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**An Oral History of Silas Craft  
Conducted by Richard Richardson**

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**Abstract:** Silas E. Craft (1918-1995) was a school principal who promoted education for Black students in Howard County, Maryland. He helped to open the first Black high school in the county, the now defunct Harriet Tubman High School, and was its first principal from 1949 to 1956. Craft also contributed to the reorganization and revitalization of the Howard County branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). In this oral history interview, Craft discusses his early involvement with the NAACP as a child and the relationship between the Congress of Racial Equality and the NAACP. He provides his thoughts on Lillie May Carroll Jackson and her activist work, as well as on Theodore R. McKeldin's tenure as mayor of Baltimore, Maryland. Craft also describes his experiences as a Black man in the United States Army during World War II.

Note on Oral History: Oral history is a methodology of gathering, preserving, and sharing the voices and memories of individuals and communities. As primary material, it documents personal reflections, commentary, and recollections, and is not intended to present a verified or "complete" history of events.

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**An Oral History of Silas Craft**  
**July 8, 1976**

Mr. Silas Craft was interviewed on July 8th, 1976, by Richard Richardson at his residence in Montgomery County, Maryland.

**Richardson** [00:00:04] This is an interview with Mr. Silas Craft for the McKeldin-Jackson Project of the Maryland Historical Society on July 8th, 1976, at Mr. Craft's home in Montgomery County, Maryland. The interviewer is Richard Richardson.

**Richardson** [00:00:27] Mr. Craft, please tell us something about your early life, education, and involvement with the civil rights movement.

**Craft** [00:00:36] Well, my early life was spent basically in southern West Virginia, around Kimble, West Virginia. Although I was born in Virginia, I moved to West Virginia at age five and resided with an uncle, a maternal uncle, and his wife. And then my mother moved back to West Virginia herself in about 1928, and I remained in West Virginia up until the time I entered the armed services in 1943.

**Craft** [00:01:21] My first involvement with the NAACP as a civil rights organization really started around 1924, at about age six, when I started selling the Christmas seals. And the originator of the Christmas seals for the NAACP was Mrs. Memphis. T Garrison, who herself was a native of West Virginia. And of course, she was quite instrumental in getting around, disseminating this material. And many of us youngsters would sell the stamps at one cent a piece back there in 1924. And report the money into someone, I don't recall whom, possibly my aunt collected the money and turned it over to some of the auxiliaries or some of the ladies who were instrumental in conducting the project.

**Craft** [00:02:25] Then, I stayed rather alert to NAACP activities in the early days in my life, right on up through high school. Although there was no youth branch for you to join, there were just no youth branches in that part of southern West Virginia. So most of my relationship then was through reading materials about Walter White becoming a lawyer to Roy Wilkins in 1931, as editor of *The Crisis*, and many succeeding events involving the NAACP as it worked very diligently towards trying to get the enactment off of federal anti-lynch law. And I had become rather versed on the subject matter by the time I graduated from high school in 1936. But I didn't officially join an NAACP branch until I came to Maryland in 1945. I worked with the Howard County group of citizens in reorganizing the Howard County branch of the NAACP. After that was done, I played a very active part in recruiting members practically the width of Howard County—spent a lot of Sunday afternoons, Saturdays, soliciting members young, old, and what have you.

**Craft** [00:04:03] And each year I would average, I guess, around a hundred to a hundred and twenty memberships in Howard County. Then in 1947, we started an active drive to try to get a high school for the Black youth in Howard County. And I played a very important part with the NAACP in gathering information both past and present about the educational level and the educational lags between the races in Howard County. And I visited churches, wrote memorandums, composed a lot of materials, gather data, disseminated with people, and sought spokesmen to exercise some initiative with the Board of Education in seeking an improved school building or learning facility.

**Craft** [00:05:07] This facility came into being in 1949. I was principal of the school and of the high school in Howard County from 1944 until the time I left at the end of school year in 1950-56. I left Howard County then as a school person and came to Montgomery County as principal of the Carver High School here in Rockville, Maryland. I remained there as principal until 1960 when the school was closed, and the desegregation process here. I left there and went to Montgomery Blair High School as assistant principal. I remained there for five years, then went on academic leave and subsequently went on another leave; it carried me to the middle west to work as an educational consultant to the Mid-Continent Regional Education Laboratory.

**Craft** [00:06:14] Out in that area, I kept my active NAACP membership and remained a member of the National Board, to which I was elected in 1962 or '63, I don't recall exactly, possibly '63. My work there kept me in contact with a large number of individuals of rather important status in the states of Oklahoma, Kansas, Missouri, and Nebraska. I was the Director for pilot schools in the cities of Kansas City, Missouri; Omaha, Nebraska; Wichita, Kansas; and Tulsa, Oklahoma. A large number of people who were very active in community affairs and who could and did play a very important part in the shaping of educational policies and procedures in our respective communities.

**Craft** [00:07:28] My chief interest, however, was from the community school aspect, and I worked more or less with people that I recruited in these various centers as a community coordinator for activities. But my whole goal was to bring together various and sundry groups around a common policy of improving the educational program for all citizens and working with diverse groups in various communities. My emphasis was to try to educate them to ways and means of utilizing the school program fully. First, if the parent became well informed, naturally it was a source of interest, of greater interest for the child. But we did bring into those areas large numbers of people who had remained and probably would have forever remained aloof of the school. The school program just does not touch large numbers of parents throughout this nation in spite of it being labeled a public school.

**Craft** [00:08:42] From the time I went on the National Board in the early '60s, I guess I've been a part of almost every major plan that the National Association has fostered with respect to education, housing, unemployment, political action and you name the other various sundry programs. Of course, now I am very much involved in plans of the organization dealing with operational procedures internally to national issues.

**Craft** [00:09:24] I first met Mrs. Jackson, who became quite an inspiration to me in the mid-'40s. I was principal of the high school in Howard County. She had had very close and personal relationships with Howard County since one of her parents had resided all those years in Howard County. I became a secretary of the State Conference of Branches and worked with her two or three years in that capacity. Most of my work, however, was either on a Friday evening or most of Saturday, and I worked out of the state office in Baltimore City, which was located at that particular time on Druid Hill and Dolphin Streets. And we would do much of our work on Saturdays over the telephone. She would make the contacts, and I would follow up with the contributions coming from organizations and leading personalities, state officials, city officials. And her memory was fantastic. And her ability to touch people at all levels was really an amazing sight. She could stay on the phone and do more than the average person could do in years out in the area working. And not only did she infect me with her enthusiasm, and her drive, and organizing ability, she affected large numbers of people who still remain in the NAACP, as we know them today. I could name a number up in Howard County, Reverend John Holland, Mrs. Leola Dorsey, and in Prince George's County, at that particular time, Mrs. Hester King, very instrumental. And Mr. Young from St Mary's County., Mr. Stucky from Charles County, Mrs. Dorothy Black from Queen Anne's County, and I guess I

have to take a piece of paper and write down various names and personnel for getting them all together. Of course, as she remained and later on touched younger persons like Tony Samuel Hamilton who is right here in Montgomery County now, but at that particular time, he was very active in Frederick County.

**Craft** [00:12:31] But in getting back to Mrs. Jackson, the interesting part about her was the untiring effort to go anywhere there was a problem affecting the civil rights of a minority member. She did not care what time of night or how far the problem was removed from Baltimore City. As president of the state conference of branches, she felt that she had a right and a responsibility. She kept with her cadre of young lawyers at that time up and coming, at first Judge Robert Watts who is now on the bench, Judge Harry Cole in Baltimore City, Judge Hargrave, and her own daughter, Toni Juanita Mitchell. That's just a few of them. Prior to that, she had a Donald Murray who was the first to come out of the law school, University of Maryland. As a matter of fact, he was used as the plaintiff in the case to break the barrier to Blacks entering the law school at the University of Maryland.

**Craft** [00:13:41] He was an earlier participant in the field of civil rights. And of course, the person who was called upon to take the yeoman's task in cases affecting school matters, affecting police brutality or what have you, was Tony Tucker Dearing, and he stayed with the organization very close and went from county to county and did a considerable amount of work on a purely charitable basis. Of course, he has been followed by others since that. But probably some of our best legal groundwork in Maryland was done during the years between 1940-63. And much of this was done in her administration, followed closely, following closely on the heels of her daughter's administration as state council president.

**Craft** [00:14:51] I was also introduced in the early years to the work of the national organization by Mrs. Jackson. If you didn't have money to pay the total cost of one traveling to those conventions, she was always able somehow or other, in those early days, to include you in a delegation to go with some amount appropriated to supplement your expenses. Of course, the rest of your expenses had to come from your pocket or of some sponsoring organization. In my case, it always came from my pocket.

**Craft** [00:15:32] In the years of 1963, I suppose, I took office as president of the Howard County branch of the NAACP. Our major drive, of course, at that particular time, was on fully desegregating the schools in Howard County, seeking Black policemen in the county. Until that time, there wasn't a single Black person on the police force in Howard County.

**Craft** [00:16:15] Now, I don't know what you want me to say. I can't recall any major cases at this particular time that I would like to recall without notes. I'd rather find some historical data before I attempt to pinpoint cases, places, and times. We had some ugly cases in those days. We certainly had the case of—

**Richardson** [00:16:49] Mr. Craft, what was it like being a Black man in the United States Army in the forties?

**Craft** [00:16:57] Well, at the time I went in in 1942, I took the examination, qualifying examination, since I was interested in going into the Air Corps. I was accepted and placed on leave status, November 30th, 1942. And I stayed in that category until March 1943. And I was called overnight for active duty. From that point on, the experience was rather humiliating. The way you were addressed, "you colored fellas, you colored fellas," from Fort Hays, Columbus, Ohio, to Keesler

Field, Biloxi, Mississippi, to Tuskegee Army Air Base, Tuskegee, Alabama. The Black soldier was constantly the subject of abuse on the post by his commanding officer, although we were cadets, and perhaps regarded a little higher level of courtesy than some other branches of the service, you still could feel the various indignities.

**Craft** [00:18:29] Of course, when you're on the firing line, you could be rebuked sometimes with the dirtiest kind of epithets. Color was frequently alluded to by your flight trainers, particularly if you'd pull a boner in executing a certain kind of maneuver, you might be called almost anything. It took a great deal of endurance on the part of the cadet. Some took it in a rather reserved manner; some became emotionally disturbed by the process.

**Craft** [00:19:10] Now, we were told that much of this process was conditioning you for combat because once you are up there in a dogfight, it's either your life or the other fellow's life. Your ability to carry out the mission or to fail in attainment of that mission. Another thing that was very resentful to us was the mere fact that we were not always given the best equipment. We were given a lower altitude, B-40 fighters to train in, that is, after you had passed your upper basic, and moved on up into the higher levels of flight training.

**Craft** [00:19:53] I had the unfortunate experience of not finishing flight course. I received either an injury or some other while doing a physical training on the course. I spend a very lengthy period in the hospital, something exceeding six months. And much of that was confined to the bed and not able to do anything with my lower extremities. But I could do one thing and did do a lot of, I did a lot of studying, reading, and some incidental writing during that period of time. So it wasn't just a case of just laying in the hospital, it was a case of utilizing my mental faculties if I couldn't do the thing I had enlisted in service to do, which was learn to fly, and graduate a pilot, which was looked upon as an element of pride for those of us that went in the air. So we want it to be. Most of us had chosen to go there. The only way a Black was accepted at that time was as a volunteer.

**Craft** [00:21:06] I was there during the time that Judge Hastie made a plea in behalf of not only the Black cadets but all soldiers. And you will recall that he resigned as aid to the Secretary of War with these famous words, "\$10,000 won't buy me." Much of his ongoing discussion had been trying to obtain better conditions, better treatment for the American Black soldiers.

**Richardson** [00:21:44] What was your reaction to the Supreme Court's 1954 decision, Brown versus the Board of Education?

**Craft** [00:21:51] Oh, I heralded the coming of it, I thought it was long overdue. I'd never endorsed a dual school program as far back as I can remember, which probably would be about my third or fourth grade in school. I never thought it made sense in the area where I grew up. People were coal miners. A few minutes after a person entered the mine, you couldn't tell just by looking at him whether he was Black or white. Of course, there were speech patterns, other characteristics that would distinguish.

**Craft** [00:22:27] Then we lived all next door, front yard, back yard, above you, adjacent to you all nationalities. It was really a mixture of cultures where I grew up. We did most everything else together. We made our own swimming pool, swam together. We played games together, we fought each other, we fought for each other. We ate out at each other's homes, across the fence and backyard. We shared whatever we had with each other when we were together. But when we got ready to go to school, we divided. To us, even as youngsters growing up, it never made sense to many of us. So, I've always been an opponent of the dual school system and I never have been

able to believe that "separate but equal" doctrine was ever applicable to the program. So I've been an avowed opponent, I'd say a major portion of my life to any so-called policy of separation. And I viewed it very much as I view an apartheid policy in Africa.

**Richardson** [00:23:39] Why did it take so long, and in some instances it still hasn't been accomplished? In Howard County, for example, why were you still fighting for integration or desegregation of schools ten, almost ten years after the fact?

**Craft** [00:23:58] Well, it was the attitude of the majority. They had long-standing traditional barriers and were firm believers in it. They could respect a Black person, but they had little but disdain for a Black group, whether they be children or adults. The general belief was and still is that there has to be somebody that I am superior to, someone who is inferior to me. And our school program today has not been integrated. We've had a semblance of desegregation, and in many instances, resegregation as a "white flight" has occurred. So that unwillingness to break away from traditional attitude certainly was very typical at that particular time in Howard County. Howard County was much smaller then and the new city of Columbia had not come into being in 1954 and didn't come into being until, well, it started in '66, really building and making its advent. I think the first house was sold, perhaps, the last couple of months in 1966. So you had deep-seated reservations in Howard County just like you had and still have deep-seated reservations in Montgomery County.

**Richardson** [00:25:40] Do you think there's any difference between the more urban areas, such as Baltimore and Washington, and the counties, such as Howard County, Montgomery County? You think there's less resistance to desegregation and in an urban area?

**Craft** [00:26:02] No, I would equate the resistance now. But in the very beginning, Montgomery County was the forerunner, had a strong desire to set an example for the nation. But the attitude in Montgomery County has definitely changed now and become one of deceit and many subtleties are involved in it. The deep-seated feelings are shown in various and sundry ways in Montgomery County. I don't know as much about the attitude in Howard County since I'm not as close to the subject matter anymore. I wouldn't comment on that.

**Richardson** [00:26:48] How about back in the fifties when you were in Howard County, how was the feeling and the feeling you got, for example, working with Mrs. Jackson in the city and maybe the city environment or urban environment was more—

**Craft** [00:27:07] Howard County was more cautious, but I would say it was more receptive than the inner city situation was. And there was very strong resistance in certain aspects of Baltimore City—south Baltimore for instance, when you got out, more in the, shall we say, in the middle, higher middle-class areas of Baltimore City, very little. The inner city problem were relatively attacked and somewhat resolved with respect to desegregation. Baltimore City built up to the plight they are in now due to certain evasive and deceptive means used by those who make the policies and those who implement them. In Howard County, being a kind of an open, rural area, when they did start de-segregating, it didn't create the problem of concentrated groups the way it did in the city. Of course, since that time Howard County has grown with the coming of Columbia, and they have some other problems, but not so much as I understand as they relate to desegregation of schools. I think the problems now are related to the ongoing activities within the walls of the school. There is, I understand, considerable friction at times in some schools as students assemble within the walls of schools. I don't know much about it and I don't care to comment about it.

**Richardson** [00:29:03] Mr. Craft, during your civil rights involvement in the late '40s and the '50s, were you ever threatened or was there ever pressure put on you from any groups or individuals?

**Craft** [00:29:17] No, I could not truthfully say I was ever threatened and no one ever applied any undue pressure on me. I can only tell you what happened. I was demoted as high school principal in this county in 1960 and stayed in a demoted state as assistant principal until 1971. So I went through 11 years of demoted status in this county.

**Richardson** [00:29:47] As a result of what?

**Craft** [00:29:50] Well, as a result of the so-called program of desegregation. I just was not considered for a principalship here. And I rather suspect and have been told by others that it was my attitude toward civil rights and in some instances, my outspoken and, shall I say, a zeal for what I felt and still feel was the right thing. I felt that a program of desegregation meant total involvement of both people and staff, and I still do, in the process. I do not believe you can desegregate anything and not totally involve the parties therein. So I felt when the program of desegregation started with the first decapitation of the school. Either change the school, close the school, or demote the principal of the school, that that was not truly desegregation. It was the same old prejudicial matters that I have observed all my life. So in spite of my experience, in spite of my record as a professional educator, when it came time to apply that principle, it was always something different to me.

[00:31:31] *pause in recording*

**Richardson** [00:31:33] How about threats or pressure from other sources? Was the Ku Klux Klan or other white racist groups active in Howard and Montgomery counties during this period?

**Craft** [00:31:45] Well, during my tenure in Howard County as president and before my tenure, we did have the so-called John Birch Society blossom up. We also had a strong pro-Wallace faction there. They didn't parade as Ku Klux Klanners or I don't know what they really call themselves. There was no encounter, to my knowledge, with the NAACP officers or its activities. Of course, whenever we appeared at the School Board public hearings, there were these factions contending on the opposite sides of the fence. They were diametrically opposed to desegregation, and we were strongly in favor of doing it now, not postponing it and not drawing it out five, ten, fifteen years per proposal, and counterproposal would be during that period of early civil rights days. There was always that thought expressed that we can't do it now, it must be gradualism or it must be on a "number game" procedure. The NAACP and the Howard County level and also at the state level took the position that it was a proposition to be dealt with emphatically, now. Not next year, year after next, year after next.

**Craft** [00:33:09] The first proposal that evolved from Howard County was somewhat on a 12-year plan, step by step. Well, we didn't buy that. It was finally accepted through the sixth grade, and later on, step by step, year by year, like that. Finally, it did end up with a fell swoop when they closed Harriett Tubman High School, which was the only high school open as an all Negro, all-Black school, in 1963. And began in that fall with just one high school program for all.

**Craft** [00:33:50] Bussing was an issue in those days. There were groups that wanted to provide a bus for the whites and a bus for the Blacks. We were diametrically opposed to that segregation on school buses, as a public means of conveying students to and from school. I would still be opposed today. They don't segregate when they ride public buses. We have fought that barrier-



"Jim Crowism", on trains, planes, buses. We weren't interested in having it revisited in the school system. We waged a pretty strong issue of attack against that formal procedure.

**Craft** [00:34:32] The problem also showed itself in Montgomery County, instances of parents who didn't want students from the school where I was principal, all Black, to transfer into Poolesville, Sherwood, you could name a few other places. But, those barriers were handled differently in this county. We had a desegregation committee appointed by the board and chaired by a person for whom I had great respect, and he worked rather closely with me in the early days of desegregation in this county. The person of Fred Dorn, principal of Perry High School, and was also involved in that suit against The Sentinel. He's the principal there.

**Craft** [00:35:24] So that's an indication of how differences occurred, but the early pattern showed itself almost county by county and state by state. In the desegregation process, the first step was to either close the all-Negro school, use the building as a public office building for the Board of Education or something, or decapitate the school. If it were a high school, we would make it a junior high school, or if it were a junior high school, you'd make it an elementary school or something of that sort. And we have seen that method sort of run its course, I think.

**Craft** [00:36:10] Now that's about as much, as far as anybody ever sending me any hostile letters or anything like that. I was never the recipient of them. Of course, I was never the type that went out and hung a sign on your back, and stood on every street corner, filled with rhetoric. I didn't prefer to work that way and still don't. I did prefer to work with groups, I did prefer to gather data carefully and screen it and use it in any form - written form, oral form. And I didn't do a great deal of just personal dialog. I never have and probably never will. I have always felt when you educate people's minds, somehow or another, their behaviors are altered. I still feel that way.

**Richardson** [00:37:05] During this period, the 1950s, did you have any consciousness or awareness of McKeldin's attitude or McKeldin's role as Governor?

**Craft** [00:37:18] Oh, yes. I was always impressed with him. He would receive any delegation well that went there. He attempted to follow various kinds of suggestions and as far as I could see, he did a pretty good job of keeping his formal commitments, whatever he enunciated. As far as I know. I was not in the political circles, the political circuit, am still not. But in my general observation, he was pretty pronounced in his behavior. And he did break barriers in appointing Blacks to certain administrative posts that they'd never held before in the history of Maryland. But, the state as a whole from the McKeldin regime on down, governors had a way of shying away from the basic concerns of the Black movement and civil rights, governor after governor. And not letting themselves be too involved in those areas other than to provide some lip service. And I would say the McKeldin was the forerunner of new thought in this area of race relations, from the time I came to the state, from the time that he ended his administration. I certainly think he did a good job of breaking or making the trail for change. Of course, you know, we could go back to when they got rid of the old Jim Crow laws here in the state, came right on up to appointment of Blacks to administrative boards in the state, judgeships, and so forth.

**Craft** [00:39:20] And yet, governors since McKeldin have had an opportunity to even do more of that. Governor Mandel has done a good bit along that line, although he's been accused of doing it for political patronage, and who doesn't? It's part of the political game. Governor Tawes did some, but he didn't do as much as—I never thought he did what he was certainly capable of doing during his administration.

**Richardson** [00:39:54] Do you think McKeldin was sincere on civil rights?

**Craft** [00:39:58] I felt that he was very sincere. I always thought that and still do.

**Richardson** [00:40:04] You don't think he did it for political patronage?

**Craft** [00:40:09] Well, some of that is involved in anything you do. Yes. He would have been no exception on that, but I don't think that was his sole reason. I think he had had a firm conviction and I think he expressed it not only in words, but he did it with many of his acts. Whether he could have done more or not, I'll never know. I've never had a chance to ever sit down and interview the man, talk with him, or get that close to his administration. But I voted for him on every occasion he ran for public office and I would do it again.

**Richardson** [00:40:51] How do you feel about his preaching in Black churches?

**Craft** [00:40:57] I felt that was a sincere part of him. I just never found anything insincere. I listened to him. He was a great orator and he had high political ambitions. I don't think that he fully realized, but I think he was sincere when he preached in Black churches and preach and attended the meetings of Black audiences, the citizens, folks such as the Elks and the Masons, and that he was very active also in those of fraternal circles. I'm not. For one who was a native son of a Baltimore himself, I mean, he was a different individual to what one normally got from, shall we say, the ruling class of Baltimore.

**Craft** [00:42:03] I have seen the superintendent of schools there and others. They were pretty retrench in their feelings and it came out in the public gathering. I think McKeldin did a lot to keep down friction in the early days Baltimore City, by his attitude, by his reputation that he had obtained throughout the state, and nationwide, at that particular time.

**Richardson** [00:42:44] Could you give us any insights into the relationship between Governor McKeldin and Mrs. Jackson?

**Craft** [00:42:51] Well, it was very close. Mrs. Jackson had great admiration for Governor McKeldin, and I always saw it as being neutral. I think Governor McKeldin really had true respect for Mrs. Jackson and for the work that she was dutifully engaged in civil rights. With Mrs. Jackson, there wasn't but one right way, that was, from my experience with her, that was to show the utmost respect for all people. She loved her family and I believe she really had a genuine love for humanity, period. And in my years of a close working relationship with her, I never heard her speak disdainfully of any person. That didn't mean she wouldn't take issue with you. She stressed very much that it was not the personality that mattered, but it was the principle. She kept that before us as President, "do not let yourself stray from the principles of this movement." It's not just for mere socialization that we are asking for equal opportunity, not just because the Black man wants to fraternize with the white woman or the white man want to fraternize with the Black woman. It's the rights of an individual to do what is legally permissible. If it is a bad law, then you give obedience to the law. But in the meantime, stop marching your forces to try to change it.

**Craft** [00:44:48] I don't think she was very much on the "passive resistance theory." I never heard her, in my years of working with Mrs. Jackson, ever venture along that line. She used to say that we had a responsibility to respect the law and a greater responsibility as bad law to work to change it. And that's what we went after. By changing every bad law we could find that we could go for the

change. People had their say and every right is possible to see to make changes in the law. In the sum total. That's about the best that I can say as far as my memory lets me recall that. There.

**Richardson** [00:45:36] Do you think Governor McKeldin could accept Black people as equals? Do you think any of his concern was sort of a paternalistic concern?

**Craft** [00:45:48] Well, I would have to say, not having worked very closely with him, I would have to say I saw some aspects of paternalism in him. But I think when he made overtures to Blacks, he was sincere in that point. I didn't find that to be an insincerity. And I never heard anyone that knew him well ever express that feeling. They seemed to have thought that they were accepted for their merits, all that I've ever heard comment about him that worked closely with him. I never had that pleasure. I was always on the periphery of activity. I never had that first-hand, close feeling or observations. Beyond anything, I'd say would be hearsay.

**Richardson** [00:46:49] How about your relationship with Mrs. Jackson's daughter, Juanita Jackson Mitchell?

**Craft** [00:46:57] Oh, we were very close over the years. Well, I always, I don't know, I guess I just thought of Mrs. Mitchell, sort of like I think of a sister. I always found her very sincere. I always found her very persuasive and very diligent in her efforts to reach a goal. She was very good at setting goals and working towards the attainment of those goals. Yet at that particular time, she had her own family to rear, plus her career and her time was not as free, I found, as it was with her mother. She just couldn't do other all the other things. Her mother's sole preoccupation was the NAACP at the time I knew her, [00:47:51] and she gathered the minds of the time you left for that to sole preoccupation. [3.3s] She was just in it and totally wrapped up in it. [00:48:00] Well she did a national board meeting and was at home with it came of priorities. [7.3s] Mrs. Mitchell was an excellent state president, but she wasn't as free to move about due to her family ties and other responsibilities as her mother was. But to use her not only to use her interest, time, and money, she used her legal talent, time after time in behalf of the indigents and others throughout the state in deprived situations. I'm very competent. First, they come.

**Richardson** [00:48:52] Did you see the Jackson-Mitchell family as a vital force in the civil rights movement?

**Craft** [00:48:57] Oh, I think it's a very magnificent example of total involvement by a family. My only wish is that I could have gotten that out of my own. My own have at this point in time not become so involved. My children's interests seem to be widespread—quite scattered. They haven't really taken on like the Mitchell-Jackson family. It's really been interesting how the total family that reside in Baltimore City particularly has been duly involved in the civil rights movement. I don't know about those outside the city, I only speak for those that I know. And the groundswell of support, generally, you would have to attribute to the willingness of members of that family to get out, scour through the community, and not only to be able to do just the talk things, but be able to become deeply involved in the implementation plans and also just sit down and develop strategies for dealing with would-be problems, and that's an amazing characteristic: that family loyalty as well as that initiative to become totally involved in it. And I admire all her sons that I know, particularly Clarence—the third—and Michael—they've been the two with whom I have identified most actively (unintelligible). Both of them have been very energetic and enterprising young men.

**Richardson** [00:50:57] During the '50s and even during the '60s, what was the relationship between, for example, the Baltimore NAACP and the local county NAACP?

**Craft** [00:51:08] Well, since Mrs. Jackson was president of the Baltimore branch, as well as the state branch, there was a very close involvement, very close. Most of the statewide activities at that particular time were held in Baltimore City, that being the only largest city and the great center of attraction. But since that time, there have been certain geographical shifts and we find now that many of these counties can offer better facilities and accommodations for state meetings, now, than you can get Baltimore City—more accessible. So you find in recent years—the last ten years, particularly—activities have been directed more towards the county rather than the city. Plus the fact, for a period of time, that we didn't have a state office in the city—didn't have a state office anywhere. So it was a case of going to the most convenient place in one of the counties to have state meetings. And that's still the situation now: state meetings are generally held down there in a church in Annapolis. Is that—And—No, no. We still don't have as much involvement from Baltimore City—generally, brought it down now to a representative at state meetings. But years ago when you went to Baltimore City you had large numbers from the county and also a sizable representation from Baltimore City branch. Unfortunately, that representation from the city branch now become minimal.

**Richardson** [00:52:56] During the time when Mrs. Jackson was president of the state branch also, was she a dominant figure? Did she allow other opinion to seep in?

**Craft** [00:53:10] Without a doubt, Mrs. Jackson was not only dominant there, she was overwhelming (laughing). (unintelligible) not only at the county or state level she also that same personality on the national board. She didn't do it just for personal aggrandizement of power. That wasn't her concept at all, it was just her, her personality, period. She believed strongly in something, she pushed it no matter where she was: the halls of Congress or sitting in her living room. Same zeal and enthusiasm. I've been with her enough to see it, she'll be sitting in a person-to-person conference with you. The same zeal and enthusiasm expressed there would be expressed when she was standing before the national board, which at that time I think were only 40-something members, and that increased to be only 64 members. And when she made her foray or her spiel at the national board, it was done with a flair and she was very dramatic and very forceful. It wasn't done halfheartedly, and—or maybe so, maybe there. Wasn't but one point of view—Mrs. Jackson's point of view—that was important when she projected.

**Richardson** [00:54:39] Did this ever produced conflict—

**Craft** [00:54:40] Oh, yeah.

**Richardson** [00:54:40] —either in Baltimore or with the local county branches?

**Craft** [00:54:45] Well, I never saw any foul conflict that ended in factional fights during my day. Yes, there were differences of opinion: people expressed our opinion differently and I always express the opinion that I felt was imminent from my point of view, you know, and different orientations. Now, there may have been some who never did and had resentment, I don't know, I never ran into any of that group. We had some younger ones during that period, the so-called Young Turks in Maryland, just like at the national level, who felt that everybody over thirty should get out or move, and that feeling was prevalent during her period of time. And I rather suspect some off of the Steele program. And I guess there will always be that youth versus adult conflict in our society. But, now, whether it comes out as open warfare is one thing, or whether it comes out as different approaches towards the same goal, which is another point to be taken into consideration. Of course, you choose to go east and I choose to go west, but if our mission is the

same and we all go oriented, you know, it doesn't matter from my point of view which approach you pursue. But now if our goals are wildly different, then I feel that we ought to sit down and honestly seek a way to reconcile any differences.

**Craft** [00:56:29] Differences are important and I've never been the type of person wanting to do away with differences; I like to weigh differences and try to see some kind of a consensus. I guess I administrated schools that way and I rather suspect that's my basic characteristic. I don't mind getting our differences on the table. I cannot deal well with hidden agenda. I don't care what your point of view is, you present it and I present mine, then let's see what kind of a happy medium we can strike. If we can't, I go away knowing now your basic objections, you go away assuming that you know mine. We can still fight as friends. I may never buy your point of view, you may never buy mine, but at least I know now where we differ and why we do, and how we can still maybe work together on other issues. And that is always, I guess, and always will be my approach to dealing with social situations. That element of conflict is always inevitable and I see it that way. And I wouldn't want to be in a situation where everybody's always agreeing and it becomes very static and generally results with very little productivity. But it takes differences to (unintelligible) progress in a group. So I don't want any group where everybody thinks alike and are prone to look alike and act alike and you generally end up with not much of anything being done. There got to be some differences of opinion and got to be some different approaches. Then you sit down and plan the kind of strategy that will bring about varying degrees of cooperation as one strives for a goal. You don't do that, then you're not working effectively on argumentation. Even in your own home (laughs).

**Richardson** [00:58:38] Could you discuss your involvement and the local county NAACP involvement in the Route 40 Freedom Rides and sit-ins during the early 1960s?

**Craft** [00:58:54] Well, my work at that particular time was basically in Howard County. So in the sit-ins, that would represent the groups in Howard County branch. For a while, my wife was involved and visiting various restaurants along Route 40 to seek service. They were denied at all of those restaurants, except for the one that that particular time was operated by the Chinese. That tend to set it back at Ellicott City, there. So actually their area covered just from Route 40 back up to Ellicott City up to about—Was it \_\_\_\_\_ (??) Orchard? I can't think of the little place that they all went— \_\_\_\_\_ (??) Orchard or \_\_\_\_\_ (??) Orchard. Now, anyways that's the only distance they covered. They didn't go on beyond that point up \_\_\_\_\_ (??) and all that way. I think on one occasion we did visit that little place there at Cooksville and talk with their manager and he said, yeah, he was willing to sue any and all who choose to come in. Of course, I don't suppose there were too many except those who lived around Cooksville and we found that many of them were traditional bound and they didn't go there in the first place, except maybe to get alcoholic beverages and so on. But as far as anything else, they were disdainful of the place, we found that it.

**Craft** [01:00:39] Now at that diner, Double T Diner there at Catonsville, the Howard County Group did not participate in any of those demonstrations, although they were led at that particular time by the brother of one of our dominant figures in the Howard County branch, James King. He's now president of the Howard County branch. And his mother had been a very effective worker for many years in the state of Maryland, around the vicinity of Lakeland and Beltsville—Prince George's County. Esther King was a namesake when I started in the civil rights work in Maryland. She was one of the namesakes out in the counties: Esther King. Of course, she had three sons: Arthur King went on to the legislature; James King was very active in Howard County civic and social affairs, and in the school system; and Eugene King in Baltimore County, particularly around the

Catonsville area. Beyond that point, Howard County did nothing that one would say was sensational. We just did our homework well and pinpointed our strategic areas, and then used more or less a bargaining approach with them. We didn't stage any massive demonstrations of that sort. Always generally got a group and went to the management, asked for a conference with them, sit down, talk with them, aired our views—generally initiated some change in behavior or we conducted a mild form of a boycott (laughs), one of the two. That was the system we used as a form of direct action. It was direct, we went to the management. If we didn't find him that day, we found him. Always left the strong demand that he get in touch with us. We always tried in our approach to stay away from the veiled threats. I don't know how—

[01:03:06] *pause in recording*

**Craft** [01:03:12] The basic slogan at that time that seemingly was acceptable to the group with whom I identified in Howard County was simply this: "Do you want noise, or do you want action?" And generally, the reply was always "Action!" Alright, then we wanted action and results; we were not interested in the noise. If it took the telephone call, or the letter, or the news and the paper articles to accentuate the positive, that's what we wanted. We wanted the results and we were hungry for results. And that's about the sum total of the work over there. We had our county pretty well divided up at that time into respective areas—"up-county," as we called, was going towards Frederick and "down-county," "mid-county," Ellicott City, where the county seat was, and action around about North Laurel, since many of our citizens in certain parts of the county did much of their shopping, and banking, and so forth in Laurel, so we did concentrate on that end of Prince George's County too. Anytime a problem arose, like the little riot they had in Laurel and all, we played our part, quietly and politely, bringing about peaceful agreement and improving the circumstances.

**Richardson** [01:04:45] Did the local county branches of the NAACP lobby for the state public accommodations bill in 1963?

**Craft** [01:04:57] Oh, yeah.

**Richardson** [01:04:57] How involved were the county branches?

**Craft** [01:05:00] Well, they were involved to the point of view where they made visitation to the legislature and they visited the representatives down there. We didn't care a great deal of signs and all any occasion I was there, we just went as a delegation, we sat through the committee discussions, we conferred with committee chairmen. We didn't have any paid lobbyist there as such. We just buttonholed our representatives, basically: visit them in their offices, as well as followed them to see them and observe them on the floor. We were rejected in some instances, and some instances we came back and marshaled our political forces and tried to bring about change in personnel in a couple of instances in Howard County.

**Craft** [01:05:49] I guess we played a pretty good part in bringing about some changes in personnel. Played a very important part in seeking and working for the early election of Senator Jim Clark in Howard County. And the ousting of Senator Shipley, who told us on one occasion he didn't believe that the white man should give up any rights to the Black man, or something to that effect, it's not his exact words, now. They've grown old and rusty and I don't want to quote him, but that was the inference of it. Of course, we differed with that, told him so, left there, and decided then about time for us to work for a change in representation because we were represented too in Howard County. We weren't satisfied to be left out of the representation of voters. So we did go

back to conduct a very extensive voting campaign, furnished free cars to haul people who had never cast a vote in their lives, got them registered, then saw to it with a follow-up that they got to the polls to vote. Our intent was not to tell them how to vote, but certainly to educate them. And we did by publishing and releasing the records, of those over a given period of time, both at the local level and those who run for statewide offices, you know, at the national level. But we did a lot of that. We got the records, dug them out, and published them, and posted them, and then hand-delivered them, and spread them out in churches. Most instances we got pretty good support from ministers at churches, both Black and white. We had a lot of white ministers that worked with us at that particular time. It wasn't just a case of just working solely with Black churches. Unfortunately, we never got any support from Catholics in Howard County. During the years that I was there, got no support no matter how many appeals we made, so.

**Richardson** [01:08:03] That seems strange.

**Craft** [01:08:05] Well, the Catholic father, just never responded anything to us and—But we had Catholics working with us anyway.

**Richardson** [01:08:18] Individual Catholics?

**Craft** [01:08:19] Yeah.

**Richardson** [01:08:22] In 1963, did you or the county NAACP endorse the telegram that, I think, Mrs. Jackson or the Baltimore NAACP sent to President Kennedy to withhold federal funds from the disaster area in Ocean City after the big storm there or—withhold them until Ocean City stopped discriminating? There was some controversy over this telegram sent to President Kennedy and then some have implied that this is why the first public accommodations bill was defeated, because the legislators reacted against this telegram. Even one article in the *Sun* papers quoted Marvin Mandel, who was then a member of the legislature—

**Craft** [01:09:22] Right.

**Richardson** [01:09:22] —as saying this was the cause of it.

**Craft** [01:09:26] Oh, I don't think that was the cause. I think the cause was just down, I thought so then, still think so, out and out of prejudice. There was no desire on the part of the legislator to extend that element of fairness to the Black citizen of Maryland. There was no—as far as I know, I don't know of any branch that offered any opposition to what was done. Certainly not in Howard County. The whole thing had been a whole regime of discrimination, had been repulsive to Blacks for all these years. And certainly, you talk about inhumaneness, they saw the whole thing as being inhumane. But that was an approach. It was done to get attention, it was done to emphasize, as we felt, the seriousness of a problem in America: failure to look at my Black brother with open eyes, to assume that the Black was happy and nonchalant about his rights and privileges. And that assumption still persists. It hasn't vanished yet, it's just all the way to the president's office. We ought to be happy, "Why you're the most blessed minority group in the world." In the country of your birthright, I should be happy to take second best, which is asinine to me, it's silly. This is my birthright, this is my country, and I paid my due as well. I have every right and privilege—I should have every right and privilege that pertains to any other citizen in this country. Second best is never good enough. At that particular time the public accommodations, we felt, should not have been an item of major concern. It should have been just a commonplace incident for every citizen. I

still feel that way and I'd enter in the same kind of involvement again if it were to arise. But I had no personal part in the framing of that telegram, to my knowledge. I don't think I was a part of that.

**Richardson** [01:12:00] Where is the NAACP—or back in the fifties and sixties, where was the NAACP weakest in the state?

**Craft** [01:12:10] Well—You mean what counties?

**Richardson** [01:12:12] (speaking at the same time) As far—Yeah, what counties or what section, like—?

**Craft** [01:12:14] The home county of the Governor; when Tawes became governor his Somerset County had no chapter and still has no active chapter. Baltimore County, which is the stronger of counties up here, never been very effective or strong in mobilization of civil rights activity, and yet there were all kinds of problems around there and still are.

**Richardson** [01:12:40] And there's Turner Station, which is—

**Craft** [01:12:43] Well, Turner Station had it in name—

**Richardson** [01:12:45] (speaking at the same time; unintelligible).

**Craft** [01:12:45] —but they were really not the active, aggressive branch that they needed, in my estimation. Turner Station-Dundalk area was the only area where you had a chapter existing, but none in Towson, none in Catonsville. Catonsville, early in those days, went more along the line with CORE. Which, you know, never did prove too viable in the state of Maryland.

**Richardson** [01:13:21] Were you or the Howard County NAACP involved in the Cambridge demonstrations in 1963?

**Craft** [01:13:27] We had persons to go down there, but as far as the branch sending representatives to participate in demonstrations, no, we didn't. I think at some time or another, I believe, monies were assembled and sent to assist the Cambridge branch. I think on several occasions we made donations to help Gloria and her group, who were in the midst of them. But we didn't have any delegation, to my knowledge. Now, there may have been some that went, but the branch did not appoint or did not send in a representative group. I can say that with accuracy. We concentrated most of our group appearances at the legislative sessions in Annapolis, at the meeting out there in the county—county commissions under the commission system there in Howard County. So we did appear in small groups at the county commission to petition very strongly to have the removing segregated signs at the courthouse and schoolhouse. They had them in all the public buildings around—Black and white signs for lavatories and so on. The improvement of practices at the jail and so forth, those things were done by the local branch. Appeared at school board meetings, petitioning for changes and improvement in the all Black school at that particular time, later on moving towards the era of desegregation.

**Craft** [01:15:10] So they kept abreast pretty much on educational matters and political undertakings within the county as well as at the state level. And on what they do now, you have some pretty active group chairmen—committee chairmen that really dug into the research and kept a few hotlines here and there, getting data and disseminating that data to the best of our ability. We put out a newsletter, called *The Spotlight* in Howard County, and worked on that. I do have



some of those kinds of copies, I guess still available around here, so. We drew maps and plotted where the concentrated area of Blacks were, and knew the exact number of students at every level of the school program. As a matter of fact, I guess we were more abreast sometimes on the true statistics than the school personnel was itself (laughs) when it came to the Black families. We kept them up to date (laughs). When we generally went out there to speak, we knew our data. And we didn't mind using it (laughs).

**Richardson** [01:16:25] Why do you think Baltimore was selected as a target city by CORE and what has CORE's role been in the state and maybe even in the counties?

**Craft** [01:16:38] I'm not as familiar with CORE's program. It never did prove a great attraction to me. I had admiration for Sam Farmer as the leader at that particular time. I felt that CORE certainly played a part in helping to bring about some of the changes. However, being a member of the NAACP, I also know that CORE left the NAACP with some heartaches—always in legal problems, always illegal expenses. CORE sent them off, and got them in jail and so on, the NAACP went and got bail and provided the legal services and all. CORE never really was organized to handle the aftermath of their engagement. And I believe the strength of an organization is always found in its ability to initiate, its ability to pursue, and its ability to make the kinds of adjustments are necessary after the onslaught is made. I think when you attack, you've got to be in position then to help to remedy the situation after you have attacked it. How are you going to implement it? What are you going to do? How do you handle the results that will always come after any change and so on? Well now, CORE was not in those areas then, when the changes came. There were many of those when the NAACP lost thousands of dollars by the mere fact that many, who were jailed and let out on bail bond, how—who could locate them the day we wanted to bring them to trial? So all the money that the NAACP put up in those days was just lost by forfeit. In every case that I know of any prominent CORE member getting involved in, it generally was the NAACP, in some instances the ACLU, who were to the rescue. So you didn't have it all done by NAACP lawyers, you had it done by other groups, too, but basically, it was the NAACP that went to the legal side of the question.

**Richardson** [01:19:20] Why do you think the Black militants haven't attracted—or didn't attract in the sixties and even in the seventies, now—the Black militants haven't attracted large numbers of Blacks to their philosophy or their movement?

**Craft** [01:19:38] You said why do I think they didn't?

**Richardson** [01:19:39] They didn't, yes.

**Craft** [01:19:41] Because the average Black is like the average white, he looks at the practical results of something. He isn't so swayed by the theories. You know, theories are fine, but when it comes down to living, you got to deal with the practical applications. So the average Black still has a great deal of faith in the legal processes of government. Maybe sometimes that faith is a little blind, but it's still there. The average Black believe in the spiritual attributes too, and he isn't for the radical movement that would just say "Throw everything out and start from scratch." He's just not so void of experiences that you think you can just throw everything out that had been built up in centuries and start from scratch. The average Black still gets his basis for certain social action from his religion, and his religion is generally that which is epitomized on Sunday morning at churches. That may not be the most timely approach, but it is still that which has been indoctrinated in the people.

**Craft** [01:21:12] You have to—But people have been indoctrinated in certain ways, and education, after all, is a process of indoctrination. We aren't born with certain superb learnings or certain superb methods of reasoning, we generally develop those over a period of time. And to break with tradition abruptly, like many of the Black militant groups were advocating, just didn't make sense to the average Black American. He still said, "I have my laws, I have my government. I'll take my chances." And I think wisdom lies in that section. Revolution and evolution are two points of views (laughs), and most of us have a tendency to want to go along basically with the evolutionary process. And generally, it takes longer to do that. Then the next point of view that the average Black looked at was just of life and safety. He didn't have an arsenal to carry out any revolution that could end up with killing, moving with firearms, and so forth. He can count (laughs). But it just wasn't practical in any sense of the word.

**Craft** [01:22:52] And it is a longer process when you take the legal process, and that is a basic criticism leveled against the NAACP today; "It takes too long to accomplish too little," is frequently heard. And it does take time when you go through the courts because court decisions can be enacted at one level and reversed at the next, and to bypass the next it costs time and money. Well, that's the process though, that we have engaged. And I believe in that approach, which is why I stay with the NAACP. It doesn't mean that we don't change our technique. Of course, we've got to develop new strategies for dealing with the present-day problem. Can't use the same strategies we used ten years ago and expect them to be effective. That means constantly regrouping our forces, restudying the issues at large, developing new resources, and then going ahead with the processes. It means educating a group or cadre at all levels. Always got to stem in that realm of educating people to what the issues are and the ways and means of addressing ourselves to those issues. So it's an ongoing process every day. Although I retired from my official job, I spend more time now, I guess, doing charity work than I've ever done in my whole life.

**Richardson** [01:24:31] What was your reaction to Governor Agnew's speech to Black leaders in 1968?

**Craft** [01:24:39] Repugnant. I just thought it was untimely, ill-conceived whoever advised him and certainly epitomized racism at its best. Although I wasn't here, in the Middle West when I read about it I just thought to myself that there was another way to do it. If he even had those feelings, it should've been done differently, and it should have been given a chance for a rebuttal somewhere along the line. There was no chance for anybody to rebut. They just blasted unfounded accusations, as far as most of them are concerned. Showed again how empty the man was rather than what his great leadership qualities were, as I saw it. But I didn't meet the man—didn't meet him until in recent years, really didn't meet him 'til his downfall, so to speak. And still, I never knew the person intimately.

**Richardson** [01:25:55] During the last 30 years are there any other public officials, either statewide or locally, that conjure up the same image as McKeldin does? When you ask someone about civil rights immediately McKeldin, as an elected official, comes to mind. In your mind, are there any other ones of McKeldin's stature?

**Craft** [01:26:21] I haven't met one in the state of Maryland at this point in time. I think—As I said before, I think there has been some remarkable events occurring under Governor Mandel's administration. Although, I don't think Governor Mandel has been nearly as pronounced in his position and in his actions as McKeldin had been. He has been sort of low-key, but he has done some remarkable things as a governor, and yet at certain administrative boards in the state, he's never yet looked kindly towards any Black input. And I think that's a weakness in his

administration. We're going now from the State Board of Education on down to other administrative boards around the state. Or when he has appointed a Black, he has not appointed a Black that has truly represent the dominant ideals of Black people. Generally, a Black that has—rarely, if ever, has identified with the Black man's cause, that has been selected. Makes us wonder then—makes me, anyway, a citizen of the state for some years, makes me wonder where does he find those people and what's his purpose for appointment when they do not truly represent the dominant views of the Black American in the state of Maryland. That has happened time after time, as I've looked at some of his appointments over the years. And you know the person. And if anybody—any Black person in the state had been active in a period of 30 years, I know a little bit about, I believe. I've heard. (laughs)

**Richardson** [01:28:22] Who participated in the civil rights movement in Howard and Montgomery County? Was it an all-Black movement or was it fairly integrated or—?

**Craft** [01:28:33] We always had a fair degree of integration. There were a large number of whites, but we had some effective whites that joined up. One of the white men that worked rather diligently with NAACP in Howard County was Robert Killerman—in Howard County. Worked very effectively through the whole push for desegregation and still works with the NAACP, although I guess roles have not been as prominent in recent years. In housing, we had a—(unintelligible) I can't recall Kenny's last name at the moment. Isn't that something? That name has eluded me—common name, but I can't recall it. We had some white women too, that worked along with us. Some of the names have slipped my memory off-hand, but I don't think they are very effective anymore in working in this branch. I don't know why, but in the early days, they came in, joined the workforce. We had a Mrs. Frances Mellow, who took an important part with her husband—don't recall his first name. We had, at times, Mrs. Anita Ariba, who is still pretty active in Howard County, is one of the women. Then we worked along with the leadership of the League of Women Voters at that particular time. Some of those people are, I understand, in County posts in Howard County now. Some of them joined the NAACP, some of them didn't, and some of them were kind of in a coalition with the present administrator of Howard County, David Cochran—was always cooperative and would work well with us, although during my regime he never joined the NAACP—I'm almost certain he never joined. He may have, but I don't recall him ever joining. At this point, I guess I've about run out of names of the people. I can see faces, but I'll be honest with you, I can't recall the names.

**Richardson** [01:31:07] But there was a cross-section of—

**Craft** [01:31:09] Oh, yeah.

**Richardson** [01:31:10] —of involvement in the movement in Howard County?

**Craft** [01:31:14] Oh, yeah. We had—My vice president was white, Robert Kellerman, and he became president when I resigned and went to the Midwest in 1966. He served, I think, the remainder of my term and didn't run for reelection. And the strongest person that worked in there during those periods of time that I was there was the Reverend E. E. Archer, who still works at the NAACP. He's a retired minister in—

**Richardson** [01:31:51] In Howard County?

**Craft** [01:31:54] Yes. And Reverend John Wesley Holland of Cooksville, been very active over the years in Howard County. Mrs. Leola Dorsey has run for public office several times in Howard County—is still active. And there's James W. King, Morris Woodson, Elhart Flury, they're men in

the school system but they're still working close to the organization. Mr. Frank Hawkins—he's dead and gone on, of course, now, but he was a strong man at one time, (unintelligible) Reverend Eileen Moore. She's died and passed, but she was very active. Mrs. Mamie Fisher, her daughter, Ms. Coreen offered to Jessie Wilson—very strong people who work very effectively with some of the younger people. Samuel Young, who's still working, he's an officer in the association there in the early years of moving; Calvin Carter, who played a very important part in the program towards housing; Reverend E. Robinson; my wife, Dorothy Craft; all of those were people that really stuck and worked around the clock if it were necessary, on issues. Many more than I could just name if I start naming them off or ticking them off, were very active in the program. Mrs. Dola White, a long time—she worked for a long time before she moved and came to this county. Oh—I guess I better stop; you start calling names, don't name people—Relying on your memory rather than your script is never good.

[01:33:50] *pause in recording*

**Craft** [01:34:02] —one of our most active persons in a membership campaign at that particular time or during those early years was a young man in Elkridge by the name of Charles Fletcher. He'd get out and cover that whole Elkridge area and bring in large numbers of people that didn't make meetings, but they always reported. Then there's Eugene Holland from Cooksville area, also a very active person; never took any leadership role, but they were strong pillars of support. Raymond Johnson from Ellicott City was a young man there, took all kinds of roles trying to improve housing conditions in and around Fells Lane at that time. The Fells Lane housing slum was one of the big projects that prevailed and carried through until that housing was finally established there off Fells Lane, in Ellicott City, and that slum area was eventually wiped out by the county and the situation greatly improved. So those are just a few of the people—Or Roger Carter who supported and never carried any major office, but he gave financial support and any other kind of support he could give. And I recall a glaring call went out for anything, and these are people that respond and were ready to go. An elderly minister who passed, Reverend Charles Taylor, and you could just name him by the numbers. Then you could get off into individual groups or persons that really gave support, from one end of the county to the other, you could always call upon that cadre. They wanted a representative number, and Mr. Julius R. Warren ran the barbershop out there. He and his wife were staunch supporters. Then Thomas King—in the county at that time, later left, went to Baltimore—he and his wife were very strong supporters and always there, never too busy to respond to the call when an urgent call went out for representation on given problems relating to schools, to housing, any other situation arising in Howard County. And they generally brought with them varying degrees of competency to tell you about certain things pertaining to probable solutions to a problem. That was a strong point of fellowship, that the NAACP at that particular time was more like a church organization in its approach to community problems or countywide problems. We operate on a county-wide basis. Anywhere there was a problem, then everybody had a problem.

**Richardson** [01:37:01] Who was the relation with the Black churches in Howard County and the civil rights movement?

**Craft** [01:37:07] Very good. We always were into those churches at least once a year, sometimes more. So they made contributions financially as well as individual enrollment. And certainly played a pretty important part in disseminating information. We'd use them as various kinds of depots to disseminate information to the community. And in some instances, to gather it. Most of the Black ministers were responsive; there are one or two who never did respond during my active work with the organization. Never could get any response. But you could still go into their churches. You

were always welcome when you went, they just didn't respond to written instrument. And that was not too unusual. Still isn't too unusual today; people sometimes today won't answer a written instrument. (telephone rings)

**Richardson** [01:38:10] What was the general outlook during the 1950s and 1960s of the Howard County government towards the whole human rights issue—the whole movement?

**Craft** [01:38:24] At first, it was very reluctant and reserved. And then a progressive board was elected and progress began to show itself. It was generally done quietly but done. We didn't care about the noise, we just wanted the result. So, persons like Mr. Charlie Miller, who is still a council member over there, began to take a very progressive point of view towards our requests and demand, to give support, and others elected to the board did likewise. So we established a pretty good rapport with those men. Our leadership did anyway. And, generally, you got a commitment from them and the commitment was paramount to the execution of the task or enactment of the desired measure. Said they would commit themselves to removing signs from the courthouse, they went down. That was before all these things were abolished by law. So that was a turning point and a change in attitude coming all along, even before we had the passage of the civil rights laws in 1965. So we had begun to make tremendous strides prior to that in Howard County.

**Richardson** [01:40:08] What changes have you seen since the early fifties and, as you mentioned before, the work of the NAACP—the program is slightly different because of the times. I think—maybe just go along with this more subtle, maybe—What changes have you seen from the fifties to the seventies? What's the emphasis now, do you think?

**Craft** [01:40:35] Well, the more emphasis on the politics of our times; more emphasis being directed towards the economic needs of our time, the bread and butter issues that are really paramount now. People want jobs, they want housing, want—those things are there. The NAACP is certainly having to address itself more to these critical concerns rather than to the large philosophical issues of the past, like one time our whole thrust was in the arena of education. Improve educational programs, improve people's minds, attitudes, hearts. Well, now it's towards this total economy now: jobs, housing, what have you, all moving down that line now. And the NAACP no longer can be a one-shot or one-target organization. We have to cover many facets of concern today. We've got to increase our lobbying techniques at all levels of government where laws are enacted and laws are enforced. The criminal justice division has become a very important concern and consumes a considerable amount of time for our legal staff in intervening in cases or giving advice where they're not actually involved in it per se. At the same time, we still have to stay with school cases, because school cases are still coming back after years and years of litigation. They have not been resolved. So we can't get out of that arena and say, "We can throw all our attention now to political enactment of laws or a guaranteed income and so forth. All we can get over and get the job of breaking barriers at all levels of employment, breaking up the former little white courthouse gang, and so forth. We no longer can do that, we've got to deal with elected officials at all levels now, whether they be white or Black." You still got to deal with them, so it's no longer just dealing with a white electorate anymore, it's dealing with the many others who have come in, in this whole process of change.

**Craft** [01:43:11] So the NAACP has had to broaden its front to many facets. Takes more money, takes more personnel. And the time, to mention, goes on. You got to have a scholarly foray into the field now. No longer just the old noise and rhetoric. You've got to know your subject matter well, you got to be able to present it and sell it. So it's a case now of many people coming to the marketplace, so you are no longer just competing just for basic rights, you're competing now for—

well, the right to live and live in this society more abundant. And that is a difference in what it was even ten years ago. And in the schools, now, you are no longer fighting to get them in the school; you're fighting now to integrate them fully in the school activities. And that's a difference in integration and desegregation to me. I've always seen a difference, never will buy the fact that they're synonymous.

**Richardson** [01:44:34] Do you think there's been backsliding on the part of society or on the part of government in its commitment to securing human rights for all citizens?

**Craft** [01:44:46] Oh, definitely. This whole administration, starting with Nixon, has been a retrenchment of forces, a withdrawal of our economic attainments, educational attainments, you name it. There has been an increasing pace, not a decreasing. As President Ford said to the NAACP in its meeting last year, he says, "During this period of inflation, we can anticipate and expect a depreciation of rights." But we don't—No, as a citizen of this country, my rights are not tied in with inflation or the economic means of a dollar. And I would never buy that and tie myself to whether the dollar fluctuated down or whether the flow of jobs increases or decreases and, of course, nobody buys that as a valid argument who is thoughtful and who is concerned about his personal welfare. And that's a difference that I've seen—the constant erosion of previously gained avenues for addressing one's self to the ills of our society. And it all borders very much, that racism has no longer become the hidden agenda, it has become the open form of pattern of behavior again. It's not flagrant, it's not name-calling and beating over the heads with billies and turning loose fire hoses and so on, on people, but it's become the practical, smooth, swift political maneuver preconceived by consent of parties we've manipulated. We put one Black over here and keep 10,000 out.

**Craft** [01:46:50] So that's just been how we pick the kind of Black that is easily manipulated and is not going to rock the boat, and not speak on behalf of others. "We'll keep him pacified, and to heck with the rest." And that is what we see in these types of—these appointments that are frequently made: reach out and pick a Black that represents nobody, doesn't even represent himself to start, and say that he's the representative, "We've done something about the minority member." Or the attempt to take the white woman and call her a minority. "We didn't have any women, so we put them there, now you got a minority member serving." Well, ought to take her, or anyone else, and—or take the Black woman, for instance, because she easily manipulated sometimes and doesn't rock the boat, so it'll be much easier to find a Black woman than it is to pick a man who might be vocal and representative of the group. So we take the way of least resistance, which is insincerity at its best. Or we get someone who doesn't know his subject matter and put him in a situation where you become, from the first day, the picture of scorn and ridicule. When you don't know your subject matter, don't know your—You aren't likely to be such an out-learner that you can start off knowing what you haven't been exposed to, nobody can. You don't give them sufficient time to get duly job oriented and show some competency. And if you pick a person whose level of competency isn't there to start with, he isn't likely to ever get there. And that's what I have seen appointment after appointment in this county and around the state: "We'll pass over the competent, and pick the least competent." And that to me is not by accident, by intent.

**Richardson** [01:48:59] How do you account for the decline in membership in the NAACP and some of the other old-line civil rights groups like the Urban League and—?

**Craft** [01:49:10] Well, as people have become more affluent, certain groups of Blacks, they have excused themselves from the movement saying "I no longer depend on it. It's no longer a major concern to me, I'm doing all right." That is typical of any group—Black, white, Oriental, whatever

you have, as their personal status improves. They have a tendency to drop out of any movement or mobilization or any pressure group. They want to get away from it. "My lot improved." You got Black flight out here just like you got white flight. Each time they improve their lot a little bit, they leave Washington and move out here—better homes, assumed better environment for "my child," and what have you. And that's just a natural pattern in human behavior, for an aggressive person. Though, it's no different in the Black—You have the same kind of diversity in Blacks that you have in any other group, and it isn't going to be any different. They're looking for the same economic improvements, they looking for the same social satisfactions that you have anywhere else.

**Craft** [01:50:34] So, it's not that common bond that you would want to attribute to. Some Blacks don't have any laws that the other Blacks—They don't even see themselves as being a part the situation. They've never known some of the real plights that some others have known. Out here plenty of them (unintelligible) getting around saying, "Well, I never known discrimination." Well, you have to ask yourself, "Where has this person been? It certainly hasn't been America. Or ever lived in a major portion of this world. Any—Plus, discrimination worldwide, it's not just here in the United States. (background noise; child crying) And you hear someone make that statement, you just wonder if they can really identify the realities of—I mean if they belong to another society that just descended—maybe they do (laughs). I never bother to even dignify that comment with repetition. Just shrug my shoulders and smile. I'd think I'm talking to a blind—I learned years ago, "None is so blind as he that refuses to see." You can have all your visual acuity, if you don't care to use it, you just a blind person. I don't have any public or private resentment for that person. Just feel that they may wake up someday and it may be a lost cause. So, that's one thing I have noticed as I travel around the country—I find it everywhere you go.

**Craft** [01:52:20] And as other groups have grown up, there are people who aspire for roles of leadership. And NAACP had been pretty much a one-person image. One person—The executive director, by and large from the history of the NAACP, has been the main spokesman and has had the closest attachment. And the president sits down with the executive director. He doesn't sit down in reality with the NAACP or its board. And that's the way it has been. In that aspect, though, it's changed. The executive director for years has called the shots in the NAACP. Now, a new element has come into the picture. The board is beginning to become far more assertive and rightfully so. So the image of the NAACP as an old-line civil rights organization is certainly making changes. It's not so radical at this point in time, but it's progressive change. CORE and other organizations played a very important part in the mid-sixties and late fifties. Had just about moved off the scene. Some of that could be attributed to the personality of the so-called leadership. Some of it could be to the personal taste of McKissick and others who went off as private ventures. They wanted to live—oh, they want money, too, and other things. They couldn't afford to give all that time voluntarily to an organization that could do so very little in the way of personal attainment, our goals, our dollars, and cents. They have to live, they have to be realistic.

**Craft** [01:54:16] It has given these other splinter groups that develop here and there, and each time they are attached as letterhead organizations to an individual. Generally, they have followed a one-issue platform. As soon as that issue has been resolved or abated to some extent, they have faded gradually out of the picture. For a while, they got the news media behind them and the news media has sensationalized, and they got to them. But no issue stays in the headlines forever. Watergate has come in flashes. A few years and they talk to somebody about Watergate, they don't know what you're talking about unless they're students of history. So that's just the way it is in our social life in America: we go from one climaxing activity to another. But in spite of all of this, since 1909 the NAACP has stayed in the arena, and I predict it'll be here until the day arrives when

we truly see rights and privileges abound for all America. Then I predict that eventually someday it's going to fade out.

**Craft** [01:55:42] But not during the seventies. I see this whole decade of the seventies as being a period of retrenchment. We'd like to go back—like to turn the clock back, and there are very vivid attempts. We see the action of the Supreme Court, which is becoming more and more conservative each day, reversing prior broad-phase decisions. If they're not reversing, they are seriously amending them to such an extent that the real effect of it's paramount to none. And that was the intent of the Nixon administration, to bring on that kind of conservatism. All evidence, they now have five there who are very much alike in that respect. So it's getting more and more five-to-four decisions. Of course, in the Congress, we see many people who say they're reflecting the feelings of their constituencies, but I contend they're reflecting the feelings of the vocal minority. I feel that majority is still silent when it comes to any of these issues. Or as they say, "I wouldn't go out and advocate against. I'm not going to advocate for either." That's what you run into in many, many situations.

**Craft** [01:57:22] Then we have a president who constantly keeps harking on the negatives, looking for (coughs) political return (coughs). That's definitely descriptive of the incumbent. He'd turn anything about if he could, vocally. Although, I don't think his real feelings might be that way. But anything on the base of political expediency—it's a policy with Ford. Civil rights—he'll sell the whole shebang if he thinks it's going to earn him the vote that will guarantee his re-election?

**Richardson** [01:58:01] Do you think there's going to be a change, though, in this fall? A change away from the Nixon-Ford retrenchment into something different?

**Craft** [01:58:15] Well, I'm not a student of politics. I don't know anything much of what the Democrats would do or the Republicans, but I'll say this: I think there's gonna be a continuous shift slightly in the other direction. I think it can be turned around. I don't think the president alone can do it, but I think a forceful Congress is gonna bring about a reversion in the general trend, now. I don't think we can afford to let all the goodness of the sixties be eroded. The part of the program under Johnson was a noble idea, it wasn't the program that was bad. But the administration of the program—we have to say what they should have done was worked on administration, not kill the program, as the intent has been to kill the program while we go right on poorly administrating everything else. And that is the thing that you have to see and it is so obvious as you go from city to city. The cities are just becoming dead areas, boarded up, buildings run down here and there. So, they so they really need a tremendous amount of money to revive the city area. You'll never convince me that our cities can just die like that, cause too many people are there. People that couldn't make it on a farm or do other things, they have gone to the city. They are there now. We must do something to keep them preoccupied and worthwhile. I mean, we can't go on carrying them all on welfare. Welfare will never be adequate. It wasn't meant to be. It wasn't designed as a program that way. The programmatic structure makes it something else. The best jobs in \_\_\_\_\_ (??) have not really gone to raise the level of the poor. They've gone to the people of means to start with. Still decision-makers and peanuts, so to speak, gets down to the poor—city after city, time after time. And now we've got it invading our suburban areas.

**Richardson** [02:00:51] Do you find it true in Montgomery County or in Howard County now?

**Craft** [02:00:57] Oh yeah, we have our larger areas—got some rather larger spots here in this county. And that's truly deprived. They're not seen when you travel basically in the area.



**Richardson** [02:01:10] And these would all be Black areas? Or—

**Craft** [02:01:12] Oh, they're Black and white. Maybe more poor whites than you got Blacks, but they're here. Take right here in this community, it's hidden well off the road, right back over there, just about all white. But, it's still a deprived and depressed area. And you move from here on up from this county and back toward Burtonville, which has remained relatively (unintelligible), you have pockets—scattered sites. They're not large concentrations until you get to Sandy Spring on Brook Road. Then you run into a large Black area, pretty sizeable. Then you move on around there, back toward \_\_\_\_\_ (??) and all, and you've got white scattered sites. So they are there. They are not seen; they are the faces that are not seen. In Howard County, you go along New Cut Road, there you've got a small pocket. You come right on out of Ellicott City, on Main Street, you've got a small pocket right in there. No real improvement of housing, sanitary conditions, or nothing else. They've been there and they're still there. Circumstances are not getting better, every day it's getting worse. Yet they are right there—those who administer, sitting right there on the hill. All there right under their nose. Like Fells Lane used to be, there was this tension, but those are the things in lower Ellicott City, right down there in that area. Around the railroad and all, they're still there.

**Craft** [02:03:56] Haven't done much to improve; in sight of all the beautiful houses and modern conveniences, there are still large numbers not enjoying those things. Those are problems we must grapple with. And you leave them and go down, and get into the Waterloo community, upper \_\_\_\_\_ (??) community built all around the \_\_\_\_\_ (??) Industrial park. No sewer down in here, these people can't improve their lots or houses. They fall into what we call an "underdeveloped area" because they can't meet standards when the facilities are not there for them. They don't put the sewer line down there, and then they're handcuffed. And they know that. It's not by accident, by any chance, I contend. But, you withhold services, you're certainly going to inhibit people who populate the area. And that's what has happened. Put the sewer line all down for the business places, got them down on the lower end coming down, but nothing in between. So, people are caught. The land certainly will not stand septic tanks and other things. I would say they're oversaturated now. It's just fortunate that no health epidemic has broken out there. So, that's just one of the problems you run into. Would you care for some coffee or something while you're here?

**Richardson** [02:04:31] Oh, no thank you.

**Craft** [02:04:31] Well, have you eaten breakfast?

**Richardson** [02:04:32] Yes, I have. Thank you, Mr. Craft.

**Craft** [02:04:35] Yeah, you're welcome.

[02:04:35] *end of recording*