

**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 REVEREND WALTER MOON**

**COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 4**

**CONDUCTED BY JESSICA DRYSDALE AND JAY LUTZ**

**THURSDAY, 8 OCTOBER 2009**

Kennesaw State University Oral History Project  
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 4  
Interview with Reverend Walter Moon  
Conducted by Jessica Drysdale and Jay Lutz  
Thursday, 8 October 2009  
Location: Hattie Wilson Library, Marietta

JESSICA DRYSDALE: Reverend Moon, if we could just start out with you telling us a little bit about your background.

WALTER MOON: First of all, it is a pleasure for me to be here and to take part in this lesson for you. I am a native of Marietta, Cobb County. I'm a graduate of this very building that we're in. I was in the fifth grade when this building was constructed, so I spent grades five, six, seven and eight in this particular building here. That's one of the reasons that it has such significance to the black community. Of course, the old wooden structure that was here, I started first grade in the old wooden structure that was here and, of course, the high school, which was across the street initially, was Perkinson High and then later on it was changed to Lemon Street High. I graduated in 1958 from Lemon Street. It's an interesting parallel because at that time the deep South was extremely segregated and the only high school in all of Cobb County, was Lemon Street High. All of the black students, once they reached high school age, no matter where they lived in the county, whether it was Acworth, Kennesaw, Powder Springs, Austell, any municipality in the county once you reached high school age, the black kids were required to go to Lemon Street. That was where all high school students who were black in Cobb County attended high school. There were numerous advantages and disadvantages that came out as a result of that. From an athletic standpoint we always had a good basketball team and a good football team. As a matter of fact, we challenged to play Marietta High School football and because of segregation it never came to pass. In 1966, when the schools did integrate, we had a carry over of an enormous number of our football players and, interestingly enough, the year after that was the year that Marietta High won the state championship. That was on the plus side. On the downside, this being the only high school in the entire county, we would get what we called "hand-me-down" supplies, books and etc., primarily from Marietta High School. A lot of the books that we would get, some of the pages were missing, covers missing on some of them and some of them were in fairly good condition. I suppose probably the greatest disadvantage was the curriculum that we had here was inferior to the curriculum that they had at the other high schools in the county, but that was soon rectified.

I think probably another downside, as we think about it in retrospect, the students here prior to desegregation, it seemed that they had a much closer relationship with the teachers than when we initially desegregated. The black students were, for lack of another word, were thrust into a situation where that personal relationship, that parental type guidance that they received from the teachers was no more, so I think that was probably a disadvantage. Like I indicated, I graduated from Lemon Street in 1958 and at

that time we had forty-two students in our class, which was the largest class to graduate from Lemon Street up to that point. We had twenty-one boys and twenty-one girls.

JAY LUTZ: That's easy to remember.

WM: I look now and when we look at, I'm on the committee with the Marietta City school system and one of the things that we're tracking is the percentage of blacks that are graduating from high school and right now there's a considerable gap between the number of black boys that are graduating and the number of black girls that are graduating. What we're looking to do is to see what can be done to elevate the number of black boys that are graduating where it would be comparable to the overall graduation rate and at least close to the number of black girls that are graduating. I think the last stats that we looked at, all total there was about 83 percent of students attending Marietta High School who graduated. I think it's like 79 percent of the black girls graduated but when it came to the black boys, I think it drops down to like about 72 percent. It's kind of interesting, all of my adult life, with the exception of a twelve year period, I've lived here in the Marietta, Cobb area. For twelve years my job carried me to various other parts of the South and the Northeast and ten years ago, after I retired, I spent a couple of years in Birmingham because of the ministry and then my wife and I came back home here because this is where our children and our grandchildren are. We are four generations of Marietta public schools so that's how long we've been around here.

My involvement as far as the movement is concerned began in 1964 when I was discharged from the Navy. I'll share the experience with you and then I'll relent. I joined the Navy in 1960 and the company that I was with in boot camp, we had a total of eighty-four recruits: four black recruits and eighty white recruits. I went in the Navy at age twenty, it's ironic because up until I was age twenty, I had never touched a white person. That's how segregated it was. I think a lot of blacks, because of growing up in a segregated society, even though it may not have been knowingly, had an inferiority complex because of the way we had been treated all through the years. When I went in the Navy and realized, I said, "I don't see really any difference," from that standpoint, so that was a tremendous learning experience for me. During the time from 1960 to 1964 if you will recall, that was, particularly in 1963 and 1964, that was the time of the upheaval and the turmoil that was taking place in Montgomery, Alabama and in Birmingham, Alabama, particularly with Bull Connor and the dogs and fire hoses. All of that took place during the time that I was in the Navy. Well, I indicated that there were only four blacks in my unit. When I went onboard the ship I was in the navigation gang on an aircraft carrier. The aircraft carrier carried about 5,000 sailors. You could count the number of the 5,000 sailors, that were black on both hands onboard that ship. I was the only black in my division on the ship. When we were in port, we had what we called a swing room; we could go in the swing room where we had a large television and watch television. If some of the guys in the division decided that they would not go ashore but they were going to stay and hang out on the ship, or whatever, we would watch TV. At that time, everything on the news was about Birmingham, Alabama. The Sixteenth Street church that was bombed and the four black girls who lost their lives. Well, in the military, particularly in the Navy aboard ship, just as in any other branch, you're so close

to your shipmates and everything that there is a family type atmosphere. When we would sit in the swing room and watch the news and everybody else in that swing room, twenty-five, thirty, sometimes forty people, thirty-nine whites and one black, and every channel that you looked at you saw what's taking place in Birmingham, Alabama. Surprisingly, not one time did one of the shipmates ask me about it because it was like, they were afraid to talk to me about it and I didn't want to talk to them about it because I was angry seeing what was happening.

JD: Can you expand more on your feelings at the time? How it felt to be away and not be able to be a part of these things that you're seeing the images of on television?

WM: The experience that I had and that I witnessed there was one of the primary driving factors that in 1964 when I was discharged, I decided "that I can make a difference." Seeing all that that happened and being there in the Navy, and they have strict guidelines in the Navy about what you can and you can't do, so I said, "Well, there's nothing really that I can do about it now, but when I get out I'm going to be determined to do what I can to make a difference." I think that was the starting point. I say that was the starting point of my involvement of the civil rights movement even though I was still in the Navy, but because of that setting that I just described to you, that motivated me to, as soon as I was discharged, I said, "Hey, I'm going to see if I can make a difference." At the time, Hugh Grogan, who was still living in New York and shortly after I was discharged he relocated back to Marietta. He's a native of Marietta but he was living in Harlem, down in the black section there in New York City. Shortly after I was discharged he relocated back to Marietta and we began to collaborate and said, "Okay, what is it that we can do to make a difference?" That was the starting point.

JD: All right. What was your involvement with the Civil Rights Movement? Do you have any specific stories?

WM: There were several areas that we were involved in here; one being the first effort that we made was we noticed that there were zero blacks on the police department and the fire department. We started to protest and we went to, I never will forget, we went to one of the city council meetings, filled the council platform and we were protesting about the fact that they had no black firemen, no black policemen. The question was raised "how many blacks have applied and taken the firemen and policemen's exams?" That taught us a lesson because we had not done our homework and researched enough to say "Okay, how many have we really had?" We couldn't put our finger on the number that had actually applied and taken the police and firemen's exam. So what we did, we regrouped, and at the time I was living on Lemon Street, here at 436 Lemon Street, which is what they call The Hill, and we started to mobilize in my basement. We said, first of all, what we need to do is find out what type of information is on the police and the firemen's exam; so, I took the exam. Once we found out, I passed the exam, once we found out the type of information that was on the exam we began to give classes in my basement. From those classes we had individuals who agreed that they would take the exam. At the same time now, we were marching and we were protesting and the media, any time the media gets wind of some activity like that, they were always there. As we protested this got

immediate attention so we also now had other blacks who were saying, "Hey, they don't have any policemen or any black firemen in Marietta, we'll go there and we'll take that exam." That protesting and the coverage that we were getting in the media was also like marketing because it opened up a wider area for people to come in. As a result of that, the very first black policeman that was hired was a young man by the name of Charles Haywood. He was the first black policeman that was hired and everybody thought it was a big thing, but what it did was it opened up the door for other blacks from that standpoint. Just recently we had the first black police commander, I can't think of his name but he was promoted to commander. He's one of three commanders in the Marietta city police department from that standpoint.

The other thing that we did, back during that time in 1966 when separate but equal was ruled unconstitutional, when they began to integrate the schools we had, we still only had Lemon Street as the only high school and we pretty much knew that the high school was going to go but we also had several elementary schools in the black community. It appeared that the Marietta school board was going to systematically close all of the black schools and move all of the black kids out of the black community into the white community for their schooling. They were not going to send any white kids into the black community, but send all of the black kids out of the black community into the white community, so we began to protest that. As a result, we were able for a good while to keep this school going and to keep Wright St., which is now long since gone; we were able to keep open. There were a couple of borderline schools. Park Street, I don't know if you all know where Park Street is, but it was kind of on the borderline and it's still open. From that, we decided to escalate our protest. We said, "Okay, let's look at employment at the city." When we looked and asked for the data, blacks only had menial positions, so we began to march and protest for that.

Joe Mack Wilson, who was a former mayor of Marietta, we looked at as a racist man. Any time you take part in a movement like that there's a tendency to label the leaders as radicals and Hugh [Grogan] was labeled as a radical. I was labeled as a radical and several others were. We actually believed that our phones were tapped and everything and that the FBI was listening in. Anybody that they say was radical at that time, you were on the FBI list. Joe Mack Wilson, who ran for mayor, was very vocal in his opposition to our movement. Now, we are well into the '70s and it was at that point that I had my "Damascus road experience," where I gave my life to the Lord. I was converted. We received a call from Joe Mack and he was wanting to know if we would support him in his efforts for mayor. I said, "Man, you've got to be kidding." I said, "The racist comments that you've been making and you want us to support you as mayor? No way."

JL: Do you remember what year this is?

WM: I'm thinking now this was in the early '70s, '74, something like that. He made a profound statement. He said, "Walt, if, and I can see that the Lord has changed you, if the Lord changed you what would make you think that He couldn't change me?" So those words that he spoke resonated in my spirit and we got together for coffee. We decided "Okay, let's see," we said, "Okay, we've been trying for several years

unsuccessfully to get blacks jobs with the city. If we support you, what are you going to do to put blacks in a position in the city of Marietta?" He made a promise that he would. We supported him, he won, and that as the beginning. He did what he promised to do. As a result, a lot of this was taking place in 1972 to 1978, I served on the Marietta School Board. Professor Woods was the first black to serve on the school board; I was the second. As a result of all of the activity, they said "Well, maybe we need to put someone on the civil service board. I was appointed to that board. Aaron Cuthbert was the first black on that board.

Then there was Dana Eastham, who was a mayor of Marietta. Even though integration had taken place and we were making progress, we felt short in a lot of areas. He said "I'm going to form a commission, a council if you will, and its going to be the mayor's council on human relations." He formed the council and asked if I would co-chair that commission. As a result of that we did an awful lot. From the standpoint of that council, to fuse the communities and to eliminate a lot of friction that existed in the community. So it was nothing like just "Okay, the civil rights laws are passed and everything that happened then is over." It was a gradual process that transpired. Going back to Hugh, one of the things that happened, when Hugh Grogan, in 1970 I believe it was, I think it was 1970 that Hugh came back to Marietta, where we looked at it, it was very clear to us that gerrymandering had taken place and they were systematically watering down the black vote. When we look at what we call Baptistown, Fort Hill, when you look at what used to be called the race track, all those were the areas that were segmented. All of those areas were such that they were segmented. What the council had done, they had deliberately dissected the black community to where it was virtually impossible for a black to be elected to any position. What we did in the basement of my home, we secretly met.

JL: Can I ask, to clarify, who is "we"?

WM: That was, we had Hugh Grogan, we had myself, we had, this person is dead, Frank Sexton, who also lived up there on the hill. We had James Gober, who later ended up working for the Marietta Housing Authority and he was over the R69 project, which was the Baptistown slum area of Johnson Street which was called Skid Row. The housing authority overtook that project and said "We're going to clean up this area." So they tried to get a buy in from the black community. From that project we decided "Okay, what we need to do is look and going back to the lesson that we learned when we initially went to the council and was asking about why there were no blacks." We said "Okay, in every venture, what we need to do is get our minds together, make sure that we research, we re-research and re-re-research any action that we would take to make sure that we have all of our facts." So what we did, we got copies of all seven wards of Marietta and we drew them out in different colors and then we looked and said "Okay, they have systematically gerrymandered our community to where it's virtually impossible." So, we said "Okay, what are we going to do?"

Hugh, at that time, he was doing consulting work, he didn't have an accountable job. I was working for the postal service as a letter carrier. Everybody else, James was working

for the Housing Authority, so everybody that was working even though we worked together on a project. Everybody except Hugh had an accountable job that they could go after you and get you fired from your job. We said “Okay, Hugh, you’ll be the front end.” That was why only Hugh’s name was on that court case because they couldn’t come after him for his job because he was virtually self-employed. The rest of us had jobs and if you will recall, this was a pattern throughout the southeast that if you participated in any type of protest or activity, your job was gone. They would fire you. School teachers would lose their job; any other job that you had that they could be influential to getting you fired, you would lose your job.

JL: Do you remember Mr. Grogan’s reaction when this decision was made?

WM: Oh yes, precisely. Like I said, every action that we took was in our basement. When the suit was filed and we said “Well, we felt good that we would win the suit because it was so clear as to what they had done.” Now, after the suit was won, then this lawyer came back and said “Okay, here’s what you’re going to be required to do. You’re going to be required to redistrict the wards.” So we went back to work again in the basement and said “Okay, let’s see what we can do to assure that we have a majority black ward on file.” That was what we went after because again, we knew that Baptistown, Fort Hill and all the areas, if we could get to somewhere between fifty-five and fifty-seven percent, we would be successful. I think at this point that our city was, they were going ahead because they didn’t want to be in violation of the law. They agreed and the courts approved the submission that we made. It was not like the Marietta City Council drew the lines and said “Okay, this is what we want.” We were the ones that said “Okay, this is what we want,” and we insisted and that was what the courts accepted. In other words, it was almost like you could in some sense say it was reverse gerrymandering because what we did was put right what really had been wrong in the first place. So that’s kind of how it came about. [ In Judge Moye’s decision he called for the two parties to obtain an independent arbiter to redraw the voting districts. This decision was later adjusted for the city to finance the arbiter, which was done in accordance with federal, state and city voting regulations.]

JL: Let me bring us back a little bit actually to Lemon Street High School and get some information about your early years. Were you here for Principal Woods?

WM: No, Perkinson was here before Professor Woods. Professor Woods was the first principal of Lemon Street. Now, when it was Perkinson High, that was somewhat before my time. I just remember the history. I remember that as a, I won’t call it a “cornerstone” because there was not a corner; they still had the marble inscription, “Perkinson High School,” even though it was Lemon Street. I remember Professor Woods, everybody just looked up to him. There was a creek, a branch that still runs on the other side of the property over here, and the boys, we would like to sneak off and go down and play in the creek during school. Professor Woods, even at his upper age, he could almost outrun any of the kids. When we would see him coming I mean, we would all scattered different ways and that was one of the things that we remember. Back during that time, also it was okay for schoolteachers to paddle. I mean, if he had his turn to paddle and when you would cut

up, you would be sent to Professor Woods and you knew you were going to get a paddling at that time. I think that was one of the things that caused the kids at that time to really just, we didn't have the problems then that we have now. We just didn't have those things. I think a lot of it had to do with the care and the concern that individuals like Professor Woods and like some of the other teachers that we had. They were like an extended parental figure. Everybody respected the teacher. Teachers, at that time, came to school like they were going to church. They dressed like they were going to church and you really looked up to the teachers. I mean, because you had the sense that they cared for you. I think that's not really true today. Plus, we have a situation today where you have several generations of young people, particularly in the black communities, you have two and three generations of young people that are unchurched. When you have that situation, that draws from their ability to do right, and they're encouraged by their peers to do wrong. Of course, I think you saw what was taking place in Chicago yesterday with all those youths, what's going on with all of the teen violence in Chicago? You have that everywhere; it's not just in Chicago. It's interesting. That's an awful lot when you look at what is transpiring today in the black community that you might not put your finger on to say "What is the root cause of all of the violence?" But, I personally believe that a lot of it goes all the way back to when you had desegregation, integration and the care and the nurturing that the black kid perceived then that then they're not receiving now. I think that has an impact. The largest impact, like I said before, I think has to do with, when you have parents that are nothing more than children themselves and you have three generations and the oldest one is thirty or thirty-one. I had a situation in one church that I pastored in Birmingham. I had a mother who was twenty-nine years old and a grandma. Twenty-nine years old. She had a child when she was fifteen and the child she had had a child when she was fourteen. Twenty-nine years old and a grandma.

JL: Wow.

WM: I think that weighs heavily on the problems that we're having today.

JL: Can I ask you, what you remember about the violence in Birmingham and integration in Marietta? How would you compare the two?

WM: I really don't. The things that we experienced here in Marietta are miniscule compared to what took place in Birmingham. I lived in Birmingham for twelve years. Oftentimes when we had people that would come visit us, one of the places that we would take them would be the Birmingham Civil Rights Museum. Without a doubt, I think that's probably the best Civil Rights museum in the country and fittingly being in Birmingham, which is the seat of what was going on at that time. When you look at Kelly Ingram Park in Birmingham, there's a statue of a policeman and he has one of the canine dogs and there's a black kid that's posing like this, like "Okay, this dog is going to bite me." That image of that statue is what you were seeing on television. You were seeing the real thing. That image of the fire hoses and I'm sure you're aware the pressure that a fire hose has that when you direct that fire hose at an individual, it has such force that it will just literally throw that person across this room. When you actually saw that, I don't know if you all have seen films of what was going on but to go through the Civil Rights

museum is almost like you are reliving that moment. The Freedom Riders bus that was burned, they have part of it in the Birmingham Civil Rights Museum, and the bus that Rosa Parks was on.

JL: Is there?

WM: Part of it. So it's like you actually are reliving that experience when you visit the museum. There really is no comparison because at no time during, when we were protesting here, at no time did our protests turn really violent. I do give the city credit for saying "Hey, as long as these protests are peaceful, we need to give them some space." I don't think it could come close to comparing what we did because of the number of persons that were killed, the number of persons that were mistreated, and we had none of that that took place during the protests that we were making here in Marietta.

JD: What other sort of opposition did you encounter, though? You talked a little bit about Joe Mack Wilson; because there was media coverage for your protests did you receive backlash from the white community?

WM: The only backlash that came came from the *Thunderbolt* which was a—oh heck, I can't think of his name now. He published the *Thunderbolt* and he was a renowned, I mean, vocally a racist. [J. B. Stoner]

JD: Was that a newspaper or a magazine?

WM: It was a newspaper, the *Thunderbolt*. He would publish things in the *Thunderbolt* that were an affront to the black community. We never had any situation that we had in Birmingham. Lester Maddox, things that Lester Maddox would do with the axe handle, we never had any situation like that, that I recall from that standpoint. I would think probably because each time that we would protest it was like somebody from the white community would say "Hey, maybe we can get together and work this out." I do give the city credit for that. And I think that was part of the reason that we had a number of positions in the city that were appointed, at that time, members of the school board were not elected, they were appointed. Jeanie Carter was the first black member of the school board to be elected and she's retiring now. Up until that time all of the blacks on the school board were appointed by the city council and the city council made it a point, "Hey, we need to have a black on the school board." They took the initiative so we have to give the city credit and I think even back during those early years we have to give the city credit even though it took some nudging, arm twisting, what-have-you. Once that took place they would come through from that standpoint. But at no time did we have a situation where there was a single arrest. It was always like before it escalated to that point, let's see what we need to do.

JL: Did you receive that same support from the new residents of the new Ward 5, from the white community in the new Ward 5?

WM: I think so. We still have a situation now where, incidentally you know Hugh Grogan was the first black to be elected to the city council? Okay. One of the things, we were truly together on was “Let’s have our ducks lined up that we can assure ourselves that we’re going to get a black in there to the board.” The strategy was and is, if you split the black vote and forces a run off, historically, blacks do not go back to the polls in a run off. We made sure that Hugh was going to be the candidate and he was elected. Now, we find that later on when everybody was saying “Oh, okay, I think I’d like to run, I think I’d like to run,” we had the exact situation as now to where there were two blacks and one white. Neither of the blacks got 50 percent plus one. It forced a run off with the white candidate. The whites went back to the polls and voted, the blacks didn’t so we lost that seat.

JL: Is this the ’81 election?

WM: The ’81 election. We lost that seat.

JL: I’ve heard that there was some controversy with that run off. Do you believe that there was any underhandedness?

WM: I don’t know. I really don’t. I guess from my ministerial standpoint I guess I would say since I don’t I don’t really address it, but I will say this: we have the exact same situation that’s transpiring right now in Ward 5. We have two black candidates and one white candidate. It’ll be interesting to see how that plays out or if that will be a replica of the 1981 election.

JL: Let me ask you, going back again to Lemon Street, besides the professor, who were some of the people that made an impression in your life, the teachers?

WM: There were a number of teachers that made a lasting impression. Probably one that is a history teacher that we had by the name of Lewis Scott, he’s still living. He was so strict in his class, he insisted that you do well. He would drill in our minds that you must, he says, it’s absolutely necessary that you use rational, critical and analytical thinking. That was in 1958 and I can still recall, he would stand up on the radiator. We had radiators, not these kind but the old steam ones and he would stand up on the radiator and lecture and he would make statements like “Rational and critical and analytical thinking. Unless you use those three, you will not be successful in life.” It was like those words just resonated in your spirit. We had an English teacher by the name of Ms. Fred and she must have weighed 270 pounds, but when she walked it was like she was floating. She was just like Mr. Scott. She insisted that, I mean, that when you were in her class, she said “If you’re out there, you might want to talk like you’re in the street but when you’re in my class you will pronounce, you will enunciate, you will do this, you will do that.” That was, I think about that now as the impact that she had on the lives of so many of us. There were a number of other teachers. We had an algebra teacher by the name of Mr. Johnson and he was real tough too. But the thing was everybody in the class knew that they were cared about. It was not like you were just in there and the teacher said, “I’m just trying to get to 3:30.” If you said, “Hey, I got this situation and I need, can you help me after class?”

That teacher would stay there after that class and help you with that situation. I cannot fathom that taking place now. I just don't see that.

JL: Sure. I have another question for you. As a class we spoke to Deane Bonner who is the current president of the NAACP and she used one word to kind of define Hugh Grogan and she used the word fighter. I was wondering if you had a similar word that you would use to describe Hugh and if so why would you choose that word?

WM: One word?

JL: Yes.

WM: "Brilliant." The reason I would say that Hugh was brilliant was because Hugh, during that time, I would think he was ahead of his time. A lot of people in the black community, a lot of folks don't know this, but a lot of people in the black community, not only by the media, the powers that be, they said he was a trouble-maker. A lot of people in the black community were saying, why is he causing this upbeat? Why is he doing what he's doing? It goes back to the saying of "a little knowledge is dangerous". The people that were making those type comments, some of them had no knowledge and some of them had a little knowledge but I say Hugh was brilliant because he was a researcher of researchers. He spent an awful lot of time, of everybody that we had, probably Hugh spent more time researching than the rest of us collectively. When we would come together and he would say "Okay, this is what I found." It was like, okay, we know he's done the research so we don't even have to double check. We know it's going to be right. I would say that "brilliant" is the word. I was fortunate to do his eulogy. One of the things that I commented on at his eulogy was the fact that he was brilliant. Perfectly brilliant, perfect. He was brilliant.

JL: Was a lot of his research done here?

WM: A lot of it was done locally and a lot of it was done at the state level, some at national level, so depending upon what we were trying to gather, the information, he researched other cases across the country on gerrymandering to kind of get a feel for really what was gerrymandering. He had it together when it came to getting information and having that information available to us. We had confidence that if he had researched it it was accurate.

JL: Do you remember, was he approached by the NAACP legal defense fund or did he go to them or how they became involved with the case?

WM: I think that was a request that was made because at the time, here again, we had never ventured in this arena so we had situations where we would call in the NAACP, SCLC. I never will forget at one rally, it was kind of interesting because at that time the old Zion Baptist Church, all the new complex, none of that was there and the old church, that was Zion Baptist Church, that was one of the focal places where we would meet in the old Zion Church. We could have easily been labeled as extreme from the standpoint of

Marietta, extreme militants. We had an individual, I won't call his name because he's still here, from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. We were all there in the church and about one-third of the way through his talk he used a four letter word and it was like everybody in the church said "Ohh!" So when everybody like sighed, he realized "Uh-oh, I've said something I shouldn't have said." Even as intense as that moment was, everybody in that church, and it was packed, realized we're in the Lord's house and if we're in the Lord's house, we can't use words here. It was amazing, I mean, it was almost in unison, like the whole crowd, "Ohh!" that he used that four-letter word.

JL: How closely would you say the Marietta community, you know, regular folks, how close do you think they followed the gerrymander case and the redistricting?

WM: I really don't think it was followed that much because we didn't, at the time, we didn't want to really just blow it up. We just wanted to quietly do it on paper, it was Hugh Grogan who filed the lawsuit in fifth district court for gerrymandering, and people were just shocked. When the ruling came down it made big headlines. Of course, it made even bigger headlines when Hugh ran for the city council and was elected as the first black councilman in the history of the city of Marietta.

JL: The attorneys for the city, some of their paperwork that they submitted for the court was pretty disparaging. Do you remember seeing any of that paperwork or any of the reactions to it?

WM: If I remember correctly, one of the things when we were seeing what the attorneys for the city were saying was like, we felt like what they submitted would help us more than it would them and I think it did.

JD: You've seen a lot of changes in Cobb County and Marietta over the years. Is there anything in particular that sticks out to you in terms of race relations or people? What changes have you noticed?

WM: There were a number of changes that have taken place, one being, I don't know if you all followed the bussing case that was in Boston, Massachusetts or if you ever did research on it. There was an awful uproar in Boston, Massachusetts because the courts had ruled that there was an appreciable number of white students that had to be bussed. I mean, it was in the national media for weeks of what was taking place.. The thing was they were going to have to bus these white kids, not necessarily into black communities but because of the disparity in the breakdown, they were going to have to equalize and some of the white students in the Boston school system were going to have to be bussed. I thought back, I said, now, and they were talking about how horrible this was and my mind went all the way back to what I alluded to earlier when all of the black kids in Cobb County, many of them were bussed right by white schools and bussed all the way here to Lemon Street to go to school and at no time were we complaining. All of those years that that transpired, at no time. I thought "Why would they have the audacity to, when they're just trying to equalize the populous in the school system to cut up the way that they were?"

After we did that for years and years and years. That was one of the things that has stuck in my mind.

Now, you say, what has changed? Years back, the population in Cobb County, there was about 3 percent of the population in Cobb County that was black. At the time, if you were black and you lived in Atlanta and you mentioned Marietta or Cobb County, it was put on the parity of Cumming which was the last stronghold for whites. I don't know if you all remember or if you researched it, you were probably too young, when Hosea Williams decided that he was going to take buses to Cumming and they were literally run out of the county. Have you all done research on that?

JL: No, I haven't.

WM: Oprah Winfrey did a show in Cumming that was an aftermath of the incident with Hosea because he was ran out of Cumming. That was why Oprah went and did the show that she did in Cumming. Now, Cobb County was not far from being thought of like Cumming, three percent. Most of the blacks in Cobb County were in Marietta. You have a smithering of blacks in Acworth, Powder Springs, Austell, just a few, not that many, just a few. Okay. Now, quietly, when you look at blacks and Hispanics, blacks and Hispanics are soon to be the majority of Cobb County. Where my church is located in Mableton, Georgia, southwest Cobb County. If you look at southwest Cobb County it's predominately black and Hispanic. You have some of the largest churches, Bishop Bronner, Word of Faith, 8,000 members, southwest Cobb County. World Changing Ministries, 3,000 members. These are black churches I'm talking about, southwest Cobb County. Okay. You have Hurt Road, AME Zion Church, 2,500 to 3,000 members, southwest Cobb County.

JL: Has anyone in the congregation been affected by the floods?

WM: Yes. We have four families in our congregation that were impacted by the flood from that standpoint. You said what's the change from now to what was then, that is the most significant change. Up until the last election, you know, they had the first black commissioner for southwest Cobb County portion, she was cut up, she didn't get re-elected. According to the media, she couldn't keep her finances straight. That's probably the greatest change that I see from that standpoint. I see now, even the county is making, we have, as you know, one of the most proficient and recognized county managers, Dave Hankerson, black, who's the manager of Cobb County. We have in Cobb County now, a number of blacks that are not only in elected posts but appointed posts. Two years ago, a year and a half ago, under Cobb County, not Marietta, but Cobb County, I was appointed to the Cobb County Board of Ethics and that was unheard of years ago. So, there are a number of things that are taking place in the county. The Cobb County police department is more diverse than the Marietta police department in terms of minorities. I do see a lot of changes that have taken place over the years that years back I never would have fathomed that I would have lived to see some of the changes that are taking place.

JD: I think we've covered your life up to about late '70s, early '80s. Do you want to tell us what you've been up to since then?

WM: Well, my career, I started out as a letter carrier, this is interesting, in Marietta, in 1964. We had a postmaster by the name of Pierce Cody and there were three blacks that were given jobs at the post office Marietta. We were the first three blacks in the history of the Marietta post office that they hired. I remember post master Cody calling us in his office and he lectured us and he said "Now, you all are the first colored..." Back during that time they used the expression, they didn't use "black," they said "colored." He said, "You all are the first colored to be working at the post office." He gave us the spiel about what we needed to do, how we needed to carry ourselves and everything. I remember the other two, we said "Wonder what they're going to do with us?" Starting out they wouldn't let us deliver mail or collect mail in the white community, it was only around the Square and Roswell Street and in the black communities; i.e. Baptistown, Fort Hill, Louisville. Those were the three. I remember very vividly when we would go, and back then where everybody was walking with the satchel on his or her shoulder, and people in the community would say "Here comes Gary," or, "Here comes Allens," or, "Here comes Moon." It was like they were proud to see that "Hey, we have three blacks working in the post office," because that hadn't ever happened. That was a highlight and of course, for me because I spent thirty-four years in the postal service, started out as a letter carrier. In 1999, I retired as the district manager of customer services and sales for the whole state of Alabama. So, you said, what was I doing? Working.

JD: When did you become a reverend?

WM: In 1983 I accepted the call. I had been teaching the Bible study Turner Cathedral. I came out of Turner Cathedral, that's my home church and the original church was downtown Marietta right where the Cobb County administrative office is now. Our church owned about half of that block. We had a nice, big church and it had gotten old and everything and it fell under the R69 project. They call it R69 because it was in 1969 that there was the residential rehabilitation. What happened was we relocated from there to where the Lawrence Street swimming pool is. The church that sits up on the hill, that was where we relocated to. We worshipped there. I taught Bible study for several years before I accepted the call into the ministry in 1983.

In 1987, my job started to transfer me to different areas. I spent a year in Oklahoma City, a year in Beaumont, Texas, a year in Tampa, Florida, a year in Memphis, Tennessee, and ironically enough, when I found out that I was going to get a promotion to Birmingham I almost turned it down. I had some apprehension about going to Birmingham because of the former reputation that Birmingham had. I prayed about it and I accepted the position as the director of field operations in Birmingham. I ended up buying a second house and I told my wife, this is kind of strange, I said "Don't put any pictures on the walls, keep remnants of carpet under the furniture, because we're not going to be here, this is Birmingham." I was there twelve years. If there was ever a place that I think that the people tried and are still trying to rectify the stigma that was attached to a city, I think Birmingham is doing everything. When I talk about this I'm talking about the white

folks, they're doing everything that they can to this day to try and distill the bad stigma that was placed on Birmingham during the Civil Rights Movement. I stayed there twelve years and then I relocated back here after I retired in 1999. I stayed there for two more years where the church that I had, I had some projects going on and I wanted to stay there to see those projects through to fruition. In 2002, I came back and we started a new initiate in Mableton and the reason that we chose the Mableton area after we had prayed about it, we had done a demographics and it showed a lot of black folk living in this area. Even the demographics showed the percentage that were unchurched, et cetera and so we said "Hey, this is an opportunity that we can start a church here," and we did. We started a church in 2003 and we have right about 300 members now.

JL: It sounds like obviously you've been very active over your life in the Lord's work and in local politics, what would you say is your proudest accomplishment?

WM: Probably, without a doubt, even though I relish everything that the Lord blessed me to be a part of and with Civil Rights, my proudest accomplishment has to do with my ministry. I mean, by far, when I can take and be a part of a child that is going down the wrong road and I can say, "Hey, I've been in some way a small part of the rehabilitative process of that child to get that child on the straight street," and then that child calls me back and says, "Reverend, I'm graduating from Morehouse, I'm sending you an invitation to my graduation." "Reverend, I remember you saying this to me years ago and I believe the Lord is calling me into the ministry." When I get those types of responses, I think to me, that's the crowning jewel of my existence, from that standpoint.

In terms of everything that the Lord blessed me to be a part of with reference to Civil Rights, I'm proud of that, I'm proud of that. I think the drive that I had and I still have enabled me even in my career, for instance, when I went to Alabama there were 554 Post Offices in Alabama. There were eleven black postmasters. When I became district manager, I said "I think we need to try and improve our diversity in this state." When I retired, in 1999, we had seventy-six black postmasters across the state of Alabama. I feel good about that. I think that was a carry over of my involvement in Civil Rights, but what it did, it allowed me to work within the existing framework, within the system, and not be upset, but to do systematically what we could do to improve the life of a lot of minorities. I'm proud of that accomplishment, that I can say I had a small part in improving the lifestyle of a number of individuals that perhaps may not have had that opportunity had I not been in that position.

JD: Well, is there anything that we didn't cover that you wanted to discuss today?

WM: No, only just that I enjoyed this. I always enjoy talking about situations that have existed over the years and I've enjoyed it. I was looking forward to this with anticipation to be here and I really do appreciate the opportunity to have been here and to share with you.

JD: Well, we thank you for your time and we really appreciate it, too.

JL: Yes. Thanks for coming being with us.

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