

**KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**

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

**AN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT OF THE HIST 4425 (ORAL HISTORY) CLASS AT  
KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY, FALL SEMESTER 2009**

**INTERVIEW WITH REVEREND DWIGHT GRAVES**

**COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 29**

**CONDUCTED BY ERIC MEZ and MATT BELL**

**MONDAY, 2 NOVEMBER 2009**

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 29  
Interview with Reverend Dwight Graves  
Conducted by Eric Mez and Matt Bell  
Monday, 2 November 2009  
Location: Hattie Wilson Library, Cobb County, GA

EM: Could you first start by telling us a little bit about your background and how you came to arrive in Cobb County?

DG: Well, actually I grew up in a little place called Freeman, West Virginia, Rocky Mountain Hollow. I was in the United States Air Force, and I was assigned to Dobbins Air Force Base, Georgia, which is in Cobb, of course, in 1976. That's how I ended up in Cobb County. I was stationed at Dobbins.

EM: Did you attend elementary up through high school in Freeman?

DG: Yes, I went to elementary school, Blue Star High School in Freeman, West Virginia up until 1964. Then we integrated schools, and then I graduated from Bramwell High School in 1966, which is called the Bramwell High School Millionaires. The town I come from in Bramwell had the most amount of millionaires for any town of its size in the United States. I don't know if that has any relevance here. All the coal barons lived in that little town.

EM: In Freeman?

DG: In Bramwell. Bramwell is the school where I integrated.

EM: Is it still a wealthy area?

DG: I don't know if it's as wealthy as it used to be. Most of those folks have died off, and the coal industry kind of went down from what it had been, but it had the most amount of millionaires for any town of its size in the United States. That's the reason our high school was named Bramwell High School Millionaires.

EM: Were your parents from the area of Freeman, Virginia?

DG: Yes. West Virginia.

MB: Can you talk a little bit about the integration? I guess when you integrated in '64 or after '64?

DG: Yes. My father led that movement. He was a big civil rights person, and he led the movement to integration. He was the one that coached us and guided us through and told us what not to do, how to act, behave ourselves, et cetera, et cetera. So it got to be interesting.

MB: So he was involved with the community?

DG: Yes, he was a community activist, politician, civil rights person, my father, so he led the integration of the schools in that particular area. I think at some point, I don't know when, he served on the board of education; he was a city councilman, town councilman, vice mayor, mayor pro temp for that town.

MB: Wow. I guess he had quite an influence on you.

DG: Yes. Got me out of a lot of trouble!

MB: That must have been, I don't know if necessarily intimidating, but integrating to a school where the mascot was a millionaire?

DG: Yes, it was. It was interesting, but he drilled all of us. We had to be on our best behavior, so we had to deal with a lot of abuse, foul treatment, etc. We were called names and different things. I got in a fight with a guy one time. We were both playing in the band, and we were both on the bulletin board for having the best manners of the month, and we just got in a fight in the gym over stupid stuff. They were going to deny me a trip to Florida with the band because of the fight.

MB: But not him?

DG: Not him.

EM: What instrument did you play?

DG: I played the tuba. I was good because in the black school we learned to play by ear. We didn't mess with learning to read by music. Then when we integrated schools I had to learn to read music because the band teacher said that African American kids couldn't read music. He shouldn't have told me that.

MB: Even in the segregated school?

DG: In the black school they didn't make us read music. We just played by ear, tone quality.

MB: That probably gave you an edge over the other kids once you got integrated.

DG: Right, once I integrated, you know, the band director said, black kids can't read music, so then of course, I had to learn! Just to show him. So when I got to college they wanted me to play in the band because I had the tone quality, and I could read, so it was fun.

MB: So you went to college after high school, you didn't go straight to the . . .

EM: No, I went to Bluefield State College in West Virginia, HBC, retired to play a little football, had too much fun.

MB: What were you studying while you were there?

DG: Secondary education.

MB: Really?

DG: Yes, secondary education.

MB: What ended up making you decide to join the Air Force rather than . . . ?

DG: Academic suspension. I just wouldn't go to class. I had a good GPA. I had too much fun, so it was Vietnam, Army or the Air Force. So I joined the Air Force.

MB: What did you do in the Air Force?

DG: Human resources.

MB: Being in the Air Force, there was no risk of you going to Vietnam?

DG: I went close but they never sent me. I went to Thailand, which was close enough; I flew over.

MB: How did you end up in Japan, what we were talking about earlier?

DG: Did I tell you I was in Japan?

MB: Yes.

DG: Oh! That's right, I did tell you. Well, actually when I got in the Air Force, I was a jock, right, so I was stationed at Ft. Meade, Maryland, you know where national security headquarters is. Well, I should say that, NSA, where they had the Air Force, Army, Navy and Marines. We had football there, so I played football and scored the winning touchdown. We beat the Army team, so they were all impressed, so I played kind of jock. When they came through, they asked me where did I want to go next. I said I want to go to Japan, so they sent me to Japan. So that's how I ended up going to Japan, and I spent almost six years there.

MB: Was the Air Force integrated when you were in?

DG: Pretty much so, yes.

MB: Did your experience in the . . . ?

DG: Oh yes, I was the equal opportunity social actions guy, human relations, that was my job. Well, you know all my background in West Virginia; I dealt with racial issues in the Air Force.

MB: Were there like any more extreme issues that you remember?

DG: Quite a few. Yes, somewhat subtle, systematic, institutionalized is the word. There were different tensions, different misunderstandings, communications between races, but it was there in the military.

EM: From your superiors and your regular peers?

DG: Regular peers and the higher ranking folks too.

MB: So when you came back from Japan was that like it was just a six year thing like you knew you were going to come back at that time or you kind of wanted to come back?

DG: Well, yes, it was time for me to come back. When I left Japan I went to Thailand, and then I left Thailand and went to the Philippines.

MB: Wow, quite a journey.

DG: I got the assignments that I wanted.

MB: That's good. So what did you do once you came back? You went to Dobbins Air Force Base?

DG: Dobbins. I was the Personnel Liaison for Active Duty Air Force.

MB: And you'd been here since 1970?

DG: No, I left in 1980. They came through on another inspection, and they sent me up to the headquarters, Air Force Communications Command Headquarters. I wanted to stay here, but they snatched me up. They inspected my unit, and it was pretty good, my operations, so to speak, so I went up there and stayed there about twelve years working at the headquarters, communications, military air lift command headquarters, Air Force inspector, inspector general's office.

EM: So what made you decide to go into human resources after going from secondary education in college?

DG: I don't know; they just stuck me, you know. We tested, and they stuck me in personnel. I guess fit personnel with my whole background which was, growing up with my father, people issues and working with people, community stuff. I seemed to fit. Once I got into it, and I tested, that's where they stuck me in personnel, and I liked it. We called it personnel, you know human resources, interchangeable.

EM: Before you joined the NAACP were you involved with any other activist organizations?

DG: I was an activist. I was always an activist in the military bases, at Dobbins, everywhere. I was always, but I was more of an individual. Out of the military and equal opportunity, social activist in the military, I was additional duty equal opportunity NCO at Dobbins, and, of course, back in that time there were some issues at Dobbins that we had to deal with.

EM: Could you give us an example? You don't have to.

DG: Well, Dobbins was a reserve base primarily, but we were a communications squadron stationed on the reserve base, an active duty unit. They felt that active unit brought its own separate issues and problems. They felt that blacks—African Americans—should not seek any entertainment in the Marietta area; they should go to Atlanta. And my concept, we're all wearing the same uniform, where this uniform puts me I want whatever I can get. But I found the people here locally were a little reluctant. They didn't want to—they treated me like second class military people. We all bleed the same blood.

MB: Was there a lower number of blacks in the reserves rather than enlisted?

DG: Probably a lower number. It would be interesting, yes. But this is the Atlanta area, so we had a pretty good number that were stationed out here, but they couldn't really reap all the benefits that were here, like the entertainment. They said, "You guys go downtown." I guess they didn't want to interact socially.

EM: That was from your superior that said that?

DG: Yes. It was interesting. I've got a couple of stories I can tell you. I used to coach the basketball team.

MB: At Dobbins Air Force base?

DG: Yes, I used to coach the inter-service basketball team, and I couldn't get a key to the gym because I wasn't responsible enough to get a key to the gym, but they had a kid that they gave the key to the gym, a white kid. So one day, what the kid would do, he would leave the key up under the door mat in order for me to get in to practice my guys in the gym, so I would have to get the key from under the door mat in order to get in the gym and practice the guys for basketball practice. So one day the key got lost. He didn't leave it up under the mat, so they called me in and chewed me out about the key being lost.

MB: It's his fault.

DG: Well, the executive officer called me in and told me to go find the key, I said, okay. So I went and talked to the kid. The kid was in school. He had a key. He was a Navy

dependent, right, his father was in the Navy. His father had a key, and he had a key, so I had to get a key from the kid, but I went and got the key, and then I stopped at my house and wrote up an IG complaint and handed them the key and the IG complaint at the same time. They really talked about that. Then, another time, I was coaching my team getting ready to go to a basketball tournament in Mackville, Florida, so I was asking for basketballs and towels to go to Florida, and they were saying we're not going to give you any. So I was saying, if you go to a basketball tournament without towels and a basketball, what's going to happen?

MB: Seriously.

DG: The other team's not going to let you get any. You're not going to get any clean towels, and you're not going to get a basketball. I mean, you might get them, but it'll be so late, so I was upset and I complained and I said, "This is not right." They said, "What do you need basketballs for?" We're letting you go to the tournament? But I played racquetball with the Wing Executive Officer every day and some of the generals at Dobbins. They called my commander. I had to play racquetball with him. I was fairly decent, but anyway, so I said, "Look, would you go to a racquetball tournament without your racquet? Would you? If you went to a racquetball tournament and they handed you a house racquet—you know the difference between a house racquet and your own racquet—okay." But hey, that sort of stuff. Issues like, just various issues. It was tough.

MB: Did you play football or any sports while you were in high school?

DG: Yes, I played basketball and football in high school. Well, I played football in junior high because we integrated schools.

MB: I was going to ask, did you play when you integrated?

DG: They didn't have a football team.

EM: The Millionaires, they didn't have one?

DG: They didn't have one, and I got cut from the basketball team because I hit a thirty-foot hook shot!

MB: How far is that?

DG: I hit a hook shot and the coach said, "This is not the Globetrotters!" [laughter] I said, "Oh, I'm sorry." In the integrated schools they ran a lot of plays; in the black schools, we were kind of like behind the back, between the legs, that kind of stuff. But anyway, I didn't stay on the basketball team. They said, we don't shoot hook shots. It was fun though. But I did play football in college for a little while.

MB: What was the biggest difference you noticed from leaving the area in the 1970s and then returning twelve years later in regards to I guess racial tension?

DG: Covert versus overt, overt in the 1970s, covert later.

MB: Were you pleased when you came back that it was a lot more open?

DG: Pleased that some things had improved, but folks were still, you know, just turning their face to injustice; they just kind of scrubbed things under the rug.

EM: Was there much racism in Illinois when you were up there?

DG: Of course.

EM: Would you say just about as much?

DG: Just about as much.

MB: Really?

DG: Sometimes the northern places are even worse; it just depends.

MB: Was it different in that maybe they're just not as open, maybe in Chicago?

DG: It's not as open, people were integrated, yet they weren't, so to speak. It was still a little bit of separatism there. It was more covert. I think more covert up north than it is in the south in a lot of areas. Some are not but those that are . . . but there are some places that are fairly integrated, northern places that aren't as bad.

MB: After Bluestone integrated did they close Bluestone?

DG: Yes.

MB: Do you think that the separate but equal, do you think Bluestone was in any way equal to Bramwell?

DG: No, we had substandard books, supplies, and facilities. We were down the river, so every time the flood came, it flooded our school. Our school was down by the river, and our books, well, we didn't have . . . . We practiced football up on a cow pasture, way up on the hill, in a cow pasture. We didn't have a gym, so we worked out in a coal bin. We had an old gym; it was about as small as this room, run down. It wasn't anywhere equal, not in West Virginia it wasn't. I'm sure in places like Atlanta it probably was, but not nearly as much in West Virginia.

MB: Do you think with the integration there was a loss of the sense of community in the African American community?

DG: Overall yes. In my particular community I don't think it mattered very much but overall yes.

MB: So when you came back you came back in 1990? How long was it before you joined the NAACP?

DG: I grew up with the NAACP. My father was in the NAACP.

EM: So did you participate in any student activities or anything like that while you were younger?

DG: Well, I worked directly with the editor of their magazine, the editor of the *Crisis* magazine, Reverend C. Emerson Davis; I worked directly with him when I was in high school. The *Crisis*, NAACP, *Crisis*.

EM: What was your dad's role in the NAACP?

DG: He was the vice president for the state of West Virginia. As a matter of fact, I think it may be in the book over there in the library, his information.

MB: So when you first started attending . . .

DG: I got involved here. I wasn't a big NAACP person, after I left home for the military, because now when I left home in '68 there weren't a lot of NAACP affiliates. I was mostly Air Force, equal opportunity and social actions, so there wasn't a great amount of NAACP involvement except that we did NAACP type things. We had officers that we did our own military type thing. I don't know how we affiliated that much with the NAACP except on a few occasions, so when I came back I think I joined the NAACP in '90 and became a member.

EM: Who was president, Dover Ferrel? Was Dover Ferrel president at the time?

DG: I'm not sure. I was probably influenced by my neighbor, Ms. [Deane] Bonner. She's been a long time. She's always been an NAACP person ever since I've known her, and I just joined.

MB: Do you remember the size?

DG: I think it's grown. I think it had a pretty good number here in Cobb. I guess the NAACP, from what I gathered here, has a great history here in Cobb because of some of the issues that they've had to deal with. People were having to take on a lot of issues. I knew it from, I used to be a member of Zion Baptist Church, Reverend R.L. Johnson and all those guys in Cobb County got involved also.

MB: And they used to meet there?

DG: Yes.

EM: Did you know any of the presidents? Oscar Freeman?

DG: Yes, I knew Oscar, I knew Donnie Perry. I was elected president twice for the NAACP.

EM: Can you talk about that?

DG: In 1996 I was elected twice but I never had a chance to take office.

MB: Why not?

DG: It was kind of political at the time. What happened was I got elected. The first time I beat Donnie Perry by two votes, so somebody had appealed. Since it was so close they appealed it. They wanted to cancel that election and start a new election.

EM: Because it was so close?

DG: Yes. So I filed a temporary restraining order in Cobb County court to stop the new election and declare me the winner. But because I was so aggressive there were some folks that were afraid of me. They went ahead and denied the temporary restraining order. Then they held a new election, and I won again, but more votes.

MB: Do you know how many?

DG: It was double the last time because one of the guys dropped out that was in the election before, and I got all his votes.

MB: Who was the other guy in the election?

DG: Randolph Scott.

MB: So was Donnie Perry in the second election?

DG: Yes, and I won, so I beat both of them, but then they came down and said, "You can't hold office because you filed a temporary restraining order."

MB: That they wouldn't even approve. Who came down?

DG: The national, it was some folks that probably facilitated that. They didn't like the fact that I took them on. But it worked out for the best. I'm more suited in SCLC anyway.

EM: When did you start the SCLC?

DG: Somebody asked me that. After that I was just a lone ranger. I'm used to that, and I didn't want to be involved in the organization because I thought they were all sort of

bought and scared to take on real issues, but somebody talked me into being a part of the SCLC.

EM: Like what real issues?

DG: Well, like county hiring practices, discrimination at Lockheed, some stuff that was going on at Kennesaw State nobody ever said anything about.

MB: In the 1990s?

DG: In the 1990s, yes.

MB: Really.

DG: A handshake and a pat on the back and a little invitation to this thing and that function.

MB: I've read some documents about the NAACP in the mid-1980s trying to get the Kennesaw State faculty and student body more integrated. Was that what you guys were dealing with?

DG: Some of those issues were integration issues. I guess some people felt I pushed a little bit too hard; they weren't ready to push quite that hard. So they suspended me, and they said, "You can't hold an office; we can't install you."

EM: Were you a member after that?

DG: Yes, I'm still a member now. They suspended me for a period of time, but like I said, I didn't really care. I was real aggressive.

MB: But it helps.

DG: I just wanted to go against the establishment, and they didn't like that. It didn't look good publicly.

MB: Can you talk about some of your early work with the SCLC?

DG: They formed the SCLC in around 2004. It was here before in Cobb, but somehow it didn't survive for some reason, so they reinstated it. Some folks met over at this church down here, down the street. Some people asked me to get involved with the SCLC. I really didn't want to deal with any more civil rights.

MB: Did you already have a reputation, like they wanted you for your aggressiveness?

DG: I guess. I don't know if I like the word reputation. Anyway, yes, they wanted me to come in, so I came in. After I got in the SCLC, I liked it. Because I'm a minister I felt more at home with the SCLC. Like I said, I didn't really want to get involved, but I felt

more at home. And then they need the counter balance approach in Cobb County because everybody was kind of like, you grease the NAACP, you rub them on the back real good, they may not say anything. You needed someone else. See, you've got to watch out for these guys. They will complain; they will bring issues; so I think we needed to counter balance out here. After I got involved I enjoyed it. I was vice president, chairman of the board for a number of years. I got this guy elected president for the SCLC this year. I'd been in it for a few months then I was the state secretary for the SCLC.

EM: In Atlanta?

DG: Yes. Well, the Georgia State Chapter of the SCLC. Now I'm a member of the national board of directors, voted to get Dr. King in, Bernice King, as President of the National SCLC, so now they brought me on the board of directors in the national for SCLC, so it's working out fairly decently so far. I'm enjoying it so far.

MB: Have you guys done work with the King center?

DG: Yes, primarily so. We've done some work with them. We're primarily boots on the ground; we march; SCLC marches. NAACP people are negotiators, legalese, yes, we go to the streets.

EM: Have you conducted any marches recently?

DG: When's the last time we marched? When did we march? You know, we did the Obama monkey t-shirt? We did coalition. Do you remember the Obama monkey t-shirt at Mulligan's? You know Mulligan putting it all over the t-shirt? We did that. We did the Obama t-shirt with the SCLC. You know, I did the swastika at David Scott's office? You didn't see that press conference?

MB: No, no, no, no. What is that?

DG: You know where they painted the swastika in David Scott's office?

MB: Did they?

DG: Yes. Congressman Scott. It was because he was for health care.

MB: Oh. Was there a protest; were there demonstrations?

DG: Yes, press conferences, demonstrations, you know, we do press conferences and demonstrations. I do the Selma march each year; we march across the bridge. We went to Mississippi on a poverty march this year, poor people's campaign.

MB: Do you think that the more public activities like the marching and the demonstrations that the SCLC does, do you think you get more results than negotiating like the NAACP does.

DG: I'm not really sure. I just think you need to bring the attention . . .

MB: To the public?

DG: Yes, I mean, negotiating is fine, but you need both at different times. The only thing is sometimes I think people get dissuaded or get used to being complimented, patted on the back and recognized, whereby the SCLC was more, to me, was more of a . . .

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

DG: In the NAACP a lot of folks made great sacrifices, and my father—I really liked the NAACP; I have a lot of respect for the NAACP; but I'm just more suited for the SCLC.

MB: It's kind of under the table but you don't really hear as much about it. It's not as public.

DG: It's coming out, it's getting more. We've only been here about five years compared to twenty years that the NAACP has been here. And the organization itself is only fifty years old compared to a hundred years for the NAACP. But we just got Bernice King as president, so you're going to hear more from her. But the main thing is the people get a chance to surface their concerns, and their concerns get heard. You know, a lot of times that diffuses—I found out in the military working with human relations, social actions, equal opportunity, people get a chance to talk to somebody about their problems, and they feel like somebody is addressing them, and they're being dealt with. I think a lot of times that eases a lot of tensions. When people don't have anything, anywhere to vent, there's a lot of frustrations.

EM: So it seems like the SCLC complements the NAACP?

DG: I think so. I think we complement each other. Yes, there's no question. When I was in my mode I was just, you know, I'm an old football player. You want a good fight, I'll give you one. I don't care who you are. But that's part of the West Virginia mountain spirit too anyway. You know where the term redneck came from, don't you? A coal miner named Bill Blizzard; I went to school with his relatives. Well, they revolted against the coal mine companies. Do you know Bill Blizzard led a revolt in the coal mines back in West Virginia? The coal companies didn't want to give the miners their benefits.

MB: Oh, yes.

DG: Are you with me there? You know, come on. So you know what he did? They tied a red bandana around their necks, so when they got in the war, do you know, they dropped bombs on the coal miners. Come on guys, check it out. They tried to bomb the people in the hills. See, my father was a union leader too in West Virginia.

MB: How do the unions respond to it today?

DG: They tried to fight.

MB: Seriously.

DG: You've heard of the Matewan [West Virginia] Massacre, right?

MB: I've never heard of it.

DG: Have you heard of the Hatfield's and McCoy's? You know Sheriff Hatfield here in Cobb County, you know, Sheriff Hatfield?

MB: Yes, I know who he is.

DG: I used to tease him about Hatfield and McCoy in West Virginia. Did you know that the sheriff of Mingo County, West Virginia, at Matewan, West Virginia, that sheriff was named Hatfield [Matewan Chief of Police Sid Hatfield]. That's West Virginia history. Come on guys! Check it out! A guy by the name of Bill Blizzard; I went to school with his relatives. He led a revolution against the [Stone Mountain] Coal Company. That's how they identified themselves. They tied a red scarf around their necks. I'm a red neck. You could say, "How can you be a red neck?" It's my history, man. I think they complement each other. I think God in God's divine wisdom; he had me go through this for whatever.

MB: Do you foresee in the future, do you ever see, trying to get another leadership role in the NAACP?

DG: I don't foresee it.

MB: I mean, Deane Bonner has been president now for twelve years.

DG: Twelve years, yes.

MB: They seem to be doing all right with their leadership. But you never think about running for president?

DG: No, I've got my hands full at the SCLC.

EM: Could you talk a little bit about how you became a reverend?

DG: Well, really it was a life-changing situation. My ministry, I never thought I'd be a reverend.

EM: Was your dad involved in that?

DG: Yes, my dad was involved in the church; he was a deacon in the church. It's one of the things where I came to a point in my life where I had to make a change and eventually ended up being part of the ministry. Being in the military, traveling all over the world and doing a lot of things, you just sort of disattach yourselves from a lot of things. You become so independent, the mind, you get to the point that, I kind of got to the point where I probably need to speak to myself. I just didn't need other people. You lose some of the—that's what happened to me, and God just kind of got my attention.

EM: At what point did you start your church?

DG: In 1987 on Father's Day over in Belgium. I was in Belgium, and God woke me up one morning and told me it was Father's Day. See, when I was growing up, I was like the eldest son. I got in a lot of trouble as a kid. I was in a lot of stuff, you know, fights and et cetera. My father got me out of stuff. So then I really grew up. I played sports in the military; I got away with a lot of stuff because I was an athlete. I never really ever grew up. When my father died, because he always got me out of stuff, even in the military, he was always able to get me out of stuff. So God kind of asked me to maybe lean—I kind of leaned towards my father, and God said, "Well, look towards Me." So that's kind of how it happened. God told me I was ready to assume a position in the church. Really, I had to take on a leadership role in my family because I've got all these sisters under me, so I was ready; before I wasn't because I didn't want any reasonability. Even in the military if I got into a tough situation, I would go get reassigned somewhere. So in 1987, God woke me up on Father's Day and told me to go preach.

MB: In Belgium?

DG: Yes. I was in Belgium. I was living in a chalet. So I said, "Go preach?" When I got there the normal guy wasn't there, and they said, "Oh, you've got to preach today." So that's where I started.

EM: That's crazy.

DG: Yes, I know. That's how it started.

MB: When you were traveling in Asia, Thailand, Belgium, were you open to a lot of different religions that you had never thought about or anything like that?

DG: Yes, primarily Buddhism. During Japan, yes, I was into a little Zen and stuff and kind of got away from that. You were doing martial arts in Japan, you study Zen and you start dealing with oneness with nature and the powers in you.

MB: Did you ever feel like you were losing your Christianity?

DG: Yes. When I got into marital arts, yes. I got real frightened because there's a thin line between your dependence on a superior being and what you do yourself. Like Japanese

teaching Zen, all the power is in you. That was scary for a while. Because you can really do a lot of things physically and mentally especially in some of the Far Eastern nations where they let people stick them. A guy took me out one time, so I got a little worried about that because I figured it may take me away from my—because they had us doing stuff like walking on glass, hot coals, and all that kind of stuff.

EM: Do you think it helped steer you in the direction towards ministry, like a test to see if you would . . .

DG: I don't know, but it probably was. Thank God it got my attention because I relied on my own abilities and myself too much. I can get myself out of my own situations. That's kind of dangerous. If you rely too much on your own abilities then you say—if you believe in Christianity and you believe in God, now if you don't that's a whole different story. If you're Christian, your faith has to be set on relying on God, and I agree with that. Everybody may not be Christian but it's kind of where I was centered.

EM: So after you came back from Belgium did you enter the ministry right away?

DG: Yes, I took over the service there in Belgium, the gospel service on the military base, and then I went back to Illinois and was an associate pastor, and then I left Illinois and came back here. I was associate pastor up at Zion and finished the seminary and started my own ministry.

MB: What year was that?

DG: In 1997.

MB: Where were you a minister?

DG: Sandy Plains up on Sandy Plains, Emmanuel Tabernacle Christian Church; it was non-denominational. I went to a Baptist seminary.

EM: So right around when you were starting the church, that's when the dispute occurred, NAACP and . . .

DG: Well, about a year after the NAACP, the NAACP thing happened in 1996.

MB: Well, it was probably a little more fitting to be in the SCLC, being a minister.

DG: I feel a lot more. I think God wanted me there. I think God wanted me there. I felt that no matter, everything that happened, God wanted me there for some reason. I think being a minister, you're right; I think it's where God wanted me to be. But I had my own will, I wanted to win. Because I won, I wanted my seat.

EM: Did a lot of people leave after you left the NAACP?

DG: I don't know. NAACP is an institution. It doesn't really matter who's in charge of the NAACP. The NAACP is an institution, and people support the institution.

MB: They rely on their members in the community rather than the administrative.

DG: Hm?

MB: They rely more on the people in the community rather than taking orders from the administration?

DG: Yes, it's just a nationally respected organization. The organization itself is highly respected, and I think regardless of who is over the NAACP, the NAACP will always be the NAACP. It's an institution; it's a highly respected institution, whether I'm the president or whoever is the president. I don't think they've held another election since they had that big controversy with me.

MB: That might be the reason.

EM: Does the SCLC ever work with NAACP nationally?

DG: Oh yes. Well, see, actually the SCLC kind of sprung of—[Dr. Martin Luther] King sprung away from the NAACP.

MB: So all the movers from the NAACP are in SCLC as well?

DG: Some. I need to make sure my membership is renewed with the NACP.

MB: How many people do you guys have currently in the SCLC?

DG: About seventy-eight in the local chapter. Not quite as large as the NAACP. Cobb County is the NAACP County; that's all they're used to. We're sort of viewed as outsiders.

MB: Well, you're a new organization.

DG: We're new. You need to counterbalance your Cobb, you really do.

EM: Did you go to the Freedom Fund Banquet?

DG: Yes. I attended the last one.

MB: Do you have any thoughts about that? Do you agree that the banquet should have been named after Oscar Freeman?

DG: He probably deserved it. Oscar was before my time, I don't know a lot about him. I'm sure it was a challenge whoever was the president, but if they said he deserved it, he

deserved it. It's not easy trying to lead an organization with so many different interests. People are—it's always difficult. And it's a highly visible, with such high velocity people get caught up with being, I'm in charge of this and I'm in charge of that, and so I'm sure there were issues associated with that. I'm sure Oscar, from what I could tell was a nice guy; he was a good guy. His ideas may have been a little bit different from mine at that time.

EM: He's not as action oriented as you are?

DG: I used to be. I'm mellowed out now. I'm not action Jackson any more or John Shaft. You learn.

MB: I think that's pretty much covered it. Is there anything you want to add about what's going on in Cobb County of the SCLC outfit?

DG: Well, you know, I'm looking at the county. Particularly, I think it should be more diverse in the county administration and Cobb County government. I think we're coming a long way. I think immigration is going to be the next big issue. Immigration is the next big issue. They're trying to get us involved in the immigration fight. The African American community says, well, you know, where were you guys when we had our struggles? But that will probably be the real next hotbed issue, I guess.

We still need to be relevant. I think we're getting there, though. I guess with the election of President Obama it's very obvious that a lot of Americans are making some good choices. Even though there are still some out there who are opposed to progress. Like us, for example, who would have thought that a woman would lead a major civil rights organization? But she did. It helped that she was King's daughter. But still she got twenty-seven votes, with fifteen against. So it wasn't like a cake walk. So there are still some people feel that—same way in the military. A lot of people really didn't think that women ought to be in the military. I had to fight some of those issues too as far as women getting a fair shake in the military. It was like, you know, they need to satisfy the needs of the other GI and not get promoted but you had some very strong, intelligent, tough women in the military to make things happen.

EM: Do you think your experience in the military helped you?

DG: Oh, yes. It did. We had some real issues. You remember the Navy had that Tailhook situation where a daughter of an admiral, wasn't she, and they still tried to sexually abuse her. You know what I'm saying? So we got a real good training in the military in social activism and equal opportunity. I used to get complaints about people like black guys wear Afros, right? They go in the bathroom and comb their hair, and I used to get complaints about black hair being in the sinks in the bathroom. Just kind of little tensions. One of the best experiences I had was a white guy that worked for me when I was in Japan. I'm going to tell, my real experience was my first supervisor I had in the Air Force. When I got to Ft. Meade, Maryland, can I tell you this story? I got to Ft. Meade, Maryland, and I got there on a Friday. We had a football game on Saturday. I

intercepted a pass and scored the winning touchdown, right? So we go into the mess hall, you know in the military everybody's going into the dining facility. All the guys were asking me who I was and where I was from. They were giving me like, questioning me what college did I go to and blah, blah, blah, because I was new. So I went to work, I was one minute late, one minute late, right, in my new assigned office. The guy I worked for was a redneck from Oklahoma. This guy did not like black people and he said, "Look, you guys are always late. You argue and you fuss at each other, keep up a lot of stuff. I don't want you working for me." So I told him, I said, "Look, I'm from West Virginia. I've been treated wrong by white people, so I feel the same way you do, but I tell you, I'll beat you to work everyday from here on out." And I did. So we got to be the best friends.

MB: Even though he was a redneck?

DG: Yes, people don't realize that once you cut through the crap and communicate with people, people basically are the same. Then I had another guy over in Japan. He was a white guy. He thought this equal opportunity stuff was crap, and he worked for me, but he was brilliant. The guy was like brilliant, man, and he could do just about everything. But we got to be real good friends based on the fact that we were honest about what we didn't like about each other, and once we got that crap out. Communication is very key in resolving a lot of people. Nobody's the same. Once you get beyond all the other crap.

MB: So much is on a personal level. We don't like black people or we don't like white people, but once you get to know an individual.

DG: It's a whole different story. So, that's my experience in the military because sometimes you're thrown into some tough situations.

MB: The racial tension you experienced in the military while you were in Japan, did you see any of that against Japanese citizens?

DG: The Japanese went along with whatever the American, Caucasian, how can I say this, the leadership or the influence because they were being swayed. Once you were in close to the military base. Now once you got out away from the military base, and the Japanese people weren't influenced, and they got to know you one on one, it was a little bit different. The Japanese were generally pretty decent people anyway. They've got their own little honor system. Of course, they were influenced by what the stereotypes were, what they see and what they think and what they hear, but once they get to know you, same thing anywhere you go. Once people get to know who you are personally, then . . . I guess that's why Dr. King's content of character resonates so great with people. I had friends, we never agreed on anything, but we were still good friends. That's what I like about Appalachia where I came from, up in the hills, we had rules. You respected people, you had to respect people. So we had a sort of like an unwritten law in Appalachia.

EM: So there was a difference in the sentiment in Appalachia than there was in the South?

DG: Yes, the prejudice was still there in Appalachia, but there were certain unwritten laws that you had to respect elder, older people regardless of what race they were. You had to speak to people, and there was some sense of fairness. For some reason, there was some sense of fairness. Like if you got in a fight, it could have been racially motivated, but if you got in a fight, it had to be a fair fight. I don't know how to describe it. That's the way it was when we grew up.

MB: Well, I guess that's the end of the interview. Thank you.

DG: All right.

END OF INTERVIEW

## INDEX

Blizzard, Bill, 12-13  
Bonner, Deane, 8, 13

*Crisis*, 8

Davis, C. Emerson (Reverend), 8  
Dobbins Air Force Base 1, 4, 5

Freedom Fund Banquet, 16

Freeman, Oscar, 9, 16-17

Freeman, West Virginia

Blue Star High School

Segregation at, 1

Band training at, 2

Closing of, 7

Substandard conditions at, 7

Bramwell High School (integrated)

Problems during integration of, 1-2

Difference in music class at, 2

Affluence of, 1

Sense of fairness in, 19

Graves, Dwight

Background, 1

On his fathers role as a civil rights activist, 1-2, 4

On the problems faced during integration of Bramwell High School, 2

Discussing his career in the United States Air Force, 3-4

On his role as a civil rights activist, 5

Coaching basketball at Dobbs AFB, 5-6

Differences in basketball teams at segregated and integrated schools, 6

On the changes in the racial climate of Marietta, Georgia during the 1970'sm 6-7

Discussing racism in northern states, 7

On joining the NAACP, 8

On the 1996 election for Cobb NAACP president, 9

Joining the SCLC, 9-10

Criticisms of the NAACP, 10, 11

Early work with SCLC, 10-11

Discussing the Hatfields in West Virginia history, 13

On becoming a reverend, 13-14

Starting his ministry in Belgium, 13-14

Experiences with Asian cultures, 14

On Christian values, 15

Discussing the support of the NAACP, 16

- On Oscar Freeman, 16-17
- On immigration into the United States and the issues it presents, 17
- On encountering racism at Fort Meade, Maryland, 17-18
- On the similarities between people and communities, 18
- Discussing a sense of fairness in West Virginia, 19

Johnson, R.L. (Reverend), 8

King, Bernice, 12

Matewan, West Virginia, massacre, 13

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)

- Role compared to the SCLC, 11

- Working with SCLC, 12

- As an institution, 16

Obama, Barack (President), 17

Perry, Donnie, 9

Scott, Randolph, 9

Southern Christian Leadership Coalition (SCLC)

- Support of the King Center, 11

- Role of, 11-12

- Compared to the NAACP, 11

- Working with the NAACP, 12

- Creation of, 16

- Membership of, 16

Zion Baptist Church, Marietta, 8, 15

This item is part of the following collection:  
Thomas Allan Scott, 1943-  
Kennesaw State University Oral history project, 1978-  
KSU/45/05/001

The collection is held by:  
Kennesaw State University  
Dept. of Archives, Special Collections, & Records Management  
1000 Chastain Rd  
Sturgis Library Rooms 215-226  
Kennesaw, Georgia 30144  
(770) 423-6289  
archives@kennesaw.edu

To request permission to publish, reproduce, publicly display, broadcast, or distribute this material in any format, you must contact the Dept. of Archives, Special Collections, and Records Management.