a big Democrat named Robert Washington, and he was one of the first blacks here in Birmingham that had a supervisory position in a manufacturing company. And he

worked for the Dixie Clay brick company out near Bessemer, and he was over some of the kilns and the employees that stack those kilns and unloaded them after they'd gone through the heating and all that kind of thing. Well, I want you to know I get out there, and I'm telling you there was a crowd. I had to park two blocks away. And I get there, and it's just a sea of black people. The church is packed, and there're all out—and this is in cool weather, everybody was comfortable with a coat on. Well, I go in, and Arthur Shores, who is a well-known Birminghamian, and rightly so, was kindly running the show, and he said, "Now you're going to be near the end because I think the nature of your speech is such that we need to end up with it, and so you just sit back and enjoy yourself." And it was an interesting meeting. And they, I don't know, they had speakers. They had a whole long list. They maybe wouldn't speak but three minutes, but they were running them through and they were certainly working up the crowd.

KH: Had you ever been to a meeting like that before?

CD: Not one like that! I had been to some church meetings. I had spoken, while in the seminary in Philadelphia, to a number of black churches, but I had never been to anything like this. Anyway, after-- And they had a lot of music, and I assumed-- I mean it wasn't long after that I learned that meeting pretty much followed a litany or a plan that they had in most of their meetings. You know, scripture, a song or two, either of a spiritual nature or a hymn or something, not much loose stuff. And sometimes they would have a few who would do what were called sentence prayers. But I learned that the format of that meeting was pretty much the acceptable procedure. Well, they finally got to me, and I got up and went through, "I bring you greetings," and such and such, and it was quiet—real quiet. And I think I was the only white person in that whole sea of

black folk. I got a real sense of being a minority on that occasion.

KH: Did any other of those people know who you were, besides Arthur Shores?

CD: Yes, yes. I, you know, by that time a lot of the leaders knew that I was doing a lot of the planning and background work. And see, Vance had asked me to come to do that because I had been involved in, a few months earlier, not so much in helping the county committee reorganize itself, but helping the developing work that enabled the county to sustain the changes it had brought about. But I had been very much involved in that, and that had been done unexpectedly. So, through my work in the county committee, many of these leaders there knew who I was.

Anyway, I told them what Chairman Vance had told me to do, and it was just like a bomb had gone off. I mean, they yelled and clapped and shouted and praised the Lord and praised Vance, and it was something. And this went on, I don't know, for maybe three minutes. It seemed like forever. And then, with that crescendo, the meeting ended with everybody, this whole sea of people, joining hands, you know crossed arms, singing, "We Shall Overcome." And by that time I realized I'd made a real statement. And while we were singing, "I Shall Overcome," I'm thinking to myself, "I sure hope so!"

[Laughter]

KH: Because you didn't know how you were going to do it.

CD: No! So anyway the next morning I go into the office, into my office, and Vance comes into my office and says, "Well, rev, how did it go last night?" And I said, "Man, it went! But let me ask you, now I've done this, how are we going to achieve it?" He said, "Figure us out a way. That's what I've got you for." Well, it wasn't that bad but it was tough, and we spent a lot of time. And this is something that was never known,

except by just a handful, and virtually all of the people that were involved in what I'm about to tell you are now deceased. In fact, I and maybe two others are about all that's left, and I don't know that we're doing too well. [Laughs] But anyway, we began meeting on--. The regular schedule was one Saturday a month. Now some of the time we met every other Saturday. And we met in the Frank Nelson building downtown on the ninth floor in the law office of which Vance was a partner, Jenkins, Cole, Callaway, and Vance. We met in the library, and we had black officials from all over the state--not officials, black people, because there wasn't many black officials.

KH: Right. Were there any black Democratic officials?

CD: Not at that time. Well, there were of the black Democratic organizations. But we would have these meetings, and they would come, one and two at a time, up the elevator. You know it hadn't been many years before that that the blacks hadn't been even allowed to ride the elevators in the Frank Nelson building. They would come up and then we would meet, and they came from various parts of the state. We had Dr. Glomidian, a well known professor at Tuskegee that was involved in some of the very basic litigation. He was a very polished, quiet, reserved individual, but had excellent strategy ideas. Very quiet, talked very little, but he understood how to move his people, he was very good at that. Emory Jackson, who was editor of the Birmingham World.-- and Emory was an interesting person, smart, but he, at a moment's notice, could create more confusion. And of course he would do this if he thought we were on something that didn't make good sense. He'd say something and it would cause dissension. But he was an interesting person. And Judge Peter Hall, who later became a municipal judge and the first black judge in the state, Arthur Shores, Wilbur Hollins, his brother-in-law, Rufus

Lewis from Montgomery—they called him Coach Lewis—who was-- He'd been a coach at Alabama A & M I believe, and he was an undertaker. He had a large funeral home that I believe he and his wife had inherited through her family. But he was--he later became a state legislator. We had a fellow named Frazier, I believe from Crenshaw County. We had Isom Clemons, who was president of the longshoremen's union in Mobile. We had Joe Reed and Alvin Holmes from Montgomery who-- Joe headed up the Democratic-- Let's see, the black Democratic—they changed the name. Caucus--it was the black arm of the Democratic organization. Those were a few of the blacks that came in and helped plan strategy. Now what were we doing? We were trying to work out-- The big thing was without creating much fuss or notice, we were trying to set up a plan so that in May—I believe it was the first Tuesday in May, I might be wrong about that, but it's pretty near that. I'd have to go back to my records. And the primary, the Democratic primary, we would elect blacks to the state committee. That was the big thing. And in addition to that—and that probably was really more exciting—elect delegates, black delegates, to the Democratic convention in Chicago in '68. Now earlier that year, I believe it was in--I'd have to go back and check, I haven't looked at this stuff, many decades now. We met in the old Tuttweiler Hotel, the committee did, to set up the primary that was to take place. And part of that primary would include the election of new state committee members and a new national committee man and committee woman. The way we tried to achieve this, we did redistrict the membership of the committee. And we were able to elect some blacks by doing this. And it was similar—. Much that was established in achieving that, would later be used in '72 I believe, or '73, to redistrict the legislature, breaking up the districts. Anyway--.

KH: Was this a popular election?

CD: Yes.

KH: Okay.

CD: But we simply, frankly, did some gerrymandering.

KH: Yeah.

CD: And you know that's a wholesome endeavor, if you're doing it. Now if the other folks are doing it, the devil be damned! But you know it's like a lot of things in politics--it all depends on who's making the decision, you know. Don't let it ever be said that consistency's been overworked in the political field. Anyway, we got our districts adopted and we had districts for the delegation, but we couldn't, we didn't have as much, as great a number there, and we had real problems. So we finally—. And I was the one that--. Vance and I would work a little almost every day, and I worked sometimes all day, and Vance had a brilliant mind at knowing how to analyze things. He had good knowledge of the demographics of the state, and we had developed a pretty database to work from. So, we had a real problem integrating that delegation. We made a commitment. Now, how are we going to deliver? And there were nights that I didn't sleep too well, because that was a difficult challenge. Finally, I came up with a plan where I knew we would have a token black. Now that's something you don't brag about, but when you're behind the eight ball it's like, you know, having a technicality in a lawsuit. Folks curse these technicalities, but if they need one and get it they think the Lord sent it. So I figured out that we had one district that involved part of Mountain Brook and part of Birmingham, and we had a lady here who was from a very affluent family. Her husband was very wealthy. She had a good name, highly regarded, but she

was liberal. And she came to me and said, "I'll do whatever y'all need me to do to help the cause." And I told her the predicament we were in. Her name was Marie Jemison. Her husband was John Jemison. And I said, "Marie, if you qualify in this district immediately, nobody else will run in that district against a Jemison--that will put up any serious opposition." So she said, "Is that what you want me to do?" I said, "Well, that's part of what I want you to do." I said, "Now, it just so happens that Arthur Shores lives in that same district. Now I want you to qualify, and then I'll get him to qualify, but I'm going to get him to qualify at the very last hour of qualification. And then a few days after that I want you to withdraw, and that's asking an awful lot of you." Now keep in mind this is in Birmingham, Alabama, and we're asking a white lady to do what Mrs. Jemison did for a black man, Arthur Shores. So, she said, "That's fine." And of course Marie kindly liked to do things like this. She had an inkling to do unusual things and things that nobody expected. So, we did it and she withdrew. Now, we made her an offer which meant she could go, and all of the alternates got to come down and sit with the delegation at least part of the time during the '68 convention.

So, that gave us our token black. We looked over the number of winners and saw right quick that there were a number of Wallace people on there. And we anticipated that they would cause us trouble somewhere along the line if we did not do something ourselves. We knew that our delegation—we had no reason to expect otherwise and I had made contacts with the party officials. The party appointed Governor Hughes of New Jersey as chairman of the credentials committee, and we learned early on that we would be challenged. The reason that we would be challenged-- There was now a history of the Alabama delegation not agreeing to support the nominee of the convention

and walking out, and that was a big thing you know. Color was involved in that. One of the previous years--. The first time it occurred in recent history, George Wallace was the delegate and he refused to walk out and stayed. That was before he became governor and I believe though he was already in the state house of representatives.

KH: But you wanted to make sure that this delegation wasn't going to walk out?

CD: Right. Well, no, no. We thought they were going to walk out. So they're going to walk out. You see this we're doing before the qualifying is over. We are having to do something to place people, so we identified just a few more of the slots where we thought the people would be inclined to walk out in lieu of signing any kind of loyalty pledge. And, I said that they not only would walk out, they had walked out previously, but in some cases they had not taken their credentials. I felt on this occasion things had gotten so stressful and so heated. And see, this was made further complicated because we had a dentist, a black dentist, a highly regarded black dentist in Huntsville named John Cashion, who never would work within the system. And he was all the time trying to undermine the black group that Joe Reed headed and also the established white group that Vance headed, and of course Reed and Vance worked together.

KH: Why he want to undermine--?

CD: He wanted to be head--. He felt that the Democratic party leaders in the state were not pure enough. He thought they ought to just, you know, go for broke, and it was a death wish kind of thing for the political party. And he seized on that, and did everything. He was plenty smart. I always felt—I don't know that I could prove that. I can't even remember now what I did find out about his activities, but he had out of state help. And you know, it's oftentimes that kind of help comes from the very areas you

would expect it not to come from. But anyway, we decided, and it worked, they are so focused on who they've got in these different slots, we won't run anybody in those slots. We'll just run people in the alternate positions that are black, most of them unknown, and say nothing. And so, we got quite a number of blacks elected as alternates. We still didn't say much. Now it became known what had happened, but we didn't talk about it. There's a time to talk and there's a time to be quiet, and during that period for us most of it was time to be quiet.

KH: So you didn't let many of the voters know that you were trying to integrate the committee?

CD: Well, very candidly we didn't blow any horns, no we did not. And very frankly had we, we would have failed. And if I'd a been told I could not do it my way, or the way that I and Vance's advisors developed, I would have never said it, because if you had gone out head on, you'd have been slaughtered. That was just the way it was, anybody could see that. Now we had to be--. We had to plan well, put it that way. Some folks would describe it differently, I guess. Anyway, after the voting and everybody--. It turned out that it was split pretty good between the Vance element and the Wallace element, but Cashion was in there to some extent, and he was trying to sabotage now Vance's efforts. He wanted it to go to Wallace, which he thought if it did it would catapult him into a position of control with the national group, see? Well, we began to plan. And I simply hit the road, and I was all over this state, and our strategy was that we would make Vance chairman of the delegation. And it turned out that there was a lawyer in Montgomery named Bob Colbrin who had been a Wallace supporter, but there had been a dispute between Colbrin and some of the Wallace people. And I went to see him

in his office in Montgomery. His office was located where the civic center in Montgomery is now located. I remember it was-- I can still remember meeting him and going to his office. And I told him-- I had never met the man. But he had wanted to get certain things done, and he felt that the Wallace machine had blocked some things he wanted to get done for some people. That had led to a problem. So I was given carte blanche authority to work a deal, cut a deal, with him to be vice chairman. And he was in the frame of mind that he liked that. And he was elected vice chairman, and every officer was chosen, and I went to them personally and worked out the deal. And then I wrote the nominating speeches, got the people who would do the nominating. Everything was pretty well orchestrated, because the least little thing and we would be down the tube.

Well, we met at the Parliament House which is--well I guess that's about 430 20th Street South. It's right now next to the University of [Alabama-Birmingham]—part of the medical school. It was on 20th Street between 4th and 5th Avenue south. And the building is still there, but I think it is scheduled to be imploded and they're going to put some new facility there. We met there, and I remember that the people whom I had asked to nominate Vance, nominated. There was one person nominated him and then two people who endorsed that nomination. And then things were going so good. And Bull was there, now he's going out of office, but he's still the national committee man through the '68 convention and then the new person takes over. Well, things are just going so nicely, and we get to that point and he lets out a yell that he was well known for, and I thought, "Oh, Lord! It's fixing to come apart." And he said, "Chrissy boy!" and that I didn't like, but you know I could put up with anything if we could get through this thing winning. He said, "Hey, hey I need attention!" I thought, "Uh, oh." And he rolled out in

front of the platform at the meeting in his wheelchair and said, "I want to third that just for the hell of it."

KH: Okay. [Laughs]

CD: I'm telling you that was like cursing from heaven. Anyway, after that Bull and I were buddies, you know. And I must say Vance had told me, "You make friends with that guy. Both of you are pretty good at shooting the bull." And I did, I went out of my way and I would talk to him and I asked his advice on a lot of stuff—I don't think many people did. Bull either told you what to do or there was nothing to it, but I discussed with him what he thought. Anyway, after that he was no trouble, he really wasn't.

KH: And I bet you got a lot more support because of him, right?

CD: Well, let me say this. I think it softened--. It probably did more to soften the Wallace opposition. There wasn't any question the Wallace element didn't like us, and they had no reason to like us, because we were definitely a thorn in there side. It was the one thing--. And it was embarrassing in some respects for the governor not to be able to at least be the titular head of the party in his state that was supposed to be his party. Well, anyway we got through that and everything went off pretty good, and then Bull would call me, and I would call him and we have--. Cashion has filed a challenge to our delegation. So Hughes' committee sets up a hearing--I don't know, almost a week before the convention convened--and we went up for that. Bull did not get involved, but he did come on up, and we, you know, very frankly weren't interested in his being involved. You know he and I may be getting along, but having him support what we were trying to do publicly--and he wasn't really supporting, he really wasn't involved--but if he had

come out and spoke favorably, he would have been the kiss of death. Cashion would have eaten our lunch after that.

Well, anyway we get up there and we have our initial caucuses to, after-- Well it turned out that after we had this laborious and lengthy hearing--very tiring, I mean the weather was about as hot in Chicago as it is here today. It was terrible, in the nineties. And the hippies were beginning to demonstrate, and they were putting stink bombs off in all of our hotels. It was quite obvious that it was going to be something we weren't used to. But anyway, after we had the hearing--and I thought we did a pretty creditable job. And we had done a number of things, not just here but we had gone to Washington, held a press conference, we had done a number of things to try to convince the national leadership that we were for real and genuine, and I think they bought that. And we had the two powerful senators, Hill and Sparkman, who never came out big and loud, but behind the scenes--which sometimes the real decisions are made--it was very clear that they didn't want us messed with. But anyway, the afternoon after we finished up the hearing before the Hughes committee, one of his staff and I got to be pretty good friends, and he came to me and he said, "Governor Hughes wants to see you in his private suite. He wants you and Mr. Vance and Clifford Fulford," who was one of the lawyers with us. And so they take us, we go--I don't remember without checking. Anyway, we are either in Hughes' hotel, or we go to it, and they lead us there, or they came and got us and we were already there, and took us up on the freight elevator. Then we got off and got on the regular elevator and went on up to his suite. And we went in, and he said, "Y'all are going to be seated," but he said, "You're going to have to sign a loyalty pledge." And of course my feeling was, you know, if you're going to be part of it, you ought to be loyal.

KH: Can you explain the loyalty pledge to me?

CD: Well, it was very simple.

KH: Okay.

CD: I drafted it. I don't know--. I looked for a copy of that and I know where it is, but I think it's so far in storage it would take me a month to dig it out.

KH: That's okay.

CD: And it basically, it basically said we would support the nominee of the convention, period. That was it. It was very clear that we were going to be loyal, but they weren't making us do anything that everybody else wasn't expected to do. Well, he said, "Get your pledge drawn up. Just let (somebody there) see it, get me a copy, and we'll release what has to be done." I don't remember--. That was on a Thursday, I think, but I'm not sure at this point, it's been a long time ago. We then--. What I did without saying anything, I got all of these alternates to sign off, see. Nobody knew that was happening. I got them to sign in case the person in the main seat wouldn't sign.

KH: With the Wallace supporters.

CD: Right. Now, we knew working with us in all of this was the state committee woman—national committee woman—Mrs. Ruth Johnson Owens. She was very helpful to us, and so Hughes said that everybody could pick up their credentials beginning at 1:30 or sometime right after lunch at his, I think it, it was at one of the offices. I don't recall from memory right now which one it was. In the meantime, Ruth Johnson Owens went to him and said, "Governor, if Connor gets these credentials,"—you see the national committee man and committee woman were to pick them up—"if he gets them, he and the group that will surround him will never turn those credentials back in, and our

delegation will still not be seated." So he said, "Well, Mr. Connor is in a wheelchair. Why don't you and Mr. Doss just come at 10:00 and pick them up?" So we go over. Let me back up here, these things come to mind. The evening it was going to be announced the next morning, or maybe we had given it--. Hughes said give this to your newspapers. I believe later that evening we gave to our newspapers here in Birmingham the story of the loyalty pledge. I think that's right. And anyway, we thought would work on Bull a little. So, one of the delegates was a lawyer, Bill Fife, who was Rankin Fife's cousin, and Rankin Fife was George Wallace's speaker of the house. But Bill, he was with our group--and he's still living, and quite an interesting character--so I got him to come down to my suite, and I said, "Let's liven--. Bull's not getting any attention, so let's get him in the middle of things." He said, "How are you going to do that?" I said, "Well we're going to call him, and I want you to tell him whatever you want to, but I would suggest, say you were Ralph McGill," who was a very famous reporter from the Atlanta Constitution.

KH: I've read a lot about him.

CD: "Tell him that you're he or one of his assistants or something, and that you just want to talk with him a little bit and get some insight on police enforcement and control. And ask him what breed of dogs did he use, and where did he get them." We set up a whole bunch of stuff about dogs, and which breed did he find best, and what were the strengths. It was just a whole lot of malarkey. Then we got into fire hoses and, you know, which brand can take the most pressure and squirt the water the fastest, just, you know. Well Bull bought into that, and he got to talking and raving and you could hear him across, from the telephone across the room. And Bill was ideal for such a purpose. I

mean he was always pulling pranks on somebody so he was tremendous. Well later—I don't remember. Later that evening or the next morning when this breaks, Bull is talking about, "Man, I got this long inquiry from a reporter from the Atlanta Constitution last night, and they wanted to know all about my expertise concerning police dogs and fire hoses." And he was just, you know. So that was an interesting episode.

And then we had—. In the meantime before we went up there, we made entrée to George Wallace. One question: what do you want out of the convention? Now he later, or at least I was told, denied this, but this happened. What do you want? And his response was, "Don't embarrass me." All right, we'll try not to embarrass him. Now I never did understand—I don't think any of us did—but I think it meant, you know, don't make me look bad. And we tried to keep that in mind, not that we went along with some of the things he was advocating, but we just—. Really the effort was to ignore him, not mention his name, just not have banners or buttons or anything. Just act as though he didn't exist, that that would be the safest way of not embarrassing him. Maybe some folks would have thought that was the worst way to embarrass him, but our conclusion was, under the circumstances, we just act as though Wallace doesn't exist.

KH: How was Wallace's political reputation at that point. Like, were most people in the state still pretty staunch supporters?

CD: Oh yes, yes.

KH: But on the national level, not so much?

CD: Right. Well anyway, there was a delegate from Mobile who was the only—. Now a few of the Wallace people stayed, but they were very respectful, and we understood, they understood, that we were not going to try to embarrass him. And I think

they really felt that we were acting in good faith, you know, let us exist and we let you exist. Now some folks would say that's not heroic, and it probably wasn't, but again we're down to the nitty gritty of surviving. Well anyway, it was interesting that this fellow from Mobile, Dan Alexander—a very attractive young man, but he was continually wearing big Wallace signs and he would have statements wearing about Wallace, and he was getting a lot of attention, because the media wanted this, see. Well, one morning we had a caucus, and Vance gave everybody a pep talk about we don't want to embarrass the governor, and it would be better if we concentrated on what was at hand. Well Alexander pops out with—I don't remember what the button was, but it was a pro-Wallace button--and Bull wheeled over to me and he said, "Let me talk to him. I think I can get him to behave." I said, "Mr. Connor, I wish you would. He's not helping anybody. It looks like--. We look a little bad in the delegation. See what you can do." Well Bull--we were in a big room and half of it was just open--he rolled over to him and motioned to him. And they went off to one of the corners of the room and they were talking, and I don't know what was said. The first thing I heard was Bull says, "Yes, and you're a G-o-d damn fool!" And he was--. Of course Bull was putting on his show maybe, I don't know what was going on. He rolled back over to me and said, "The (g.d.) idiot hadn't got a bit of sense—do whatever you can to him!"

KH: Okay.

CD: So, you know well, that had its effect on the people that weren't too happy, that were left in the delegation, that weren't too happy with us. And he would do it--. And of course now it was partly show, but he later mentioned, "That helped you out." But he would, you know--. Anyway, the first night of the convention he was there in his

wheelchair, and he was pushed by his brother-in-law, a real kind, laid back, nice gentleman. Mr. Gentle was his name, and he was gentle, and he was pushing Bull around. And he was nice to everybody. Just made sure Bull got where Bull was supposed to be, and he didn't try to in any way inhibit Bull, Bull did as he pleased. But anyway, he was sitting back about half-way of our delegation area, and I don't remember now, but three votes came up, and I was calling the votes out. I'd go back--Vance was up on the stage--I'd go back to Connor and say, "Mr. Connor, now a vote's coming up. We got to vote on--this is the issue. What do you want to do?" He'd say, "Chrissy boy, vote me any way you please. You got my vote, just vote." I learned later that he was enjoying his cup of coffee, which wasn't coffee. But anyway--.

KH: [Laughs] So he really didn't care.

CD: So when I go back the third time, he said, "Wait just a damn minute!" He said, "Let's make an agreement. You got my vote. You vote me any way you want to. That's your vote. But I want a promise out of you." I said, "All right, what's the promise?" He said, "When it comes time to vote for the nominee, you promise old Bull that he can cast his vote,"—it was half a vote, I believe. I think that's what--. We split them up so, well--. Anyway, I think it was a half a vote. Maybe it wasn't from the national committee. Anyway, he said, "Old Bull wants to cast his vote for "Bear" Bryant for president. Can you deliver that?" I said, "Yeah, I think I can deliver that, if you talk fast." He said, "You set it up, and you got my vote for anything you want."

So, we went through the convention. I don't know about--. The third night we were there--. Arthur Shores spoke the first night, I believe for the convention accepting our delegation. And Arthur was groomed, he was in a fine suit, and he was looking good.

Now there was something funny about that, or about the Shore family. I think their house--. [End of part two]

KH: I've been in that neighborhood.

CD: --on Dynamite Hill--

KH: Yeah.

CD: --been blown up three times. Well, they were having a lot of burning and carrying on in Chicago, and Ms. Shores wouldn't go to the convention. She said, "Go to the convention, why no!" She said, "You're liable to get hurt up there, all of that carrying on!" And she was living in her house that had been blown up three times. We thought that was funny. Anyway--.

KH: I guess that's why she was scared. She'd seen it happen so many time.

CD: [Laughs] So anyway, Arthur's made his speech and, you know, a cubicle right up--. We had the New York delegation, the Alabama delegation, and right behind us, suspended--I never did know how they'd done that, but they did--they had Walter Cronkite. What was that, CBS?

KH: Pardon?

CD: Walter Cronkite, the news reporter.

KH: CBS.

CD: He was from CBS. Was he with CBS?

KH: I think so.

CD: Well, his network was right behind, and he would sit us there and watch us. Well one morning--see we would start late at night and go to early morning because it was so hot. So, he sent a runner down to ask me, he said "We've been watching y'all,

and you've got Mr. Shores, and you've got Mr. Connor"--. And I can't remember whether it had been the previous convention or two conventions back, Bull, as he was leaving the convention, walking out, Arthur Shores was there up on some bleachers. And Bull pointed to him and said, "There's my nigger, there's my nigger," you see. And I don't know whether Cronkite remembered that and he was trying to do--. I don't know what it was, except this runner came to me and said, "Mr. Doss, we noticed Mr. Shores and Mr. Connor down here on the floor together talking some, and we would like to interview them live tomorrow evening during the convention. Can we do that?" And I said, "Well you'll have to ask them. I don't care. If they're agreeable to it, have at it." Well they both thought it was great, or at least that's what they said. Next evening, somewhere in the course of things, here came a camera crew and a reporter--must have been about five or six in this group of cameras and lights. And a reporter--and I don't even remember who the reporter was, but it was one of the junior reporters--came up, and they talked to Arthur Shores first. And Arthur told them it was good to be there, it certainly was good to be there under substantially different circumstances, and I thought made a nice little general statement. And then they turned to Bull, and Mr. Gentle was standing by and Bull was seated in his wheelchair. And they said, "Mr. Connor," and I don't remember, but posed some question, and he didn't answer. And they kindly hit him on the shoulder, or shook him very lightly, and called his name--still no response. And then they were kindly vigorous and they said, "Mr. Connor!" and poor Mr. Gentle said, "Gentlemen, I'm so sorry. Mr. Connor is drunk." And of course with that, the camera went off to something else. I mean, the picture on the tube was changed. What had happened--and it started the first night. It all came to me then, that when he was being so

agreeable, that they were doing, they were bringing him these old churn white, creamy colored cups—coffee cups—and they were putting bourbon in those. I don't know what all they put in them, but bourbon was the thing that was doing the job.

KH: He was drinking straight bourbon every night.

CD: And he was drinking those, and he didn't want to be bothered. And if he ever knew if happened, I don't know. He never said anything to me and I sure didn't say anything to him. Well, after the convention, everybody just about has gone home. Vance and I have packed up, and we've gotten all of our records and everything packed, and they've done been sent back to Alabama. We're waiting for our plane. We get out to the airport, and guess who's there? There's Bull. And they roll him down the ramp and turn him around and back him into the plane, and as he went through the threshold of the door of the plane, he raised both arms up and said, "Hooray for George Wallace!" [Laughs] And he went back to his seat, and went to sleep. But now, that actually happened.

KH: Wow!

CD: And let me tell you, I have told you more detail than anybody up to this time. And I've got this on a lot of stuff.

KH: So, from all that work you did, did it make it a lot easier for the next delegation to be integrated?

CD: Oh yeah, it was never an issue after that.

KH: Good. Thank you for sharing all that with me.

CD: All right. Uh--.

KH: I have a couple more background questions to ask you.

CD: All right, go ahead.

KH: How did you get interested in practicing law?

CD: Well, I guess as far back as I can remember, the legal field intrigued me, it really did. But I grew up in a culture that was pretty typical--there were a lot better citizens than lawyers. And so, I loved history, and as you can see I have over 28,000 volumes here and most of them are history, not all of them, history and biography. I loved history, but my love of history was such that I never felt pursuing history as a vocation could sustain my needs for gratifying my history bent. But I had intended, frankly, to be a pastor, a local pastor. I enjoyed-- I did not-- And I held pastorates in Pennsylvania and Alabama. I did finish the seminary, and was ordained, but my first wife was a doctor, and I soon found that Baptist deacons didn't like smart women. That's changed some, I hope. I think it has. And I felt she should have the right to fulfill her aspirations. And then from my history interests and the reading of the Baptist church, the more sophisticated position on church and state, I became-- I found that intriguing, and I think developed a sincere appreciation for the real, genuine sense of separation of church and state. But at the same time, perceived this to be something still evolving, that the final word hadn't been written, the final application hadn't yet been made. And I doubt if it ever will. But anyway, I became interested in that, and decided that I could serve, and serve well, in working on first amendment issues. So that I decided to pursue, and I did, but realizing if I was going to get into the thick of things, I needed a law degree—and I like to be in the thick of things.

KH: [Laughs] Yeah, I got that impression.

CD: [Laughs] So, and I had been interested in politics ever since I'd been in the seventh grade in school. I'd held an office every year of some sort, and when I finished

high school I was president of the student body. But anyway, I got my juris doctorate and then became the law librarian—well I became the law librarian before I had finished. And I had some offers to go to other schools that were attractive, but my wife and I had decided we would return to Alabama because we thought we could make some contributions that would be significant. So we returned here and except for one occasion when I was almost tempted to leave because of the attractiveness of an offer, there's been no question of staying here. So I was at Cumberland, and then I was in the state legislature. I wrote—and that's a great story, because it was an accident, or its succeeding was an accident. I wrote, or co-authored, the first ethics law of the state of Alabama in 1972. And that was quite a story, because, I mean it was by accident that the thing even became law. Of course that's true of a lot of legislation. But anyway, I then headed up the county government here and enjoyed that experience. But then in '88—no '87—the president of Samford came to me and said, "Won't you come back to Cumberland? We want to start a center for the study of law in the church, the first amendment, doesn't matter. We'd like for you to come back and establish it and run it." So I came back and stayed there until May of—I've been gone two years—May of 2005, and retired. And I do nothing now but solo practice, and I do a lot of behind the scenes political advising, and drafting of legislation, and stuff like that. But it has turned out that I am as much involved in basic litigation of just routine church matters as I am on first amendment matters. A lot of disputes-- In fact Sunday I'll be at a church here in Homeland that's in a dispute. And we have finally worked our way through the courts, and we're going to have a vote.

KH: Is it a dispute within the church?

CD: Yeah, and most of these disputes are within the church. And used to, most of your disputes were in small churches, marginal churches. That's no longer true. It used to be that most of your disputes were in black Baptist churches. That's not a criticism. If you analyze the reason, it's pretty wholesome. But that's no longer the case. All of the various denominations or church groups, whatever you want to call them--if you don't like them you call them sects, you know. A lot of it's highly subjective. But a lot of the disputes now are on worship forms, on gender preference, and just, you know, there's a whole bunch of things that many of the churches are having to deal with, and they're having a hard time. And then, churches, frankly many of them have become quite affluent, and now there's a tremendous fight on who's going to control the assets. Doesn't have one thing to do with the theology. And then, you've got many people who are out in the market world, in the secular world, that are CEOs and people of a lot of influence, and they're very sophisticated, you know, in the church. And in your black churches, it's interesting--and of course I find it interesting because I do a lot of trial work. I'd rather try a case than anything. I have bad arthritis in my left shoulder, and it can be just about to kill me. I can get in the court room, and in thirty minutes of good trial work I ain't got a hurt anywhere. I'm feeling-- [Laughs]

KH: That's how you know you're doing what you were meant to do.

CD: But what is happening in the black community, black churches, there. Since the civil rights movement, there has developed the beginning—and it's now reached pretty high levels, or it's moving pretty fast—there is developing in the black community, the black church, a strong middle class. Now, interestingly--and folks don't like me to say this, but it's the truth--it's a middle class dominated—and I know that isn't a good

word—but we'll say heavily influenced, till they control, of the ladies. You've got more females going to law school, medical school, becoming CPAs, becoming administrators and supervisors than you have black males. And they are learning, and learning well, the benefits and values of structured approach, of good organization, accountability. And when I have a board of trustees come to see me from some black church and there's four or five women on the board, I know some black preacher is in *bad* trouble. [Laughs] I'm just telling you. Because, if he is like a great many he wants to be the whole cheese, and this new middle class isn't going to stand for that. And I understand--there's a history. At one time in the black culture, the minister and the undertaker were about the only two people the bigots couldn't touch, see? Well, that's changing. And just because you're the pastor of some big church no longer means you got the final word. And these ladies in particular that professionally and managerially rising up, assuring that they are fully capable-- and they think analytical--they're bringing about all kinds of change. Now I don't how it is in Austin, Texas, and I don't how it is up on Chapel Hill.

KH: It sounds a lot--. I think we have those things going on too.

CD: But it only--. And I can tell you this from my own experience. I guess I've attended, in the last year and a half, fifteen black funerals, and I would say all but two of them have had women ministers participating in the funeral. Five years ago, women, black women, weren't supposed to be preachers. The Lord didn't call them to do that. Now that thing in five years--. And it's going to soon be pretty universal in the black church. The reason I say that, it is already very common in the black churches that have multiple ministers. If a black church has three ministers, one of them's going to be female. Well you see, very few things in any church transpires or occurs so quickly to

something as deeply imbedded. And of course a lot of the males still don't like it, and the Southern Baptists are still fighting it.

KH: I know.

CD: But they gonna lose! They gonna lose. And I'm sure one of these days somebody will have a vision, or have a revelation, that will straighten it all out theologically, but it's coming. I'm just telling you, it's coming.

KH: What about in politics, like especially city politics? Have you seen black women making, going into new areas, making new innovations?

CD: Yes, yes. I think that has been pretty common. Most of them—I hadn't thought about this much—I would say probably most of them come out of education.

KH: Okay.

CD: Or maybe--. They're either professional educators, or a number out of real estate, or a number of them are in all kinds of things—a housewife, this that and the other. But they run for the school board. And from the school board they go to something bigger and more prominent. But there isn't any question of-- The females of our culture have laid a claim to the marketplace, and they're not going to give it up. Now that was perhaps brought about by a number of things, some we understand, some we're not probably even aware of. But it's a new day. And I probably won't live to see it, but I think—I'm very optimistic, frankly—I think we're in a lot of turmoil now, which you expect any time there's such broad change. But I think once we wade through the turmoil and things get a little better stabilized, you're going to see a much stronger society. I think in government, local government, females are still on the lower rung for the most part. Now, you've got a few female mayors or something, and

you have a few department heads. Now here in Birmingham we have--the police chief is a female, but that's not too common. There's a little bit of that. But I think that we're going to see a lot of improvement. And I think that the good Lord just created women with a deeper sense of genuine care, and that leads to a higher ethic, and a higher efficiency. And my experience has been generally that women can be much tougher than what we think. And I know in these church disputes, they don't take nigh as long to make up their mind, and once they make up their minds, they're ready to move. Men are more casual, less intense, and there are certain advantages to that in some situations. But we're in a very much changing world. Now, you plan to teach, or what do you plan to do?

KH: I'm going to be a professor of US History--African American History.

CD: All right.

KH: I like doing church work too. I guess I'll try to do both.

CD: Well I think you can, sure. And I've heard some very good preachers that were female. Normally you don't think of women having the ability as a public speaker, but I've heard some that I sure wouldn't want to have to debate with. [Laughs] But now are you doing this just for the summer, have y'all got an overall plan? Tell me a little more about this.

KH: Well, we've been--.

CD: Oh, pardon me. [To someone else] Ask Sarah to come here. She's about to leave.

KH: I'll put that on here.

CD: I just feel like, I don't find the young blacks being any better than the whites

about remembering history. And I guess I think of the blacks as having a greater reason because of the civil rights movement. Some tremendously big things occurred that affects them, and I--. They just don't seem to be interested. [Interruption] Huh? She's not here? She's done left? Oh! Well she was the fifth girl at the 16th street--. I wanted you to meet her. I got to talking and didn't realize.

KH: Well I'm sure I'll come back to town.

CD: Well I want you to meet her--,

KH: Okay.

CD: --for several reasons. And this is kind of graveyard, but it makes the realism of human relations in all of this. There was fighting within that church about how some of the victims were treated compared to others. And there have been times when she's talked to me about it, and she is of that group. Now her own family, which was very poor, have done a lot to overcome. But there's a real feeling about the other element that, you know, was treated. And it's the same old thing, dynamics, you have in most groups, but, you know--. And she's pretty articulate.

KH: I heard that three of the girls, their families are pretty, well relatively affluent.

CD: Well this one came from the less, in fact--. But now the—. I forgot how many girls, I met most of them. I think I've got them all. They've all been--. She's the only domestic, and I think her eye—losing the one eye--. And then I think--. See, she was in the room when the other four were killed, and I think that they kindly felt pushed aside. And I'm trying to get her to, in her own words, in her own time, express things.

KH: They made a documentary about that. They didn't ask her to participate?

CD: They've talked to her, but I don't think they used her.

KH: I don't remember her in that documentary.

CD: Well they came to her. And on top of that I think that they confused her.

She doesn't know who she can talk to or what she can say now on this thing. And that bothers me. Now if they were going to get with it and use it, I might feel a little bit more sympathetic, but to get stuff and then try to hoard it up somewhere, bothers me. So, if you're back I'll--maybe we can set it up so that--. You'll have to be prepared though to ask a lot of questions. She will not be forthcoming.

KH: I understand.

CD: But anyway, you'll have to be prepared like you were in getting me--.

[Laughs]

KH: I have one more question for you.

CD: All right.

KH: Partly for your personal use. What would you like your grandchildren to learn from your example, or from the story of your life?

CD: I hope they will understand that—and this may sound a little sanctimonious, but it's the basis of much of my being—they will understand that all human beings are creatures of the supreme being's creation, the good Lord who made us all, and that one fact alone makes every one of us equal. And if we can ever get folks to subscribe to that belief, we'll have a lot more peace than we have now, and we'll deal with a lot of things that permeate the business world, the political world, even the religious world, of greed and self-centeredness. I don't know. I would--. You know, we all have our notions about things. I don't know--. I have a hard time subscribing to original sin as something that

goes back and is anchored to somebody eating an apple. I really have trouble with that. But I do understand that there is something, and how it got there I don't know. I'm going to ask the Lord about that if I ever meet Him. How this business of survival seems to have a spin off of greed. Now most of us control it pretty well, unless we're challenged too much. And this I guess sounds bad, but there are times when I'm afraid that we all have our price. I think that is one of the reasons the Lord, in teaching the disciples to pray, said to pray, "Lead us not into temptation." In other words, oh Lord, let us never get to where that temptation is more than we can withstand. But I hope they will understand that I was a mortal human being that tried to teach them, and live, that everybody is important. And everybody should be loved and treated with respect. Now that doesn't mean you let them get away, and you don't have discipline, but it does mean that we don't humiliate, we don't exploit other people. That goes back to my early upbringing, my parents. I lived in rural north Alabama. And this is what I was taught in school, in church, at home. And we lived in a simple world, and that background of teaching never had any idea what they were teaching me to take with me into a much different world, but has at times been trying. I've enjoyed most of it because I like to fight a little, some of the time. I do. If there's something to fight about, I like a good fight. [Laughs]

KH: Nothing wrong with that.

CD: So, but you know now I grew up about fifty miles north of Birmingham. But I was born in '35, and the Depression was weighing heavily in our community. I was born on a farm. My father paid Dr. Lee Tucker, a friend of the family, fifteen dollars for delivering me. They got a lot for fifteen dollars. But you know I saw oriental people

before I saw black people, because in that agricultural area were a lot of poultry activity—chickens. And the Japanese had perfected a means of determining the sex of chickens, and they would sort chickens. And see we had hatcheries there locally, so we had a small group of Japanese that came there. And during the Depression we didn't go very far out of the county. We certainly didn't come to Birmingham. There was a colony—I didn't know about it then—about twenty miles from our home in Cullman County, about 600 blacks, but I didn't know about them. I guess I was twelve years old. Let's see, it was right at the end of World War II because up there in that area they began to put on people's houses composition roofing. You know, shingles with tar and silicone and other--. And those companies came out of Birmingham, and many of the roofers were black. And that was where I had my first experience. And then shortly thereafter we started to come into Birmingham because the war was over. Things were in much better economy, and we did some shopping in Birmingham for heavy equipment and farm equipment and stuff like that, at least to begin with. Before long they had outlets for that sort of thing for us locally, but not initially. And I never dreamed as a twelve year old boy I'd be in the middle of anything like this. I didn't even know there was any of this.

So, but I've enjoyed it and I really--. I'm glad that I've had an opportunity to play the role, and I hope I've done some good. There are days when I think, well really will any of this ever amount to anything, and then I have to think, that's not for me to worry about. You know, in seminary they teach you to be faithful and loyal--or at least they used to, I think they still do. In law school the emphasis is pretty much on how you win. I think there's still a certain degree of honor of a certain type there. I have found taking

those two things and trying to weld them together enables me to do things I probably wouldn't otherwise be able to do. And I was going to tell you this, in Christmas day in 1988, I went to the mailbox to get my newspaper and I opened it. In those days--the feds stopped them from doing that, maybe they wanted to be stopped, I don't know. And that's fine, because I get several newspapers and they put them all now in sleeves, and that's fine. It helps the newspaper delivery man. But I saw a pipe bomb in that mailbox right out there by the driveway--that long. And one year, less than one year, Judge Vance was blown up by the mailbox. They never did find who it was. I know the FBI, and the Alcohol and Tobacco, that group--oh I don't know, several other groups--had me in here in this room wanting to know who I had upset and how I'd upset them, and I couldn't figure out to this day. Except--.

KH: You never got any threats.

CD: Much of the stuff that was attributed to Judge Vance--and he was the head man, so he's supposed to get credit—I was the one who did it. [Laughs] But I don't what happened. But the trigger mechanism of the bomb malfunctioned and didn't go off.

KH: Wow.

CD: But a little less than a year after that, he was killed. So, you know, you--. And in those black--. Well, in the '60s for some reason--talking about how I feel now--I felt safer than I do now walking in any urban area.

KH: Why is that?

CD: Huh?

KH: Why is that?

CD: I don't know. I guess maybe I'm just, I'm not as informed or as sure of

what the situation is anymore. And then perhaps there's an observation—whether it's valid or no, I don't know--that we think that folks are just not overall as respectful as they used to be. And I think there's something to that. But I've known a lot of the leaders. I never knew Martin Luther King, but I knew his father well. I knew his father-in-law well. I did a little work for his father-in-law, Mr. Scott. He was a real-- He lived to be 100. But most of the people that were involved in those elements in the '60s, they're all gone. They're all gone. I have a large section on the civil rights movement. I guess I have a larger private collection than anybody in the southeast. And I have a big collection of black history aside from civil rights. I mean, you know, labor history, education. And I think progress is being made, but I wish it were made faster. And yet I don't think-- I think when you do certain things, it's best if you can, you have to let time do its thing. And that's hard for some of us to accept. But I-- Do you know Dr. Franklin, the historian?

KH: I met him last February. He lives in Durham.

CD: Is that right? Well, he's been here. And Dr. Glomidian I knew well. And I had a case about a year and a half ago down in Tuskegee, and one of my clients was a student of George Washington Carver. Maggie's older sister drove me down there. She'd just gotten her driver's license, so she chauffeured me down there. And she got to shake hands with one of George Washington Carver's students, and she thought that was quite something. And you see, I have George Washington Carver in my stained glass window. You see the peanuts, and the boutonniere?

KH: Yeah, that's a beautiful window.

CD: But anyway, I'm glad-- And how did you say—

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcriber: Deborah Mitchum

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