

**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 JAMES E. GOBER**

**COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 28**

**CONDUCTED BY JESSICA DRYSDALE and JAY LUTZ**

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 28  
Interview with James E. Gober  
Conducted by Jessica Drysdale and Jay Lutz  
Thursday, 22 October 2009  
Location: Hattie Wilson Library, Marietta, Georgia

JD: Mr. Gober, if we can just start off with you telling us a little bit about you background?

JG: Yes. I attended elementary school here which is Lemon Street and Lemon Street High School and graduated in 1958, just across the street. There's no building there now, but that was good old Lemon Street High School. I left and went to college on a football scholarship, Allen University [in Columbia, South Carolina]. I didn't make the team. I went to a junior college in Birmingham in 1958, and that's where I came across my experience in the civil rights movement during my second year of junior college in 1960. Thereafter, I went back to Allen University and stayed there for a year and had financial problems. I didn't finish, but I came back and got a job in my major, which was PE, physical education. I ran the Lawrence Street Recreation Center here on Lawrence Street. When they built it, I was working at Kennestone at the time as an orderly, and they hired me. I stayed there I guess about seventeen years. From that time, I mentioned Hugh Grogan, Hugh Grogan and I go back a long time. Hugh finished Lemon Street High School three years ahead of me, but, anyway, working with the recreation department I got involved with the communities. I left that and did an urban renewal which was the slum area I was raised in which we call Page Street and Montgomery. I worked there displacing all the families. After that I got into construction, learned construction, and I've just been around here ever since.

JD: What year was it that you graduated high school?

JG: In 1958.

JD: So you grew up in Marietta. How would you describe things here in the city?

JG: Well, back in Marietta, during that time, I must say that I didn't know too much in reference to how bad, I would say, races were around the country compared to how the blacks lived in Marietta. I must say that where we lived which is over what we called Baptist Town urban renewal area, and as well as Fort Hill, a lot of our parents worked in the white homes, maybe like other folks did too, but there was a relationship of raising their kids, and we played with them. As far as going to separate places, the only thing I remember really was going to the movie. We'd sit upstairs in the balcony—had the best seat in the house and didn't realize it. But everything else, I can't remember separate water fountains, black and white, so that was an experience for me after going to Alabama that year. As we got older actually being in the community we found out that there were some differences, and the differences had to do with housing, had to do with jobs, and we began to look into the real issues of life at the time. Growing up we didn't realize—I didn't realize it—that it was a problem. But once you get educated a bit and

grow in experience you find out when you come home there were some problems here. So that's how it was up until Hugh Grogan came back—I'm going to have to keep mentioning his name because I was in the urban renewal department of the Marietta Housing Authority, and I had to displace families. In doing that, displacing those families, there had to be better housing than what they lived in.

Well, before that I worked part-time at a school, Blackwell School, worked the recreation department. In the morning time up until about 2:00 o'clock I worked at Blackwell School and then would come to the recreational department. Well once when M.L. King was killed, in our community we had some problems. In fact, it was over in the area we call Baptist Town; this was where the urban renewal was. This is off of Hunt Street, Cole Street, Montgomery Street, and there was a grocery store in the community which was owned by a white person. Also the area we had black business as well. I was at the recreation center working, and I heard this stuff going on. So I went over there and found out they was tearing up the man's store, you know, throwing fire bombs and everything. I went over there, and, believe it or not, I had to get the guys' attention. "Don't do that." He let us have credit. Everybody just stopped, and after then the newspaper people called me because I was just involved. As I got involved in the urban renewal, people heard about me doing this, and they said, "Okay, we need you. We've got urban renewal going."

So after getting the urban renewal, I learned about the construction. I learned about social service work as well because I was in recreation, and I learned about the banking system. Hugh Grogan at the time was in New York at Mt. Sinai Hospital. When he came home, he came to my office, and we talked. We got interested in doing something for our city. He had moved back. So my involvement began then in looking at the city because I had displaced families. These families had to have jobs, good jobs, and those who didn't have jobs I had to find jobs. You're dealing with families in, say, a two-bedroom house, and they've got maybe eight people living there. There's a mother there who works at Kennestone or did some kind of work; we had displaced those people. So all of this just sprung into a positive, I guess, research for myself that says, "We've got problems here." But when Hugh Grogan came back to town we had to look into how we could better our city in reference to equal rights, equal opportunities based on jobs, housing.

Well, all of that meaning that I came out of Birmingham school being in the civil rights movement, and, believe it or not, I would say three-fourths of the people in Marietta don't know I was in that movement. I don't publicize it. I don't talk about it. For some reason I just don't do that. But, anyway, that experience—going to Birmingham—that experience over there when I was a student—they had been meeting for some time. [Reverend Fred L.] Shuttlesworth had been involved in the civil rights movement for a long time, and if you get this book and read it, you will hear some negative stuff about M.L. King. It wasn't negative on movements. Birmingham was Shuttlesworth's territory while King was everywhere. Shuttlesworth was in the movement in Birmingham a long time ago, and, of course, he was bombed. The local movement of M.L. King really got to flowing. But Shuttlesworth had kids who were in school. He tried to integrate the

schools over there, and he went through stuff like that. So being on campus my senior year, I still was like a low-profile guy. My roommates told me something was going on about a movement going on, so I went to the meeting. In this first meeting, what I heard, it was like, "Golly, I'm interested." So I volunteered, not knowing what I was getting into, but I volunteered.

The sit down demonstration, I mean, that was a scary situation afterwards, but in the beginning it was, like, okay, this is easy, we've got to do it, and not being afraid. And to this day I believe that every one of the ten guys that were there were inspired spiritually, unknowingly, because we had no fear going and we volunteered to do it. Knowing how Birmingham was, my experience of Birmingham was everything was divided. I mean, nothing over there was where you knew, if you were black, you did not go too close to touch or do anything with the whites. Even when you got arrested, there were separate windows, black and white. Being in jail was a different experience, as well, but going back to the meeting, after we all volunteered, and they gave us a plan, in that plan, it says, what we're supposed to do was to go into this store, a white store [Pizitz]. There were twelve of us; the other two were just in case somebody couldn't make it. I sat in a clothing store. There were three clothing stores, Woolworth's, and another store where they had restaurants [lunch counters]. The thing was that upstairs there were hairdressers, beauticians, and restaurants. In those restaurants you had black people waiting on tables, bussing the tables. I never will forget as we came upstairs the people said, "You can't come in here." I remember a black lady saying, "Here y'all coming, messing us up already, messing us up." I used to think the same way. I used to think that M.L. King, "Why do you keep doing this' why do you keep doing this?" I had no idea, not being educated and not even thinking really what the impact of this thing was. Anyway, we sat down, and once we sat down, they closed up the whole upstairs to put everybody out. Nobody was sitting in there, but there was a guy named [James Albert] Davis, us two, and the blacks that were in there were mad. They were mad because, I guess, we were messing with their money.

So as we sat there I remember some men were coming towards us. We weren't afraid. I wasn't afraid. Davis wasn't afraid. But the plan was, and you'll read about this, I've got some information I can show you, but the plan was everybody sit down at the same time. The plan was to protect us there had to be a telephone call to the police department about what's going on to rescue us. It happened on time. We sat down, everybody sat down at 10:00 o'clock, and when those people were coming to us, I remember seeing the police coming up the stairs. They jacked us up, took us out, and threw us in a car, whatever car they could find. I remember being in a car with a lot of drink bottles and stuff, but, anyway, all of us were arrested at the same time. And that was the protection. If not, they would have torn us up and thrown us back down, I don't know. But it was a dangerous situation. But once we were arrested, we booked in, and we stayed in jail about three days, and it began to get kind of shaky then. You know, if we don't get out what are they going to do with us? We couldn't make any telephone calls, so finally we were questioned separately, and the detective was sort of sweet-talking us, getting us to tell exactly what happened. So there were statements made. You will read where the statements were made by me and by Davis.

Well, we got out four days later. The college I went to was called Daniel Payne Junior College, which is located in Woodlawn, which is right off First Avenue. Now, the airport, if you've been to Birmingham, as you go in the gate where the hotel is, just above that, that's where the campus was, and it was up on a hill. They just let it all down. [The campus was forced to relocate because of airport expansion and the construction of interstate highways.] But to take us back to campus, there was a big park area there. Well, they had closed school down for a while, and, I guess, we were out maybe three days out of jail, then we had a threat from the KKK. They didn't come on campus. They burned a cross across the street from the school, and from that point I came home for a few days and went back. Court came the following year because we left and went back to Allen University. All of us had to come back. The court date was '61, I believe it was. In the court all of us were questioned, but the emphasis was put on Davis and myself and was based upon the testimony, the questioning that they had asked us about who was involved. We mentioned Shuttleworth. Now, mind you, if you read that, it sounds like we were ratting, but it wasn't ratting. There's a law that said that it was a violation if you did what we did. There was a city ordinance and a violation that you go to jail; it was against blacks.

Well, you're dealing with federal law that it was wrong for that, so how do you go to court; how do you really get the right people to listen to the case? Well, we were found guilty, and they appealed it. I went back to school, and when I went back to school, that was it. Everything else worked from the lawyers. So Shuttlesworth was who they were after, not us. Shuttlesworth had a history of upsetting Birmingham. Knowing that who we were, they said, "Okay." I think I was eighteen going on nineteen, and it was sort of like boys that were influenced by a bad guy. All during that time, Shuttlesworth and there was another gentleman that worked with him [Rev. Charles Billups], they did arrest him, and they charged him. All of this went to the federal court, but if it hadn't gone to the federal court then the sit down movement wouldn't have been effective, and the law wouldn't be on the books where you could go in an eat. So Shuttlesworth wasn't charged in federal court when it went to appeal because we hadn't been through the appeal courts yet. So they found us not guilty, okay, and Shuttleworth was found not guilty because he wasn't an influence over us. So all of this worked real good and made it that segregation in Birmingham was unlawful, where we couldn't integrate the restaurants. So all of that worked into some experiences that I've never cared to explain. Number one that it was a helluva experience. Afterwards, I turned Christian because after I came back the second time I began to read the Bible more, and there was a ministry there, and since then I've been really great with it and been successful in trying to live right.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In *Gober v. City of Birmingham* 373 U.S. 374 (1963) the U.S. Supreme Court reversed the convictions of the college students on the grounds that the Birmingham segregation ordinance was unconstitutional. In *Shuttlesworth v. City of Birmingham* 373 U.S. 262 (1963) the Supreme Court reversed the convictions of Shuttleworth and Billups on the grounds that "there can be no conviction for aiding or abetting someone to do an innocent act."

JD: What motivated you to become involved in that particular demonstration? I know you've said that for a little while you didn't understand why Dr. King persisted in doing what he did, so what changed your mind?

JG: I think just going to that meeting and what I heard. I had never been in a meeting. I avoided going to meetings. Even when M.L. King came to Birmingham at that time, I wouldn't even go to that one. Back during that time you had a lot of blacks who thought like that. We were pretty comfortable and didn't know what was going on in the country. Maybe they were just like me, and they had never gone any place. But after I went to the meeting and heard what was going on and the problems, I just did this, and from that day on, I saw the light. When I came home I got involved. Being here at home I couldn't get totally involved because I worked for the City of Marietta Recreation Department, and Hugh Grogan and I worked together. The experience that I had in Birmingham was I can't explain it. After that movement, it was like in April I think it was, in Birmingham, riding the bus, we had to go to the back of bus. See, my eyes weren't opened until I went to the meeting. Going downtown and you go purchase something, "Colored" here, I didn't see that. I just did it. But what Shuttleworth said and what the other guys was saying—there was one guy from Miles College in the group, but just hearing those people that were from Birmingham or from some part of Alabama talk about the disadvantages, it really opened my eyes. So by me just raising my hand, it had to be God that did that for me. I have no other reason, but it opened my eyes to see that there were some problems.

JL: Can I ask you just to kind of get a little character, what do you remember of Reverend Shuttleworth?

JG: Well, Shuttleworth is a minister, a retired minister. Shuttleworth was a man of independency. He really didn't depend on others. Everything that I know that he did—like I say I went to one meeting, listened to him thereafter, knowing him, he couldn't wait on anybody. His personality was like "I've got to do it. If you don't do it, I've got to do it." I guess that's why he put his family on the line because he couldn't get anybody else to follow him. He was a smart man, and I think he was God inspired, trusted in God to do what he did. He was a soft-hearted man, a loving man. Not judging M.L. King because I've never been around him, but I think both of those men are similar in their calling of the civil rights movement. I think that the reason they did not communicate that much is because Shuttleworth was self-planted in Birmingham, and M.L. King was always somewhere doing something and speaking. In this book I read where he said, you know, M.L. King is his speeches. That's fine, but what are you doing? We didn't understand why he was doing what he was doing because Shuttleworth was actually a person that was doing things with hand, right there, didn't call anybody else, and that's just the way it was, and that's the way he is now. I talked with him maybe about six to eight months ago, and he hasn't changed, still believes in what he believed in then. He's monitoring the way the system is now; he's monitoring. Nothing he can do, but he has influence.

JL: With your protest in Birmingham, did you ever have any encounters with Bull Connor?

JG: Bull Connor, not personally, But Bull Connor was the one that arrested us during that time. We were never face to face with him; the detectives, they questioned us. I do remember this though, when we went back to court the second time, and we were found guilty in the superior court; the judge that found us guilty the first time, he had died; the prosecuting attorney had died; Bull Connor had died. Strange! Now, during the movements when they had the buses and the dogs, I was in Columbia, South Carolina then. I don't know too much about what was going on. I think Bull Connor was still alive during that time.

JL: Can I ask you, going back to your school years here, were you here for Professor M.J. Woods?

JG: Yes.

JL: What do you remember of him?

JG: Well, Mr. Woods had been around a long time, a long, long time. We used to call him Drip. He was a clean-cut guy. He was maybe five-two, five-three, always wore a suit. He always carried a pencil, and when he talked to you he put the pencil down and talked very dignified to you. He didn't talk very much, but he was very strict, very strict. Mr. Woods worked under some pretty hard situations. There was a principal [at Marietta High School] named Mr. [Shuler] Antley—see back in those days like the books that we got were books that Marietta High School used. You tried to fight to get the best ones. I remember nothing positive as far as my education is concerned of learning because we just had reading, writing, arithmetic, nothing special. The school teachers did what they could—pushed us. There weren't too many bad guys coming up when I came through. I quit school one time, and with the guys, the football coach and the PE coach were always the one that would push a guy if he slides off because they played sports. That's what kept me in school. I had quit school, and I was a pretty good football player, basketball player, so they encouraged me to come back. Mr. Woods always dealt with discipline with us. There's a branch right back here, a creek, and where the school was, if we slipped out, he used to run us down to that creek. He was called drip because his shoes never got wet. But as far as a principal he had some skills. In fact, Mr. Woods taught brick mason and plastering. That was before sheetrock came along. Behind this building here there was a house that they turned into a brick mason school. In fact, my father learned brick masonry from Mr. Woods. After school was out he taught veterans. No GI Bill. Back in those days this was a trade of blacks. In Marietta, there were about three carpenters. You've heard of James Dodd?

JL: Oh, yeah.

JG: James Dodd worked with his daddy. He finished about two years before me. James Dodd's dad was a carpenter. He built new homes for blacks around here, and there was another black guy, but most of the workers dealt with masonry, concrete work, blocking brick, and plastering. They were self-employed individuals during that time. That was a

trade, and Mr. Woods taught most of those people. In high school we had a choice to take typing or brick masonry. The same old house, when they built that, they tore it down, the school that we had over here [Lemon Street High School]; that was a center court, nothing in there. For recess we'd get in there. Well, they brought that little house and built it right in the center there, and he taught it as part of the curriculum. Do you remember Walter Moon?

JL: Oh, yes, we interviewed him last week?

JG: Okay, Walter and I finished school together, and Walter took up brick masonry, I took up brick masonry. Walter was the smartest person in the class, and Mr. Woods always gave him special attention. He built a fireplace; we built piers. [laughter] That's for real. But my Daddy, he laid block and did plaster, and mine was just a natural thing, for some reason, but Walter was very smart, still is smart. So I didn't take typing. I wish I had now. I just try to peck. But Mr. Woods dealt with that trade personally from a curriculum standpoint. I don't remember him ever actually being involved in any curriculum as far as teaching. He was a very good principal, especially the discipline part because when you came to school and class, you didn't run the halls, no way. And if you were in the hall you had to have a pass. In the shop we made little blocks, you know; it had a hall pass, what class you were in, and you couldn't come out unless you had that pass, and he'd be out there. If you didn't he'd take you in the office, and he would chastise you with a black leather strap. I was one. [laughter]

JL: How was he as far as instilling a sense of community into the students?

JG: Mr. Woods, as far as community was concerned, I don't ever remember him doing anything in the community. He was respectful. Back then you didn't have to do anything for blacks in the community. As long as you were respectful you were there, you got their attention. That's just the way it was. I don't know too much that was there that they could give us. Recreation, we had the canteen over here on Montgomery Street. There used to be a hospital. I don't know if you know about it or not. There was a black hospital. I was a Boy Scout, and when they got us together to go over there to tear this place out to make a recreation center, it was the best thing that happened to us because we didn't have any place to go. So we tore all the walls out, and it's been a recreation center ever since. There are gyms and all the other stuff and a pool. But that's all we had to do. Mr. Woods allowed us some time to go to the gym. Of course, we used to break into the gym as far as that's concerned more than he would let us in. But people in the community didn't do too much for us. School teachers didn't do too much for us. After we would leave school that was it, so we had to motivate ourselves to do a lot.

JL: I was just going to ask, so it was while you were in school when you first met Mr. Grogan?

JG: No, Grogan, he was in school; he was raised right here [Fort Hill]. You can see the building he was raised in. In fact, the door on the end, that's where he was raised. He was two years ahead of me. We played football together. When it comes to Hugh



Grogan, you're right in the heart of his life here. He was raised right here, and he died a few months ago right around the corner of this building.

JL: Was it when he came back from New York that he really became active in the community as far as civil rights?

JG: Yes, back during the years, Grogan was a lifeguard. This is when I was in the twelfth grade, and he was three years older than I am, and during the summer I assisted in teaching swimming lessons. He went to Morehouse, and from Morehouse he went to New York. In New York he was in the union up there or something. When he came back that's when he really got involved in civil rights. As far as I know.

JD: Now you said when you came back to Marietta you were involved here as well. Did you two partake in any activities?

JG: Yes, I was involved here, but it was more in political things. See around here it wasn't like I said, like other places. Marietta, and I'm the only one saying this, no one else, but Marietta is considered to me as a very nice place even though back in those days there was separation of black and white. But we didn't see it. We saw it, but we didn't feel the impact. When I say we I mean people like Moon. Moon is also in the same thing with Hugh Grogan and myself. I think our generation was motivated by our experiences. We said let's get something going on, and from that point we got other people involved in the community that could have done something years ago. We were younger than they were, but we motivated them, Aaron Cuthbert, Frank Sexton, even some of the school teachers like Lewis Scott who is still living, lives up on the hill, Mr. [S.R.] Ruff who was the principal and on and on and on.

When Hugh Grogan came back he used to come in my office because I was in the city government, and I could get information where nobody else could. I was the only black male working for the housing authority in the city of Marietta. I worked for the recreation department. I was there part-time, but I worked for the recreation department for about fourteen years before I went to the housing authority and three years part-time over there. So I knew a little bit about what was going on in the city when it came to city government and the problems. Aaron Cuthbert, Frank Sexton, these are older gentlemen who were respected. They were on a board or two. Charles Ferguson went on the [Kennestone] hospital board and nobody knew it; it was quiet. That had to do with them getting extra funds for us because you've got a minority on the board. The other guy, Aaron Cuthbert was on the [housing authority] board. Same difference. They were just there as a token. But they never said anything or did anything for us. So when Hugh Grogan came on the scene, we started looking into all these boards that the city had, but there as no fair representation, no blacks. I got some information there that shows you where a letter was written to the city and so on.

Then Dana Eastham [became mayor]. Dana Eastham was over here of of Freyer Drive. Raised over there—like where [William B.] Dunaway is. So all these people we know those people, know the families of those people. We could communicate with them, and

just like back in those days, you didn't think there was segregation anywhere, because we talked with them and they came to our neighborhood. So when Dana became mayor, he made promises because he was familiar with us. Blacks worked in his home. We would come through there going to the hospital to work, and he made promises of certain things. So when Hugh came to town, okay, let's see some of this stuff go to work. So that's when things started. A guy by the name of [Felmer] Cummings who was a councilman who lived on Cherokee Street was a good guy. So all of this time that the city recognized that they were supposed to have done something, promises, but there was nobody to motivate anybody. So when Hugh Grogan came home, he met at my office practically every day before he moved back here, and we just started putting stuff together. Walter, at the time, was at the Post Office. We'd meet, and Walter lived right up here on the hill at the time. We met and discussed some strategies and organized a group and on and on and on.

So the city cooperated, had no choice, because the way Hugh Grogan worked was based upon what is written, guidelines, period. It's not what we want, what we said we wanted and you didn't do it, it was guidelines. This is why like, I think Mr. Willis from Equal Opportunity got involved because we wrote him a letter saying, okay, the city is not doing certain things because of the federal funding. Well, you go to the city council; then we're being heard. Hugh Grogan did all of these things step by step before he ran for city councilman. So that's why they had to revamp the wards because, recognize, we can't get anybody in unless there's been changed. But believe it or not, back in [1961] there was a black guy ran for councilman. His name was Bertie Lewis Blackman. He lived on Cole Street right where they're building the new bank.

JL: Was he running for the Ward 5 seat?

JG: Yes. We were talking about this some time ago. I think before Hugh died he brought that to my attention. I lived in that same community. It's called Baptist Town. He ran for councilman. [Blackman came in second in a five-candidate race behind the winner, Howard (Red) Atherton.]

JL: Were you privy to any of the conversations with Hugh about him deciding to run, whether he was all for it or did he . . . ?

JG: That was his idea. That was his plan. That was his whole plan, I think, when he was coming back and doing all of this because what he was doing when he came back, he was find fault with the city; do you follow me? He was working with the community, Walter and myself. During that time he and I had most of the information because we were insiders. As far as people that he knew, the older people that he knew, like Frank Sexton, Aaron Cuthbert, couldn't trust them due to the fact that they were good representatives, but they had been tokens for years. But after Hugh came back, even their eyes opened up. If you look at research about Aaron Cuthbert who was on the city service board, if you find out what he said, you would think, wow, this man is on fire, he means business. But he was sitting back there three or four years ago and wouldn't do anything. He was just a token. So Hugh opened a lot of doors and opportunities for all of us.

JL: The actual election comes and obviously there are issues with the election. Do you remember for representation [in the suit against the city over gerrymandered wards], did the NAACP and legal defense fund come to Mr. Grogan or did Mr. Grogan approach them?

JG: I don't remember the NAACP being involved with Grogan at the time. I remember well when Hugh decided to run. As far as monies supporting him, any group that was a citizens advisory group that he had set up and the names of the individuals, those people still exist, they're still around. They're younger than him. See Walter and myself are younger than him. Harold Adams; I don't know if you heard about Harold Adams; young folks, Green, you know. The old folks, like I said, they were just sitting. They didn't want to get upset. They were sitting up in a pretty nice little house, got a nice income, they didn't want anybody upset with what they were doing.

JL: Well, Mr. Grogan gets the Ward 5 seat. What type of councilman was he?

JG: The best. There had never been a councilman like Hugh Grogan. He was full-time, that's what was so good about him. When he became councilman he didn't pull his seat up to the councilman's seat and leave us; he led us. We had a citizens group that we met once a month, and when we met he told us what was going on, and we made suggestions. Will you do this? Who is best for this? Remember the different boards that they had? We have a list, and we suggested who was a person that really could be supportive on that board. We just didn't throw anyone out there to be a token. We chose individual blacks that were qualified, not educationally but the best person to represent us on the board. We'd tell Hugh Grogan this is what we want, and he says, "Okay." He had a good relationship with Dana Eastham. We would have arguments, but it was a good relationship. Phil McLemore who was the city manager respected him. The other councilmen respected him. The only guy that he had problems with was [Jack] Crane. I don't know if you remember him. If you read anything about Crane, he was city manager at the time, and this was right before Hugh was re-elected. There were problems. Crane was trying to dig up bad information, you know, bad stuff on Hugh. And Hugh was the best, best, best.

JL: The '81 election comes around and it goes to a run-off, and Hugh loses the seat. What happened?

JG: I'll tell you what I think happened, and basically it's almost the truth. He ran against [John] Hammond. I lived up there on the hill. Hammond came to my house. Hammond was nowhere qualified. He was just an attorney. But somehow Hugh got some bad vibes out there, okay. Jack Crane publicized some negative information. Back during that time Hugh had done a lot of stuff, a whole lot of good stuff for the community, for the city of Marietta as far as that's concerned. Jack Crane was under pressure, not from doing anything wrong, but he had to do the right thing, and he didn't want to be told to do the right thing, not by Hugh Grogan. Then Dana Eastham was the mayor, but Jack Crane

had the authority over the city as city manager. So one thing he did—Hugh had gotten divorced.

Just like the guy that ran for the school board [Douglas E. Martin, Ward 5 candidate, 2009]. They said he didn't pay child support. He said he misused funds on a trip, that kind of thing. Well, that stirred up a little stuff. When John Hammond ran, he put some money out there. Now this might not be a fact, but I'm telling you what I know, that Hugh had people working within his campaign, but at the same time worked for John Hammond. That's how John Hammond won. How did that work? Back in those days, and it's still happening now, in the black community, it was happening before I was grown, and it continued up until Hugh Grogan got here. Any white person that was running in the community, they used to go to the churches, and at the same time they were giving some individuals monies to work in the community to get them votes. So you had blacks in the community then, they say, okay . . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

JG: Okay, so if you give me monies, okay, I'm going to go out there, and I come to you, and everybody knows me, "Hey, I want you to vote for John Doe." What they did, they got enough money to rent a car, so they would go out in the community and pick up people to take them to the poll. They trusted me. They trusted who I had to drive. They gave them a car. This is who you vote for. That's the old system. That's what happened. That's what happened to Hugh. Hugh didn't do that because Hugh didn't have the money to do that. It was a straight vote for Hugh, but Hammond came back and did the same thing. So the people that were picking up folks—I forgot what the percentage was, look at the percentage and you'll see. That's what happened. Otherwise Hugh would have come through.

JL: That run-off election, I think it came down to a handful of votes, like I think less than ten, I think the number was about seven.

JG: That's the way it was. It's like that now, but people in the community didn't think for themselves. It's not like, we just want a black in there; we want the person that can do the job.

JL: Do you think that that negative stuff that came out about Hugh affected him in the '85 election?

JG: Sure. The man did too good of a job. In fact, that was the mistake that the community made. The reason I say that is because at his funeral the people that were there and the respect that they gave him—that had been years ago when he was councilman. Have you talked to Goldstein, Philip Goldstein, you've heard of him?

JL: No.

JG: Philip Goldstein has been on the council for what, thirty years? He's been on the council since he was eighteen, Philip Goldstein. Philip Goldstein came to his house. If you get a chance, talk to him. He'd been in there a long time. But Hugh was very respected. Everybody has personal problems. But the same folks that he grew up with are the same folks that actually helped him on his campaign, came to his house. Everybody's friend. I don't care if you were poor or wealthy, Goldstein came to his house. You got some folks now that's trying to get his information. I've got some. Well-respected.

JL: Let me ask you one more question about Mr. Grogan. Everyone that I've interviewed I've asked this one question. If there was one word to describe Mr. Grogan what would it be and why would you pick that word?

JG: I would describe him as being ... great. I say great because he came up during a time that Marietta needed a person like him, not necessarily I'm talking from a black point of view, but I'm talking about the city as a whole. During that time the city was hurting on growth, number one, and federal funds were beginning to flow in like, the revenue sharing program was just beginning and without black input the city would get no money. He followed the guidelines; he had the city before he became councilman to make sure monies were put in place which made the city like it is now—this building [old Lemon Street Elementary School], for instance, okay, the housing programs that they have in the city and other urban renewal. I worked for the urban renewal program, but he came in and revenue sharing, jobs, fair representation on the boards, on and on and on. That's why I say he was great for Marietta.

JD: What kind of things were you personally hoping to see while he was councilman? What were you pushing to see take place? Was there anything in particular or just fair representation or was there anything else?

JG: Well, there was no certain thing. Everything he did was a positive punch. Not to say that we were trying to make the city of Marietta wrong. The fact is that was the old grandfather clause; it was time for correction. As I said, if Hugh hadn't opened our eyes, we would have never seen it because we were comfortable. We were comfortable. This is Fort Hill. The best housing that the city of Marietta had for blacks was Fort Hill. Homeownership. Over in Baptist Town we had the existing housing which was Cole Street and the lower part of Avery. The upper part of it where I lived in 1952 was the slum area. The only housing that was better was public housing. My dad owned a house, which was in the slum area, owned his own home. They rented, but I used to look at these [public housing buildings] as mansions because they had hot water, inside bathrooms, had a man to cut their grass.

Back during that time people were just comfortable, but things changed, urban renewal came in, and that was one of the best things too. There had been two urban renewals. I was in one but ours was small which was Baptist Town. It was homeownership but it's not like what's happening now. Then they had Louisville over there, you know where those apartments [Johnny Walker Homes] are that they tore down on Powder Springs

Street across from the cemetery? That was a slum area and they built public housing. That was a bad location. Then they hired me to do Baptist Town. That was the best. I'm not saying that because I worked there, but due to the fact that the funding was better. If we buy your house it might end up being worth \$6,000, but the government gave an additional \$15,000 if you had a grown son in your house or had an extra family in your house. They would give you up to \$4,000 to relocate in a newer rental place, public housing or whatever. At the same time, we bought the old furniture that was bad and give you a new starter.

So all that was totally new for Marietta. This little James Street around the hospital, do you ever go down Tower Road? Those people were displaced from slum areas. And then some other people built in the county, and the bank system opened up monies there. I remember W.P. Stephens Lumber Company would build houses for black people. It was right here on Church Street before you cross the track. There's a building there where the parking lot is. That was the lumber yard. So the housing authority really gave the blacks an opportunity to get better housing. Some of those people worked at Lockheed, but they couldn't get a loan. So Marietta Federal was giving out loans because it was a local owned bank. Also back during that time Hugh Grogan, after he came back, all of this was developed, but what was the problem was that existing homeowners, the elderly, couldn't keep their houses fixed up. So we made sure that the revenue sharing funds were put into it. All of this was put into place. We've really come a long way. But we are behind Smyrna.

JL: Six years after the redistricting case, very important case for the African-American community in Marietta, six years after that case John Hammond becomes the councilman for Ward 5, a white politician. For the next eight years there's no African American on the council. What do you remember about that period? Were there steps backwards, were there steps forward, and then in 1989, James Dodd, An African-American gets the seat back. Can you just talk a little bit about that time frame?

JG: Yes, very simple. John Hammond did nothing. He didn't have to do anything. Hugh Grogan already did it. James Dodd did nothing. Hugh Grogan already did it. It's that simple. But what happened was everything was in place, and the way it is in Marietta, the blacks were not going to see it removed because we're still respected. Marietta is sort of strange when it comes to race; we're small but yet we're still respected. We can go to city hall when there's a new city manager or whatever; we can go to city hall and sit down and talk to you and everything would still be like it was when Hugh Grogan was there.

JL: Sounds like he developed the structure and everybody . . . .

JG: Exactly. I worked for the housing authority for about seventeen years. I was the only black male there. Walter Moon's wife worked for me, Winifred. But anyway, Martha Blount who is resident manager [director of public housing] now worked for me. Back during that time there were no blacks represented, and then we had to do something to get a fair representation of blacks. That's when Marion Thomas came on. He was from

Marietta, and he was in service here, in the Air Force, so he was on the board of the housing authority. Even during that time he was put on, but he was just a token. Everybody else on all of the boards, when a person is to be elected or put on the board, it's a person that really represented the blacks, because of the foundation that Hugh Grogan laid. Up to now. Let's mention [Anthony] Coleman.

JL: Okay. I actually have a question for you. Dealing with run-offs, one thing that I've heard about this upcoming election, it's a three candidate race again, two African-Americans, one white candidate; it's simulating the '81 election. Do you think that if it goes to a run-off the seat could be lost for the African-American community?

JG: No. Marietta has changed. The way I look at it, fair representation. Now fair representation could be termed black having opportunity, but I'm talking about the fact is that we live in a city now where if anybody that can get on there, it's going to be good. It's supposed to represent the people. It's a change. Now, James Dodd didn't do anything. He admitted to my wife some time ago—she worked for him one time; and I said, Coleman, see Coleman, a lot younger, I guess he was still in high school when Hugh was councilman. These are things I know first hand. Now, Coleman is a recipient of Hugh, not in reference of Hugh showing him or telling him what to do or how to do it; he picked up on what was already existing, Okay, comparing to James Dodd. The same thing was there with James Dodd, but he didn't do anything. You'll find out, if you don't know, Anthony Coleman gives seminars every year on jobs, job training, housing programs, and on and on and on. James Dodd is running, and I talked with him the other day, really if you're going to run, you've got to have a record. Anthony has a record. James Dodd doesn't have a record. The white candidate, I don't know what he's running on, I haven't listened to him; I don't know actually who he is; but out of the three Anthony has a record, Anthony's a good councilman, Anthony's a darn good councilman. He is second in reference of doing for Marietta like Hugh, but Hugh set the foundation. He's piggybacking, you see, he's full-time. Hugh was full-time. That's the difference. Anthony doesn't have a job. He's a full-time councilman.

JL: Do you think Councilman Coleman, do you think that was a conscious choice to follow in Hugh's footsteps?

JG: He didn't know anything about Hugh. He was just younger. In fact, he didn't communicate with Hugh that much because of his [Coleman's] personality. He's a young kid, this young man, I know him personally, he's come to my house, and I talked with him, and he put us on the back burner at times. My wife had campaigned for him, and he put her on the back burner. You know, kind of bigheaded in his personal ways. But when he wants something, he'd called, but he's a good councilman. I'm hoping that if he wins that he'll do a little more communication with the people that will help him. If you hear anything negative about Coleman, you'll hear that he's bigheaded. He's an "I" in a lot of situations, but he's piggybacked on what Hugh has already done. Personally, I can say that he's a good councilman. He'll speak up. We weren't getting a fair representation as far as contracts. He got involved, and he requested a total six-year audit last year on one of the housing programs for Cobb County, not the city but Cobb County.

A six-year audit. They were mad at him. And he went on to Washington and found out there was discrimination. He put these people on notice. Anthony is tough. Hugh was different. I guess they respected Hugh so much that Hugh could sit in council and sit around the table with them and say, "This is what we ought to do." Because with Hugh it wasn't a threat; he was a business-minded guy. He was also a teacher to some of the councilmen. He was full-time. Goldstein respected Hugh because he had the knowledge. Hugh knew about federal stuff, you know; that was a plus.

JL: Let me ask, do you know, did Mr. Grogan, I know Mr. Grogan attended Morehouse in Atlanta and also St. John's in New York. Did he graduate from either one, do you know?

JG: No. [Certificate in medical technology from Manhattan Medical School (1959)].

JL: No, okay. So I guess this was just his innate knowledge.

JG: He operated when it first came out a new kidney machine.

JL: Yes, we have an interview with Mr. Grogan that was done in '84, and he talks about where the doctor who developed the new implement to the dialysis machine, he helped to work out the kinks, I guess.

JG: See, there was something happening that nobody knows and I don't mind telling you. Hugh had a car accident when he was in New York and something changed. Why would you leave New York and a job like that? Something changed. He came back home, and he started working politics. The job that he got when he came back home was he worked for the city in the housing program as a social worker, out of this building, right down the hall. He sued because they fired him. He won the suit. He was that smart guy. You wouldn't think that he was that smart. He was an everyday guy.

JL: With the accident in New York, do you think that changed him?

JG: A little. He had been away a pretty good while from Marietta. I used to see him when I was in college and came home for Christmas. I talked to him, and then I didn't see him anymore for a few years. After the accident he was coming down anyway and I was talking to him. This is how I personally know that he had an accident.

JL: Was he hurt?

JG: I don't know how much or what; all I know there were some problems. I know there were some problems. When he came back to Marietta, he was all about what can I do here at home. As I told you, he did not always suggest. He listened. We had this citizens group and we met. He'd just be there as a representative of council for blacks. Well, this and this has gone on blank, blank, blank. We'd sit around and we'd talk and we did certain things. He never sat at the head table. We'd ask, "Well, Hugh, what do you think about blank, bland?" "Well, just like we're doing."



JL: He always had an open door policy?

JG: Yes. Different from Coleman.

JD: If I can go back for a minute and just ask you again about your involvement in the civil rights movement in Birmingham. How do you think that compares to what was going on in Marietta or just in Georgia, Atlanta? Do you think the intensity of the opposition was equal or is there any comparison between the two?

JG: Birmingham, there's no comparison, because the cities that you named, weren't like Birmingham. I went to school in Columbia, South Carolina. When I got up there in 1960, the same thing was going on. They were doing sit down demonstrations in Columbia, South Carolina. It was nothing like Birmingham. I mean, you would go down and sit down in a Columbia, South Carolina restaurant to give you an example—there was a white instructor. I don't know if she was American or what, but the black guy was from Africa. There was a sit down demonstration at Woolworth. This was the fall of 1960. There was a sit down demonstration, and you got the black, the black didn't know who and the white sitting at the counter. He said, "I'm not American; I'm from Africa." We demonstrated. If you did that in Birmingham, you'd be tarred and feathered.

JD: So you think Birmingham was what's different.

JG: It was tough. I mean, white and black, no public communication, none whatsoever, everything was separate. Like I said, water fountains, you didn't have any water fountains around Marietta city that was black and white. I didn't see what I saw in Columbia, South Carolina. I didn't see it in Marietta.

JL: Were you in Birmingham for the bombings?

JG: No. For the bombing of the church I was working here at the center. That was the way it was.

JD: Atlanta was nicknamed the city too busy to hate. How true do you think that was, and do you think that mentality carried throughout the state?

JG: I don't think it carried throughout the state because if you went south of Atlanta, further down, you'd see a big difference. I used to go to Brunswick, Jekyll Island; if you travel to those places. I went over to Bremen. I had two kids at the time going through Bremen out US 78. It's different. Atlanta was different because the percentage of blacks was number one, and I will say the clientele of educators [made] a big difference. When you're talking about politics, politics really play a role in cities where you've got cooperation of blacks based on the vote. You've got the politicians going in your favor, and people hear that and they see that. That's the difference between Atlanta and other cities. Maybe you wouldn't go through things like you did in Atlanta. Atlanta had to be represented. It was positive. I think that's one of the reasons why it grew like it did.

JD: Is there anything that we haven't covered so far that you want to discuss today?

JG: I've been going through Birmingham. I have a daughter in Memphis, and I stop in Birmingham. Birmingham has changed. Not only Birmingham has changed, but Marietta has changed. Maybe other cities have changed. Fifth Avenue in Birmingham was black businesses. Marietta—Lawrence Street—was black businesses. Urban renewal that I did over here, the black businesses—they're gone. What happened? We talk about this all the time. What happened? We had more black businesses back during the days of segregation than now. What do you think happened? Where are they? What did we do? That's the worst.

JL: Absolutely.

JG: We're supposed to be flourishing, now; opportunities are much better than they were then. Where are those black businesses? We've got a citizens' advisory committee which I'm a member of. We're working with the city of Marietta now, and they're trying to come up with some names of black people in Marietta that did something, places and businesses. We can't find a spot, but we thought it'd be a good idea to maybe get pictures of black businesses and post them where they were as historical, so you can walk by, like where the courthouse is up here. The thought is to have a plaque, all businesses with a picture and say this was located blank, blank, blank, blank, where the courthouse is. Stuff like that. Yes, what happened?

JL: Do you remember the time frame when those businesses especially started to go?

JG: Yes. I have moved them. I was in urban renewal. I displaced them because downtown Marietta was a displacement area; it wasn't slums, but you know, the Downtown Marietta Development Authority which is active now. That came from urban renewal days. I had to displace those people and those businesses, over in Baptist Town. I had to displace them. Cab companies, family-owned restaurant businesses. I tell you another thing too. After the black trades, the masonry—around Marietta that was the business—the masonry, concrete, brick [work]; it's gone.

JD: Do you think that could be attributed to the way integration was played out? The way that it was tried to be achieved, I guess?

JG: Yes and no. I think the experience of not being equal had more to do with education than anything else. I mean you had a house, but being equal in education had to do with the fact that you want your kid to have the best education to get a better job. That's what happened. We got out of the trades and got into this. That's the problem. I've got grandkids. My granddaughter's staying with me and now going to school at McEachern. She's sixteen, cute little thing. I said, "You're going to have to get you some gloves. You need to change because you're going to do some work." And I have another granddaughter who lived with me, and she's only nine. She can do painting, and she'll go out there and push the lawn mower. I told the sixteen year old, I said, "You're going

to be cutting grass.” “I ain’t pushing that lawn mower.” That’s the mentality they have you see. And the boys, I’ve got a twenty year old and a nineteen year old. The nineteen year old was raised around me, and he’ll work. The twenty year old, he’ll work too but less far. Because everything that’s in front of him—he has a place to live, a nice house, grandma, mama, whatever, will support him. What do you want to work for? He worked for me for a while, and used his hands. I had a guy who showed him how to do stuff. But now, it’s the reverse of wanting to work, knowing how to work, but they said they don’t have to work. That’s the problem.

When I was in school, we had vocation, we had shop, and we had masonry. They’re getting out of that now. You get a guy from Mississippi, in fact, I talked to a guy that’s nineteen—they had vocational [education]. He knows how to use his hands. I think the problem not necessarily has to do with the system. It’s the idea that what integration did was bypass the ability of a person to put more thought in education, and look what education has gotten them. Some of them don’t have a job. They don’t know how to do anything. I’m in construction. Now I’m from the old school, okay. When I left this school I got my card and I had to get a birth certificate. I was a D student when I was in college. I didn’t know how to read. I had to learn for myself. I’m not boasting, but the fact is that that ability—I learned how to read when I was twenty-one. I know how to fill out your income taxes, the whole rules. I know how to read blueprints. I know every aspect of building. I only know because I had to be self-motivated and I had to put myself in that situation. These kids are smarter than I am, and they are doing nothing. So where are we failing as blacks? We, back in those days, depended on the system. When Hugh Grogan came into Marietta, there wasn’t a system. We didn’t have opportunities, but what he did was to allow the city of Marietta to have better living opportunities, okay, not education. When Marietta High was integrated everybody was, “Well, kids are going to school, going to college.” Friday [Richards], the football coach at Marietta High School was raised [around here]. There was more motivating in being somebody and doing something. When the kids come out of school and go to college now there’s no motivation, no more to get your education. You don’t have to get a job. My granddaughter lived with me, and I had to be positive. I don’t care about you playing ball. Her mother is a basketball person, and she still plays. No, you’re going to work at Kroger. I got her an application at Kroger. She’s going to have to learn how to work and learn how to spend money and stuff like that. We’re a long way from where we’re supposed to be because of desegregation.

All the jails are being full of black guys. In Cobb County, they’ve got a five-story new jail they built out there. It got too small, and now they got a five-story. My stepson is Hugh Grogan’s son. In fact, I married Hugh’s ex-wife [Bettye], and Hugh and I were still friends. He came and ate dinner with us, and we were just like old friends. I helped raise his two sons. When I married, his younger son [Reece] was ten, and now he’s thirty-six, thirty-seven, something like that. His older son [Hugh III] went to college and majored in criminal justice and worked in Cobb County. That’s why I know about the system and what it’s doing. It’s going backwards. So how do we change? There’s not going to be another M.L. King; there’s not going to be another black leader. I think that’s gone for the blacks. Jesse Jackson tried, maybe some other people tried. I think what we

have to do now is go back to the old school as blacks. We've got to go back to the churches. That's our background as how we are supposed to be as a society, good or bad. That's what our foundation is. That's what I care about. Church is supposed to put you on the right track, you know, but now it's not happening.

So, all our black males are going to jail for crazy stuff—crazy, crazy stuff. The education system. My ex-wife is a retired school teacher—she taught over here at the junior high school. Her voice changed because she had to holler over the years. But now we got to change. A twenty-one year old guy went to jail when he was seventeen because he got in a fight on the bus, and now he's got a record. We've got to change some kind of way. I don't know what, but we've got to go back to the churches. So, overall, what did it do for us? What did desegregation do for us? It set us back in a sense. Going back to the black businesses, going back to the raising of our kids, but we're smart, we're getting straight, and that's our problem.

JL: It's a community problem, it really is. Thank you for coming in today.

JD: Thank you for your time.

JG: I hope it was of service to you.

JL: Absolutely.

END OF INTERVIEW

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