

**NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN  
AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**Civil Rights History Project**

**Smithsonian Institute's National Museum of  
African American History & Culture and the  
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**Mildred Bond Roxborough oral history interview**

**conducted by Julian Bond**

**in New York, New York, Oct. 29, 2010**

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1		[START AFC2010039_CRHP0002_MV1.WMV]
2		MS. ROXBOROUGH: She never stopped
3	01:00:04	talking.
4		FEMALE VOICE: Ms. Roxborough
5		[phonetic], Mr. Bond, I'm recording.
6		Begin the interview.
7		INTERVIEWER: Ready to go?
8		FEMALE VOICE: Yes, sir.
9		INTERVIEWER: Ms. Roxborough, you
10		were born into an African American
11		family that was aware of the need to
12		do what was necessary to improve the
13		quality of their daily lives.
14	01:00:32	Can you share with us how your family
15		made changes in their lives to
16		improve their situation?
17		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, we lived in
18		one of the three counties in the
19		State of Tennessee, in which blacks
20		did not vote. One of the things my
21		parents felt which would be of
22		paramount importance was to get the
23		right to vote. They proceeded to
24		campaign for that purpose by getting
25	01:00:55	other people in the community to join

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
26		them to go to the county courthouse
27		to register to vote. That was a
28		primary ingredient. This is before
29	01:01:13	they organized a branch of the NACP.
30		Of course, they also felt that the
31		community of blacks in the county--
32		Hayward County was the county in
33		which we lived. The county was
34		Brownsville in which I was born.
35		Of course, they felt that it was
36		important to organize our black
37		citizens because they outnumbered the
38	01:01:42	white citizens about 3 to 1. If they
39		could marshal the black citizens in
40		greater strength, they could change
41		the quality of our lives to some
42		extent by exercising political power.
43		INTERVIEWER: Did you ever hear your
44		parents talk about organizing the
45		first NAACP chapter in Brownsville?
46		Did you ever hear them discuss it?
47		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes.
48	01:02:05	INTERVIEWER: What did they have to
49		say?
50		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, they said that

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
51		we needed to have people who would be
52		able to withstand the pressures which
53	01:02:14	they anticipated would be applied
54		when they started formally organizing
55		a group together instead of having an
56		individual who would join them on
57		certain occasions. In order to do
58		this, at that time, as I recall,
59		Walter White was executive secretary
60		of the NAACP. I would hear his name
61		frequently, saying we've got to get
62		Walter White to authorize a charter
63	01:02:55	for our unit. Then they rode away to
64		get enough information about the
65		number of people who would be
66		required.
67		There was much discussion when I was
68		a youngster. I suppose about this
69		time I was about 7 years of age,
70		having been reading The Crisis
71		because they subscribed to it. I was
72		well aware of what the NAACP was in
73	01:03:21	my own perspective.
74		INTERVIEWER: You were 9 years old
75		when you first became involved with

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
76		NAACP. What led you to be willing to
77		sell <i>The Crisis</i> , to sell
78	01:03:33	subscriptions?
79		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Both my parents
80		would teach us. My mother, there
81		were three of us, of which I was the
82		youngest. My mother or my father
83		virtually every evening before I went
84		to bed would read poetry, excerpts
85		from history, and events to my
86		sisters. I would be sitting on my
87		mother's lap. Oftentimes, in reading
88	01:04:01	poetry, she would quote to them
89		saying that this is a piece by
90		Langston Hughes, which was published
91		in <i>The Crisis Magazine</i> . Of course, I
92		wanted to know what <i>The Crisis</i> was
93		after having heard her say that so
94		often. She said, "You'll see it.
95		It's here on the desk," or wherever.
96		I would start looking for <i>The Crisis</i>
97		after hearing my mother mention the
98	01:04:24	fact that they actually were reading
99		excerpts from things that appeared
100		therein. That's how I learned about

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
101		The Crisis.
102		INTERVIEWER: How'd you come to sell
103	01:04:33	subscriptions?
104		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, I noticed they
105		had in some ad in the paper
106		indicating that subscriptions were
107		available. I said one day, "Can I
108		write to Roy Wilkins [phonetic]," who
109		was the editor of The Crisis, "and
110		ask him if I can sell The Crisis?"
111		After all, if you're going to have a
112		chapter of the NAACP, then--my
113	01:05:01	language wasn't as it is today, as
114		you can appreciate--they said, "By
115		all means, but you must write the
116		letter yourself." I said I'll do
117		that, so I did.
118		INTERVIEWER: Did he write back?
119		MS. ROXBOROUGH: I heard--I don't
120		know if it was from him--saying we
121		will be glad to have you sell The
122		Crisis Magazine. In any event, it
123		was typed, but it had his signature
124	01:05:23	on it and under his name it said
125		editor. I was so proud to get that

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
126		letter from the editor of The Crisis.
127		I was beside myself.
128	01:05:35	INTERVIEWER: I bet. Can you share
129		any details with us about what
130		happened to your father as a result
131		of his civil rights activities in
132		1939?
133		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, by 1939 the
134		branch had been organized. He was
135		the president and my mother was
136		secretary. During those intervening
137		years, my father had been arrested
138	01:06:01	and taken to jail a few times, but
139		not formally charged. He was usually
140		let go. However, one evening he was
141		brought home having been rather badly
142		beaten. The sheriff and a deputy--
143		anyway, they were law enforcement
144		officials--brought him home and
145		opened the front door, which wasn't
146		locked because in those days you
147		didn't lock your door until you went
148	01:06:32	to bed at night I think. I was home
149		alone. My mother was at a meeting.
150		They brought him in and dumped him on

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
151		the couch really. They said, "Take
152		care of your pa. He's been hurt. If
153	01:06:45	he had not had connections, he would
154		be in jail." I was of course
155		frightened. I was about 9 at the
156		time. When my mother came home, I
157		said to her these two men brought
158		them home and they said to me if he
159		did not have connections, he would be
160		in jail. I said what does that mean?
161		She looked at me. She said I guess I
162		should tell you the county coroner of
163	01:07:20	Haywood County--his name was John
164		Severe [phonetic]--was a doctor. She
165		said Dr. Severe probably asked them
166		not to do anything to your father
167		because he's your grandmother's half
168		brother. He was white and of course
169		my grandmother was black. She said
170		that Dr. Severe is widely respected
171		and they tried to be as accommodating
172		to him as they could.
173	01:07:53	INTERVIEWER: When you were a student
174		at Howard and later Washington Square
175		Campus of NYU in the '50s, you recall

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
176		how you and other students felt about
177		segregation and the lack of civil
178	01:08:03	rights that most African Americans
179		endured?
180		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, I recall that
181		we went to I think it's the Howard
182		Theater in Washington. You weren't
183		welcome in the other theaters as
184		such, except on a segregated basis.
185		We were concerned about that. This
186		was during World War II that I was at
187		Howard. During wartime, we were
188	01:08:38	concerned about our good and welfare
189		as students. Also, why couldn't we
190		go into many of the places, which
191		were still segregated in Washington?
192		There was much discussion about that
193		among us. We probably didn't do very
194		much, but periodically a few of us
195		would undertake to go into a
196		restaurant and be denied entrance.
197		But it never became an issue in the
198	01:09:11	sense of escalating into arrest at
199		that point in time. That was a
200		little early. This was 1943. From

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
201		'43 to '45, I was at Howard.
202		Of course we were also concerned
203	01:09:25	about our studies. There were a lot
204		of uniformed young men on the campus
205		as a part of the training program
206		that the federal government had at
207		that point in time.
208		INTERVIEWER: You joined the NAACP on
209		the staff in 1953 right before the
210		Brown decision and a little more than
211		a year and a half before Emmett Till
212		was murdered. Share with us the mood
213	01:09:51	of the NAACP staff and leadership,
214		and tell us about some of the
215		personalities you met.
216		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, I don't want
217		to give you a wandering answer. I
218		started work in the fall of 1953 to
219		do a special project for Gloster
220		Current, director of branches in
221		Baltimore, Maryland, which was one of
222		our largest branches in the country.
223	01:10:15	It also had as its president a Dr.
224		Lily M. Jackson, who was very well
225		known throughout the country because

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
226		she was very colorful, a very strong
227		and aggressive NAACP leader well
228	01:10:28	respected in Baltimore, and difficult
229		to please.
230		Gloster Current at a staff meeting
231		Introduced me as a temporary field
232		secretary, and that I was going to
233		Baltimore to do a six-week membership
234		campaign for the Baltimore branch.
235		Thurgood Marshall, who was sitting a
236		couple of seats away from me laughed
237		loudly and said, "Gloster, why are
238	01:10:58	you doing that to that girl? You
239		should be ashamed of yourself."
240		I did not know what that meant until
241		I got to Baltimore and found how
242		demanding and difficult it was to
243		work for Ms. Jackson, but I did. We
244		had a membership campaign which ran
245		for six weeks. Her daughter, Juanita
246		Jackson Mitchell, at that time, was a
247		first organizer of the youth program
248	01:11:27	for the national NAACP.
249		She worked with me and we survived
250		each other. I was baptized in that

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
251		particular branch experience and
252		worked. At that point, there was a
253	01:11:47	man who was the president of Parks
254		Sausage, which was an early black
255		corporation which was if not the
256		first of its kind, was one of the
257		first of its kind. One of the great
258		founders was a locally well-known man
259		whose income supposedly was derived
260		from numbers and that type of thing.
261		I became very friendly with those men
262		and was able to get them to support
263	01:12:18	the NAACP. Those were the extremes.
264		Ms. Jackson was a great church leader
265		and these men were on the other side
266		of the spectrum. They came together
267		for the purpose of supporting this
268		common cause.
269		INTERVIEWER: Would that have been
270		Henry Parks?
271		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, Henry G. Parks.
272		The man was William Adams.
273	01:12:38	INTERVIEWER: Little Willie.
274		MS. ROXBOROUGH: He was always very
275		nice to me. I always felt very

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
276		comfortable and safe with him and
277		Henry Parks. I was quite young then.
278	01:12:48	INTERVIEWER: Let me take you back to
279		the New York office and the people
280		you met there. Thurgood Marshall,
281		whom you just mentioned a moment ago,
282		obviously you knew of him because
283		you'd been active in the NAACP as a
284		young girl and in later years. What
285		were your impressions of him when you
286		met him?
287		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, first of all,
288		I had to get accustomed to his
289	01:13:09	language. I never heard so many cuss
290		words in my life, which was colorful.
291		Nobody minded. He was a wonderful
292		raconteur. He had a tremendous sense
293		of humor. I said this is Thurgood
294		Marshall?
295		He was also very effective in getting
296		you to do things and making difficult
297		subjects sound easy. He said we'll
298	01:13:41	be going to Hoxie, Arkansas. He said
299		you'll be able to do that. It'll be
300		a good first experience for you to

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
301		get to know the parents there and the
302		children. It'll be something that
303	01:13:54	you'll remember for years to come.
304		Of course, he was right, but it
305		wasn't pie like he claimed that it
306		would be. But he was good at getting
307		people to do things and also
308		inspiring them. He's an
309		exceptionally bright man, but it was
310		all beneath this demeanor of
311		roughness and semi-crudeness. It's a
312		manner he affected, and he did well
313	01:14:19	with making you comfortable with him.
314		INTERVIEWER: What were your
315		impressions of Roy Wilkins?
316		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Very elegant man,
317		one who was extremely similar,
318		concerned about the language and its
319		use, the syntax and sentence
320		structure. Of course, I learned much
321		about grammar and composition from
322		Roy Wilkins, who wrote beautifully.
323		He also was a very unpretentious
324	01:14:47	person. He did not want any
325		ceremony. He rode the subway, which

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
326		at that time was 5 cents going and
327		coming to work. He did not want
328		bodyguards or attendants.
329	01:15:00	
330		He was a purist when it came to
331		commitment to the association. He
332		wanted the staff to dedicate
333		themselves to achieving the goals
334		which were set out for them in terms
335		of their work and to at all times be
336		properly attired and achieve the
337		right demeanor to present the NAACP
338		as a wholesome, serious organization
339	01:15:29	who had intelligent people as its
340		representatives.
341		INTERVIEWER: Walter White?
342		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Walter White was
343		colorful. He enjoyed people. He
344		embraced people and he enjoyed the
345		social interaction. He also liked
346		the spotlight. Wilkins, on the other
347		hand, did not seek the spotlight. He
348		tolerated it, but Walter White
349	01:15:58	thrived in the spotlight. Also,
350		because of his people skills and his

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
351		ability to interact, he was able to
352		get certain information in terms of
353		doing his research. He was very
354	01:16:14	fair. He would be presumed to be
355		Caucasian, unless you would know
356		otherwise. He was successful in
357		going into places like Mississippi,
358		Georgia, and Arkansas and
359		investigating lynchings and other
360		incidents, and coming back without
361		having been assaulted or thrown in
362		jail. He enjoyed that kind of
363		activity and the fact that he could
364	01:16:41	live in these two worlds. It was
365		effective.
366		INTERVIEWER: A moment ago you
367		mentioned Hoxie, Arkansas, and that
368		took, you into contact with Daisy
369		Bates. What do you recall about
370		Daisy Bates?
371		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Ms. Bates was a very
372		dedicated civil rights worker, but
373		she also had a sense of style. She
374	01:17:03	enjoyed the spotlight as well. She
375		was not ever shy. At that time, the

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
376		governor of Arkansas was Orval
377		Faubus. He was known to be anti-
378		black, a segregationist, and was
379	01:17:24	determined to keep the schools in
380		Arkansas separate. Of course, Daisy
381		Bates on the other hand--this is in
382		the '50s now. This is just before
383		'56. This was 1954, when I first
384		went to Little Rock. Then I went
385		back two or three years after that
386		during this period leading up to the
387		integration of Central High.
388		Daisy was colorful, aggressive, and
389	01:17:54	she didn't mind the spotlight. She
390		was very talkative. She too was a
391		people person. She was able to get
392		branches and what we call the little
393		people and the simple people, many of
394		whom were very literate to follow and
395		come in to the NAACP. At this point
396		in time, we were focusing on
397		education to get their children, who
398		were students, a better education.
399	01:18:24	She was able to get many of them to
400		become active in the units in the

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
401		various cities and towns in Arkansas
402		who had never been active before.
403		INTERVIEWER: A moment ago, when you
404	01:18:38	and I were talking, we mentioned Rosa
405		Parks. What are your memories of
406		Rosa Parks?
407		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, Ms. Parks was
408		a very charming and gracious lady. I
409		think I said at one point laconic.
410		She was of few words, but when she
411		spoke, you listened to her. She was
412		very kind. In those days, when you
413		traveled as a field secretary as I
414	01:10:05	was, you would stay in the homes of
415		NAACP people in various parts of the
416		country. Usually they were officers
417		of the branch. Once when I first
418		went to Montgomery, I stayed with Ms.
419		Parks. This is before of course she
420		left Alabama. She and her husband
421		both were very pleasant and
422		comfortable people. They were
423		quietly militant. They weren't
424	01:19:34	bombastic. They didn't make a lot of
425		noise about it. They just would act.

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
426		At that point, she was still
427		secretary of the branch. She was
428		very determined that we should do
429	01:19:50	more with our youth. She was
430		focusing at that time a lot in
431		getting the youth in Montgomery to
432		organize and to take certain steps in
433		terms of preparing them to move
434		forward in the integration movement.
435		INTERVIEWER: Do you remember E.D.
436		Nixon, the president of Montgomery
437		Branch, a Pullman car porter.
438		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, I do.
439	01:20:14	INTERVIEWER: What do you recall
440		about him?
441		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, he was a very
442		dedicated person with a strong
443		commitment to civil rights. He was
444		committed to the NAACP and the way he
445		believed that we had to have an
446		integrated society if we as blacks
447		were to thrive and achieve in this
448		country. He was one of the few
449	01:20:40	voices who would withstand a lot of
450		the pressure in Alabama to take a

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
451		stand. He refused to give up the
452		membership roles of the NAACP in
453		Alabama when the Attorney General
454	01:20:56	demanded it. After that period, you
455		may recall, the NAACP was banned from
456		operating in Alabama.
457		INTERVIEWER: You had been at the
458		NAACP about a year and a half when
459		news comes that this boy, Emmett
460		Till, has been found dead in a river
461		in Mississippi. Do you remember
462		hearing the news about that and what
463		the reaction of the people in the
464	01:21:20	office here were?
465		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes. I remember.
466		It was considered in our office to be
467		a great tragedy because just before
468		then--I'm sorry I can't remember the
469		town--one of our branch presidents
470		had been killed in Mississippi.
471		INTERVIEWER: Gus Counc [phonetic].
472		MS. ROXBOROUGH: I think yeah. We
473		were in the throws of that. Because
474		the NAACP was encouraging them to
475	01:21:53	continue the voter education

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
476		registration campaign, this brought
477		about his death, the branch
478		presidents. This one child, as he
479	01:22:07	was presumed to be, was killed. It
480		was felt at that point that
481		Mississippi was completely going out
482		of bounds, and that nothing was
483		sacred or safe in the state. The
484		NAACP really had to stay behind its
485		people to help them and to keep them
486		from having to cave in or to become
487		too intimidated to keep the movement
488		going. If the NAACP didn't continue
489	01:22:42	to function, then we would not be
490		able to do anything about an Emmett
491		Till. This was the great concern,
492		whether this would stop the movement.
493		INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any
494		interaction with Mamie Bradley,
495		Emmett Till's mother?
496		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes. I arranged a
497		tour, I guess, of NAACP branches for
498		Ms. Bradley to visit. Actually, I
499	01:23:14	accompanied her for some of the time
500		to some of the cities, which we

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
501		arranged for her to visit. She was a
502		woman who was very articulate. As
503		she campaigned or visited the units
504	01:23:33	across the country I should say, she
505		grew more militant and more informed,
506		and became more involved. Then of
507		course she started speaking more
508		forcefully and making demand which
509		should be met in terms of acquisition
510		of civil rights and justice for her
511		son. She insisted, for example, on
512		opening the casket when he was
513		funeralized in Chicago, which was
514	01:24:06	quite an experience for one to have
515		to see him lying in the casket and
516		showing the evidences of him having
517		been killed.
518		INTERVIEWER: Before we began this
519		interview, you and I were talking
520		about Clarence Norris, one of the
521		Scottsboro Boys. Tell that story
522		once again, how you came to know him.
523		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Our office moved to
524	01:24:32	1790 Broadway, off Columbus Circle.
525		One day this man came into the office

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
526		and the switchboard operator called
527		me to say we have a man here who
528		needs help, which often that
529	01:24:45	happened. At that point I was I
530		think executive assistant to Roy
531		Wilkins or assistant director between
532		Mr. Wilkins and Dr. Marcel
533		[phonetic]. I went out to see this
534		man and it developed his name was
535		Clarence Norris.
536		INTERVIEWER: Did you recognize him?
537		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Not at first, but
538		then after he started talking I
539		realized
540	01:25:12	that I had seen his pictures, and
541		that he was one of the Scottsboro
542		Boys. He said--
543		INTERVIEWER: [Interposing] He was a
544		fugitive, was he not?
545		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, he was. He had
546		been for several years, so this was
547		not new. We knew this in the NAACP
548		that he had escaped.
549		INTERVIEWER: But you didn't know
550	01:25:30	where he was and didn't know he'd

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Line#	Timecode	Quote
551		walk into the office, did you?
552		MS. ROXBOROUGH: I didn't have the
553		faintest idea he was in the New York
554		area. This had to be I guess in the
555	01:25:40	late '60s. He said, "I went to the
556		old office years ago," meaning 20
557		West 40th Street, "and I met the lady
558		who was the office manager. He
559		described her. I said, "Ms. Branch?"
560		He said yes. He said, "If she's
561		here, she'll help me." I said, "You
562		need help?" He said yes. I called
563		Bobbie Branch and asked her if I
564		could bring him around to her. She
565	01:26:11	said yes. She remembered him.
566		Our officer manager then, as you
567		might recall, Bobbie Branch, embraced
568		people. She was very gregarious.
569		She welcomed him and said, "I'll help
570		you. What do you need?" He needed
571		some money of course. He said his
572		wife, I believe, that first time--I
573		think his wife was ill. She said,
574		"Well, let me see if Mr. Wilkins is
575	01:26:43	here and I'll take you over to meet

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
576		him." I told her he wasn't there,
577		but Dr. Marcel was.
578		He met Dr. Marcel and they talked.
579		Dr. Marcel was a very thoughtful--
580	01:26:54	[break in video] --if we had provided
581		some further assistance. Willie
582		Norris said, "Yes, I need assistance.
583		I want to clear my name before I
584		die." That's how this relationship
585		again with him was resumed after the
586		NAACP many, many years ago had been
587		instrumental in helping them until a
588		political problem arose where the
589		communist party became involved and
590	01:27:28	the NAACP stepped aside. That was
591		when he was a much younger man,
592		shortly after having been arrested
593		for the rape to begin with.
594		INTERVIEWER: He escaped and came to
595		New York City, and now he's coming to
596		the NAACP and making a request for
597		assistance for pardon. How did that
598		follow through?
599		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Actually, for money
600		it was his first request. When he

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
601	01:27:50	met and talked with John Marcel,
602		Marcel said we want to see how we can
603		provide some meaningful assistance
604		for you, meaning to try to get him
605	01:28:07	settled into a job and whatever. He
606		said, "I want to clear my name before
607		I die." That's really when our
608		general counsel--not that visit--but
609		it was arranged to give him some
610		money and for him to return. When he
611		returned it was then he talked
612		without general counsel.
613		Mr. Wilkins had spoken to Nathaniel
614		Jones, who was our general counsel at
615	01:28:35	that point, and asked if you would
616		join Wilkins when Mr. Norris came
617		back into the office. From that
618		point on, Nathaniel Jones became the
619		person who was exploring how our
620		legal department could help him. He
621		assigned one of the bright, young
622		attorneys, whose name was James
623		Meyerson [phonetic], to work on the
624		issue of getting a full pardon for
625	01:29:04	Willie Norris.

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
626		INTERVIEWER: Eventually Meyerson and
627		Wilkins and--
628		MS. ROXBOROUGH: [Interposing] Jones.
629		INTERVIEWER: Jones and Norris go to
630	01:29:13	Alabama and secure his pardon.
631		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Meet the governor
632		and the attorney general and get a
633		full pardon from then for Willie.
634		INTERVIEWER: That's a wonderful,
635		wonderful story.
636		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Following that, the
637		book was written, The Last of the
638		Scottsboro Boys.
639		INTERVIEWER: Many young people
640	01:29:32	became involved in the NAACP through
641		youth council. For a time you worked
642		as field secretary and director of
643		education. What were your goals for
644		the programs that involved young
645		people?
646		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, first I should
647		say I was never director of
648		education. June Shagaloff was. I
649		was director of a lot of things. I
650	01:29:50	can't remember all of the jobs I had.

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
651		Every five years I would transfer to
652		a new job. I was an assistant
653		director to the executive and a
654		director, and then finally director
655	01:30:07	of operations and director of
656		programs, under which education fell
657		at that point. I'm sorry; I forgot
658		the other part of the question.
659		INTERVIEWER: What were the goals
660		that you worked on that involved
661		young people? What were the programs
662		that you worked on that involved
663		young people?
664		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, the programs
665	01:30:29	which involved young people and which
666		I worked early on were ACT-SO, which
667		is the Academic, Cultural, Scientific
668		Olympics. They subsequently added
669		Afro to the title. That was for the
670		purpose of developing academic
671		excellence and general achievement as
672		far as youth were concerned. It
673		could be in any of 24 fields--arts
674		and science, and literary--in
675	01:31:11	general, and the youth were organized

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
676		on a local level according to the
677		program.
678		This program was founded by Benjamin
679		Hooks and Vernon Jarrett, who was a
680	01:31:24	newspaper reporter from Chicago.
681		Benjamin became the successor to Roy
682		Wilkins. We organized units across
683		the country such similar to youth
684		units with an advisor for ACT-SO.
685		The idea was to recruit those who
686		showed promise locally. They do have
687		local competitions, then regional
688		competitions, then national
689		competitions. The program is still
690	01:31:50	going strong today. There are some
691		600 ACT-SO units across the country
692		which are actively engaged. One here
693		in metropolitan New York, where we
694		are at the moment, is the largest one
695		because there are some 17 branches
696		who participate.
697		INTERVIEWER: If you count the local
698		branch participation, this is
699		probably the largest African American
700	01:32:19	talent-based scholarship program in

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
701		the country.
702		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, and the most
703		enduring. Scholarships are given;
704		rewards are given; medals are given
705	01:32:29	at the national convention. We have
706		had such people as I was trying to
707		think of some people who have come
708		through the ACT-SO program. I think
709		there's a young man who was the
710		conductor of a symphony who appears
711		at Lincoln Center, who was an ACT-SO
712		graduate. We have others. I don't
713		want to try to name names because
714		I'll leave out some who--
715	01:32:59	INTERVIEWER: [Interposing] They're a
716		distinguished group of achievers.
717		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, absolutely.
718		INTERVIEWER: A moment ago you talked
719		about Roy Wilkins succeeding Walter
720		White. Walter White died.
721		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, he did.
722		INTERVIEWER: Roy Wilkins was named
723		to succeed him. Do you remember any
724		discussion whether or not Roy Wilkins
725	01:33:19	should have succeeded him or was

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
726		there another candidate?
727		MS. ROXBOROUGH: No, not at that
728		time. Walter White died in 1955
729		suddenly. He had been ill and on
730		leave. He had
731	01:33:39	a leave of absence, Walter White, and
732		Roy Wilkins had been serving as
733		administrator. In his absence as
734		executive, he took over the duties of
735		executive secretary. When Walter
736		White died while on leave, Roy
737		Wilkins--after the funeral of course--
738		-at the next board meeting I believe
739		it was, at the spring board meeting,
740		was named his successor. There had
741	01:34:09	been some earlier discussions prior
742		to this. When Walter White had a
743		leave of absence before, he went
744		around the world I believe a few
745		years before that. There was some
746		discussion then about whether Roy
747		Wilkins would be his successor.
748		INTERVIEWER: Succeeding Roy Wilkins
749		was Benjamin Hooks.
750		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes.

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
751	01:34:30	INTERVIEWER: Describe him.
752		MS. ROXBOROUGH: He was a Baptist
753		minister, and a dramatic Baptist
754		minister. His oratorical skills were
755		great. He enjoyed demonstrating as
756	01:34:45	he spoke. He inspired our
757		constituents. Whereas Roy Wilkins
758		was an intellectual-type speaker who
759		would lay the facts out in elegant
760		prose, Mr. Hooks demonstrated his
761		speeches frequently by his physical
762		activities at the podium. He used
763		shall I say the gospel approach in
764		terms of inspiring our constituents.
765		He was effective. He got the kind of
766	01:35:19	visceral response which people enjoy
767		during the course of speeches. He
768		could inspire them also not just to
769		respond to him, but to become
770		actively engaged in the work of the
771		NAACP.
772		He kept our constituents committed in
773		the units across the country. He
774		tried to travel as much as he could
775		because they are the connection

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
776	01:35:43	between the national office and the
777		constituents. If they aren't
778		actively engaged in the 50 states
779		across the country, then the NAACP's
780		presence is not being brought to the
781	01:35:55	fore as it should be and to show how
782		forceful it can be. It is the only
783		organization of its kind which has
784		shall I say 1,700 units in the 50
785		states for some 500 youth and college
786		units.
787		INTERVIEWER: Why do you think it is
788		that the NAACP's accomplishments and
789		achievements are not as well known as
790		one would think they'd be? After
791	01:36:21	all, the organization's 100 years old
792		plus, and has a remarkable record of
793		achievement and accomplishment. Yet
794		it doesn't seem to be as well known
795		as one would think it would be. Why
796		do you think that is?
797		MS. ROXBOROUGH: I have no idea
798		except that we as a people don't
799		focus on our history and our
800		heritage. The NAACP was here before

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
801		most all of us
802	01:36:50	were here at this point. As it has
803		achieved many accomplishments,
804		actually, it has affected the order
805		of life for all of us, whatever color
806		we are. What is more for our
807	01:37:07	reaching than the interstate travel
808		bill, for example, the desegregation
809		of the public schools or the public
810		accommodations laws where everybody
811		could get access to places? What
812		happens I believe is we forget our
813		history.
814		We live in the period and then we
815		take for granted what there is, and
816		do not retain it as an achievement
817	01:37:36	which had been caused by the hard
818		work of those who came on before us.
819		We don't really as a people in this
820		country--not just the black people--
821		we don't really focus on our own
822		American history, what has happened
823		at various periods, and the
824		transitions through which we have
825		gone. We forget. Then we take for

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
826		granted this is my right. It's here
827	01:38:05	now. We don't think about how it was
828		in the past. The NAACP has been
829		actually forgotten a lot of times
830		when it was the only instrument which
831		was able to achieve certain things
832	01:38:20	which we now enjoy. I don't have an
833		answer.
834		INTERVIEWER: I don't either. Let me
835		mention some organizations, some of
836		which have come and gone in the span
837		of the NAACP's history. Give me your
838		impressions of them. The Southern
839		Christian Leadership Conference.
840		MS. ROXBOROUGH: SCLC?
841		INTERVIEWER: SCLC.
842	01:38:41	MS. ROXBOROUGH: My impression?
843		Well, I think the SCLC was an
844		effective organization in the sense
845		that it brought to the fore in the
846		minds of the public that the
847		religious leaders in this country
848		were engaged in and active in terms
849		of passing the word of our civil
850		rights and providing inspiration and

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
851		leadership to their congregations
852		throughout the country.
853	01:39:15	We should be mindful and become
854		engaged in this struggle, and we can
855		do by showing ourselves and lending
856		our voices. SCLC was flexible
857		because its leaders could go from one
858	01:39:31	community to the other and call
859		together the religious leaders in a
860		given community to provide a voice
861		for a particular cause and a
862		particular action. I think it was
863		helpful in that respect in terms of
864		setting before us actively through
865		the pulpits what it was we needed to
866		do and what we must do.
867		INTERVIEWER: What about the Student
868	01:39:57	Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, my
869		old organization, SNCC?
870		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes. Well you know
871		more about that than I do. I
872		certainly think that the sit-ins were
873		extraordinary in the sense that they
874		opened the eyes of the old folks, the
875		adults in the country. This I can do

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
876		also, the simple act of walking into
877		a café or a 10-cent store as they had
878	01:40:23	then, lunch counter and sitting there
879		and saying I'm not going to move.
880		That's something all of us could do.
881		The students demonstrated that this
882		is something that had not been done,
883	01:40:35	and that we're going to do it. They
884		did and it was impressive. It
885		inspired us as older people to really
886		go out and demonstrate. If our youth
887		can do it, our children can do it,
888		then why won't we do it?
889		INTERVIEWER: What about the Congress
890		of Racial Equality, CORE?
891		MS. ROXBOROUGH: CORE was a little
892		more intellectual. It had an
893		excellent
894	01:40:57	leader in James Farmer, who formally
895		worked for the NAACP as our program
896		director. Many of these leaders by
897		the way of the other organizations
898		had gotten their grounding and their
899		foundations in the NAACP, such as
900		Martin Luther King, Jr. did. His

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
901		father had been active in the NAACP
902		before him. The CORE was more
903		integrated than the other groups were
904	01:41:28	in terms of racial integration. It
905		appealed to a younger group in
906		general, students and young adults,
907		and they were concerned about
908		demonstrating in black and white the
909	01:41:48	acquisition of the goals they wanted
910		to achieve. They had certainly an
911		impact--I believe CORE did--in terms
912		of encouraging non-blacks to
913		participate actively in the civil
914		rights movement.
915		INTERVIEWER: What about the Black
916		Panther Party?
917		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, the Black
918		Panther Party I believe had the
919	01:42:10	energy and the ambition, and a sense
920		in my judgment of misdirection
921		eventually. It started as a militant
922		group wanting to use its power and
923		apply it actively. Then it veered
924		towards separation and separatism.
925		Black power became an instrument, in

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
926		my judgment, to shall I say encourage
927		and focus on black separatism, which
928		I believe and am convinced was then
929	01:42:47	self-defeating and would be today.
930		INTERVIEWER: Back to the NAACP for a
931		moment, I think many people think of
932		the NAACP primarily as a legal
933		organization. It's an organization
934	01:42:59	that achieved change through legal
935		means through the courts. Do you
936		think this fairly characterizes the
937		NAACP?
938		MS. ROXBOROUGH: No.
939		INTERVIEWER: Why not?
940		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, one of the
941		first executive orders that President
942		Roosevelt--not one of the first ones,
943		but an executive order that President
944	01:43:22	Roosevelt issued about the arms
945		services, the preliminary one, was
946		done as a result of the NAACP's
947		lobbying and campaigning and the fact
948		that Ms. Roosevelt was on our board
949		of directors. Walter White and Ms.
950		Roosevelt had a good relationship,

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
951		and it was possible to get Ms.
952		Roosevelt to work with Walter White
953		and Phillip Randolph, and to get
954	01:43:54	President Roosevelt to understand
955		that an executive order desegregating
956		federal installations should be
957		issued. Of course that wasn't
958		integration, but it was a first step.
959	01:44:12	That was done without any legal
960		action.
961		The first civil rights law was
962		achieved primarily through lobbying
963		and under the aegis of Clarence
964		Mitchell, the Washington Bureau.
965		Again, that historic was passed by
966		congress as a result of lobbying. It
967		was within the confines of reality,
968		but it wasn't an illegal act. I
969	01:44:40	think the public accommodations are a
970		lot of the same things. There are so
971		many things which widely affect our
972		society, which the NAACP inspired,
973		led and accomplished, which were not
974		legal actions; such actions as far as
975		litigation is concerned.

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
976		INTERVIEWER: Again, this may be
977		redundant. Why is it that many
978		people think of the NAACP as
979	01:45:06	primarily a legal organization and
980		these other activities that you've
981		mentioned aren't associated in the
982		public mind with the NAACP?
983		MS. ROXBOROUGH: I suspect one of the
984	01:45:15	reasons is our lawyers appeared
985		before the Supreme Court so many
986		times. Former general counsel Robert
987		Carter had made some 36 appearances
988		before the Supreme Court and won
989		about 30 of those cases. Before
990		that, Thurgood Marshall, before he
991		became a justice when he was NAACP
992		counsel, appeared before the Supreme
993		Court. I can't remember the exact
994	01:45:45	number now, but it was more than two
995		dozen times and of course most of
996		those cases were won. This of
997		course, the publicity of these cases,
998		set in the minds of people that legal
999		action is responsible for our
1000		progress in this country, and to an

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1001		important extent it is. Without the
1002		grass roots lobbying and without the
1003		meticulous work of putting before our
1004	01:46:22	congressman both on local, state, and
1005		federal levels the need to enact
1006		certain laws and the pressure from
1007		the grass roots, we would not be
1008		where we are today.
1009	01:46:36	INTERVIEWER: Skipping to another
1010		personality, do you think Malcolm X
1011		had any effect during his life on the
1012		NAACP or civil rights generally
1013		speaking? Did his death or his
1014		murder have an impact on the NAACP,
1015		particularly in northern cities,
1016		northern communities?
1017		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, this is one
1018		person's opinion. I think certainly
1019	01:47:04	he demonstrated the fact that
1020		discipline could be achieved in
1021		leadership. He exercised discipline
1022		in the sense of the followers who
1023		became committed to the movement
1024		which he lead believed and committed
1025		themselves to conforming the

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1026		guidelines and expectations. These
1027		were in so many instances young men
1028		who had been street people, who had
1029	01:47:40	no commitment as such except to
1030		survive the best way they could for
1031		themselves. They became part of a
1032		cohesive group, interacting with each
1033		other, and willing to help each
1034	01:47:52	other, and then project this on to
1035		the community. I think that's one
1036		excellent cause he served.
1037		I believe that his death did have a
1038		serious impact because of the fact
1039		that it represented the death of a
1040		leader who had a following over whom
1041		he had shall I say such vast
1042		experience that they could be
1043		effectively banned together to
1044	01:48:27	achieve progress by folks who have
1045		been formally on the streets and who
1046		have formally not been engaged in any
1047		meaningful activity. This was
1048		important example it seems to me for
1049		those of us in civil rights, not that
1050		we agree with all of his philosophy.

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1051		INTERVIEWER: Do you think you could
1052		feel a measurable impact that he had,
1053		particularly after his death, that
1054	01:48:56	there were people within the NAACP
1055		perhaps who said perhaps in some ways
1056		we should emulate his dedication, his
1057		conviction?
1058		MS. ROXBOROUGH: I think there were
1059	01:49:08	some people like that. Measurably
1060		there were, especially among our
1061		youth. They felt that he had the
1062		right idea in terms of his discipline
1063		and his rhetoric, which became more
1064		bland before he died than it was when
1065		he began when he was preaching almost
1066		anarchy at one point in time. He
1067		modified his position to develop
1068		pressure on what he called the power
1069	01:49:44	structure by threatening and also
1070		showing that he represented a force n
1071		the community--in the society I
1072		should say, not just the community.
1073		I think this impressed especially our
1074		younger adults and youth in the
1075		NAACP. You had a reaction that they

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1076		believed that he was on the right
1077		track or he's a good example for us
1078		to follow.
1079	01:50:16	INTERVIEWER: You were married to an
1080		attorney who worked with the NAACP to
1081		effect change. How did his work
1082		construct your lives together?
1083		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, before I knew
1084	01:50:28	him, John, he was Chairman of the
1085		Legal and Redress Committee of
1086		Detroit Branch, having been born in
1087		Michigan and reared in Michigan.
1088		When I first went to Detroit to work
1089		with the NAACP branch there and
1090		Arthur Johnson as executive
1091		secretary, we were organizing the
1092		first Freedom Fund and Life
1093		Membership dinner.
1094	01:50:56	At that point, the Legal and Redress
1095		Committee of the Detroit Branch was
1096		very active, and they had won two or
1097		three cases in Michigan before the
1098		Michigan Supreme Court involving
1099		housing and education. John was the
1100		lead lawyer in those particular

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1101		cases. It was after then that I got
1102		to know him. I always felt that the
1103		Detroit Branch was an excellent
1104	01:51:30	example of the kind of activities and
1105		accomplishments that an NAACP branch
1106		should undertake.
1107		Of course, the work of the legal
1108		committee actually got commendations
1109	01:51:46	from the national office and Thurgood
1110		Marshall, who was then our general
1111		counsel. That kind of thing
1112		impressed me about the importance of
1113		having a varied scope of activity in
1114		the civil rights movement. Of
1115		course, he on the other hand was
1116		supportive of the Detroit Branch's
1117		other activities. We were, shall I
1118		say, compatible in the sense, and we
1119	01:52:12	share an interest in terms of civil
1120		rights. That wasn't the reason we
1121		married, but that was one of the
1122		reasons of the common interest in the
1123		early days.
1124		INTERVIEWER: Thinking about the
1125		Detroit Branch from your perspective

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1126		and what you've seen over the years,
1127		what is it that makes branch A
1128		effective, efficient, hard-fighting
1129	01:52:34	and so on; and branch B lackluster,
1130		sleepy, do-nothing?
1131		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Its leadership. I
1132		believe it's the leadership. The
1133		extent which your leadership
1134	01:52:45	inspires, the board, and the members
1135		will be the extent to which they
1136		respond and become creative and are
1137		inspired to become creative and do
1138		things in a more positive and
1139		forceful nature. I think the key is
1140		in the kind of leadership branches
1141		have across the country.
1142		INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you to talk
1143		about some occasions in the past over
1144	01:53:12	time when the leadership of the NAACP
1145		has faced real challenges or
1146		difficult circumstances. I'm
1147		thinking about the barring of the
1148		NAACP in Alabama, the lawsuit against
1149		the NAACP in Mississippi because of
1150		the boycott. Let's talk about those

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1151		things. How did the people here
1152		respond to that?
1153		MS. ROXBOROUGH: When you say here,
1154		are you talking--
1155	01:53:34	
1156		INTERVIEWER: [Interposing] I mean
1157		New York, in the New York Office.
1158		MS. ROXBOROUGH: About the national
1159		office.
1160	01:53:37	INTERVIEWER: National office.
1161		MS. ROXBOROUGH: First of all, they
1162		were defiant, one. We are not going
1163		to give those membership lists up.
1164		That was the first thing. Second,
1165		we've got to find a way to work
1166		around this and continue our work.
1167		We had employed recently Ms. Ruby
1168		Hurley [phonetic] who was sent to
1169		Alabama to organize units of the
1170	01:54:05	NAACP in the southeast region, which
1171		is the confederate states. Ms.
1172		Hurley had been in Alabama not too
1173		long--I guess probably less than a
1174		year--doing this and organizing units
1175		headquartered in Birmingham, as I

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1176		recall.
1177		She moved after the NAACP was banned.
1178		The office there was moved to
1179		Atlanta, but as a result of that, she
1180	01:54:36	and some other NAACP volunteer
1181		workers would visit these states in
1182		which the NAACP had been banned,
1183		Alabama and I forget the other state.
1184		There were two states whose
1185	01:54:59	membership roles were taken, would
1186		not be given up I should say. In any
1187		case, the thing I wanted to say is
1188		Ms. Hurley and other volunteers went
1189		almost surreptitiously into
1190		communities to work, again,
1191		memberships with the NAACP and to
1192		organize certain things like getting
1193		petitions signed and to get them to
1194		get organized to go to the polls to
1195	01:55:32	register, go to the courthouse or
1196		wherever to register and vote.
1197		It was done under the cover of night
1198		so to speak without the banner of the
1199		NAACP in the daytime having these
1200		meetings. It made it shall I say

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1201		dangerous. Ms. Hurley was threatened
1202		many times. Her life was threatened
1203		and she was in danger doing this, but
1204		she was a
1205	01:55:56	spokesperson who was able to get
1206		these groups in these various states
1207		in Alabama and Georgia and
1208		Mississippi to come together to agree
1209		to do certain things in terms of
1210	01:56:09	continuing the fight for civil rights
1211		in their communities.
1212		INTERVIEWER: What about when the
1213		local leadership would be under
1214		attack, as in the case of Medgar
1215		Evers assassination? What was the
1216		New York Headquarters' response?
1217		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, its response
1218		was to send people into Mississippi
1219		to fill the void; actually, to
1220		reassure
1221	01:56:30	the people that the NAACP was
1222		continuing its fight with Medgar's
1223		death. This was just even more
1224		important that we demonstrate that we
1225		were not intimidated by the fact that

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1226		he was killed.
1227		Actually, his brother took over the
1228		position of field director for the
1229		State of Mississippi and he's still
1230		there in Mississippi. He eventually
1231	01:56:57	became Mayor of Philadelphia I
1232		believe it was, Charles. This is the
1233		kind of thing the NAACP was forced to
1234		do in order to make sure its
1235		constituents had examples of our
1236	01:57:14	continuing the work of the
1237		association one way or the other.
1238		INTERVIEWER: What was Medgar Evers
1239		like? You surely knew him.
1240		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes, I worked with
1241		Medgar. I was sent to Mississippi in
1242		the '60s to interview farmers who had
1243		been denied credit, who were
1244		subjected to economic reprisals
1245		because of their NAACP activities,
1246	01:57:41	continuing to go to the polls to
1247		register and vote.
1248		Medgar and I, as a field director, he
1249		would drive to the various places
1250		because that's the best way to get

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1251		there. We went into the Delta area
1252		to interview the farmers so I could
1253		take these reports back to New York
1254		to see how we could help them to
1255		survive the winter. Being denied
1256	01:58:08	credit over the winter season, it
1257		meant they had no means of getting
1258		food because that was the tradition.
1259		You get credit for the next four
1260		months, and then when the spring came
1261	01:58:20	you were able to start planting and
1262		you would be able to start paying the
1263		bills again. All of that credit was
1264		cut off.
1265		We traveled. I guess we spent at
1266		that point about two weeks doing
1267		this. One particularly difficult
1268		time when our farmers were being
1269		economic reprisals, we had had two
1270		branch presidents who had been killed
1271	01:58:52	just before this particular time. It
1272		was difficult to believe that these
1273		people would continue to carry on
1274		like this because the situation was
1275		so oppressive in Mississippi. We

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1276		were driving one night and I had
1277		taken off my shoes and felt something
1278		on the floor which was cold. I said
1279		to Medgar, "What is this? Maybe I
1280		can move it." He said, "Well, that's
1281	01:59:22	my shotgun you have your feet on."
1282		Of course my feet flew up. But this
1283		is just to give you an idea of the
1284		sense of the environment.
1285		We would drive each night from
1286	01:59:35	wherever we went, Yazoo or whatever
1287		town, into which we'd gone at night
1288		again--not to further endanger the
1289		farmers and the people who were being
1290		subjected to these reprisals--and
1291		drive back to Mound Bayou, which is a
1292		black town in that area, in which
1293		there was a motel. We would go back
1294		to stay at that motel and then start
1295		out the next day, planning to arrive
1296	02:00:03	in sort of the evening to visit the
1297		farmers. This is the way in which
1298		you had to function in those days out
1299		of Jackson where you walked around in
1300		the daytime and did your interviews.

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1301		Does that answer the question?
1302		INTERVIEWER: Yes, it does.
1303		MALE VOICE: Pardon me before you
1304		move on to the next one. It's been
1305		an hour, so I need to start a new
1306	02:00:26	tape. Do either of you want a glass
1307		of water or anything? Can we get
1308		something for you?
1309		INTERVIEWER: No, but I could go to
1310		the bathroom. What a memory. I
1311	02:00:39	don't remember what I did yesterday.
1312		[END AFC2010039_CRHP0002_MV1.WMV]
1313		[START AFC2010039_CRHP0002_MV2.WMV]
1314		INTERVIEWER: --them on first
1315		meeting?
1316		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, I really met
1317		them at first at a meeting. Ms.
1318		Bates would plan to have them gather
1319		not necessarily an NAACP meeting as
1320		such, but just to meet with them, to
1321	01:00:23	talk with them, and I would say to
1322		inspire them and to sort of inject
1323		discipline. To keep them together in
1324		other words. They were individual
1325		personalities. I did not get to know

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1326		them well. I only knew them as a
1327		group in the course of the meetings
1328		because they were carefully tended in
1329		the sense of for their own security.
1330		This was year before the Central High
1331	01:00:59	School began, the actual process of
1332		integration. I forget the year, but
1333		it was '55 or '56. Then they
1334		actually entered the next year in the
1335		fall.
1336	01:01:18	The thing that impressed me was the
1337		quiet determination of Ernest Green--
1338		I remembered him--who later became a
1339		member of the NAACP Board of
1340		Directors. Another one whom I
1341		remember is Minnie Jean Brown, who
1342		had a special assertive personality.
1343		INTERVIEWER: Yes, she did.
1344		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Some of them were
1345		quiet. Others, they were sort of
1346	01:01:45	followers in this sense. I'm sure
1347		they had their own individual
1348		personalities outside of the group,
1349		but those are the ones I remember
1350		most particularly as being responsive

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1351		and actively ready to go forward with
1352		the process of going to school.
1353		The others, I wouldn't say they were
1354		followers, I would just say they were
1355		engaged in a quieter fashion. They
1356	01:02:20	were less vociferous or less active
1357		in the process, except that they
1358		wanted to finish their schooling.
1359		They all had that.
1360		MALE VOICE: Hold on, one moment.
1361	01:02:35	Okay, we can continue. Thank you.
1362		INTERVIEWER: Let me ask you about
1363		two women from South Carolina whom
1364		you may have met, Septima Clark and
1365		Bernice Robinson. They're cousins I
1366		believe.
1367		MS. ROXBOROUGH: I met them, but I
1368		didn't really know them, except by
1369		reputation that they were very active
1370		and engaged. But I really didn't
1371	01:02:59	know them.
1372		INTERVIEWER: What about Ella Baker,
1373		who worked at the NAACP?
1374		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes. After she
1375		worked for the NAACP is when I met

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1376		her because she was a very forceful
1377		personality. She became focused on
1378		our youth if you recall and actually
1379		was involved in the founding of the
1380		Student Nonviolent Coordinating
1381	01:03:22	Committee. She worked in our
1382		Department of Branches before I came
1383		on board to the NAACP. She spent
1384		considerable time traveling around
1385		the country organizing branches,
1386	01:03:33	eliciting memberships, developing
1387		membership campaigns, and instructing
1388		our branches how to do that. She was
1389		a very forceful woman. I was always
1390		impressed by her determination and
1391		her aggressiveness.
1392		At the time when I first started to
1393		work for the NAACP, you didn't have
1394		that many women who were working in
1395		levels up beyond the support levels
1396	01:04:06	in the work arena, period--in other
1397		organizations as well. Most of the
1398		females were assistants or
1399		secretaries or that type of thing in
1400		the NAACP. For example, Lucille

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1401		Black who came in at age 17 as a
1402		secretary, she worked her way to
1403		become membership secretary it was
1404		called then of the NAACP. Bobbie
1405		Branch came in as a clerk wound up as
1406	01:04:37	office manager. Obviously, in NAACP
1407		in the legal department, there were
1408		always one or two females. Then when
1409		I came on board, one of the few
1410		female executives was June Shagaloff,
1411	01:04:55	who was a field director in
1412		education, who traveled and worked
1413		providing information and support for
1414		the legal department and our legal
1415		programs.
1416		INTERVIEWER: Not a woman, but Jack
1417		Greenberg. What do you remember
1418		about Jack Greenberg?
1419		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, he was a young
1420		lawyer. He was on board about a year
1421	01:05:18	before I came on. I got to know him
1422		quite well. Very active. We were
1423		contemporaries in terms of age also.
1424		We were about the same age. He
1425		worked well with Thurgood Marshall.

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1426		I believe they were called either
1427		associate or assistant counsels
1428		during that period, the young lawyers
1429		who were brought in.
1430		He was focusing a lot on the
1431	01:05:48	education cases. That was one of the
1432		things that Jack focused on during
1433		the period when they were putting
1434		together cases in the various
1435		communities--about six or eight
1436	01:06:00	communities primarily in the south or
1437		as far west as Kansas, which
1438		eventually became the group of cases
1439		led by Brown to go up through the
1440		process on to the Supreme Court.
1441		INTERVIEWER: What about Robert
1442		Carter? What do you remember of him
1443		in those days?
1444		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Yes. Well, Bob was
1445		the associate I guess. He was a
1446	01:06:27	second attorney to Thurgood, who was
1447		still NAACP counsel at this point
1448		when I came on board and remained so
1449		for the next few years. Bob was the
1450		quieter one, but he also was the one

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1451		who reached out in the communities
1452		and spent a lot of time and effort
1453		putting together the South Carolina
1454		cases, for example. He eventually
1455		pled in a couple of instances during
1456	01:07:05	those trials before the Supreme
1457		Court.
1458		He has as wonderful time. He was
1459		meticulous and concerned about
1460		amassing the information in an
1461	01:07:18	orderly way. He spent a lot of times
1462		questioning and really you got the
1463		feeling that he was being too
1464		meticulously difficult, but it wasn't
1465		at all. He had this commitment to
1466		make sure that nothing was left
1467		untuned and no I was undotted. As a
1468		result, it became sort of laborious
1469		sometimes, the work for the people
1470		that were working for him; that is,
1471	01:07:47	the assistants and the researchers.
1472		In the final analysis it was what had
1473		to be done. It was not easy, but he
1474		was willing to put himself into the
1475		task of getting this part of the work

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1476		done.
1477		INTERVIEWER: Do you want to stop
1478		that? Can you hear the talking down
1479		there?
1480		MALE VOICE: Yeah, I can hear it.
1481	01:08:10	[break in video]
1482		MALE VOICE: Cameras rolling. Ready?
1483		INTERVIEWER: A moment ago, you
1484		mentioned that when you began working
1485		here at the NAACP the employment sort
1486	01:08:23	of paralleled what we saw in the
1487		larger society. That is, women in
1488		clerical roles and men in the
1489		executive roles. Over time I guess
1490		that's changed, but it also strikes
1491		me that it contrasts with a different
1492		picture in the branch system. In the
1493		branch system, women are presidents.
1494		Women do serve in roles that maybe
1495		they weren't expected to serve in.
1496	01:08:45	How has the situation changed over
1497		time?
1498		MS. ROXBOROUGH: You mean in terms of
1499		the--
1500		INTERVIEWER: [Interposing] Of women

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1501		in the NAACP.
1502		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, actually when
1503		you think about women's contributions
1504		to the NAACP, without the women we
1505		wouldn't have an NAACP. The person
1506	01:09:03	who was responsible for generating
1507		the organizing meeting was a woman.
1508		Of course, ever since then we've had
1509		women in key roles--not in the
1510		majority, but in the very key roles
1511	01:09:19	which were responsible for the
1512		evolution of the NAACP.
1513		I think in terms of people like Daisy
1514		Lampkin, who was a member of our
1515		national board from Pittsburgh; she
1516		traveled around the country garnering
1517		memberships and helping to organize
1518		branches. That was back in the '30s
1519		and '40s before it became fashionable
1520		or popular for women to travel. You
1521	01:09:52	have women who subsequently held
1522		positions in the NAACP nationally as
1523		program directors and as leaders of
1524		various divisions. For example,
1525		Althea Simmons actually succeeded

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1526		Clarence Mitchell as head of the
1527		Washington Bureau. We had Constance
1528		Baker Motley in the legal department
1529		who eventually moved up to the
1530		leadership role in the NAACP Legal
1531	01:10:28	Defense Fund subsequently.
1532		Women had no defined place in the
1533		organization and Ms. Frances Hooks,
1534		the wife of Benjamin Hooks, founded
1535		when WIN, Women in the NAACP, which
1536	01:10:45	gave them a structure in which to
1537		function and reach out and do the
1538		things in the NAACP that they had
1539		been doing, but in an organized and
1540		recognizable fashion. You wound up
1541		having Margaret Bush Wilson become
1542		the second female to be Chairman of
1543		the Board of the NAACP. Then the
1544		vice chair has developed Roslyn
1545		Brock, who has succeeded you as
1546	01:11:14	chair.
1547		As a matter of fact, I don't know if
1548		you know this in your research of the
1549		NAACP, but the 19 march in New York
1550		here in protest to lynching, the

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1551		silent march, the research in
1552		Arkansas of the lynchings and then on
1553		to Georgia was done by a female. She
1554		brought the report back for Dr.
1555		Dubois, who was involved at that
1556	01:11:52	point in terms of amassing the
1557		information, which was the basis on
1558		which that march was constructed and
1559		held as a result of that report she
1560		brought back in 1918. The march
1561	01:12:10	subsequently was held in 1919 after
1562		the information on the lynching and
1563		the murders that she had investigated
1564		was submitted really through our
1565		Washington Bureau to the federal
1566		government. It was felt that nothing
1567		would be done, so this march evolved.
1568		Of course Dr. Du Bois was given the
1569		greater publicity for having been the
1570		leader. Actually, the responsibility
1571	01:12:40	of putting that together and causing
1572		it to happen was the report done by a
1573		female.
1574		INTERVIEWER: Did you have any
1575		interaction with Dr. Du Bois?

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1576		MS. ROXBOROUGH: No, no. He was even
1577		before my time.
1578		INTERVIEWER: I mean do you ever run
1579		into him? You both live in New York.
1580		I know it's a big city.
1581	01:12:57	MS. ROXBOROUGH: I met him and had
1582		written him for a copy of one of his
1583		documents, one of his papers. He
1584		wrote back saying he'd be delighted
1585		to send it, to send \$5. I sent the
1586	01:13:13	\$5 and got the paper. He was
1587		interesting I gather from those who
1588		knew him in our office. They would
1589		relate stories about Dr. Du Bois and
1590		how acerbic he could be.
1591		INTERVIEWER: Can you share a story?
1592		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, I don't
1593		remember them well enough to tell, so
1594		I won't undertake to do that and
1595		mislead the history.
1596	01:13:40	INTERVIEWER: What would you like the
1597		public to know about the work you've
1598		done here at the NAACP?
1599		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Well, not really. I
1600		never thought about the public

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1601		knowing much about what I do. My
1602		concern as far as my being a part of
1603		the NAACP was to do what I could in
1604		my small way to make it through its
1605		leaders and that's my satisfaction.
1606	01:14:05	INTERVIEWER: I'm sure your parents
1607		told you don't hide your light under
1608		a bushel.
1609		MS. ROXBOROUGH: They sure did.
1610	01:14:08	INTERVIEWER: There must be something
1611		here that you've done here that you
1612		are proud of among other things.
1613		Among all the things you've done
1614		here, there must be things that stand
1615		out, something that you're happy that
1616		you did.
1617		MS. ROXBOROUGH: I'd have to give
1618		some thought to that. I can't... I've
1619		had to do a lot of different things
1620		over the years. I wound up getting
1621		into that position where it was felt
1622	01:14:36	that I was flexible and I could fit
1623		into a lot of different places doing
1624		a lot of different jobs.
1625		The reason I'm still probably at the

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1626		NAACP in one sense--I worked as a
1627		full-time person until 1997--was
1628		every five years I moved into a
1629		different department or different
1630		job. I have held, let's see,
1631	01:15:00	probably about 8 or 10 jobs in almost
1632		every department in the association
1633		except its accounting department. I
1634		can't count.
1635		The satisfaction I got was learning
1636	01:15:17	how the NAACP functions and how I
1637		could make it more effectively
1638		function in that particular area.
1639		For example, I went from the branch
1640		department as an assistant to Gloster
1641		Current and a field secretary at
1642		large. Now that was my baptism. If
1643		you traveled in the early '50s, and
1644		as a female, a young, unattached--I
1645		wasn't married then female--it was
1646	01:15:38	quite an experience. First, you had
1647		to be sure in the cities where you
1648		went and the meetings and whatever,
1649		that you were properly on your guard
1650		in terms of the male-female

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1651		interaction. Then you had to be
1652		concerned about the branch president
1653		who was an authority, but you were a
1654		young female. You had that as a
1655		thing, traveling in those days. It's
1656	01:16:06	no issue in later years, but it was
1657		unusual apparently for young,
1658		unattached women to travel into the
1659		kinds of byways I traveled.
1660		That was an education. I thank the
1661	01:16:21	NAACP for educating me, giving me the
1662		experience of being educated. Each
1663		time you had to be careful. You had
1664		to learn diplomacy. You had to learn
1665		self-protection, and you had to do
1666		your job. Now all of that was
1667		combined in the process when I
1668		started work for the NAACP. I won't
1669		go into all the departments, but I've
1670		worked in virtually every department.
1671	01:16:46	For me, it was always a good female
1672		when they said to me, "Well, you've
1673		done the basic organizing in the
1674		membership department. We need you
1675		as an executive assistant to the

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1676		executive secretary. We would like
1677		to get you to move into the executive
1678		department. So I did. I was
1679		director of operations at one point,
1680		director of programs, and I wound up
1681	01:17:20	being development director.
1682		With the education I got at the NAACP
1683		and the knowledge, I could use that
1684		for marketing. Then I of course
1685		wound up going to school taking
1686	01:17:35	courses so that I would know the
1687		technical side of fundraising. Then
1688		you had to learn how to respect
1689		confidences. I've learned an awful
1690		lot about the leaders of the
1691		association, the executive directors
1692		primarily; and what makes them tick
1693		and how they do this, that, and the
1694		other, or what they shouldn't do,
1695		what they did do, and shouldn't
1696	01:17:59	happen, whatever. It was a part of
1697		the education in terms of
1698		understanding what the NAACP needed
1699		and what they needed is leaders.
1700		It's hard for me to say to you I'm

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1701		most proud of this or that or the
1702		other. There's probably something I
1703		am most proud of. But I guess I'm
1704		proud that we were able to keep the
1705		parents inspired in Hoxie, to keep
1706	01:18:25	the children, walking the children to
1707		school every day, and getting them.
1708		That school board voluntarily
1709		desegregated its schools, but the
1710		parents needed support and help. I
1711	01:18:37	got a sense of satisfaction of
1712		walking with these children, holding
1713		their hands, going to school with
1714		them. Then they are persevering so
1715		that they wound up not being forced
1716		out of the school.
1717		It's hard for me to pick an item like
1718		an accomplishment. I don't know what
1719		accomplishment I might have achieved
1720		that would be worth talking about in
1721	01:18:59	the sense of an event. It would be
1722		cumulative the fact that I've been
1723		able to serve. I'm not answering
1724		your question, I know.
1725		INTERVIEWER: It's okay. Let me ask

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1726		one more. In Hoxie and in other
1727		places where you went traveling for
1728		the NAACP, were there times where you
1729		felt in fear of your life?
1730		MS. ROXBOROUGH: Afterwards, yes. A
1731	01:19:20	funny thing about it is when you're
1732		in danger--like Medgar and I were
1733		traveling around and I didn't realize
1734		I had my feet on the shotgun there--
1735		and being intimidated and going
1736	01:19:32	across cotton fields and other fields
1737		at night to get to a local meeting
1738		which was being held, and the fact
1739		that there were police patrolling in
1740		the Delta area, my reaction of fear
1741		has come after I've gotten through
1742		it. Because you don't have time to
1743		be afraid. I have found that after I
1744		said you're stupid. How could you
1745		get into such as situation out in the
1746	01:20:03	middle of nowhere and nobody on whom
1747		to call. But the fear comes as far
1748		as I can recall after you've gotten
1749		out of that particular physical
1750		situation. It does come, but later.

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1751		I think if you're pushed to do
1752		something or have to do it, you're
1753		more focused on "How can I get this
1754		done?" That's just been my
1755		experience.
1756	01:20:30	My parents always had said to me
1757		you're an idiot if you get afraid
1758		while you're doing something because
1759		you're becoming your own worst enemy,
1760		and you act without logic or reason.
1761	01:20:43	You don't want to do that. You want
1762		to plan and try to do what is the
1763		most appropriate to safeguard
1764		yourself and reach that goal,
1765		whatever it is. Some things I look
1766		at now. As I said, some of the
1767		travels in the '50s, say I spent a
1768		summer in Arkansas traveling to the
1769		various branches--El Dorado, Arkansas
1770		and Cotton Plant, Arkansas, I never
1771	01:21:15	heard of it until I went there--and
1772		places where the white citizens in
1773		the town, the power structure, the
1774		worst thing that they could learn was
1775		that a visitor for the NAACP branch

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1776		from New York was coming in to stir
1777		up trouble. That was the kind of
1778		environment in which I worked, so
1779		many instances, during that five-year
1780		period that I served as a field
1781	01:21:53	secretary.
1782		I guess I must've worked in about 40
1783		states. Some of them, the western
1784		north, were not as intimidating as
1785		the south, but I traveled frequently
1786	01:22:06	in Mississippi, also in Georgia, also
1787		Alabama. Those states were where the
1788		tensions were greatest and the people
1789		were most fearful, including the
1790		local units were exceedingly careful.
1791		That was a learning experience for me
1792		about people and how you could
1793		survive and accommodate yourself to
1794		staying in their homes and feeling
1795		that you were bringing them danger,
1796	01:22:40	the fact that I was there sleeping in
1797		their room. There was nothing secret
1798		eventually. The town knows what the
1799		folks are doing.
1800		Those experiences have I think made

## Civil Rights History Project

Line#	Timecode	Quote
1801		me maybe more humane today and made
1802		me understand that people are
1803		imperfect, but they are worth any
1804		help you can give to ameliorate the
1805		problems and negative problems. I
1806	01:23:17	think the NAACP has had that kind of
1807		an effect in communities where it has
1808		functioned as an entity. People have
1809		felt that they could get help going
1810		to the NAACP, that there would be
1811	01:23:33	something done in their behalf. I
1812		think they believed that. I believe
1813		in large measure they still do. We,
1814		on the other hand, should be
1815		accountable and responsible and our
1816		leadership should be effective in the
1817		sense that they should be able to
1818		reach out to people and inspire their
1819		confidence about what they do as an
1820		example. Any help you can give to
1821	01:24:01	make that happen should be given. I
1822		still haven't answered your question,
1823		have I?
1824		INTERVIEWER: That's okay. Thank you
1825		for giving your help. Thank you. I

Civil Rights History Project

Line#

Timecode

Quote

1826

think we're through.

1827

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