

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

***HISTORY OF THE COBB COUNTY BRANCH OF THE NAACP AND CIVIL RIGHTS
ACTIVITIES IN COBB COUNTY, GEORGIA***

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INTERVIEW WITH THOMAS R. CARTER

COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 14

CONDUCTED BY MATT BELL and ERIC MEZ

MONDAY, 19 OCTOBER 2009

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 14
Interview with Thomas R. Carter
Conducted by Matt Bell and Eric Mez
Monday, 19 October 2009
Location: CETL House, Kennesaw State University

MB: Mr. Carter, if we could first just get a little bit of background information. You were born in Memphis?

TC: I was born in Memphis, Tennessee where W. C. Handy wrote the Blues, Blues capital of the universe, that's where I'm from. I graduated from a black high school. We call it the University of Melrose at Orange Mound, Tennessee. The actual name of it is Melrose High School, and it in the community of Orange Mound.

MB: What year did you graduate high school?

TC: I graduated from high school in June of 1957. Our high school was mostly a prep school and the reason why I say that is because at the time there were six black high schools in Memphis, Tennessee. Of the six we were the only school that did not have crafts. The only crafts that we had were mechanical drawing, two years, and woodwork, two years but you could not major in them. All majors at our high school were academic.

EM: Were your parents from the area?

TC: My parents are from Arkansas and Memphis, Tennessee. I'm trying to think of the name in Arkansas. Batesville, Arkansas is where my father is from and my mother is from Memphis, Tennessee.

MB: What did you do after you graduated high school?

TC: I went into the United States Air Force where I spent four years, four months and twenty-eight days; I remember so well about that! They tested us and I qualified at that time to be an IBM operator, which was called originally EAM—Electronic Accounting Machines—, was a big business at the time. When I went through basic training that Tech school was closed because there was such a push on getting people out there into the industry. As a result, I had to go OJT—On the Job Training—Homestead Air Force Base, Homestead, Florida. I went from there to Anniston Air Force Base in Guam and to Fairchild Air Force Base in Spokane, Washington where I got my honorable discharge. I left there—I've got to tell you this part, it's curious that I got discharged, I left the United States Air Force because they had signaled to me that I had to go to programmers school and I said no. I got out of the United States Air Force and went to New York City.

EM: Was this in 1962?

TC: When I went to New York City?

EM: Yes.

TC: I spent fourteen years in New York. I started working for Olin Mathison Chemical Company on West 59th Street. There I became the first black person to ever be in their operations department, what you call today the information technology environment. I was the first black operator, which was an EAM operator; I was the first black computer operator, the first black programmer, and the first black programmer analyst for Olin Mathison Chemical Company. I left there and I went to United States Trust Company of New York on Wall Street. I was the first black programmer there and the first black programmer analyst too. I left there and I went to work for the IBM Corporation. I was working in the Brooklyn plant. President Kennedy and Secretary of State McNamara conceived the idea of the Brooklyn plant. These two gentlemen in fact argued the point that if you don't get more black people involved in industries, which received federal funds, then we're going to cut back your federal funds. As a result the IBM Corporation started an inner city plant. This inner city plant was conceived and the only thing they really did there was produce cables for computers; there were lots of cables at that time. I was brought in from Wall Street to design, develop and implement a cable tracking system, which was the first time it was ever done in the IBM Corporation. I left there, and I was the only person to leave the IBM Brooklyn plant and go to IBM's Mohansic Research Laboratory. To go to the research lab for the IBM Corporation at that time was to be the second highest technically you could be. The highest was to be an IBM fellow. I was at the second level; I never became an IBM fellow. At least I was at the research lab. At the lab I worked in the Future Systems (FS) time frame that meant that our responsibility there was to design and develop software fifteen years out. After I did my tour there they closed down the Mohansic Research Lab simply because of economics, the way it is now, and at the time they had within ten miles two research labs. One of them was Mohansic and the other one was the T.J. Watson Research Lab, the founder of the IBM Corporation, so they weren't going to close it down, okay! As a result, when they closed down the Mohansic laboratory I was privileged enough to get an assignment here in Atlanta, Georgia.

I worked here in Atlanta, Georgia until such time as I took a buyout; I think it was about 1988. At the time that I worked in the IBM Corporation, every job I had was a senior level job. After I left the IBM Corporation I became an entrepreneur. As an entrepreneur I would find contracts for my clients. One happened to have been a painting company that was coming out of Massachusetts. It was a black firm. I got them the first black paint contract in the city of Atlanta for about \$155,000.00 a year or something like that. They refused to pay me so I had to go belly up. After I went belly up I had to go back to work because my wife said, "We have no money coming in; you've got to go back to work, Thomas." As a result I went to work for the Department of Administrative Services for the State of Georgia. There I worked as a senior level programmer and an analyst. What they did was have a RIP, they RIP I don't know how many people, but I was a part of that. After a year or so I went around trying to find something to do and I couldn't find any work because I had gotten myself in a funny position. My age was against me, okay. At the time they weren't hiring folks my age, that's where age discrimination came in. I floated around and floated around and finally decided that what I was going to do was nothing, since I couldn't find a job. So I used the resources that I had then and today to keep some money in the family. My wife decided that I should go

back to work and I went back to work for Manpower which in my opinion is a subsidiary or it could be an affiliate, but I'm not sure, of the IBM Corporation. I do know that at the time that I took the contract I was really working directly for the IBM Corporation. I took a ninety-day contract with them and was asked to stay but I said no. I started going to Poly Tech and I went to Poly Tech for one semester. I took two courses. One course was in English composition and the other one was in History. I got an A in English composition and a C in History. I have to qualify that now. The qualification was that I did not know that I had a hearing problem until the history class. The prof in history did not give out reading assignments; all of his were oral; and I couldn't hear him. So I had to get me some hearing aids. That I attribute to me getting a C. I think I could have done better in history because I like history.

I met a gentleman by the name of Oscar Freeman in the 1976-1978 time frame. I met Oscar Freeman on Marietta Square in front of Church's Chicken. A third party introduced us. At the time that I met Oscar Freeman he said to me that he wanted to be president of the NAACP in Cobb County. I told him we would never clash because that's not a job I want. I wanted to be involved in politics in Cobb County simply because I've always been involved in politics at some level, political organizations and things like that. My mother and my father were primarily responsible for me getting into politics; they always told me to—and I quote—“You should know what the politicians are doing with your money because you're paying them.” That stuck with me and to this day I'm still involved at some level in politics trying to find out what the politicians are doing with my money. Mr. Freeman and I made an agreement that we would not violate each other and that no one would be able to put a wedge between us but us. He carried it to his grave. No one was ever able to draw a wedge between Oscar Freeman and myself, and to this day I am very close to his family. In my opinion, Oscar Freeman, during his time here was the most prominent black leader in Cobb County. Oscar Freeman took the NAACP in Cobb County from an address box to two suites. He also had the first computer installed because I wrote the proposal for the IBM Corporation to get the NAACP in Cobb County a PC and a Selective typewriter. Mr. Freeman, I have been behind closed doors in many, many, many meetings. He was the best. He was the best and I'm not trying to disrespect any of the presidents that have come before him or after him, that's not my intent, but I'm telling you Mr. Freeman, behind closed doors, was the best. He never raised his voice, he never got irate, none of that. But he was always successful. Anytime that we went into a meeting, and this is the truth, I want y'all to put this in, this is true, sometimes we would go into meetings and we didn't have a clue what we were there for. We had no plan but he would always come out of the meeting with something positive for the Cobb community, and this had nothing to do with race.

EM: What sort of instance? What kind of meetings were they?

TC: Community activities. I can tell you one for example and I love to tell this story. We got on the Cobb County Commissioner's list to speak. I was to be the speaker. We were either third or fourth on that list of speakers. Every time that our name would come up they moved it. We knew what they were doing. What they were doing was trying to get the audience at a lower level so we'd have less people that we could speak to. We knew

exactly what was going on. I recall Oscar saying to me, "Thomas, do you see what they're doing?" I said, "I'm on it." I had my speech together and everything right, but as we went waited we ended up probably being second or third from the last, which meant there weren't that many people there. When it came time for us to speak I said, "You just disrespected every black person in here and we don't want to talk to you, we're out of here." You should have seen what happened. They were throwing papers and baskets and whatnot. They were really disturbed because I don't think at that time they thought that black people in Cobb County had the audacity to walk out on them.

MB: Do you remember what year that was or around what time frame? Was it early '80s?

TC: No. I ran for county commissioner in 1988 so it had to be after that. It had to be either 1990, around 1990 time frame I believe, if my memory serves me correctly.

MB: Do you mind if we backtrack? There are tons of things I want to ask you about but first of all, I see you graduated high school in '57. In Memphis, Tennessee quite obviously there was quite a bit of racism, segregation.

TC: It was segregated, not quite a bit. No, it was segregated.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about growing up in a segregated environment?

TC: Yes, I can talk about it. I love to talk about that as a matter of fact. I was one of six people on the debating team in my high school. We were debating Woodrow Wilson's 100th centennial year. We were not allowed to go to public libraries and the only way that we were able to gather our data was to go across town to LeMoyne College, which was a black college. At that time there was something like a contest in Memphis, Tennessee, between all of Memphis, Tennessee, city schools. It was for them to see what high school had the best information about Woodrow Wilson. We won. As a result of winning the six of us, excuse me, three guys and three girls, were invited down to the Hotel Peabody along with our coach. Hotel Peabody in Memphis, Tennessee at that time was the best hotel in Memphis, Tennessee. So we got our suits on, ties and whatnot and went down. The young lady who was the instructor or whatever she was, representative from the Board of Education met us down there. There were eight of us going in. We walked in and the maitre de said to us, "What can I do for you?" "So this young lady who represented the board of education was a white lady and she said, "We have dinner arrangements for the eight of us." He said, "You can come in here but those niggers ain't coming in here." She said, "I don't think you heard what I said. I said we have reservations for eight dinners here." He said, "You didn't hear what I said. I said you can come in here but them niggers ain't coming in here. We have never had a nigger come in here and eat in our dining hall except the president of Morehouse and he had to go through the back door." That's what was told to us. So you say, segregation, yes, I know what segregation is. And, as a matter of fact, one day when I was coming from the golf course, I was a caddy, hiking a ride home. Well, the gentleman, who was a white guy, pulled into his neighborhood and he stopped and let me out and I got shot in the arm by a BB gun. I'm going to tell you something I refused to flinch. I just wouldn't do it. Yeah, I got shot in the arm with a BB gun.

EM: Did he shoot you?

TC: No, no, some kid shot me from across the block. But I wouldn't even turn around and look. I just kept walking and went on my way. I can tell you about segregation. Segregation in Memphis, Tennessee, the time during our era, was so hard-core that—I was a basketball player, incidentally, at my high school. I played basketball at my high school. One night we were coming, this is my community, out of a place that sold hamburgers. I was trying to see if I could remember the name of it because at one point in time it was a landmark. Anyway, there were about four or five of us guys came out of there and we had eaten hotdogs, no, we had eaten hamburgers that night, and we came out of there so the four of us were walking to the gym where we were going to watch a basketball game, probably four or five blocks. The police pulled up and told us to disperse and the question was, why? I asked the question why and they told me don't sass us boy, I know who you are, I know you play basketball for Melrose High School. So they knew who we were. I mean they knew who we were. I had a cousin that owned a nightclub. Every Friday night around nine o'clock the police would pull up and make all of the patrons line up against the wall and search all of them, inclusive of the women, patting them down. I know segregation. In Memphis, Tennessee, during our era, we had one day at the zoo, we had one day at Libertyland which was like a place you go, like Six Flags over Georgia, not on that scale but sort of like that. But we could only go there once a week. We could go once and they gave us the time and the date that we could go there. I think it was on a Thursday that we could go to the zoo or something like that. Only once. So all of these state facilities that we were paying taxes for, right, we couldn't go to. We could not attend—and by the way, I've got to tell you this because I told y'all I was from Memphis, Tennessee where W.C. Handy worked the Blues. Okay. Memphis has a street called Beale Street; it's synonymous to Auburn Avenue except this was the only integrated street in Memphis, Tennessee at that time. But don't get off Beale Street, you get off Beale Street you had problems, back to segregation. When we would go to the theater, which was down town, we had to sit in the balcony; we had to go through the back door, to get to the balcony to watch a movie. AND by the way, you couldn't sit on the front of the bus; you had to sit in the back of the bus. So do I know segregation yes. Do I hold some scars for it no. No, I don't hold any scars for it because it taught me a lot. When I went in the United States Air Force in 1957 I was running from segregation and ran right into it. Oh yes. Oh, big time.

MB: In the Air Force?

TC: Yes, sir. See, the Air Force was not integrated until about 1955; 1957 was when I went in. The only reason why I went into the Air Force was because as I told you, we was sort of like a prep school and the word got around that black people could not pass the Air Force test. Well, my brother went in the Air Force and so I couldn't understand that. A group of us, about twelve from my high school, all guys, went down and took the exam and all of us passed it. We weren't going in; we just went down there to see what was on the test that was so hard. We were on our way to College. I had three scholarships offered to me to play basketball: one to Lane College in Tennessee, S.A. Owen Junior

College in Memphis, Tennessee and the other one was in Ohio, Central State. That was where I wanted to go. And the reason why I wanted to go there--Central State in Wilberforce, Ohio—so bad was because at that time I thought I was good enough to play professional basketball. I really had trained real hard for it; I actually did want to be a Globetrotter. And I could dribble the basketball extremely well. I could play too, don't get me wrong but I wanted to be a Globetrotter. But after I got out of high school I decided, hey, you've got to go to college. I wanted to go to Central State in Wilberforce, Ohio and my application was sent to me. The way I got the application was two of my teachers, my English teacher, and my History teacher wrote Colleges for me; I graduated at a pretty good level in high school. I was probably in the top twenty in high school when I graduated. So they saw in me that I could make it through college or university. My coach, who was a black man, refused to let me go to Central State. You see, I know segregation and disrespect too! When I went into the Air Force, probably 50 percent of the guys in barracks were from the South. They were mostly white and they used some words that were very, very hard words, until such time as we black guys challenged them. There were a couple of guys there from Alabama who I had struck up a real good relationship with and they apologized to me. They wanted me to know that in their environment, these were the names that black people were called. I understood that, I mean, I grew up in a segregated environment which was very hostile to black people. Jobs were not so good. It turns out that my family was very lucky, my father was the best heavy equipment operator in the South, so he always had jobs; he always made good money. My mother owned her beauty shop she was an entrepreneur. I came from a structured family, everybody in my family knew what their responsibilities were and education was number one priority in my family. My father had a sixth grade education; my mom graduated from high school, and helped me with my ninth grade algebra. I grew up in this atmosphere where my parents never taught us to be subservient to anybody and we were not supposed to be superior to anybody either. We were taught that it was absolutely unheard of for you to entertain either one of these thoughts. No, no, no! My father always taught us, and I teach this to my kids, and grandkids today, his favorite words were, "Can't died five years ago and they whipped the hell out of couldn't." My father said you can do anything on the planet you want to do. It may take you a little longer but if you want to be whatever it is you want to be you can be it. I grew up with that. All the jobs and everything that I've ever been involved in I have never felt out of place, never. Not even when I was in the research lab. The research lab was a different animal. These were the best programmers and analyst that the IBM Corporation could find at that time, and I was part of the staff. Like I said, our responsibility was to develop software fifteen years out, and I learned a lot. That happened to have been the best job I ever had in my entire working career, every other job that I ever had I was discriminated against. Every one. Listen to what I'm saying, every one! Every one. Okay; except that one!

MB: Were you disappointed that rather than having been sent to Tech School in the Air Force you had on the job training or do you wish that you had actually gone to school?

TC: That's a very good question. That's a very good question you asked. Yes, Yes, I wish I had and the reason why I say that—oh, I've got to tell you another little story. While I

was in the United State Air Force I was privy to go to the IBM Corporation's school on Biscayne Boulevard in Miami, Florida. I was the only black person in the class. I had to go through the back door. There were three of us from the Air Force, two white guys and myself. Every day we would go to the chow hall and pick up our lunches and they would take us to class in a staff car. We had to be in our uniforms but they took us through the back because of me. I was only privy to go to the conference room where we would eat, to the bathroom, and to the classroom, in the building. So when you say segregation and do I wish I had been at an Air Force class the answer is yes. We had like twenty questions on the final exam and of course I finished all of them before anybody else, right. Well, I got this problem. My parents taught me to read and they taught me to read everything I could get my hands on and so I do. I read a lot. So I couldn't help but when the test came down it was a piece of cake to me, I'm being honest with you. I gave the other two guys answers so all three of us could get out of that class. When we got back to the Air Force base within two or three weeks they selected one person to go to Louisiana to Tech School, and I was not that person. I laughed about it. I told the sergeant when they told me who was going I said, "He'll be back in a week." I was correct; he was back in a week. Everywhere I went in the Air Force I had problems. I had big, big, big, big problems. At Homestead Air Force base in Florida I worked for a gentleman from North Carolina and he used to call himself Rebel. He was given orders to train me. He lied: he flat lied. The sergeant in charge at that time went away to California to a meeting and when he returned he ask for an update on my training. This guy lied. When the sergeant called me in to ask me, I told the truth. NO, none of that, they didn't teach me any of that. The sergeant got a little bit disturbed about that. And he called a gentleman by the name of Sergeant Pryor who was in charge of the financial section. There were four sections within our department and the financial section was the most important because it created a lot of good working relationships with other people plus everything had to be balance to the penny. Exact! So they gave me a black guy, his name was Doyle Austin, to train me. He was good. That guy was good. He was another one of these people who talked about reading. You've got read everything he would say. When they shipped me overseas I got hooked up with a sergeant from Thunderbolt, Georgia. He didn't like anything black. I don't think he even liked night. I had worked for this one sergeant; name Harold Hadley. Sergeant Hadley came out of California and at that time they had just started to have Senior Master Sergeants. These guys were the highest rank sergeants with the stripes down and one or two up. Sergeant Hadley got promoted so therefore this other guy from Georgia, I was responsible for reporting to him. The Air Force had what they called efficiency reports which was a way to measure us and then send them to personnel. Sergeant Hadley called me in and showed me my efficiency report prepared by the sergeant from Georgia. He said, "If I turn this in now they're going to kick you out of service." Almost everything on there was negative. Sergeant Hadley said—I started crying, I was only about seventeen years old, maybe eighteen, somewhere like that; I started crying because I'm supposed to be leaving discrimination. I'm in the Air Force, on Guam! My mindset could not understand this so I started crying. Sergeant Hadley said to me, "I know he lied. He's going to change this." Well, it turns out that personnel would only issue you one of these forms for evaluations so he made him erase all that garbage. I know because Sergeant Hadley let me see the evaluation; prior to the Sergeant from Georgia signing it, and I saw where it

had been changed! So I started playing, a mental game with him. I had a white friend of mine that came out of Dallas, Texas, named Charlie Spurgeon. Charles and I used to hang around all the time. He was a ham radio operator; he had all the equipment and stuff, amateur operator use. We were also in class together where this sergeant was in charge; he did not like our relationship. My trainer over there, I was trying to think of his name, Paul Sterns was his name—came out of Springfield, Massachusetts. Paul was white and trained me. He made an animal out of me. Paul trained me so well that I could take a machine internal wiring diagram, and follow impulses all over a machine. At the time we used 407 accounting machines. He turned me into a real EAM animal in the real world because he gave me knowledge and information that other people didn't have. I used it to grow and develop. All of my work career I thought about him, I thought about Paul and how Paul helped me. Now the other guys did too, don't get me wrong but Paul was the best. This Sergeant from Georgia gave us this exam; I got one question marked wrong and I knew it was right. I started this little confrontation between the sergeant and me. I said, no, no, that is the correct answer; his position was, no, it's incorrect. I said, no, no, no, no, that's right. So when I got back to the office I went to Paul and I said, "Paul, this is correct and he marked it wrong." Paul said, "I told you, never argue with people, prove it." At the time we were wiring panels so I go over, wire the panel and sent my test data through the machine and I'm correct; the sergeant is wrong. I go back and I show it to him. I said, "We agree that this is correct, right, because of the results?" "Yeah, it's correct, yes he said." I said, "So what you're telling me is you're going to give me 100 percent." He said, "No, that's not what I'm telling you, I never read that anywhere in the manual." That doesn't mean that it doesn't work we see that it does. He wouldn't give me a hundred; he just wouldn't do it. He just would not do it. All of my career that I worked in the Air Force, I had problems. When I worked at Fairchild Air Force base in Spokane, Washington, now that was a different animal all together. Everybody out there seemed to be in harmony with everybody. I forgot about that. Yes, that was a place that I did work and not get discriminated against. There and the IBM Research lab were the only two places that I ever worked in my career that I did not get discriminated against.

MB: What age were you when you started to caddy? While you're still in high school?

TC: Oh, no, no, I began to caddy when I was thirteen years old. The reason I started caddying was because most of the guys that I knew, my age, in the community were always talking about how we can make some money caddying. It was \$2.50 for me to carry a bag for eighteen holes. Now, if you were privileged, you may get a dollar tip. Well, I was a small guy then, I was a little bitty guy, therefore I had to carry a bag thirty-six holes to make five or six dollars.

MB: You said, aside from the IBM Research lab you experienced racism in all of your jobs. Is it the same with caddying?

TC: Well, you got to understand when we were caddying, this was a private country club, and only black guys caddied at this country club. We were located down in the caddy house that was a good distance from the pro shop. We weren't allowed to go in the pro shop, or

any other place but the golf course. The only thing we were allowed to do was when a call was made for a caddy to come up you would go up the outside of the pro shop and they would issue you a ticket and the golf bag(s). You would take the clubs to the first tee and wait for the person(s) to come out that you were going to caddy for. So to that extent, yes, it was segregated.

EM: I've been meaning to ask you, were your parents ever involved in any politics?

TC: My parents? That's a strange question. Let me tell you why that's a strange question. My high school did not have a basketball gym. When I started playing basketball I had to go across town to the YMCA, the black YMCA to practice. One night I came home and my mom was there, it was about nine o'clock at night. My mom asked me, "Where you been, boy?" I said, "I've been at basketball practice." She said, "Where did you go to practice basketball?" And I told her. She said, "So here's what you're telling me. You're telling me you spend an hour on the bus to go across town, you practice for a couple of hours, you spend another hour coming back home, that's four hours and now you've got to go do your homework. Is that correct?" I said, "Yes ma'am. That's correct." She said, "Something about that's wrong." Now, we had, in my community the Orange Mound Civic Association but I don't know what they did, I'll be honest with you, I never was at a meeting I don't know what that was. All I know is I think my mother was a part of it. I can tell you within ninety days after this conversation with my mother there was a gym at my high school. I don't know what my mother did, but I think she was involved in the community activities whether they were involved in politics, I don't know.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

MB: I asked you about Melrose High School and you said it was not a private school.

TC: That's correct. But it was, like I told you it was more like a prep school.

MB: Prep school that didn't have any crafts?

TC: Right, they had crafts at other black high schools?

EM: At Melrose High School did they have basketball?

TC: Yes, we had a basketball team but we just didn't have a gym, we had to practice on the blacktop outdoors.

MB: Do you think it was because of your parents' educational background, like, obviously you grew up in segregation however you were active in the debating team, you caddied, you played basketball, and you were very active. Do you think you can attribute that to your parents?

TC: That's a very good question. As I told you, see, my parents were parents that were open-ended. They didn't give us stigmas or they didn't tell us what we couldn't do and things of that nature. They were parents who were always talking about education and why you needed an education and what you should do when you work on a job. Remember my father was a blue-collar worker and he always instilled in us that there was only two ways that you do things: the right way and not at all. These were the same building blocks basically in the entire community; I'm going to be honest with you, the rest of the kids in my neighborhood were basically taught the same. The neighborhood was like that! The neighborhood was actually settled by black men from the Civil War. Orange Mound, Tennessee. It originally really was an orange grove, private property, okay. Now, if you visit it, it's one of the largest black ghettos in the United States of America, and it was the largest black residential neighborhood in the United State of America in the '40 and the '50s when I grew up. But remember what I said, residential, and that's taxpayers. Politics, tax, and money go together, okay.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about Beale Street? You said it was probably the most integrated area.

TC: Beale Street was the integrated street and the only integrated area to my knowledge in Memphis, Tennessee.

MB: Was it specifically black and white or were there other minorities that tended to migrate there?

TC: Well, I remember there were Greek people there, there were Italian people there, there were Jewish people there and there were black people there that I remember off the top of my head. Now, you've got to remember I only went on Beale Street as a little person because of my parents. I had very strict parents and my father would carry me down on Beale Street on a Saturday during the day, that's where I used to get my hot dogs from. He would give me an education on what was on Beale Street and who was doing what at that time. But that was the only reason why we went down there, and to go to the theater. Now, subsequently, my community opened two theaters, its own movie theaters so we didn't have to go down there any more. One was called the Esquire Theater and the other one was the W.C. Handy Theater. Like I told you, W.C. Handy wrote the Blues on Beale Street in Memphis, Tennessee, that's history, that's fact.

MB: Let's talk a little bit about the NAACP. After you met Oscar Freeman you said originally you hadn't wanted to necessarily mix up with the NAACP because you were more concerned with politics. How did he convince you to help him out basically?

TC: [laughter] That's a great question. You have to understand the mindset of Oscar Freeman, Jr. This was a man that was deeply devoted in his religion and deeply devoted to his family and he loved his community. I mean I don't know of any words that I could say to you that would make you understand how much this gentleman loved his community. This is across racial lines. I don't think that he saw black and white. I mean, I think that Oscar saw the community not holding itself up or not doing what the

community should do and that's not black or white. I think that he convinced me to get involved simply because of the relationship we had. I told him that I would never violate him and he told me that he would never violate me and as a result we figured we had each other's back. When he asked me to come in and help I couldn't turn him down. If you understand the nature of Oscar, here was a man that had impeccable leadership. The reason I use those words is because I don't follow to many people and not to many people I say I respect as leaders. I respected him. I respect Oscar Freeman to this day as a leader, and a friend.

EM: Why is that?

TC: Because he did not see color, he saw right and wrong. Oscar saw if this is something incorrect it ought to be corrected and it didn't have anything to do with black or white, it just turns out he was a black person. But he didn't see it that way and when he would talk to you about a task, and what he thought we should do, he did not stress, we're doing this for black people he didn't do that. Oscar would tell you, this is wrong and we need to do something about it. That was the way he was, and you can't argue that point. All my lifetime and all the jobs I've ever had I've been a problem solver, I've been trained to solve problems. From high school until my retirement, that's all I have ever done. Here comes Oscar with a problem, right? What am I going to tell him, no? How am I going to ever say to Oscar or refuse Oscar when he says, we need to do this and I know this man is not doing this with any malice, I know he's not doing this because Oscar's got an ego, I know he's not doing this because of color. I know he's doing this because this is a problem that needs to be solved.

EM: Had you been involved with the NAACP before Oscar Freeman?

TC: No.

MB: Oh, not at all?

TC: No.

MB: Was it your political interests that made you not want to make a career out of the Air Force or your pursuit for political position or something like that? You came to Atlanta from New York?

TC: I did not see the Air Force as being a career and the reason I didn't see the Air Force as being a career is because I did not think I could make enough money, to be honest with you. I said I was going to leave Spokane, Washington, and go to New York City and unscrew all the light bulbs. And I'm going to make all the money in New York. I didn't know I was going to run into segregation. When I walked in to the headhunter's office to look for a job they told me that I wasn't qualified.

MB: After you left the Air Force?

TC: After I got out of the Air Force. They told me I was not qualified. This was when I was in New York City. They told me I was not qualified to make the kind of money that I wanted.

MB: Even with your extensive resume?

TC: Now wait a minute. Let me tell you how much money we're talking about. Watch this right here: \$450.00 a month. [laughter] They told me I wasn't qualified for that. My question to them was this. I said, "Why?" They said, "Because you do not have commercial expertise. You only have armed forces expertise and the folk in the commercial arena had more skills than you." I said to them just like this, "Bring in anybody that you think is better than me that has the same amount of experience and I don't care if you bring us a test in here with tic-tac-toe, I'll beat them." That was the way I was. That was my honest opinion, Paul had taught me well. Like I said, I had done extensive reading and I had knowledge and skills. Well, when I got this offer to go on an interview for this job, in the old days they had machines and the machines kept up a lot of noise. When I walked into the office to interview it seemed to me, my gut feeling said, all those machines stopped at the same time because I was black. I was black and I was walking into the office for an interview. Well, it turns out that the gentleman who interviewed me was the director. He was a former Air Force person. I interviewed, we had a very good interview, and he said to me, "You will get word from us whether we will or will not make you an offer." I said, "Okay." And I went about my business; I went on home. I get a telephone call to report Monday morning and I did. Okay. Every job at that installation that I qualified for disappeared. They didn't have those jobs any more when I qualified for them. There was one black lady who worked in the key punch section at that time and when I came in she and I bonded and she told me, she said, "Hey, you're the first black male that ever stepped in this door." I said, "Okay." She told me to watch my back and I told her no problem, I'm that good. [laughter] Her husband died and there was a young lady who worked there was black, who had been passing for a Jewish person for thirty years. I didn't know it either. The only way I knew it was because at the black lady's husband funeral and she showed up with her husband who was black. Her son was mayor of some city in Long Island. He also had the body, so he owned the funeral home. Well, I didn't know her son, I didn't know who he was, right. Her name is Marcellis Good and she told me this story. She said, "When you left out of the interview that morning a meeting was called with everybody in the department and the director said 'I have just interviewed a person that's not of your color and I'm thinking about hiring him.'" The consensus of the opinion was, you hire him and we quit. He said, "Well, ya'll better find ya'll better find a job because he'll be in here Monday morning at 8:30." That's what she told me. And at 8:30 Monday I was there. All the time that I worked in the operations department there every job I qualified for disappeared. One day, the assistant director at that time was a gentleman by the name of Izzy Millgen, a Jewish guy. He liked me. He liked my work. He liked my work so well that when it was time to have overtime I could not leave to go home. I tried. One day they didn't call my name for the overtime roster so I left. They hollered out the window, "Come back, where you going?" He was like a surrogate father to me. Izzy and I got along really, really good. This was a gentleman of very, very high integrity. Well, one

day Izzy said to me, "I'm tired of jobs disappearing when you become qualified." They had a machine there called a 108 Statistical Sorter and that was a premium job. The reason why it was premium, was because you were on your own, you worked independently. The other operators would bring all these IBM cards to you. You didn't have anything to do but just run them through the machine. Once they were processed, and you got all your reports you had to take, at that time they called them summary cards, upstairs to the computer room. That's all you had to do; nobody bothered you. If there were no cards to process you didn't have to do anything. Plus it paid a little bit more money! [laughter] I recall the first day that I ran the 108 and had to take the cards upstairs to the computer room. When I walked in there were two operators, guys. I remember, they were in this big room, and it was a Univac File computer, a huge room full of machines. I walked in and said, "What are you guys doing?" One person gave me a little synopsis of what they were doing and I said, "Well, I can learn how to do this in one day." They laughed at me. "Yeah, right, we heard that before." I started working with the 108 and I decided well, you got to do something better than this and what I decided to do was go to computer programming school. Remember I told you all I left the Air Force because I wasn't going to programming school. I was sick and tired of schools and classes and reading and things like that and I just wanted to be left alone for a while, right, just let my brain rest for a minute! Well, I decided I couldn't make enough money as an operator and I was married and had three children at the time so I decided to go to RCA Institute and study programming.

MB: In New York?

TC: Yes, New York City, in Greenwich Village. We had an average of seventeen hours a week of homework. I had a wife and three children, I had to work rotating shifts, and go to school all day Saturday. But I was the second highest in the class. [laughter] I was the second highest in both classes that I went to there. The first programming class I went to was a hypothetical, mythical computer. It didn't exist, it was just pieces of logic that they had put together and decided that these were the rules and you should learn how to program this thing. The object of the game was to teach you that you didn't have to be around a computer. Like, most people used to like to have their hands on the computer and watch it process. What were you going to watch, lights going on and off? This computer class was to teach you that you didn't have to do that. So that was the first computer class that I ever went to. At Olin Mathison Chemical Company, I remember--we changed directors--and I remember going and taking my application for school, you had to get approval prior to going to school so you could be reimbursed. But you had to pay out of your pocket and once you had a passing your grade, they would reimburse you. I remember going to this new director. I had my application for RCA Institute and he looked at the application and the first thing he asked me was, "What do you want to go to school for?" I said, "Why do people go to school?" They go to learn, right? [laughter] He said something ridiculous to me like "Do you have a math degree?" I said, "Well, no." He said, "I wouldn't hire you as a programmer you don't have a math degree." He gave me some old funny formula and said that if he would ask me to solve a problem by this weird math formula, I wouldn't know how to do it. So I said, "Let me ask you this question. If I asked you to solve a problem by Boyle's Law would you know how to do

that?" He said, "Give me your paper." and signed it. Well, that same gentleman, after I came out of that class, saw me writing a COBOL program. He ask me what language was I using, and I said COBOL, he said our installation was using Autocoder; I said that I already could write programs in Autocoder. I started writing code just to improve my skill. Well, the other operators got a little irritated about that one. The IBM Corporation turned over to Olin Mathison Chemical Company, a large-scale computer, at that time; it was a 1410. As a result, I was the only one qualified to run it. The reason why was because I'm an information sponge. I would go over to the engineer and I ask him all kind of questions and then I asked him to give me some books. I lived about a forty-five minute ride from home to where I worked. Well, I could read on the train so I was sponging again. When they got ready to turn the machine over to the company the management said, "We can't take that machine because we don't have anybody qualified here." The two IBM systems engineers said, "Thomas Carter's qualified." Oh-oh. So the assistant director said, "Let him have at it." I had the computer by myself, which won't set to good with the other operators, so they complain. My supervisor came to me and told me about the complaints and said, "These guys are want to learn how to operate the 1410." I said, "I'll teach them. You'll never know how good I am until you have something to compare me with." Now this is not being facetious this is being honest. I really didn't want to be an operator anymore, I really wanted to program.

MB: What kind of code were you using, this is before Visual, and C-plus and so forth. What kind of codes were you using back then?

TC: Programming language? The first language I learned was SPS, the next one was Autocoder, and the third one was COBOL. Now, that's back in that era. After COBOL came PL1—Program Language 1 and then APL—A Program Language. APL was more of a scientific language, they had Fortran then but APL had much more power Fortran in that Fortran you had to go through some compilations to get your output whereas APL was interpretive. You write it, it got interpreted as you were writing and you didn't have to compile it. So we wrote APL mostly in the research lab.

MB: Because right now it wasn't in your job description to be writing code?

TC: Correct, I was hired as an operator; they had a large-scale computer and a small-scale computer. 1410 was a large scale, 1401 was a small scale so since I was able to teach these guys how to run the 1410 that left me to run the 1401. Well, while I was running the 1401 I was programming, I wasn't supposed to be programming because I was actually hired as an operator. Again, the other operators complained to our supervisor. I ask for permission to use the company's 1401 after hours and was given the ok so I would go to work at 2:00 am, code and test my programs to increase my skill level.

MB: Were you still going to school at this time? Were you still at RCA Institute?

TC: I did my entry level programming at Olin Mathison Chemical Company.

MB: I didn't know if this was at the same time.

TC: Yeah.

MB: Same time?

TC: Yeah. I was working for Olin Mathison Chemical Company while I was going to school. The assistant director called me into his office read me the riot act. "Thomas, we actually hired you here as an operator so you can't spend your time programming." Let me just ask you this question. Could I use your computer to program on my off time? Yeah! I used to go there at two o'clock in the morning. I was supposed to go to work at 8:00 am; I'd go there at two o'clock in the morning to learn. Well, after I was successful, the same assistant director saw me writing some COBOL programs. "What you doing?" "Writing some COBOL programs." "Wouldn't hire you for that because we don't use COBOL here." Well, that was the next language so I was ahead of the installation . . .

MB: That they used.

TC: Yeah. [laughter] That's how I got promoted from an operator to a programmer because I went in and I talked to the director and I told the director point blank, his name was Harvey and I talked to him and told him point blank that that I like him, I like working for him. I thought he was a nice guy but if I didn't get what I wanted in the next week or so I was quitting. Harvey said, "Don't panic. Let me see what I can do for you." Well, within a week to ten days I was promoted. What really generated this conversation was they gave me a \$25.00 a month raise, and I gave it back to them. I told them I wasn't on welfare. "I'm not a welfare recipient. You must be giving that to me. I'm not on welfare, I earn things." I didn't earn that; you gave me that. If I'm not worth more than \$25.00 a month, keep it. That's what precipitated the meeting I had with Harvey and who told me to calm down, let him look, let him see what we can do. Well, within a week to ten days he called me back to his office and he said, "You have been officially promoted to a maintenance programmer, keep the \$25.00 plus we are giving you an additional \$125.00, you now have a \$200.00 per month raise."

MB: How many programmers did they have at the time?

TC: I guess we probably had on the staff maybe twenty, or twenty-five.

MB: Were they equally as shocked as the operators when they found that there was a black man qualified?

TC: No, no. I'm glad you asked that question, that's a very good question. I teamed up with a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant guy, a Jewish guy and an Italian guy; management put me on the team with them. These guys said, "You're all right. We're going to teach you." And they taught me. They taught me very good. From Paul Sterns, well, actually Doyle Austin was my first teacher when I was in at Homestead, Paul when I was overseas, and now I'm teamed with these three guys. The Jewish guy went to Wall Street and he brought me with him. That's how I got to work on Wall Street.

MB: That was your next move after that company.

TC: Yes, after I left Olin Mathison Chemical—I went from the Air Force to Olin Mathison Chemical Company, from Olin Mathison Chemical Company I went to the United States Trust Company of New York on Wall Street then to the IBM Corporation. That was my career path. The guys that taught me programming at Olin they were good. They were good man. I mean, these guys were good and they taught me. And that's how I really learned my trade as a programmer and an analyst because of those three guys.

MB: So how did you make the jump from computer programming to politics?

TC: When I got to Atlanta.

MB: This is '76?

TC: Yes, 1976. When I got here in 1976 they didn't have that many black people walking on the Square. I couldn't understand that. I could not understand why they won't go on the Square?

MB: You moved to Marietta?

TC: Yes!

MB: Oh, you moved to Marietta?

TC: Yes. Well downtown Marietta there were not many black folks walking around Marietta Square.

MB: Oh, they didn't?

TC: No sir. Not in 1976. You might see one or two.

MB: And you're walking downtown watching this?

TC: Yes, downtown Marietta. Glover Square, I guess they called it that; that's where I'm talking about. So that was odd. I was affiliated with the NAACP, I wasn't really a working member, but I was affiliated with it. I went to a meeting and at the meeting they were getting ready to install officers. I was told that I should not talk too much about where the installation was going to be. That if the Ku Klux Klan knew they would blow up Zion Baptist Church where they were going to have the installation of officers. I said, "Well, let me just ask you this question. If you're afraid of having Zion Baptist Church bombed, why don't you just take it over to the municipal building? You have a 501(c)(3), they'll have to let you use it." That's where they had it. There was a gentleman who used to be the coordinator for the Martin Luther King, Jr., parade annually. His name is Reverend James Orange he is deceased. My brother was a freedom fighter and he was James Orange's best man at his wedding. When I got down

here my brother told me to go look him up and I did. James Orange said to me when he found out I lived in Cobb County, at that time they called it Snob County [laughter] They insisted there weren't any black people living out here. I said, "What can I do to help?" His challenge to me was, "Start a Martin Luther King, Jr. Support Group in Cobb County." We did, I was one of the co-founders. Well, now that they don't allow black people on Marietta Square, what we did was, I believe it was the second Tuesday of each month, we had the Martin Luther King, Jr. Support Group meeting in the municipal building. This brought some black people to the Square to let people see that we weren't crazy or anything. Maybe they thought we were weird or something, I said let them meet us. You ask me how did I get involved in politics? This is the truth. There was a club here called Papa's and we used to frequent it, every night around six or six-thirty they would play country and western music and run black people out of there. We'd go there for happy hour and around six, six-thirty the music would start. I thought that was kind of weird. Why would you all do that? I recall asking a very prominent person who was in the Democratic Party in Cobb County at the national level would they support a black candidate?

MB: She was white?

TC: Yes, she was white. I asked her that question one time when I was at one of the Democratic Party meetings one night and I said—this was 1984—"Let me ask you this question. Would the Democratic party in Cobb County back a black politician?" She told me absolutely they would. I said, "Well, let me just tell you something. In 1988 there will be a black politician out here in Cobb County." She said okay. I wasn't talking about me.

EM: Who were you talking about?

TC: Nobody. I was going to find a candidate! I wasn't talking about anybody. I was standing at Papa's bar, talking to a very good friend of mine. I said to Ray, "Ray, we need to get a black politician in Cobb County." This was 1987. Ray's answer was, intellectually, as he was, he was a very intelligent person. He said, "What we need to do is get a black political group out here in Cobb County and find us a candidate. I said, "When you find that candidate, tell him he is going to have to run against Thomas Carter because I'm running." That's how I got involved. It's true. It's the honest truth. That's how I got involved in politics. And I did something that nobody ever paid any attention to out here in Cobb County as a politician, how astute I am in politics. But nobody paid any attention to this and it's gone over his or her heads to this day. I'm the best-kept secret in Cobb County. I ran in 1988 as a rookie black Democrat in East Cobb in an overwhelmingly Republican neighborhood. I never had to run a primary. How'd I do that? By being an astute politician!

MB: I don't know. Because there probably was not much racism in Cobb.

TC: Oh yes.

MB: Was there?

TC: Oh yes, there were plenty of people out here racist and the racism was personified inclusive of the Democrat party.

EM: Was there a Democrat running in East Cobb at the time?

TC: No. But being black they would have found someone to run against me, but they didn't; this was very astute.

EM: Yes. How did you do that?

TC: How'd I do it? Well, we won't talk about that. Let's just say that I know the political game! We won't go into how I did it, let's just say that was good politics. The next thing was my opposition fell out of favor within two years but the party never asked me to run again.

EM: Did the NAACP support your campaign?

TC: That's a good question; let me think about that. I don't know. I don't want to say no. Oscar Freeman was the president at the time that I ran, and he made sure that when I had fund-raisers out in East Cobb that there were people there. [Editor's note: The NAACP does not endorse candidates, but individual members supported Mr. Carter's campaign.]

MB: Was it hard to get people to come to your support rallies from East Cobb?

TC: No. These were East Cobb people at the events. At that time Oscar lived in East Cobb on Senoia Drive. There were a large number of East Cobb people that he brought that I didn't know. Plus I had a set of folk that I knew from East Cobb.

EM: Were you ever involved in any campaigns with Oscar Freeman?

TC: Well, the only one, now this was behind the scenes. I was actually involved with Oscar in Anthony Coleman's campaign who is a city councilman. Oscar and I did some planning behind closed doors.

EM: You mentioned earlier before we started this tape that Oscar sent you over to the Marietta Country Club, I believe it was.

TC: Yes, there was a gentleman and I will not call his name but he was running for county commissioner and so he had a function at Marietta Country Club, which is now City Club of Marietta. Oscar sent me over there as a spokesperson for the NAACP to find out whether or not he had any black people in his campaign. When I asked that question he told me to talk to his campaign manager, that she would answer that question for me. I haven't gotten an answered yet; I was somewhere I wasn't supposed to be. [laughter] I never got that answered.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about Martin Luther King Day?

TC: Martin Luther King Day. After we organized out here we brought in civil rights people from downtown to Zion Baptist Church where the late Reverend Johnson offered us his facilities to train. They taught us non-violence procedures and how we were supposed to perform when we came down to help with the parade. It turned out that they me captain of the Cobb group. As captain, my responsibility was to post the group at the dignitaries' area. We were responsible for all the dignitaries there which included the King family. That's how we got MLK, jr. Support Group started; the civil rights folk from SCLC came out here and taught us. Before the parade started there were so many people on Peachtree Street that the sidewalks were overflowing. I had to get work to the police and let them know what I needed so I sent an SOS out saying I need some policemen out here because the crowd just got large and we cannot manage it. This was the first parade and the crowd just got so large. I hadn't seen so many people on the streets in my life. There was a reporter and a live cameraman broadcasting and taking pictures. We had a little bit of a problem with some young fellows; they seemed to have been troublemakers. The cameraman started filming them and I said, "Turn the camera off." The cameraman stopped, while the reporter was talking to me, the cameraman started the camera up again. I said, "You're not listening. Turn the camera off." I said to the reporter, "Listen you don't want to send out into the community about these troublemakers because some more troublemakers are going to come here." The reporter said to me, "Well, Dr. King always talked about truth and honesty." I said, "Yes, but you're inciting a riot." So he says to me, "Well, I don't see it that way." I said, "Let me just tell you what you got to do now. You got to take your cameraman and you've got to go up there where the press is." See, he was not supposed to be down at the ground level. He was supposed to be up where the rest of the press was. I was trying to be gracious enough to let him have closer proximity to the parade, because he wasn't a bother at the time. Since I felt they were going to cause a problem I made them leave.

EM: What were you saying to some of these protestors?

TC: They seemed to have been pushing and shoving people because they wanted to be in the front. We've got these six layers of people and they could cause a problem. Well, now, this is my opinion, if some young people see this on TV live they'll be there. I didn't want that to happen. I did not want to disrespect Dr. King's birthday so I told them they would have to move back on the sidewalk. And I would not call them protestors, it was just that them were pushing and whatnot so I had the police to handle them.

EM: Did you ever experience or come into contact with some of the past presidents of the NAACP?

TC: Dover Ferrell. I think Dover was one of the founders, I think he was the first president, if my memory serves me correctly.

MB: From '80 to '82.

TC: I think he was one of the first presidents. I worked with him a little bit. As a matter of fact, I just saw him at the funeral for Hugh Grogan. I saw him and Mary Cater. They both looked very good.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

MB: We were talking a little bit about your involvement with other presidents in the NAACP and you started talking about Dover Ferrell.

TC: I was able to work with him, not that I was a part of the NAACP, I mean I wasn't on the NAACP board of directors or anything like that I was just affiliated with the NAACP. I had a membership card but I never did anything until Oscar came along. I would be a member and buy a card every year just to support them. I had gone to a couple of meetings and Dover Ferrell seemed to be very knowledgeable being the president but I only worked with him and Oscar. I remember Mary Cater at the few meetings I attended; she is a very knowledgeable person. That's another person, in my opinion, that is very community oriented.

MB: She helped found the Cobb County branch correct?

TC: See, I don't know about that because I wasn't here at that time. I don't know the history. I can't talk to that because I don't know it.

MB: So you became involved in the NAACP in 1986.

TC: I came down here in '76 so it must have been somewhere between '78 and '80 I got involved, somewhere in the time frame that I met Oscar. I just don't remember what year it was because as a community activist, a lot of things have been on my plate at one time or another. Dr. Scott can tell you I've been involved with some things with him. In the NAACP I was just, I only became very active and the board of directors because of Oscar Freeman. Under his leadership I was actively involved. When Oscar Freeman left his leadership in the community, I left too. It was time for him to move on; he didn't have the stamina anymore to deal with all the problems and whatnot.

EM: Did you run for office after your first campaign in 1988?

TC: Yes, I ran again but I don't remember what year it was, like 1992 or so. I don't remember! It must have been, let's see, I ran the first time in 1988 so it must have been like six or seven years later. I don't remember what date it was because that was a not such a good campaign. People had gone separate ways. And the people who I worked with that were part of my campaign had left here and things like that so I really couldn't get organized. After that defeat I decided that what I was going to do was become more community active. Recently, I have been asked to run again and I haven't made up my

mind. I've turned it over in my mind two or three times but I didn't come up with an answer so I don't know.

MB: While you were involved with the NAACP in the '80s what was the popularity like?

TC: Of what?

MB: What kind of membership, how many people do you think belonged?

EM: In the NAACP?

MB: In the Cobb County branch.

TC: Probably somewhere between 50 and 100, I would think. Membership was probably around 50 plus at the time.

EM: Were you involved in any membership drives?

TC: No, my responsibility was, I was really Oscar Freeman's right hand person and one of the assignments that he gave me before we got the computer, was to train people how to use PC's so I did. I used my PC for training.

EM: Did you get to know Deane Bonner?

TC: Sure. I worked with Deane Bonner when we were both members under Oscar's administration. She is a very capable person, very competent person, in my assessment of her would be that she's a great community person. Although I have not worked directly in her administration she and I have been at different meetings and whatnot together, i.e. before the last presidential election I spoke at the Cherokee Senior Citizens and my topic was black history, blacks involved. Deane was there. I recognized her while I was speaking. Subsequently she invited me to the 100th anniversary of the NAACP and I was there at Zion Baptist Church and she recognized me. The other thing is Deane invited me to speak at one of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday celebration, my theme was how did the Martin Luther King, Jr. Support Group get started, how did it become organized? So I gave that speech.

EM: Are you still involved with the Martin Luther King, Jr. Support Group?

TC: I'm not involved with anybody right now. I'm just a community activist and when someone calls me or send me an email and say there's a problem, we ought to work on this then I might get involved. Like I'm involved right now in trying to get the touch screen voter machines out because you cannot trace your vote, there's no way humanly possible to do that. Once you touch that screen and submit your vote, you have just lost continuity, you will never know in cyberspace whether you voted one or two, you will never know that. And not only that but the machine could print you out a piece of paper as to what you voted for but you cannot verify it. You can push A on the screen and I can

have the program add it to the votes for B and print you out a piece of paper that says you voted for A. You can never verify it so I'm involved with that. And I'm also involved in trying to stop the construction of coal burning factory down in Early County. So these are the two things I'm basically involved in right now. Like I said, when called if someone explains a problem to me and I think I can help I will. I'm going to always be involved in my community and my community is Cobb County. Anytime someone call me and ask me for help, if I can I'll be there.

MB: Well, I guess this is pretty much everything.

TC: Okay. I will be sitting at the Freeman table this Friday. The NAACP is having its annual Freedom Fund banquet dinner and they're going to rename it in honor of Oscar Freeman so I will be sitting at the Freeman table.

EM: Because Oscar Freeman was the one who began that, the Freedom Fund?

TC: No. He's not the one that started the Freedom Fund Dinner. It has been in the NAACP for eons, I guess. His contribution to the Cobb County NAACP has been so significant that they're going to rename the Cobb County Freedom Fund dinner the Oscar Freeman Freedom Fund Dinner. As I told you, this is my personal opinion, he was the best black leader in Cobb County and I say that because, and I've told you this before, I do not respect too many leaders, not to many times will you hear me say I respect a person as a leader and there's not too many people who can lead me. They just can't do that. Oscar Freeman, I will walk on water for if I could. This was a human being; if we had ten human beings like him we wouldn't have any problems. We would have no problems on this planet. That's the kind of gentleman he was. He was extremely dedicated to his family and he was extremely dedicated to his religion but he was extremely dedicated to his community too. As I said, he was a problem solver, not an ego person. Oscar Freeman was a problem solver and like I told you that transcends racial lines. A problem was a problem to him and I understood that. That's why I think I could relate to him so much because he said there's a problem we have over here and we need to do something about it. I recall him telling me one time, you asked about segregation, I believe it was over on Powers Ferry Road that he pulled into a service station and they refused to sell him gasoline because he's black.

MB: In the '80s?

TC: It sure was. [laughter] It certainly was. He told them that he was the president of the NAACP and the guy told him he didn't care what he was he wasn't sell him any petro. He had to call the police. Oscar had to call the police to buy petro.

MB: That's all I've got. I'm out of questions. Do you have anything to add?

TC: About the NAACP? No, I don't have anything else to offer; I think it's a viable organization. I think it ought to be in Cobb. But I've got to be frank with you guys; the Martin Luther King, Jr. Support Group was the most powerful black organization we had

out here in Cobb County. We had over 200 families that met each year for a soul picnic.
That's fact, that ain't fiction.

END OF INTERVIEW

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