

*Civil Rights History Project
Interview completed by the Southern Oral History Program
under contract to the
Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
and the Library of Congress, 2011*

Interviewee: Mr. Cecil J. Williams
Interview Date: June 9, 2011
Location: His photographic studio, Orangeburg, South Carolina
Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.
Videographer: John Bishop
Length: 1:56:47

John Bishop: Okay, this is, uh, like fifteen seconds of room tone. [Pause] Okay, Joe.
We're ready.

Joe Mosnier: Today is Thursday, June 9, 2011. My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I am with videographer John Bishop. We are in Orangeburg, South Carolina, to complete an oral history interview for the Civil Rights History Project, which is a joint undertaking of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress.

And we're delighted today to be with you, Mr. Cecil J. Williams. Um, it's an honor and a privilege. Thank you for sitting down with us and welcoming us to your home and studio for this opportunity.

Cecil Williams: It's my great pleasure as well.

JM: Um, I'm just very much looking forward to the session today, so I'm – let me start our conversation with, um, can you just give a basic description of your childhood and youth and family and early education?

CW: Well, I am the, uh, third, uh, sibling of, uh, Ethyl and Cecil L. Williams. My father, who has, of course, and mother have passed away, but he was a, uh, self-employed tailor, worked in the city of Orangeburg. My mother, all of her life, was an educator. Uh, she worked on the college level, as well as the high school and, uh, elementary level.

And I grew up in Orangeburg. This has been my home, my life's home, and I have, um, preferred to remain here in spite of all the negative things and in spite of the, um, fact that this has been really, um, the beginning, and still is somewhat, of a battleground, um, for, um, my race, um, and trying to overcome all the barriers, um, that, um, arrive out of just trying to make a living, um, and growing up in a – the segregation, um, that I did grow up in under Jim Crow laws that affected the state of South Carolina.

But my mother taught me at a very early age that, um, that, really that mostly people are alike. We're more alike than we are different. And I, uh, grew up understanding that and I tried to treat all people of all races all of my life, as she did, as fair as I could. And I think that her lessons and my father's lessons, um, I think have helped to make me the person that I am today.

And, um, but at – I become aware of what's going on relative to, um, race and civil rights probably around seven or eight or nine years old. Um, as, uh, a youth, I remember, um, boarding – at that time, we had a bus system here in Orangeburg, bus transportation system. And I remember boarding the bus, and my awareness of segregation probably came about as she told me that we had to sit in a certain section of the bus. So, we would usually – sometimes it changed. Sometimes it was that we would sit at the back of the bus [laughs], and sometimes it

was that we would have to sit, uh, maybe a certain section in the bus. And it very definitely had a line that marked where we were to sit. It was either within that line, and if, if the bus was crowded and that – where we were to sit was crowded, then, uh, we had to stand, uh, or not board the bus at all. And so, this was probably my very first lesson, um, or experience in, in race and where we were to – we had a place.

So, largely, I grew up thinking that really Orangeburg, the citizens here – the white citizens, the black citizens – we lived in very parallel societies, a white society and a black society. And there were separate playgrounds, separate schools. If we went to a movie theater, there was a place designated for African Americans. We either sat upstairs or downstairs, and it changed. [Laughs] If we were to go into a store in downtown Orangeburg, uh, we could go into the main store, but if there was a lunch counter, we could not sit down at the lunch counter. Of course, I'm speaking about the period [5:00] as I became an adult and as I became cognizant of my surroundings, the '50s and, of course, the early '60s. If, uh, we were to, say, take a bus from the Orangeburg Greyhound/Trailways station, of course, we would then also have to sit on that particular bus, and so, intrastate transportation was also segregated. We had a certain place that we could, we would have to sit. Um, the school system that I grew up under from all the days that I was in education, um, was also segregated. I went to, um, the segregated elementary school, segregated middle school, and segregated high school. My high school was Wilkinson High School. So, this kind of gives you an overview of, um, my, um, growing up in and around Orangeburg.

JM: Sure.

CW: And, um, my family lived on Quick Street. I grew up on an area of Orangeburg, um, that would be about two blocks from South Carolina State College. And it was in the

shadows of those colleges that, um, that my entire world, um – whatever experiences I had were greatly influenced by the colleges. And I would say that Orangeburg would be much less a significant place as it turned out to be had it not been for the influence of those colleges, Claflin [College] and South Carolina State College. South Carolina State and Claflin College helped to, um, really fill my experiences of life, um, from the standpoint that they brought in cultural programs and speakers from the outside world, some internationally known. And they, I feel, that helped to round out my experiences from not living in a city of significant size. Orangeburg, a largely agricultural community, um, we are about midway between Columbia, South Carolina, and Charleston, South Carolina, Columbia being the capital, and Charleston being also a very significant area and a large population as well.

JM: What was the approximate, uh, uh, percentage of the local population in the city, in the town, back in the '50s, black and white?

CW: Roughly about forty percent African American, yes.

JM: Yeah. Um, and you've mentioned the two colleges and how significant those were to – as, uh, as, uh, institutions in the black community and in the city's life, in the town's life, in those days and now. Um, where was your father's tailor shop and how did it relate? Was there an intact black business community in the '50s?

CW: No, a business like tailoring and certain other businesses somehow enjoyed a very unique position. For example, um, my father's business, um, was almost entirely – eighty percent of his clientele were white, and he worked for the, he did the alterations for the downtown stores, Belk-Hudson [Department Store], as it was called during those days, Barshay's [Barshay & Marcus Clothing Store], uh, Limehouse Men's Stores. And I worked during the summer months, and then sometimes on weekends, I worked for my father. I didn't

ever learn how to really do any tailoring, but I did deliver the clothes back to the stores after he finished the alterations. And then, I would take, at the end of the week, take the bills and go to the stores and collect the money. And then, my father would give me my little weekly allowance that way as well.

JM: [Laughs] Um-hmm. Um, you got a camera when you were still – I don't even think ten years old. And that would, obviously in some ways, set you on the course that became your life's work. So, maybe you could recall your first camera and how you moved forward from there.

CW: Yes, my first camera, which was given to me by, I think, my brother – my brother had inherited the camera, I think. My mother had purchased the camera, a Kodak Baby Brownie, which I still have, and by the way, which still works. But it was – as my brother's interests grew to music and blowing a saxophone, um, he gave me the camera. And, of course, I started taking pictures and I was fascinated by the fact that you could capture an image and then, you know, see it. It was much later in my life that I discovered, of course, um, how to, um, set up a darkroom and develop my own pictures.

But as I took pictures of people on Sundays, I would have them developed. And this also became my hustle, because I could earn a dollar or two on Sundays of people dressed up in their fineries at the Edisto Gardens, which [10:00] is a local, um, garden, where, uh, we have, of course, water running – the Edisto River runs through it – and we have many roses and other, uh, varieties of things growing. And it becomes a very, um, popular place for both black and white citizens, of course, to go there and walk around the gardens and take pictures and lay on the grass. So, it was a very popular place and, incidentally, um, it was open to people of all races at the time as well. It was one of the places.

So, you had very, um, unusual kinds of, um, barriers. Again, a place like that was open, but curiously, a drive-in theater was closed to blacks, since you would arrive in your own automobile. But blacks could not go to drive-ins. But yet we could go to the stationary, um, establishment, but we would just sit upstairs or downstairs, as it was sometimes. So, we had at that time the Edisto Theater, and, uh, there was also a black movie theater at the time, which was right across the street from South Carolina State and Claflin University. And on Saturdays, as a youth, um, with my box of popcorn, I would sit in there and watch, um, the great, um, movies of those days and the series of movies that came out, like Captain Midnight and Captain Marvel and the Phantom and Roy Rogers and Dale Evans and, um, Gene Autry. And, um, the series, um, would be that there would – the main character would get into some kind of trouble and almost reach the end of his – he would have some perilous situation which would occur, but you'd have to come back next week to see [laughs] what ultimately outcome. And so, it was – I grew up with that kind of, um, background.

Of course, um, it was a culture that was developing right underneath my very eyes, um, and, of being, uh, being, um – receiving experiences from, of course, motion pictures. Motion pictures were a very important part of my development as a person, because it would, um – being an aspiring photographer, the imagery of how that was done and the process itself. Uh, I remember seeing at a very early age *Gone with the Wind*, which at that time was a great, um, accomplishment in, uh, cinema production, and MGM producing this very long motion picture, um, that really, uh, depicted the Old South, the fact of the changes coming, um, as denoted by the name *Gone with the Wind*.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Did you – would you say that your household was a race-conscious household? Were civil rights, were race issues things that you talked about around the dinner

table? Or was it – obviously, it was something that was, um, active and alive in the community. Was it at your dinner table?

CW: Yes, but, um, but, um, we did not encounter these barriers until, of course, we left our – what I thought was a very comfortable household. And I don't think I could ever, uh, say that there was one day when, even though my family was low-income, I don't think there was ever one day that we didn't have to eat what we wanted to eat. So, I have very caring parents and grandparents, as it turned out. Sometimes my mother and father would leave me in the custody of my grandmother, who was, of course, again, um, very wise. She had the wisdom, of course, of years of living under – her entire life she grew up under segregation.

But, um, from my mother's side, we grew up also with another kind of denominator that was kind of puzzling, because, um, we were of mixed race: on my father's side, Indian and black, and on my mother's side, black and white. So, this was kind of puzzling, because, um, my mother was of a skin color that if you saw her, you would not know what race she was, and my father, um, of course, um, coming with an Indian background, Indian and black. Um, so it was very confusing to a youth of eight or nine years old as to where to fit and, uh, and [15:00] how to fit into this, um, very, um, mixed bag of, um, you know, racial, um, placement that we were, had to adhere to or abide by or – .

The other thing that was puzzling was, um, the fact that, um, I grew up at a time when, um, all this was state-sanctioned segregation, legal segregation. There's a little difference between, I think, that kind of segregation and maybe a – some other kind of segregation, but legal segregation where the state and I guess the nation, the county – the county puts up signs in the courthouse that says "White water fountain", "Colored water fountain." The state, which runs the schools, and the city, which runs the schools, says you can't go to this particular school

if you are “colored.” So, the places where we were able to go to school or shop, take a bus, we had federal, state, city and county regulation of these laws that affected me as an African American growing up.

JM: Sure.

CW: During the time.

JM: Sure.

CW: Yes.

JM: When did you first connect your camera to civil –?

JB: Joe, let’s stop for a second.

JM: Okay.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We’re back.

JM: We just took a short break.

CW: Okay.

JM: Mr. Williams, when did you first connect your camera and the issue of race?

CW: Well, probably around twelve or thirteen years old, um, maybe even –

JM: You were born in ’37?

CW: I was born in 1937, yes. Maybe even earlier, but looking back and when I was gathering information for the books that I have published, um, this was something that I was also trying to connect and get all the dates right. Um, but, um, but of course, a lot of my photographs began, of course, in my own household and my family and the surrounding areas.

But probably around eleven or twelve years old, um, I have a mentor, E.C. Jones from Sumter, South Carolina. And he was called in to take photographs of the, uh – in the churches of

Clarendon County, where the Briggs, um, and DeLaine and Pearson families, um, are beginning a battle that becomes really, uh, the catalyst of the *Briggs vs. Elliott* petition. And Jones found out that I was a photographer and that I had a camera. And, of course, um, he would, um, sometimes pick me up from Sumter and take me into those, um, church meetings on Sunday. And there we began taking, uh, what became the photographs that appear in many books today, um, of the, um, the Briggs petitioners, um, the DeLaine family. And I grew up, um, you know, seeing this happening but not totally understanding what was going on.

JM: You were that young?

CW: Yes.

JM: Wow.

CW: And a lot of times – Jones' studio, by the name, was Majestic Studio. And sometimes in the pictures that I might have taken, or sometimes the ones that he took, uh, you might see his camera, um, which had on it, again, Majestic Studio. Sumter was a very important city at that time, because we had the, um, the Air Force base there. And, um, Jones would purchase the out-of-date film supplies and paper supplies, and then he would give that to me. And as I began to develop my, get my darkroom going, he would also sometimes kind of compensate me for my time. And as he became the official photographer for South Carolina State College, he pulled me into, of course, taking pictures for State, because if I could take pictures at State College, that would save him an eighty-mile roundtrip coming from Sumter. But as the NAACP and Reverend DeLaine, Reverend J.A. DeLaine, called him into action, of course, then, of course, I accompanied him, and that's, um, how many of the photographs, um, that, um, we come up with relative to, um, *Briggs vs. Elliott*.

JM: Sure.

CW: Um, in that case, um, that's how those came about.

JM: Two questions – one quick aside: how did you first become, um, connected to Mr. Jones?

CW: Well, Mr. Jones was a very close friend of my – at one time, my high school principal, and at one time, my high school teacher, Mr. Robert Howard. They were, of course, at one time students at South Carolina State College. So, um, [20:00] Mr. Howard recommended to Jones that, of course, he knew I had a camera. And my better cameras, by the way, were also, um, were cameras that I used that the high school bought. For example, I remember using, of course – I was fascinated by film. And, of course, he – they had the 16-millimeter Bell & Howell camera, um, and the 4" by 5" Crown & Speed Graphic and the 2¼" by 3¼" Speed & Crown Graphic cameras were among the cameras that my high school, um, allowed me to – well, not only high school, but actually when I was in, um, tenth, ninth and tenth grade, I was able to use those very expensive cameras at the time, more so than the cameras that I had.

I grew up, um, at, say, at taking photographs with – the first camera, of course, was a Baby Brownie, but it had no flash unit, so I could not take a picture of anything that required a flash unit. But I think I took my [brief unrelated sound here, at 21:00] first pictures with a flash unit, a flash bulb, of course, I have a picture of Thurgood Marshall coming off the train.

JM: You think that might have been your first?

CW: Well, it was one of the first pictures, but it was –

JM: One of the first pictures, that's remarkable.

CW: See, a flash bulb at the time –

JM: Yeah.

CW: Keep in mind you can buy a camera for maybe fifteen dollars at the time from Sears Roebuck. But the flash part of it, the flash bulb, was sort of, um, out of sync, because a flash bulb, in comparison to what you could buy a camera for, was very expensive. And it only flashed one time, [laughs] and it was gone. And so, um, typically, I would go and maybe, at thirteen years old, as I did, take pictures of a wedding. And I'm putting twelve pictures in the bride's wedding album and I only took fifteen pictures of the whole wedding, [laughs] because if they were taken with a flash, that was a very expensive part of it.

JM: Sure.

CW: But, um, the photograph of Thurgood Marshall coming off the train happened because, um, a gentleman by the name – who was the president of the NAACP – took me to Charleston, because in my mind he had described this big lawyer that was coming down from New York, and they had this big trial going on in Charleston, South Carolina. And that's when I took, um, Thurgood Marshall on one of his trips to the South where he got off the Silver Meteor, and I snapped this picture of him on the Silver Meteor.

JM: Um, the president of the state NAACP then was –?

CW: Well, the president of the Orangeburg branch at the time was a gentleman by the name of Squire Morgan [Shadrack Morgan, Esquire].

JM: Exactly.

CW: Yes.

JM: And the state, um –?

CW: The state at that time, I don't know.

JM: Okay.

CW: I only became aware of the state, uh, presidents of the NAACP, uh, you know, at a later –

JM: Reverend [I. DeQuincey] Newman and folks like that?

CW: Reverend Newman and those. Reverend Newman, of course, was also a good friend of Robert Howard. And, of course, he would sometimes come and get me out of school. And so, a lot of times my field trips, uh, really had become – really, was an exercise in, um, in what was turning out to be the Civil Rights Movement.

JM: Yeah. It sounds fair to say, and you can tell me if I'm right, that, um, that these gentlemen who were at that forefront, on that front edge of trying to advance the Movement, recognized even then photographs of this activity can be very helpful.

CW: Yes.

JM: And we need to be careful about this and think carefully about it.

CW: Yes.

JM: And that's –

CW: Yes. Also, the photographs were necessary because of this: um, the, um, local newspaper very rarely had news of interest to African Americans at the time, to colored people. In fact, once in a while, there was a section in the paper called "News of Interest to Colored People" that would appear once a week, and there would just be a little bit. But, of course, any action to, um, demonstrate or protest would never be in there. So, uh, it was because of that, um, void that I began taking pictures for the news agencies that reached beyond Orangeburg. So, I started taking pictures for the *Afro-American*, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, and, of course, ultimately at fifteen years old, I become an official correspondent for *Jet* magazine. *Jet* comes into Orangeburg from, um, Chicago. The story is developing and ongoing, and they need somebody

to continuously cover it, and at fifteen years old, they make me a correspondent for a national magazine.

JM: Remarkable.

CW: So, that was, um, you know. And the money they paid to me at that time, thirty-five dollars for a photograph, um, was a lot of money, um, you know, to a person my age at that time. [25:00]

JM: Sure. Let me – we'll come right back to that, but I want to have you, if you would, and you were just an adolescent, but take us back to one of those meetings in Clarendon County and describe the people and the atmosphere and the mood and –

CW: Well, it takes place in many different, um, time periods. Number one, most of the early, um, people involved in the Clarendon County and the, uh, *Briggs* case, many of them were run away. They lost their jobs and were forced to leave. So, a lot of the pictures that Mr. Jones and I took were pictures of celebrations and pictures when they gathered together again at the churches for a commemoration or an awards ceremony. And we, uh, came to photograph those, um, ceremonies and those award presentations, um, and gathering. And then, sometimes, at the, uh, at the, uh, request of the newspapers, when they were, um, asked to gather together, of course, the entire *Briggs* petitioners get together at St. Mark [A.M.E. Church], and those photographs took place.

Um, it's also interesting, um, at this time, uh, from the standpoint of, um, most historians, is that Clarendon County and Orangeburg begin at such an early part of this, and really they are the ones that are creating the catalyst from which the base of all the Civil Rights Movement begins. But at this time, it's not even known as a Civil Rights Movement. It's so early on into this, um, newfound way of, um, of, say, trying to bring down these barriers that it doesn't seem

to become known as a Civil Rights Movement until really, um, about 1955 when Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks with the Montgomery Bus Boycott.

But the *Briggs* petition is beginning ten or fifteen years earlier, and the, uh, *Brown vs. Board of Education* case – uh, the catalyst, the template, the case that really started Thurgood Marshall and the entire, uh, legal arm of the NAACP off in this direction was created by the *Briggs* case in Clarendon County, starting off in the beginning as a bus transportation effort to get a bus for the children. And then later developing in – uh, as the case went to Charleston under, uh, [Judge J. Waties] Waring, uh, then, uh, Thurgood Marshall suddenly becomes aware that, hey, this might be it. Rather than having to go the way the NAACP was going and having to maybe sue every school district in the entire United States in order to achieve, um, equality in education, here was a case that maybe, that might be the template for what they were looking for.

JM: Do you remember when *Brown* came down in May of '54? You were in high school.

CW: When *Brown* –?

JM: When the *Brown* decision came down in May of 1954 –

CW: Oh, yes, I was – yes, yes.

JM: What are your memories of that – how that rippled through the community?

CW: Well, again, because of the dangers associated with this in the early stages and, again, the *Briggs* people, you see, were forced to leave and the DeLaine people were forced to leave. Reverend DeLaine, who, by the way, my mother taught under, the Reverend DeLaine, and that's also how I have a close association with the DeLaines, because my mother was a schoolteacher under him. Um, you have this danger aspect that's not often, um, written about that's associated with it, that you don't really just talk about this, because anyone talking about

this might find themselves, um, visited by the Ku Klux Klan, or you might find yourself, if you're working for, um – see, the employment situation was mostly in control of whites. And almost everything, any type of employment, was really at the mercy of the white leaders. And if you, um, in any way were found to be associated with this effort to overthrow their way of life, your livelihood or sometimes your life was also in danger.

So, I remember, to answer specifically your question about what did I think after the *Brown*, the *Briggs*, the *Brown vs. Board of Education* case occurred, it was one that was sometimes, uh, you know, in very low tones discussed, and you only discussed it maybe within, uh, the black society that you – and other people that were, that you knew. But just generally out there, and now you're going back to 1956, this was something that, um, that, um, [30:00] was not the celebration that you might think that it would be, um, in that it was the pivotal case that brought this all, um, to a turning point.

JM: Yeah, it's fascinating, because you already knew from that direct personal experience with these families that the consequences could be –

CW: Yes.

JM: So charged with violence, so charged with this –

CW: Yes.

JM: With the ultimate, all these ultimate consequences, yeah.

CW: And in the small parts of Orangeburg County, in Elloree [South Carolina] and other little cities, and Cameron. You see, here you had an extreme form of racism that was also violence, um, attached, attached to it. So, there are many, uh, kinds of, uh, of, uh, stories that have never been reported about people who just disappeared.

JM: Has that kind of violence, that extrajudicial [JB coughs] racial violence the Klan and others had formally or informally organized – had that impinged on your immediate family directly or near extended family in your childhood years?

CW: No, my mother and father warned me about it, though. Um, some white businessmen went to my father and told him that I'd better, you know, that – they advised him to advise me that I'd better be careful, because, um, they began to note that my pictures were appearing in the, um, magazines and newspapers, and “outside agitators were using me” to, uh, report on, um, what was going on here. And, um, so probably three times, maybe, they went to him.

And my mother was sort of isolated from it, in that she was a part of the school system. And, knowing what happened to Reverend DeLaine, she often talked to me in kind of a hushed way. Because, you see, again, people of my mother and father's era, in the time they grew up in, they learned to deal with segregation and what was happening all around them, um, and they formed sort of an accommodation type of, um, relationship, in a way, to get along and also to put bread on the table. If they were, um, actually going out alone, uh, they would be, again, subject to all kinds of situations, which would have interrupted their lives.

Uh, the unity that they later, uh, become a part of in the demonstrations that develop, uh, in the late '50s and after, um, in the early '60s, of course, then, uh, together they were able to then participate and then join forces, um, and they lose any, um, individual, um, or isolated attempts to, um, to, um, antagonize them or fire them or what have you. But when it was – in the earliest years, it was very dangerous to, um – it was, again, here are people coming together, and we're talking about trying to change the state and federal – we're talking about Constitutional

change and things that would affect that, and overthrowing state government. And this is, um, more or less, looked upon as being, um, antigovernment or anti, um –

JM: Treasonous.

CW: Treason or something, you see. We were, um – it could be met with all kinds of ways, and then a legality attached to it, as well, by, um, the governing, um, sources.

JM: Yeah. Did your parents ever find it necessary to ask you to stop doing this work?

CW: No. In fact, my parents supported my efforts. They saw the advances and they purchased me the cameras. Um, I remember during, um, a very severe thunderstorm, um, and during those days, um, of course, you were taught to, um – and maybe even now – taught to kind of remain quiet during a very heavy downpour and thunderstorm. Um, I remember, um, this particular, um, time that, um, as the storm was developing, I lay down on the floor, and my mother laid on the top of the bed and, uh – as we were waiting for the storm to pass. And we, of course, cut off all the lights, and, um, and, um, and my father is on a chair also, and everybody is remaining quiet.

And I remember, uh, this was my way – I had a captive, uh, audience there to sort of beg my mother for that camera that I had seen in the Sears & Roebuck catalogue. And so, that's when I took the advantage of – and they ordered me a, um, a, uh, Brownie Hawkeye, I think, camera. And this was the camera, of course, with the flash unit, um, attached with it and, um, at that time, I think, seventy-five dollars from Sears Roebuck. And this was the way that you got something, um, [35:00] because the stores in Orangeburg or Columbia or Charleston probably would not carry that. There were no camera stores, as I remember, in – even in the larger cities like Columbia or Charleston. So, you would order things like this. And photography was not

nearly, um, as popular. Um, maybe there might have been in, um, African American, um, society maybe, um, one camera out of – one out of ten families might have had a camera.

JM: Right.

CW: So, me having a camera was very rare at the time.

JM: Exactly, yeah. Let me, um – we've talked a little bit about Clarendon County and how it set an early, early path towards *Brown*. Um, Orangeburg will be a place where, immediately after *Brown*, you get an unusual, uh, uh, movement –

CW: Yes.

JM: Quickly emerge.

CW: Yes.

JM: And just before we get to that, I want to ask one more thing. I know in early 1955, you – the Klan is also active in response to *Brown* and the climate created by *Brown* –

CW: Yes.

JM: And as the political climate shifts on race, etcetera, becomes a very active consideration. Um, you photographed a KKK rally?

CW: Well, not exactly.

JM: Okay.

CW: I *attended* a KKK rally.

JM: Right.

CW: Yes. It happened that I covered – at this particular stage of my life I was a contributor to the Orangeburg *Times and Democrat*. I took pictures for them of wrecks and I chased fires and things like that, because they would pay me five dollars for my photographs.

And, of course, anything happening in Orangeburg, I felt myself to be somewhat of a correspondent for them. So, um –

JM: And that was the standard everyday white newspaper?

CW: Right. That is correct, yes. So, I remember this particular incident where, um, I went to a basketball game in Wilkes High School and I took pictures for the yearbook and the newspaper, of course, of which I was also the editor and I was also the photographer. And, um, the Klan rally, which was held on the Belleville Road, um, in a wooded area, um, was announced in the paper. And when I read it, um, without really thoroughly thinking a lot about it, I – and without asking my parents – and, of course, I must have been about fourteen, because, um, I knew I had my driver's license and, of course, I could drive, and this gave me access to moving around and taking pictures.

Um, so I left the game and I said, “Well, I'll run by and see if that Klan rally –” you know, not realizing that it was really held not for blacks to attend but really to intimidate people, um, in the community, African American community. So, when I got there, the Klan rally was already over, but there remained, um, and out front where there were about two or three cars, and one of the cars was a highway patrol car, and, uh, there was a truck, I think, and one other car, which I did not know who it belonged to. But, um, but standing there, um, at the end of the, um, Ku Klux Klan rally was this highway patrolman and the Grand Dragon, who had taken off his hood. And they were, um – they were talking and also they were, um, putting out the, um, the remains of the cross burning, because it was all over and everybody had left.

And so, here I come. I park my car on the Belleville Road and I walk up to them. And they, you know, they looked at each other and looked back at me, as if to say [laughing], “Well, what does this guy – you know, does he not know any better?” [Laughs] So, I go up to them and

I said, "Looks like everything is over!" You know, or something like that – I don't remember exactly what I said. But anyway, they were puzzled and confused by the fact that I'm here, um, this young African American has come to take a picture of this.

And, um, what they, um, um – oh, I remember. Um, as – when I asked them, um, and they said, "Yeah, it's already over," then I turned around to leave. And as I was leaving, um, they called me back and said, "Well, do you want to take a picture of us, um, you know, here?" And I said, "Yeah." So, what happened, um, the cross, the burned-out cross was then – it needed – it was laying on the ground, and then, so the three of us re-erected the cross. And the Ku Klux Klan Dragon and the highway patrolman and I re-erected the cross, and they stood in front of it, and I took a picture of them. [Laughter]

So, when I told – later, I told my mother, you know, what I had done. She said, "You crazy –" [laughs]. You know, she really was very angry, because she realized that I had put myself in danger. But being so naïve about, you know, the whole thing, it didn't occur to me until years later that I had put myself into the danger. And that's one of the pictures that, of course, I have lost. I cannot find my images of that to date. But I often think about, um, the fact that, um, you know, that these were very dangerous times.

But, um, on the other hand, um, [40:00] I – there were a lot of instances where I, being an African American of a lighter skin complexion, uh, I find myself, um, really breaking barriers myself for my race because, um, at, um, I think, eighteen years old, um, I – and then really, um, accelerating my interest in photography, I want to become a member of the South Carolina Professional Photographers of America, and there were no African American members. And I read that they were meeting at Hilton Head, South Carolina, for a membership meeting, so I called up the membership chairperson, Dan Bone [note: he intends Bill Bone] of Walterboro and

asked him about attending. He said, "Well, I don't know." He said, "We don't have any," you know, um, "colored, um, photographers." So, he talked to someone. He called me back and he said, "Sure, we'd be very happy to have you." So, I found myself in Hilton Head, South Carolina, um, and I – and there's a picture, of course, um, that I have where we're all standing together as a group, and, of course, I'm the only African American.

And there were other incidents during my life that I find myself kind of breaking barriers. And even though, um, the, um, it's not open, just because I try, just like when I tried to take the picture that I attended the Ku Klux Klan rally, that, um, that I found myself being accepted and let in or become a part of, um, leading up to, um, during my semester break when I was at Claflin University. Um, I remember I visited my aunt and uncle during the, um, semester break, um, and read in the newspaper that John, that Senator John F. Kennedy was going to be at the Roosevelt Hotel to make an announcement. At this time, Kennedy, um – there was speculation as to whether he would become a candidate, um, as there were others also contemplating or running for the presidency, but he had not announced yet.

JM: This is January 1960.

CW: This is about January 1960. As it turned out, um, there I am in this room, in a ballroom, in downtown New York, and the security people notice me. And at this time, you know, there are very few African Americans in journalism, even with the *New York Times* and other very liberal newspapers at the time. And they, um, walk over to the hotel, walk over to the, um, to where I am, rather, in the ballroom, and they begin to remove me from the room.

And, um, just at the moment they were putting me out, John – Senator Kennedy and his wife were coming up to the podium, and they stopped them. And, uh, he, um, came over, and we talked a few minutes. He gave me one of his cards and, um, he asked me about what, you know,

why I was there and that kind of thing. And I told him that in my political science class at Claflin, we had discussed, um, the fact that he might be a great president if he were to run or he was to announce, if he was to announce. And, um, anyway, he, um, he, after we talked for a few minutes, um – and, again, here is this room full of press, and we're, um – here I am up there talking with the person that would later become the President of the United States.

And anyway, he asked – um, he cleared two seats and told me to sit down, um, here. And I sat down by Chet Huntley and David Brinkley, [laughs] who were on the front row. [Laughs] And, uh, this gave me a great – I didn't have a telephoto lens. And, of course, most of the still press photographers were, they were – they had them situated in the back of the room, and the TV people had, of course, the, um, the best view. But all the still photographers were way back in the back. So, this gave me very good close-up pictures of then-Senator John F. Kennedy.

The significance of me being there, though, um, I think, was, um – it was the most opportune time because it was at this, um, press conference that he announced that he would be a candidate. And so, I send my pictures to him at Hyannis Port, Massachusetts. Um, wherever he, um, is on the campaign trail during the time on his road to the presidency, I get an invitation to attend. When he lands in Columbia, South Carolina, I'm the only press person allowed to go in the "Caroline" airplane, which was this ten-seater plane that he used to fly around in campaigning. And, um, here I find myself, um, you know, in conversation often with, again, the gentleman that becomes one of our greatest American presidents.

JM: Yeah.

CW: Um, so it's, you know, an unbelievable story come true that, um, that I had that kind of association with a person that – again, on the background, um, that, um, Johnson, of course, the enactment of the Civil Rights Acts and so forth lead from that. But I was very, um,

much disturbed, of course, by his, um, [45:00] early death and all of the things that happened as a result of that.

JM: Sure.

CW: But, again, one of the most, um, fascinating parts of my, um, you know, life growing up as a photographer were those events that surrounded that.

JM: Yeah. Let's pause just a second here, John, if we could.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're cooking.

JM: We're back on after a short break. Uh, Mr. Williams, let me ask you to, um – let's spend some time talking about the emergence of the Movement after *Brown* and Orangeburg. We've talked about the fact that there are two black colleges here, a very strong black community of substantial size relative to the town's population and such. But Orangeburg will really be a place where you have a level and an intensity of early protest that, as we were talking before we started the interview, is oftentimes lost from the narratives written by historians about these years. And so let's spend some time really talking about that.

CW: Orangeburg is vital and, in my way, of the second of four incidents in my opinion that really created America's Civil Rights Movement. And, you see, most of the people that were involved with the early *Briggs* case and DeLaine and Pearson and all, they were run out of, uh, Clarendon County and they were not here. But there's a gentleman by the name of Billy DeLaine, and there were other leaders over there that still remained, and they were steadfast in resisting any – they were self-employed and they could exist, see, without being ostracized or their loans called in and other things that the system used to, um, to fight back against, um, this, um, integration, attempt to do what they were doing.

So, what happened, the Movement then spreads to Orangeburg, second most – that's why I think it is also a battleground, again almost never mentioned in any history books other than my own as being really one of the – uh, the second battleground. It was the second, um, of four events that lead to America's, the creation of American's Civil Rights Movement. And, um, what happened here, again, um, the importance of it is that – the closeness of the two communities. We are really thirty miles from, um, Summerton, South Carolina, and only twenty-four miles, I think, you have where the county lines, um, are.

So, um, it also – its importance to the Civil Rights Movement also underscored by the fact that where does Mar – where does Thurgood Marshall, uh, come to after the, um, *Brown vs. Board of Education* victory? He comes back to Clarendon County and Orangeburg, South, Carolina, and speaks at the gymnasium on Claflin University. And he inspires then, in about 1955, the community of Orangeburg to be one of the first in the nation to encourage their parents, to encourage parents to send their children in a test of the Supreme Court's ruling. So, Orangeburg, again, becomes an early testing ground of, um, the *Brown vs. Board of Education*, um, premise. And, um, so –

JM: Can you –?

CW: Yes?

JM: Forgive the interruption. Can you tell me a little bit more about that appearance by, by Marshall, as you recall it?

CW: Thurgood Marshall. Well, Thurgood Marshall, um, who I remember very vividly as being a very powerful, very, uh, uh – in his mannerisms and his voice and – he also used to curse quite a bit. And, um, you can imagine my, um, um, joy in being able to associate, because of the fact that I'm the one here in Orangeburg almost exclusively, that I'm on the inside of the

Movement. And most any other kind of press that would be associated with this, because they would not be African American, they would be on the outside of the Movement. So, here I have this very inside position as a photographer.

But, um, so, when Thurgood Marshall comes back to Orangeburg, of course, I get in on the meetings and get to take a picture when they are talking. I remember him talking with, um, the leaders at that time, um, say, James [E.] Sulton, uh, [Reverend] Matthew [D.] McCollum, um, and others. And he speaks at, um, again, the Seabrook Gymnasium, and it becomes a rally and becomes, um, a time when funds are needed to try to support the ongoing effort. And, um, you also have on the stage, um, sitting with him other national civil rights leaders who have also come back with him. And, um, I remember, um, riding in a car where Thurgood Marshall, um, is in the front seat and I'm in the back, and there are two other persons. [50:00] And we go visiting, um, people that have, again, um, sacrificed a lot to the Civil Rights Movement and also people that were willing to, um, actually help financially, who were able to financially assist with the Movement. And then, of course, on the, um, the evening of the, um, of the rally, um, he makes this, um, presentation before a crowd of around, I think, eleven hundred people. The gymnasium is full; it's packed. And it's a time when I'm using a 4" by 5" Crown Graphic and also a – I think I have a, um, Rolleiflex camera at the time, as well. And, um, my – I'm taking photographs of this rally and I have probably in the entire, um, series of photographs perhaps maybe a dozen pictures.

Unfortunately, uh, my negatives are beginning to deteriorate, my 4" by 5" negatives of Thurgood Marshall have begun to kind of curl up and they're, um – it looks like a cancer is almost eating them. And my, uh, 120 size negatives are beginning to fade away. Fortunately, around twenty years ago, I began – well, it might not have been that long, because, um, I

remember, it would have to be seven – yeah, seventeen years ago, when I was working on *Freedom and Justice* [*Freedom and Justice: Four Decades of the Civil Rights Struggle As Seen by a Black Photographer of the Deep South*, by Cecil Williams, 1995], and we were in the early years of digital. I scanned them in, uh, on floppy disks and now I have preserved those images. And my images of, uh, of, uh, John F. Kennedy, Senator Kennedy, are also beginning to fade away. And I've tried over years to maybe get some sort of grant, because, um, I have probably, um, maybe a hundred thousand images that, um, that maybe only a very few have been, um, scanned and really they're – have appeared in the books that I have published.

But, uh, Thurgood Marshall, again, was one of the most impressive people I've seen. And actually I did not associate, um, him with being that person that maybe seven years earlier, or four years earlier, that I had photographed in Charleston, South Carolina. Because, again, in the mind of an eleven-year-old, you're photographing someone, and I only have a chance to take one picture, and I see him coming off the train, and then we – I think – I'm not sure whether we stayed in Charleston that night or whether we came back, but I remember that we could not get in the courthouse during the *Briggs* hearings in Charleston, South Carolina.

But, um, getting back to Thurgood, again, he was just a, um, an amazing person. And the opportunity, um, that I had in being with him and the opportunities I had of photographing, again, a person that becomes a United States president, again, it was almost as if it had a divine purpose in mind that I be present to get those events that really become the, um, almost South Carolina's exclusive heritage and, and, and give some credibility to, um, a lot of the individuals that, um, came out of that, the fact that this really happened. For example, I have pictures almost exclusively of a group of people that paid quite a price, the Elloree schoolteachers. And in no other publication, um, other than mine, has what they did been reported. And now, other history

books are beginning to pick up on this. So, again, um, I felt that it was my defining moment as a photographer to maybe to be present, uh, to really capture these events and then now have them so that history can be faithfully recorded and they be utilized as we go forward.

I really believe that the Civil Rights Movement, um, and the revolution that we engaged in and participated and marched and demonstrated – I think it will have a greater importance fifty to seventy-five to a hundred years from now than it does now. We who have lived through it, um, and the historians, I think, of tomorrow will see a more, that it was a more important – it was a very, it was one of the most important times of history. Because the fact that you have America, [55:00] um, in this very, um – I guess, in a way, I could describe it as being between a rock and a hard place. Here America is with the emerging democracy, uh, uh, that they're trying to position themselves worldwide, and other countries noting that they are not treating African Americans fair. And the Civil Rights Movement, um, helped to establish America as a country of integrity, a country where morality, uh, and the freedom and justice and, um, equality of all citizens – I think this came out of the Civil Rights Movement.

JM: Absolutely.

CW: And America, I think, is a better country today for everyone, um, because of the Civil Rights Movement.

JM: Absolutely.

CW: And, um, and so, I think that future historians, I think, will connect this a little better than the present historians have.

JM: Yeah. You said a very – um, in describing the rally in the gym on Claflin's campus in '55 with Thurgood Marshall, um, you reminded me of something that I think, um, would be very interesting to have you talk about. Um, you graduated high school in '56?

CW: Yes.

JM: And I'd like you to talk about the following a little bit, because I think it says a lot about the realities that prevailed at the time. You're offered – um, President Turner [Dr. Benner C. Turner], I believe –

CW: Yes.

JM: At, um, at State [South Carolina State College] –

CW: Yes.

JM: Offers you a scholarship.

CW: Yes.

JM: Um, that will be rescinded.

CW: Yes.

JM: You will later get an offer, sort of a parallel offer to match that in a way, from Claflin [College].

CW: Yes.

JM: And the one is a state-backed institution that draws some of its funding from the state.

CW: Yes.

JM: Claflin is a – has its roots in the Methodist Church.

CW: Yes.

JM: Can you talk – by telling that story, can you illuminate the different pressures and tensions, say, on President Turner and on the leadership at Claflin and why – how those realities shaped that kind of story?

CW: Yes, but first of all, uh, my photographs had appeared in *Jet* magazine of a student uprising in late 1955. The students had come, you might say, to the assistance of Orangeburg citizens who were involved in, um, trying to, um, overcome – they had – parents had sent their children to – had asked to petition School District 5 to send their children to school.

JM: Yeah, this is crucial. You're right.

CW: Okay?

JM: There's an early petition in Orangeburg by black parents to integrate the schools.

CW: Yes. And, again, the path from that was in Thurgood –

JM: Exactly.

CW: Marshall's visit.

JM: Exactly.

CW: And then, the parents are encouraged and they, um, petition to integrate the schools.

JM: In fact, you provide an image of that original petition in *Freedom and Justice*.

CW: Yes.

JM: Yes.

CW: So, what happens, again, as State and Claflin students are urged to get involved, we have, um, a student leader by the name of Fred Moore in the Student Government Association, and he is ultimately expelled for leading the students who are supporting the citizens of Orangeburg in a boycott, you know, a counter boycott. And, um, of course, at the time, this is, um, you know, a lot of papers, um – national news. The *New York Times* carries stories. This was on the *Jet* magazine, the opening story, and so forth. And, um, the, um –

JM: Mr. Williams –

CW: Yes.

JM: Forgive me. Can you tell that in a little bit more detail?

CW: Okay.

JM: The, the boycott – the activity by whites to pressure these petition signers, and then how the events unfolded.

CW: Yes. As the parents who signed the petition, um, to send their kids to school, um, their names are noted in the local newspaper. And then, some receive, um, threats, intimidation, some people have loans called in, um, and then there are others that, um – and the list dwindles down, from around twenty down to around nine, I think it'll ultimately be. And what happens, uh, whatever way, um, the, um, people – the whites in Orangeburg, a white group forms called the Citizens Council, and they, uh, seem to be the source of the, uh, of the pressure. And anyone supporting the cause to, um, of the parents sending their kids to school, of course, is also subject to some kind of pressure.

So, black citizens bound together and they form a counter boycott. And they come up with a selective, um, a list of selected merchants that they will not support, who are members of the Citizens Council. And [1:00:00] one, in particular, is the owner of the, um, Coca-Cola bottling plant. Another is the owner of the Exxon distributing; at that time, it's called Esso, Esso gasoline. And, um, the persons owning those companies, again, their businesses are then, um, boycotted, and, um, merchants downtown who are known to support the Citizens Council, they are boycotted by Orangeburg citizens.

And it was this boycott effort that South Carolina State and Claflin students joined to support. And then, uh, Fred Moore, uh, as Student Government Association leader, um, he is expelled by B.C. Turner [Dr. Benner C. Turner]. Uh, Turner is a person that really – um, he's

between a rock and a hard place, I think I describe his position being, that, um, again, here he is employed by the State of South Carolina, and, in effect, um –. The board of trustees at this time is an all-white trustee board, and Moore is expelled. And, uh, as a result of my photographs of Moore and the student demonstrations appearing and also photographs appearing in *Jet* that embarrassed Turner, the – as I was graduating college, I had –

JM: High school.

CW: High school, rather. I had a fully paid scholarship to attend South Carolina State College, and Turner then, because of my photographs appearing in *Jet*, then rescinds on the scholarship through a gentleman by the name of Mr. Harold Crawford. He instructs him to tell me that, um, my scholarship is rescinded and, um, that, um, I would not, um, be welcome at State College. At the same time this is happening, there is a new president occurring or being elected to Claflin University, Dr. H.V. Manning. He learns about, um, this incident and then, um, gives me a scholarship – in fact, the exact same conditions, um, and benefits that Turner had offered me. And, of course, it was ideal, and probably more ideal that I go to Claflin, because I wanted to be closest to my profession, and art was close to photography. So, it was where I studied photography, and then I obtained my degree from Claflin University in art.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Let's talk a little bit more about, um, the unfolding, um, um, Movement in Orangeburg after, um, Fred Moore's expulsion –

CW: Yes.

JM: And those next several years, because really the Movement remains, will remain active for years.

CW: Yes, and especially in Orangeburg. See, Orangeburg, again, you have – the unique thing about Orangeburg is you have in a very small town two African American colleges. One

is, um, the state-supported South Carolina State University and the other, Claflin. And, um, so, you have, um, this melting pot, you might say, and students coming in from all over the state and all over the nation. And, um, it's something that you don't find, um, in too many cities other than – you know, especially the size of Orangeburg.

So, again, it becomes very important because, again, because of the conditions of the time, here are African Americans at a period of history when they're trying to make the words of the Supreme Court's ruling, they're trying to, to make it live out what the Supreme Court has ruled, and it's not. You have Southern resistance. You have, um, everything going, um, very slow towards that goal. And, um, the students, unlike their, um, parents, are not going to, um – they're going to want this to happen now and so they move into action, and you find the, um, the early involvement of student activism occurring.

JM: Yeah.

CW: And Orangeburg is, um, is at the epicenter of all of this, even before Greensboro [North Carolina].

JM: Well before Greensboro.

CW: And again, history has got it really out of whack, um, in the importance, because here you have, um, in the modern, um, Civil Rights Movement, you have Orangeburg, again, appearing before, um, Greensboro, but Greensboro gets all the attention. And Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks getting all the attention in Montgomery, Alabama, and here is the *Briggs* situation happening that created the platform from which Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks were even reacting from, that is, *Brown vs. Board of Education*.

JM: Exactly.

CW: So, um –

JM: Let me ask to clarify [1:05:00] on one thing, just to make sure my understanding of the – one thing about the petition is clear.

CW: Yes.

JM: As I've read and, in fact, probably also drawing on your work, um, one of the concerns that prompted that quick and aggressive reaction from the Citizens Council in Orangeburg when that group of black parents petitioned the school board was this is very soon after *Brown*. And a great fear that – on the part of the white community – that, “oh, my gosh, we may have – there may be no alternative legal result from a standing petition *but* the desegregation.”

CW: Yes.

JM: So, they were trying to literally sort of erase all names, have the petition become moot because everyone had withdrawn. Is that correct?

CW: Yes, they were trying to put pressure on them for them to withdraw their names.

JM: Yeah, so that there would be no existing petition at that point.

CW: Correct, yes.

JM: Fascinating.

CW: And my, um – it turns out that, uh, Arthur Rose, my art teacher, was one of the signers. He was from Charleston, South Carolina, and, um, often our, um, art education classes would turn into discussion about the Movement, because he was so much involved. And he was willing to put his, um, children, and he put his name – he was one of the signatures and, again, a very unforgettable, um, a very creative person, but yet he was, um, you know, um – uh, he had a very fiery attitude. He wanted it to happen and he was willing to give probably his life to make it happen. Yes?

JM: You've just mentioned Mr. Rose, Professor Rose, um, and earlier you mentioned the group of schoolteachers. Um, and can you tell the – can you give that account, what happened with the teachers? And, of course, you would take – you would photograph their –

CW: Yes, after *Brown*, the State of South Carolina is just in turmoil. They're trying to find all kinds of ways to circumvent the Supreme Court's ruling. And, um, you have, um, some schools, with this threat of, um, of opening their doors to African Americans, they're even, um, just closing their schools down. In Cameron, South Carolina, nine miles from here, in fact, you have one school that just closed up.

Um, but you also have, um, reaction from the all-white legislature in Columbia, where, um, they are trying to think of and pass all kinds of laws to, again, circumvent, um, the Supreme Court's ruling. And one of the, um, rulings or the legislative actions, um, calls for any teacher to, um, to declare before they are re-employed for the upcoming school year, declare whether they are members of the NAACP. Um, and, uh, they, uh – uh, the Ellore School teachers in April, um, of 1956, rather than, um, sign this document stating that they are not members, they preferred to resign.

Um, the school principal, Mr. [Bill] Davis, knows of my involvement with *Jet* magazine, feels this is a historical moment, that these teachers are taking this, um, very serious, um, um, uh – this is a very serious action: They're giving up their jobs. He calls me to photograph them. The teachers, after I arrive, um, they all line up in front of their school, and I take a picture in front of the Ellore Training School. And, uh, they, um, again, the importance of their action is sort of underscored by the fact that at this time *Jet* magazine is about, um, that big a magazine, and the centerfold being right in the middle. And at this time this picture is across the two pages of the *Jet* magazine, um, and it becomes the largest picture ever published in *Jet* magazine at the

time. And they are called by *Jet* magazine as, um, “quiet heroes” because, again, they weren’t involved in marching. They just preferred to give up their jobs rather than deny.

The NAACP was really being outlawed in as many kinds of ways. They were thinking – uh, the state legislators and politicians were trying to come up with all kinds of methods to really, um, say that the NAACP was Communist-inspired. Uh, they were trying to make it very, uh – in any community, especially Orangeburg, membership in the NAACP was considered to be very risky, because if you worked – and, again, the employment is almost totally in the hands of white citizens – if you were found to be an NAACP supporter, you might be dismissed just for that. And the, the problem, too, being that if whites who didn’t want to do this were found not to do this, then they [1:10:00] would receive pressure from the Citizens Council and other white citizens. So, it just ricocheted like that. So, they, in effect, almost had to do many things they didn’t even want to do.

Um, but, um, the Ellore School teachers, um, of course, their effort was, um, in some way, um, under – well, seemingly, as soon as they resigned, uh, their positions were filled by other African Americans who did not have, were not on the same, um, persuasion. And, uh, and, um, I felt, I always felt, you know, very upset at the fact that here are these teachers giving up their jobs, and then their jobs being really filled very fast for persons that, um, were not involved in the Movement.

JM: Yeah.

CW: Um, the teachers, by the way, many of them never, uh, were able to regain, um, employment again in South Carolina at the time, um, and they were ostracized for quite a few years to come. There are probably less than three of them alive today, and most of them live in the Orangeburg area. And, um, at Claflin University a few years ago, um, we, um, reconvened

the existing persons, um, that signed. And, um, I think that they are, you know, again, representative of the kind of, um, heroism that, um, came from so many individuals, too numerous to name, who were in the, um, at the ground roots level of the Civil Rights Movement, so many nameless people who did so many things that, again, will go unnoticed unless we record their actions. And so, I've tried to do this with my publications.

JM: Exactly. And all of your work is such a record of that history, yeah. Let me ask about, um, about one more thing, and then maybe we'll take a break and come back and do some of the events after 1960. But, um, uh, you graduated in 1960.

CW: Yes.

JM: And opened a photography studio.

CW: Yes.

JM: Um, and, um, you're quite a young man still, obviously.

CW: Um-hmm.

JM: Early twenties. Um, you're just married.

CW: Um-hmm.

JM: Um, what did it – how did you – and, of course, all of this civil rights context is all around you.

CW: Yes.

JM: How were you going to make a living in Orangeburg with a new photography studio? How did you measure your prospects, and what was going to pay your bills?

CW: Well, um, there are – at this time a black business, because of the separation of the communities, a lot of times you had, um, support from black citizens, and that was a unique aspect of it, rather than white citizens, um, and so I could expect, uh, support from black citizens,

um, very easily. And, um, State College and Claflin, of course, were main contractors with me, and they gave me work, because I did their yearbooks and their newspapers and so forth. And, um, but also, um, my clients came from the students who were at State. They could just walk across the track.

But this, at this advantage point, though, gave me, um, the unique opportunity of whenever there was a demonstration or a march that I didn't even know about, they would have to pass right in front of my business. And all I had to do was just go outside and take a picture of them as they were getting ready to march. And often that happened. I didn't even know that there was going to be a march and I'd go outside and see everyone marching. I'd just go outside and I have a couple of pictures in my book of, you know, across the street from my studio where they are marching in front of my studio.

JM: What was the street address of that studio?

CW: The name of my studio?

JM: No, the street address.

CW: Well, that was on, uh, Boulevard [14 Boulevard Street]. And they were, uh, uh – you see, Boulevard runs right in front of the college campuses. You have College Avenue, being the street right in front of the campus, and then Boulevard, being, uh, the street that my business was on, yes, and as well as, um, other black businesses, barbershops and so forth and what-have-you. Um, so it was, um – it was my front seat to history.

JM: Yeah, yeah.

CW: Yes.

JM: How about we take a short break?

JB: Okay.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're rolling.

JM: We're back after a short break. Um, Mr. Williams, I thought, I thought we could now turn our attention, say, to 1960. And, um, after Greensboro, very shortly after Greensboro, of course, here in, um, in Orangeburg, um, demonstrations will be renewed, um, uh, at Kress and other places. Can you describe the emergence, um, of that protest activity here, and how you interacted with it, both as a photographer and at times as a participant?

CW: I've noticed through [1:15:00], um, that books of history have recorded, um, incidents of the Civil Rights Movement, and they are like here, and here, and this incident here. But Orangeburg's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, seemingly, it was like a continuous – there was always something going on from, say, about '47 all the way up through 1968. There was always something going on. Orangeburg was always involved in protests, demonstrations, or some type of activity, and they were continuous. That was because, I think, of the steadfast, uh, uh, attitude of citizens who were, again, very close to the Clarendon County situation. Here was where this great Movement had, um – it had risen from this particular area, and they wanted to see it completed.

And, um, so, in about 1960, um, we find the students at [South Carolina] State and Claflin [College] still involved in one movement or another. Um, and everything connected to the fact that here we are trying to implement and make, um, uh, to help, to make the Supreme Court's ruling really a reality so that it would effect and be here on every level a reality that we could look forward to. Because of the unevenness throughout the nation of employment and opportunities, um, and the way that African Americans were treated in court, um, and in legal situations, um, it was just something that needed to be done.

And this Movement, um, and the momentum that, um, it was undergoing, and the metamorphosis from, um, from just being, um, things going on as usual, it had to change. Something had to be done about the conditions because, again, um, here you find, um, a situation where the, um, soldiers are returning from fighting America's wars, African American soldiers. They go to the European theaters, go to Japan, uh, Korea, Vietnam, come back to the United States and then find themselves again treated as second-class citizens. And, again, this is something that had to be changed.

Uh, James [E.] Sulton is a person that comes to mind here in Orangeburg as being an example of, um, of a leader who, after returning from, um, I think, World War II, um, really found himself really in the middle of, um, the Orangeburg Movement and the effort to get, um, the children into the public school systems of Orangeburg. He's at the forefront, along with [Reverend] Matthew [D.] McCollom and others.

But around 1960, um, you also had on the college level, um, an incident, um – or maybe not – well, an incident but actually Harvey Gantt of Charleston, South Carolina, um, was granted, um, through the legal system and through Matthew Perry and Constance Motley Baker [note: he intends Constance Baker Motley], he had achieved, um, the victory of being ordered, um, by the District Court, I think, of South Carolina to be admitted to Clemson. And it was my great opportunity to be able to cover this event, uh, exclusively for *Jet* magazine. In fact, I represented not only *Jet* magazine, but since there would be a limited number of people even on the campus of Clemson that day, I also, uh, represented the black press. There were only three African Americans on the campus of Clemson University on the morning when Harvey Gantt became the first, um, in modern history to, um, of his race to, um, go to Clemson University.

And, um, I remember, um, covering it, um, with, again, um, some awareness that, um, violence could happen at any time. Um, this is happening at a time when James Meredith, um, was injured while, um, involved in an activity, I think, in another state, um, and you have some other violent activities that are taking place. Um, SLED [South Carolina Law Enforcement Division], in order to contain this particular, um, incident, though, um, [1:20:00] has ordered the school closed just for Harvey Gant's admittance. And, uh, all of the faculty has been ordered to leave the campus, all the students, and Harvey Gantt and a sea of reporters, really, are the only ones, along with, um, SLED and police authorities as he is being, um, admitted to Clemson University, and SLED's – in SLED's, um, effort to maintain the security of his entrance. Um, they wanted to be able to contain, in view of the fact that there had been violence in previous, um, attempts to, um, for an African American to enter a university.

JM: In fact, I think in your book you mention the reason there are just the three African Americans there that day – you and, I think, two other members of the press – because the University administration told the black employees of the campus *not* to come to the campus that day.

CW: Yes.

JM: Yeah.

CW: Yes, even the black employees of the dining room were, you know, ordered not to report to the campus. Um, I had been a part of a convoy, I think of about three cars, one involving, uh, Matthew [J.] Perry. Again, Matthew Perry and Constance Motley Baker [Constance Baker Motley] had, uh, assisted Gantt in gaining entrance to, uh, Clemson University. And it had been a long – I think it had been about a four-year court battle. Actually, Gantt was really achieving a dream that I at one time wanted to do myself. At one time, I wanted

to be an architect. In fact, the, um, my studio that we are in now and my house next door and one other house I actually designed myself.

JM: Is that right?

CW: I always wanted to be in photography, though. No matter what else I would have gone into, photography would have been my mainstay. But at one time, I wanted to be an automobile designer, and then one time an architect.

JM: Wow. I should say for the record, um, these homes – this building and your home next door – are quite extraordinary pieces of architecture. John and I were –

CW: Especially given this area –

JM: Yeah, as we drove up, we –

CW: Where you don't have contemporary design being very popular.

JM: So, you wrote a letter, I think, way back, to Strom Thurmond.

CW: Right, requesting that – at that time, if an African American wanted to study for some degree that was offered by one of the state's segregated colleges, he perhaps might be offered out-of-state tuition. So, I wrote to at-that-time-Governor Strom Thurmond and, of course, I never got a reply. I followed the procedures but never got a reply, so I was kind of ignored, um, altogether. Maybe the funds weren't available, or I didn't have any political clout, or whatever, but I wasn't able to do that. So, um, the incident at, um, State College and Claflin was, um, what my fate was to be.

But on Clemson on that morning, um, again, um, things went along very quietly. Everything took place, and Gantt became, um, again, the first of his race to, um, go to Clemson. Incidentally, um, back in the, um – during Reconstruction, African Americans had to attend the University of South Carolina. But, um, again, um, in modern times, again, there were no African

American students at any of the, um, South Carolina's, um, colleges. And, um, so Gantt was really, um, sort of setting the pace for other things that were to happen, the integration of Clemson University and also the integration of, um, of, uh, University of South Carolina by African American students, as well.

JM: Exactly, yeah. Um, let me ask – you had earlier mentioned this rather exceptional meeting with John Kennedy in 1960.

CW: Yes.

JM: Um, you've just mentioned Harvey Gant's entrance to Clemson in '63, and so you put me in mind, of course, Kennedy's assassination later in '63. And I wonder, I should ask kind of your reaction, as you recall it, to Kennedy's assassination.

CW: Well, African Americans, as well, I think, as the majority of people that I observed in this community, black and white, really were very, very upset. I mean, it was almost as if, um, some natural disaster had taken place, as I remember it. I mean, people were crying everywhere. It was a very, um, emotional time. I remember their having a special ceremony at [South Carolina] State College where people just sat in silence for a few minutes. So, um, he was, um, a very beloved president and, again, during his very short, um, time in office had demonstrated a willingness to try to change the image of this country and put on – put in place some of the laws we had talked about. And, um, I, by the way, was invited to the inauguration but was unable to go. I think I would have enjoyed that, but, um, I – [1:25:00] for many reasons I wasn't able to go. But, um, but he put into place many of the things, again, that under President [Lyndon B.] Johnson, uh, allowed the Civil Rights Act of the 19--, early 19--, the mid 1960s to take place. And, of course, then we have, um, some of the great changes occurring in, um, race relations,

um, in the United States during that period of time. But I think it came about because Kennedy set it into motion.

JM: Yeah. Let me ask about, um – let's talk a little about the way, the ways in which Orangeburg did and not – did and did not change through these years. And I thought we might start that conversation, um, in '61. You took an extraordinary photograph of two young African Americans on the step of a white Presbyterian Church, where I think they are met by the Mayor of Orangeburg. Can you tell that story and what that represents?

CW: Yes. Um, two friends of mine, um, Dorothy Vann and Emmanuel Hixon, um, wanted to attend a church in downtown Orangeburg, I think for the experience. And, um, they were both from other states, I think one being from Virginia and the other one being from, um, I think, um, New York or maybe another state. So, um, on this particular morning, I got a tip from someone that, um, they, that these two students were going to, um, go to the, um, I think, St. Paul [Methodist] Church in downtown Orangeburg. And, uh, I got in my car and went down there, but I didn't know which church they were at, so I really just circled the area.

And finally, I saw the students about to go up the steps. So, I jumped out of my car, left the door open, and I ran up the steps. And they had already knocked on the door. The door was closed and services had already begun. Um, and in a minute, um, a person poked their head out of the door. It turned out to be Mayor Clyde [S.] Fair. At the time, he was, um, he was a member of that church but he was the mayor of the city of Orangeburg. And I photographed that picture of, uh, the two students being rejected. And I also observed him when he said that, um, "This is a segregated church. You can't come in. Go worship with your own people."

At this particular time in my life – and this picture also had a very powerful influence on my life, as well. At this particular time, seemingly, my relationship with, um, *The State*

newspaper and the [Orangeburg] *Times and Democrat*, um, isn't, um, one where I can actually sell pictures to them. So, what happened, um, I thought this picture to be of, um, great importance and I drove to Columbia, South Carolina, after I developed the pictures. And the – at that time, the Associated Press was located on the second floor of *The State* newspaper. And I carried the picture to them and I think I sold it to them for thirty-five dollars.

The next day, um, around the world, the picture was, uh, on publications, in Germany, um, many countries, many, um, other countries and throughout the United States, um, and, um, in many newspapers, including the front page of the, uh, I think, at that time, the *Washington Star*, which was the most prominent daily in Washington, D.C., and I think the *New York Times*. Then it was in, um, magazines and newspapers later on – magazines later on – but on the day after, again, um, on the front page of papers around the world, showing this southern mayor refusing entrance to a church. So, it, the, um – it turned out that it helped people to realize that one of the most segregated, uh, places in America at any given time was on a Sunday morning anywhere in the South, that African Americans could not attend even a church of their choice, and so, we were still living in a very segregated society.

And what happened, though, after that picture appeared, about a month – by the way, I had finished college at the time and, um, I was continuing my, um, studies. I was working on my master's at South Carolina State College and I had still yet a deferment. And, uh, the Selective Service called me in, uh, to, uh, for an interview. And I knew that that picture had really provoked them or caught their attention because, as I sat down in their office on Doyle Street here in Orangeburg for the interview, one of the, um, I think one of the ladies reached up in this vertical file cabinet. And as she reached up to pull the manila folder containing my name, and it

opened accidentally, the newspaper clipping then kind of floated [1:30:00] like a feather, falling to the floor.

So, and that was my picture that they had clipped from one of the newspapers, so I knew that it was probably associated with what they, um, later did in telling me that, um, that I had thirty days to clean up my affairs – that they were going to draft me. So, I was – I didn't want, um, to be in the Army. I joined the Air Force. But, um, I had to close my studio, just kind of leave everything as it was. And, um, I felt, again, this was another way that they, you might say, finally got me, because they had, again, warned my – and this was the system, you might say, in some of the –. I'm talking about a general attitude – here's one of the persons that's fanning the fires; here's one of the ones that's publicizing these things that happen; here's this person that's helping to wreck our way of life – was in the mind of many people, including the people that made up, uh, the Selective Service Board.

JM: Right. So, you joined the Air Force?

CW: So, I joined the Air Force, yes.

JM: You were in the Air Force for –?

CW: I was in the Air Force a very short while. While I was in the Air Force, I was injured during flight, during my training, and, um, did not – well, I spent about a month and a half in a hospital. And then I returned to, um, my, uh, returned to Orangeburg and then – I had sold my studio before leaving so I had to kind of reestablish my business all over again and get reestablished.

JM: Remarkable.

CW: I was going to be, um, training other photographers. I had a very good situation, uh, when I joined the Air Force. I was going to be training other photographers in Florida. But I

had to finish my, um, my training in San Antonio, Texas. But, uh, it was not to be. And so, I was glad to get in, but I was also glad to get out.

JM: Yes, and lucky for, [JB coughs] lucky for the historical record that you came back and kept photographing.

CW: Yes.

JM: Let me ask about, um, a few more things. And let's spend the last chunk of our time here together talking about '68.

CW: Okay.

JM: But along the way you will photograph, uh, student protests on the steps of the state capitol in Columbia in '62.

CW: Yes.

JM: Again, now, I – you made a very good point a few moments ago, one I want to acknowledge, that this is a story more of continuity more than of episodic outbreaks.

CW: Correct.

JM: But we do tend – you're right, we do tend to focus on moments rather than the continuum.

CW: Yes.

JM: But, but these, um, landmarks in the history here in South Carolina: the student protests at the state capitol in '62; the desegregation of the University of South Carolina in '63; um, very interesting, um, challenge to racial segregation in the waiting rooms in Orangeburg, at a local hospital here in Orangeburg in '63 with Ms. [Gloria Rackley] Blackwell, um, Rackley Blackwell; um, and you're even approached by a white Citizens Council member, you think, with an interesting offer along that span.

CW: Yes.

JM: If you would, let's talk about that, and then we'll talk about '68.

CW: Yes. I don't remember the exact year, but I remember probably two times in my career being approached by, um, persons associated with the, um, Citizens Council. And, again, since the employment situation was almost entirely in the hands of, um, of influential white citizens, a black person's fate was often determined, um, by them. And if you were known to be associated with the protests going on, you might be fired or something else might happen to you, or a loan called in, all kinds of things to disrupt your life.

And, um, so, I took a picture of a meeting of, um, of, um, concerned citizens at Trinity Church. And, uh, it was a picture showing their faces, because I took it from the, um, perspective, the standpoint of, um, the podium back of the – and, um there must have been someone in the black community who, uh, told, uh, someone in the Citizens Council that I had such a picture or it was known that when there was a meeting, Cecil Williams probably had those pictures, one or the other.

So, uh, this person that I identified, even up to today, as Jack, um, approached me and offered me, um – he just came up with all kinds of offers to see if I would sell those pictures to him, and, of course, I never did. I thought that, um, this was an attempted bribe, and I went back to Reverend Matthew [D.] McCollom and I told him that, um, this is what had happened and, um, but I had refused, and, you know, that picture would never get to them.

But mainly what they wanted to do was to take my picture and then see what faces they could identify, what members of the community could be identified [1:35:00] that they would be able to put some kind of pressure. And mainly they were interested in, maybe even from the leadership standpoint, who were the ones that were – often in the paper you would have a report

from the papers saying that, “Well, hey, our black citizens of Orangeburg, they – it’s not them that’s doing this. It’s these outside agitators or Communist infiltrators that wanted, um – that will not let situations lie as they were.” And although there may have been some of that, still yet, again, there were no Communist infiltrators when this whole thing started, and it was an African American, uh, a movement that, um, black citizens started.

JM: Let’s, um – tell me about the – as the context for the, um, the Orangeburg Massacre in ’68 at the bowling alley, in relation to the desegregation, attempt to desegregate the bowling alley –

CW: Um-hmm.

JM: How much did Orangeburg change after ’64 and ’65, with the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act? How much of the community changed?

CW: During the period of, um, say, ’62 to ’68, many things had – many – you had a lot of tokenism. You had a lot of blacks being hired various places. You had most places after 1963, ’64, and ’65 and the Voting Rights Acts and the, uh, other, uh, civil rights legislation taking place. You had, um, a lot of, um, changes taking place. And they were felt here in South Carolina and they were very much appreciated. And the citizenry, they were enjoying the benefits of those, um, changes.

But there were some pockets of resistance. Some places – for example, the churches still were largely segregated, [someone coughs] and then, also, you had some places like bowling alleys and restaurants that in South Carolina had still not welcomed African Americans, uh, to, to, for them to, um, to go into or to shop or whatever, and one here in Orangeburg was the All-Star Bowling Alley. Any student leaving [South Carolina] State College or Claflin [College], or any citizen walking uptown from the area of the campus and going up into the city of

Orangeburg, if you were on Russell Street, you would pass by a strip mall on the right-hand side, and out front there was a sign that hung, identifying this as the All-Star Bowling Alley, but then there was a small sign that said “White Only.” So, if you were walking uptown to spend your money for, uh, to purchase something, uh, you would pass by that sign every day, or if you were riding by, you would see it. It was large enough; it was about, maybe, a seven-inch by three-inch sign that said “White Only.” And so, this was one of the facilities that did not allow African Americans.

The students, some students at State College, who, um, had been driving to Columbia to bowl and going other places because they were not welcome there, decided that they would not, um, you know, um, take this anymore. And they decided to, um, try to, uh, go to the bowling alley and they were arrested. And then, hearing about the arrest, there were others from the campus that also joined.

Um, I get involved on about, um, uh, February the sixth, wherein I hear that there’s a commotion going on at the, uh, bowling alley and that the students from State and Claflin – and being the yearbook photographer, uh, for State and Claflin, wherever the students were, I was. I would catch their, all of their athletic activities, all of their student activities, all their [uncertain word, probably “lyceum,” at 1:38:35] programs. And so, here they were involved in a protest, so that’s where I was. And, um, what happened, um, the students, um, and – perhaps two hundred and fifty or three hundred students are in the area of the strip mall, and they – you have approximately fifty or seventy-five highway patrolmen, city police, um, and others that are there, and they’re trying to tell the students to leave the area, you know, “Go back to your campus or you will be arrested.”

And, uh, just as all that was going on, um, I, um – a student pressed against a glass in one of the vacant stores in the mall. And, um, everyone is, of course, in a very packed, um, tight situation, and the least movement caused this student to break this window. And as he broke the window, everybody heard the commotion, and police authorities started, um, you know, raising their clubs as if somebody had maybe intentionally done this and, uh, they began trying to hit people. And so, everyone started running away, including myself. I had at that time a, uh, twin-lens camera and I had it around my neck and, of course, I started running, too. In fact, [laughs] I even left my car, [laughs] and, uh, because my car was parked out on Russell Street, but I left the area and I turned left towards the campus, because that's where the greater number of students were headed.

And just as I, uh, turned by a former, um, furniture store [1:40:00] known as Sutcliff's Furniture Store, I looked back and I saw a student, a female student, fall to the ground. And then I saw two city policemen start beating on her head with clubs, just because of the fact that she had fallen, not because of the fact that she had done anything, and because she was running. So, that just shows you the cruelty and the brutality that, uh, police authorities were using, um, say, this was three days before the, uh, what turned out to be the Orangeburg Massacre.

On the night of the, um, Orangeburg Massacre, um, I had returned from Columbia, South Carolina, and, of course, I had been covering all the activities ongoing. And, uh, I came to State College from the area, from, uh, again on College Avenue, uh, and right in front of Claflin, I could not get any further, because there were police authorities blocking there. And I tried to circumvent, um, where that blockage was and I went to another area, but I couldn't get in there either. Then, I had a couple of little, um, other areas that I could, that I knew that was on the

campus itself from some other streets to get in, but I could not get in. So, uh, there was no – I found no way to be able to get onto, um, the campus of State College on that particular evening.

Later I would find out that my being unable to get there probably saved my life, because during the night, um, during a time after the students had built a bonfire, nine highway patrolmen, um, started creeping up onto the campus of State College, and they started firing, um, their shotguns into a crowd of about two hundred and fifty students. And, um, ultimately, they, um – after, I think, about nine or ten seconds of firing, um, you have, um, the three students who were later, who were later found to be killed, then you have about twenty-seven injured, and you have, um, perhaps many, many more, some of whom have never come forward that also received very minor injuries. And almost all the injuries are injuries from the back. Um, Jack Bass has a great, uh, book out called *The Orangeburg Massacre*, which tells the story in detail, and he and, um, Jack Anderson did a very good reportage on that. My book, called *Orangeburg 1968*, also has the visual coverage and the pictures from that particular date.

Um, but the morning after the massacre, um, I, um, got in my car, drove to the State College campus, and, um, there was an eerie, um, atmosphere surrounding the area where the students were the night before and where the killings had taken place. It was an overcast morning. It was very cold. I had on my overcoat. And, um, this was about six-thirty or seven o'clock in the morning. And, um, I noticed that the maintenance truck from the campus had arrived, and, um, they were picking up all of the debris to clean up the area. Um, and, um, so I looked down and I saw shotgun shells and other debris spread all over the area where the students had been, um, killed, and I started picking those shells up, um, and putting them in my pockets. And then, the maintenance truck also was picking up other things, um, at the same thing.

Um, later, after my picture appears in, um, I think *Time* and *Newsweek* and in newspapers all over the United States, um – oh, I should mention that I took a picture of the shells, of a student. I posed a picture of a student holding the shells, and I think I had about seven or eight or nine shells. And, uh, later, after this picture appeared in, um, many publications, national publications, around the United States, um, the, um, Federal Bureau of Investigation, um, confiscated the shells, um, from me, and, uh, they later were used as a trial is developed to try the highway patrolmen. And, um, they led – the shells I had picked up – to coming from nine highway patrolmen who actually fired on and killed the students. As it turned out, in a trial in Florence, South Carolina, all nine highway patrolmen were found not guilty. And to bring that up to, um, today, um, I think that only a couple of years ago, uh, the FBI, uh, considered maybe reinvestigating and reopening, um, this particular case, but they failed to do so, as well.

Um, I was also offered a job to be, um, to join the FBI at that time. At this time, 1968, there were very few African Americans. And, um, the, um, FBI agent who, um, got the shells from me, um, informed me that J. Edgar Hoover himself, um, had asked, um, him to, um [1:45:00], ask me if I wanted to be a FBI agent. And, of course, I refused that offer because I didn't know whether it was a genuine effort, um, or whether, um, they wanted really just to make an informant out of me, which I refused. Um, in more recent times, we've heard of cases where some photographers were approached in the same way I was.

Um, whenever, um, I received a notice of that type, I usually would inform the, um, local [NAACP] officers that, “hey, this is taking place,” as I did with that particular – again, I told Reverend Matthew McCollom and James Sulton that I had been approached by the FBI, and, um, also Oscar Butler [Dean of Students, South Carolina State College], who was also seemingly of interest to them because, again, he was the, uh, student, uh, um – the University's student, um –

over the student, um, organizations on the campus, and they felt that, um – they were seeking information on him, as well.

And the FBI, again, although investigating this particular case, in my opinion, failed to do the job that they should have done, because there was no doubt who killed the students. The fact is that, uh, there were no guns found to belong to any students, um, and although an officer had been injured by part of a railing from a house next door during the time those students were there, still yet there was no massive effort and anything to justify the highway patrolmen really firing upon the students. And this incident, you know, came to be known as the Orangeburg Massacre because that's exactly what it was. They were defenseless. They didn't have any weapons.

And, uh, till today it's also unfortunately one of the stories about things happening in this area that many publications and people really don't know about. It hasn't been reported in many publications other than my own. Um, I think the two books about it are mine and the one by Jack Bass. And, uh, it's nowhere nearly as well known as the Kent State, uh, students' massacre, where they were protesting also at the time, again, involvement of the, um, United States in, um, I think, the Vietnam War, where students were also fired upon by highway patrolmen and also National Guardsmen.

JM: I know that, um, Justice Finney and, um – well, not then-Justice Finney, but he was then the head of the, um, Human Relations Committee –

CW: Yes.

JM: And another member both resigned in '69 out of their frustration over the lack of prosecutorial effort in the Orangeburg Massacre.

CW: Yes. Yes.

JM: Yeah. John, let's pause here for a moment.

[Recording stops and then resumes]

JB: We're on again.

JM: We're back after a short break. And we're going to finish today very appropriately, I think, with a look at, um, some of your work, Mr. Williams, and just some reflections, as you have several volumes with you that you've published.

CW: These are some pictures of, um, that I think that I probably have, um, probably more inside details than I think – of any other civil rights publication I know, again, pictures coming from the inside of the Movement. But here are students getting out of jail. These are the photographs that often you don't see into other publications, because, um, again, you see the major event or incident, but, again, these are the – kind of behind the scenes. Uh, money was raised to bail the students out, and here you see them, um, you know, getting out of jail. And some of the students have a jubilant look, because although they, um, sacrificed themselves to go to jail, they're also happy to get out, because jail conditions were very terrible, um, at this time.

JM: Absolutely, yeah.

CW: One of the largest, um, demonstrations in civil rights history, the largest number of arrests occurred at what is called the Pink Palace. Um, is it okay to turn to that?

JB: Okay.

CW: Okay, turn to Pink Palace. [Sound of pages turning] Now, I was in jail here at the city police. This is where I went to jail twice.

JM: Um-hmm.

CW: And, of course, usually the NAACP would bail me out, uh, and I was never even fully booked. I would be jailed – I would be bailed out first because they wanted me to continue taking the photographs.

JM: [Laughs]

CW: But here are students, um, in what is called “The Stockade” of the Pink Palace. Um, and, um, one of the photographs associated with this was on the front page of the *New York Times* and around the world, where at one time the largest number of demonstrators ever arrested at a mass civil rights protest, uh, was this particular one. Um, three hundred and eighty-eight, I think, were arrested. So many were arrested that it overflowed even this [1:50:00] facility and even penitentiary buses were, um, called in from Columbia to haul the students back to the penitentiary. So, again, this is about – I’m not sure whether this –

JM: March 1960.

CW: 1960, correct. Yes.

JM: Yeah, that was the first real large, large direct action protest, after Greensboro.

CW: Um-hmm, yes.

JB: Okay.

JM: And I think what happened was, if I remember, and what that photo shows is how, um, demonstrators were just sort of funneled into a fenced area behind the jail.

CW: Yes. It was a cold February morning. I remember that, and the students were wet. They were – water hoses were called in, um, and they were wet and placed in these facilities. The other unique thing about America’s Civil Rights Movement, especially the, um, the events happening in the South, in the Deep South, and in South Carolina, um, and among the students that I have associated with, was the fact that students were well dressed. Often when they

participated in a movement, the men would have on a shirt and tie and a coat, and the young ladies were looking like they were going to church. Um, so they were well dressed and they were well – orderly, and they were well behaved, even before Martin Luther King’s, um, call for, um, you know, passive resistance. So, this is to underscore the fact that they wanted to *peacefully* achieve these objectives, um, of, um, you know, equality and justice and freedom for all. [Sound of pages turning]

JM: Um-hmm.

CW: Is there any particular, um –?

JM: No, really, if some other things that really come to your mind – oh, that’s a beautiful photograph.

CW: This is a photograph that I have in my office. Um, this is, I think, about 1963, downtown Orangeburg, and, um, here you have three thousand people, including my own mother, who are part of a demonstration. Um, and they have really come here to pray for, um, peace and tranquility and also for opportunities, and also asking – I think one of the, um, ministers who prayed asked that, you know, city authorities also, you know, um, employ black youth and employ black citizens. Um, you have – at this time where you have almost no black, uh, city police, no blacks on the City Council, no blacks in the county government, nothing. So, it’s still even in 1963, um, a very, um, segregated, um, area that we live in.

I tried to, with, um, with *Out-of-the-Box in Dixie* [*Out-of-the-Box in Dixie: Cecil Williams Photography of South Carolina Events That Changed America*], produce a top-quality book that would be representative of, um, the dignity of the Movement, um, that occurred, and the fact that here is my effort to, um, bring, um, to light some of the unsung heroes, who, um, started and kept the Civil Rights Movement, um, objectives ongoing. Um, there is almost no

picture of the people that most people associate with the Civil Rights Movement – Martin Luther King, Rosa Parks, Jesse Jackson – in my book. Here are unknown, unsung heroes who are really making the Movement happen and moving along and at the grassroots level of the Movement. And, um, it starts with the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in Clarendon County, and it goes, um, through, um, really the 19--, the 2000, the year 2008 or 2009, with my coverage of events, um, that, um, largely fall into the pursuit of African Americans trying to achieve, um, their full citizenship in America. So, this is my contribution, hopefully, to that effort.

JM: Yeah. Let me note, too, for the record, that there are two other books that you have published. We've mentioned one already, *Freedom and Justice [Freedom and Justice: Four Decades of the Civil Rights Struggle as Seen by a Black Photographer of the Deep South, Mercer, 1995]*, and another, I think, if you could –

CW: And *The Orangeburg Massacre*, again, puts the faces to, um, to the Movement, and also it has the, um, the stories and interviews of the persons injured. You have here, um, stories of the persons who were actually, um, [sound of pages turning] who were actually shot, and the words of how it was when they realized that they were bleeding and, you know, very graphic illustrations. And, um, and again, from the yearbook, which I was the yearbook, um, photographer at the time, I tried to pull their picture [1:55:00], you know, what were they involved in at the time this happened, to add some background to, um, to what went on.

JM: That's remarkable. Yeah.

CW: This is John Stroman, who was, um, again – they tried to make a scapegoat, um, of him, um, and at one time tried to charge him with, um, disobedience and riot, uh, uh, charges. The only person jailed relative to the Orangeburg Massacre was Cleveland Sellers. Sellers, um, was really jailed not for the events that happened on – in 1968. He was actually, um, jailed for

the incident that happened that I described earlier on, um, February the sixth, where the police authorities are called into the bowling alley area, because, um, he was not even, um, at the actual site when it first went on. He was, I think, walking by. Sellers today has moved from, um, really, from that era to really today being the president of Voorhees College.

JM: Mr. Williams, let me, um, let me thank you so much –

CW: Um-hmm.

JM: For, um, being so generous with your time and –

CW: Sure.

JM: Your work and all these, um, just extraordinary, um, perspectives.

CW: Thank you.

JM: It's been a real honor and privilege.

CW: I'm glad to be a part of this.

JM: Thank you for –

CW: How's it – um, you are the one that is – oh, I'm sorry. Are we still on camera?

JM: Well, we'll just cut. We can stop there. Okay?

CW: Okay.

[Recording ends at 1:56:47]

END OF INTERVIEW