

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

Interviewee: Ms. Audrey Nell Edwards Hamilton & Ms. JoeAnn Anderson
Ulmer

Interview Date: September 14, 2011

Location: Meeting room, Hilton Bayfront Hotel, St. Augustine, FL

Interviewer: Joseph Mosnier, Ph.D.

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: 1:06:20

John Bishop: Okay, we're rolling now.

Joseph Mosnier: Today is Tuesday, September 13, 2011. My name is Joe Mosnier of the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. I'm with videographer John Bishop. We are in St. Augustine, Florida, at the Hilton Bayfront Hotel to do, um, some interviews regarding the local movement history. This is a part, this, these interviews are being done for the Civil Rights History Project, which is a joint undertaking of the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture and the Library of Congress. We're delighted in all of this effort to have been, um, assisted and are very much looking forward to interviewing Dr. Robert Hayling. Um, let me call out that in the room, um, today right now we have, in addition to myself and John, we have Mrs. June Conway, Mr. Purcell Conway, our interviewees from left to right, Ms. Audrey Nell Edwards Hamilton and Ms.

JoeAnn Anderson Ulmer, and Dr. Hayling is with us as well. Uh, a quick note for the recording.

We are not recording on the XD cards and I think John, you want to catch a little room tone.

JB: Yes, for about thirty seconds.

JM: So we'll all just wait for about thirty seconds.

[Pause]

JB: Okay. I think that's enough.

JM: Okay, all of the formalities out of the way [laughs]. Thank you both so much for sitting down and rolling with our, being so flexible this morning as, as we got this all in motion. Uh, Ms. Hamilton, Ms. Ulmer, thanks very much for sitting down with us. It's a real honor and privilege.

Audrey Hamilton and JoeAnn Ulmer: You're welcome.

JM: Um, I thought I might start, um, with inviting you just to share some reflections of coming up in St. Augustine and maybe a little bit about family and schooling, and that will sort of help us set the stage for how you emerged as activists in your teenage years.

Audrey Hamilton: Well, uh, coming up in St. Augustine, St. Augustine to me was a very, very nice, nice town to live in, to grow up in. We had a lot of black businesses at the time that I grew up. Washington Street was our main street that had a, a lot of black businesses and, uh, when we started, uh, in the Movement, we didn't start off picketing or demonstrating. We would go down to the St. Paul's, uh, uh, A.M.E church and sit around and just talk about what we were going to do, you know. That, that was when school was out and when we, when we found out that we had a, someone, a leader that would back us in a way that we never would have dreamed of because most of the leaders would tell us, "No, you can't do that. That's not the way you do

it. You've got to wait." But Dr. Robert B. Hayling, he was our advisor, youth advisor, and he just motivated us to want to go and make a difference in St. Augustine.

Because for me, I didn't too much care about my mom having to come and buy my school supplies at Woolworth's because at that time, there was not no Wal-Marts and it was just a downtown area with Woolworth's and McCrory's [dime store]. And they would buy our school supplies there and there was a lunch counter over there and, uh, she would go in, come out, from walk, walking through the park, go, had to pass the fountain in the park because, it, uh, had "white only" on it and, uh, she would go over there and buy my sup, school supplies, and she would also buy, you know, the accessories that you needed, you know, for school. But she couldn't go over and get a drink of water. I had a problem with that and I said to myself, "You know, there's something wrong with this picture."

So when I seen the young people gathering up at this church down the street from me, I said, "I'm going to go down there and see what they're doing." But all they were doing was just gathering. Then Mr. Clyde Jenkins, Dr. Hayling, Ms., uh, Lucille Plummer and and, and Ms. Fannie Wood, Fullerwood. They started bringing us supplies to make picket signs. [5:00] So we made our little picket signs and we would go downtown every day. Every day, every morning, we would meet at St. Paul and get our picket signs and go to the Wool – some would go to, uh, McCrory's and some would go to, uh, Woolworth's. Some would go to the little local drugstores that was down in the area and picket them. Maybe it would be two or three at one place, four or five at another, you know.

And that's how we did it until one day, we gathered at the St. Paul church and we said – it was in July. And we said –

JM: 1963?

AH: 1963, July of 1963, July the 18th.

JoeAnn Ulmer: Mmm hmm.

AH: And we said, we were sitting around and we had some older mentors like, their name was Jimmy Jackson, Francis Floyd, and older people, old, old, older, older, older, older ones, and we were just sitting there – Carl Williams – and we were just sitting there and we, and Francis Floyd said, “It’s time for us to do something.” We’ve got to talk to Doc. [Dr. Robert Hayling]. We’ve got to, we’ve got to go and do something. We need to go sit in.” So big Jimmy Jackson, there’s, there’s a difference between, there’s a little Jimmy Jackson and there’s a big Jimmy Jackson. There’s a, there’s, there’s a difference between them. And the big Jimmy Jackson said, “Well, we’re going downtown to sit in.” And Goldie [Rev. Goldie Eubanks] said, “How are we going to go downtown to sit in? Dr. Hayling didn’t tell us we could do that.” Well, we’re going anyway. So we put the signs up against the wall and walked downtown.

We went down St. Francis Street, turned down Washington Street, and as we was going down in, in the little two, we was in twos, as we was walking down the street, Mr. Ernest Wells had a barber shop and he came out because he was, he was, he was very involved in the NAACP and he came out. He said, “Where do you all think you’re going?” We said, “We’re going to sit in.” He said, “Who told you all to go sit in? Don’t, where are those picket lines?” And we said, “We left them at the church. We’re going to sit in.” He said, “Well, what, did Doctor?” “No, no he didn’t.” He said, “Well, do you have any money?” And, uh, we said no and he went back in his barber shop. He said, “You can’t buy nothing if you don’t have no money.” So he gave, I think it was Goldie, Goldie some money and he gave big Jimmy Jackson some money. So we walked on down. We never left off of King Street that day. There was, there was, what, one, two, three, three serv – it was, uh, Service, Service Drugstore, McCartney’s Drug Store, and then

Woolworth's. And we went in. Goldie, Goldie and, and, and, uh, Francis and, Francis and, and, and, uh, and, uh, Jimmy, and, uh, Gloria Jean [Thomas], they went in the Service Drug Store. And, uh, Goldie and Harold Jenkins and several more went into McCartney's. JoeAnn, myself, Willie Carl [Singleton], and Sam [White] and Delores [Miller] and Rosemary [Miller] and Horace [Holmes] went to Woolworth's, and that's where we sat in at.

JM: Would it be okay, I don't mean to stop you –

AH: Uh huh.

JM: But you've set the stage so beautifully. Can I bring in Ms. Ulmer?

AH: Yes.

JM: And we'll bring the stories together at the moment –

AH: Yes, go ahead on.

JM: When, when things really started.

AH: Yes.

JM: Okay.

JU: Things started for me when, I lived, Audrey lived on the north side of town and I lived on the west side. That means across the track and there weren't anything for black children to do because they didn't have any activities, none whatsoever. So I had to get permission because I had a sister live on Audrey Nell's side and the church was two streets behind Lincolnville and my mother said, I asked permission could I go and participate and they, of course, said yes. So I went every day over to my, uh, sister's house and that's how I got hooked up with them. I would go and say, "Well, I want to be involved." So I went and I joined and that's what happened. But there was nothing or anything for us to do.

JM: I was going to ask can you tell me a little bit about those, those early meetings of the youth council that you joined?

JU: Well, Ms., uh, Dot, was that Dot Eubanks, the one who played the piano? [10:00]

AH: No, no, Janelle.

JU: Janelle Eubanks played the piano. We would have singing and we had our little president, which was Gerald [Eubanks]. Wasn't it Gerald, he was the president then?

AH: At that time. He did it for a little while.

JU: Yeah, for a little while he was our president.

AH: Mmm hmm, but not long.

JU: But not long. And we would meet every day and we would go picket like Audrey Nell said. It was only a few of us, a handful of people, that participated and did that every day and after we decided that we wanted to go. I guess we was tired of just going with the signs. We wanted to make a difference and just go in and sit down and ask for service.

JM: When you made that decision to, young people made the decision to go out and do the sit in, uh, you alluded to some frustration with older leaders who weren't quite so ready to take more aggressive steps. Can you talk a little bit about, about that difference in perspective between young folks and older, say NAACP officials?

JU: Well, our perspective was that I guess we just wanted to go on and sit down and I guess they wanted a little more time. Maybe they weren't ready to make that plunge, but for us, it was like, "We need to go and sit in and ask for service." So that's what we did and when we did, we met our adversary, who said they do not serve niggers here. You would have to leave or be arrested. We continued to sit –

JM: At the counter at Service Drug Store?

JU: – at the counter and they said, “We told you if you don’t leave, because we don’t serve niggers here, you will be arrested.” So they called in L. O. Davis, which was the sheriff [of St. Johns County], a big old man. He showed up and told us the same thing. We was unlawful guests. We were the undesirable guests. We was, um, uh, trespassing, and if we didn’t leave, we would be carried to jail and that’s what happened. They carried us to jail.

AH: Yes, and we was also arrested by a black deputy whose name –

JU: L. O.

AH and JU in unison: D. J. Johnson.

AH: Which, to me, when he put us in that car, I think that was, that, that really was the hurting part of the whole day was when he came in and snatched us and told us that we were under arrest.

JM: I would imagine he would have been one of the first black deputies.

AH: The only.

JU: The only.

JM: The first and only.

AH: Mmm hmm. And, uh, when we, when, it, it, and I just looked because I, I grew up –

JU: Knowing him.

AH: Knowing him and, and, and, and went to school with his son and, uh, I looked at him. I’m like, “Are you really doing this to us?” And he actually, not just, he kind of *pushed* us in the car, you know, because L. O. was there and L. O. was, you know.

JU: I guess he had to.

AH: You know, he, I guess he was showing off in front of his, uh, boss and, uh, they take, they took, they took us to jail and, uh, we thought we was going to get out. Well, we didn’t,

you know, we was in there singing and, uh, all we had was, they, they, they hadn't, they hadn't put us in a cell yet.

JM: The group has how many?

AH: It was sixteen.

JU: Sixteen.

AH: Sixteen.

JU: Sixteen.

AH: Sixteen.

JM: Sixteen arrestees.

AH: And we was all just sitting around in the hallway and we was singing and, and, uh, like I said, our mentors, we all depended on Francis Floyd and Jimmy Jackson, the oldest ones. We, we, we, we, we was, we was kind of leaning on them, you know, and they were like, "Don't worry about it. We're going to get out. Dr. Hayling is not going to leave us in here," and so on and so on and so. Uh, we said, "Okay." So they came, took JoeAnn, myself, and –

JU: Dolores.

AH: Dolores.

JU: And Mary

AH: And Rosemary and Horace, Willia Carl, and Sam, and locked us up in the men's part of the jail. And I said, "Oh my goodness." We wasn't with the other ones. I said, "Why in the world are we not with the others?" And the other ones was downstairs, was locked up downstairs. So we was like, I think we hear the others leaving," because they were singing. I said, "JoeAnn, they've leaving." I said, "Why are we still in here?" And she said, and, and, and I said, "Rosemary," I said, "Y'all, what's going on?" I said, uh, uh, "Francis and them are

leaving.” Oh, they was clapping and a’ singing and going out the jail and there we was up there, locked up until the next morning.

JM: Can I ask how, how the experience of actually find, find, being arrested, spending that first night in the jail compared to, you were young, compared to how you had maybe imagined it might be? Were you – ? That’s a pretty big thing [15:00] to have happen in a white jail and –

AH: No, well, at first, it was fun to us. We was up there singing. We had all seven of us and we were just a’ clapping and a’ singing because we just knew we was fitting to leave. We knowed, oh, we just knew that we were fitting to get out. But that didn’t happen. We went to court the next morning and that’s when everything –

JM: Started to turn.

AH: Spiraled out of control.

JM: Ms. Ulmer, how, how’d it feel for you?

JU: Hmm. Well, just like she said, we was all excited about being locked up. We had no sense of fear because we was all together as a group. It was four girls and three boys. It was seven of us. So when the judge carried us to court, he had a petition stating that our parents would sign we wouldn’t demonstrate anymore until we got to age twenty-one. And we said, “No, don’t sign.” But the other two young ladies’ parents signed. So they carried them home and another young man, he went home. So that left Samuel, Willie Carl, Audrey Nell, and myself. Okay, no it’s drooling, trickling down because we’re spending more than two days in jail. It gets to be one week, two weeks, three weeks, four weeks, I think, and the young men was taken in the middle of the morning. They carried them to Marianna [reform] school.

AH: Well, well, well –

JM: How do you, why do you think your, how, what was it, how, how did you work things out with your parents so that they didn't sign those forms?

AH: See, this is what, this is what happened here. When we got, when we were in court and the judge approached us and he said to us, he said, "I do not want you all participating in any more demonstrations of any kind." And we said, "No, we, you're not going to do this to us." And he said, he turned to our parents and he said to our parents, "I want you to sign a paper stating that your, your juvenile kids will not participate in any more demonstrations of any kind." Because if our mothers had signed that paper, they were going to arrest Dr. Hayling.

JU: Dr. Hayling, mmm hmm.

AH: They were fitting to put him in jail. They was fitting to, they was fitting to put a felony on him, but what happened was the four of us, it was a higher power that came upon us for us to do what we did because this judge was very evil. He showed it in his voice. He showed it in his, the way he acted. He looked at us as, when we said no to him, he turned red as a beet and said, told L.O. [sheriff L.O. Davis], "You take those communist niggers out of here."

JU: "Lock them, lock them up and throw away the key."

AH: "Lock them, lock them away and throw away the key." So that's when the NAACP, Mr. Shaw, stood up before, in front of him because we didn't have a lawyer at the time, we had a representative of the NAACP representing us that day, and he said to L. O. Davis – I mean, uh, uh, excuse me, uh, Judge Mathis [county judge Charles Mathis].

JU: Judge Mathis.

AH: "I don't care where you take it." He said, "I'm going to take it to a higher court." He said, "I don't care where you take it." He said, "We make the law here and we break it."

JU: "And we break it."

AH: And guess what? We made it that time, we made it. He gave us a year.

JU: [word or two uncertain, at 19:01]

JM: Let me pull me back for just one second because we can talk about the experience of being in prison for so long or reformatory school in context. Um, Mr. Hayling is a young man now, but he was a very young man then and a youth chapter leader. And I wonder if you could talk a little bit about his leadership style and how he interacted with the young people in the group and how you came to know him in that experience.

JU: I met Dr. Hayling in, um, being involved with the, uh, demonstration and he always encouraged us to do good, find somebody that would encourage us to just –

AH: He motivated us.

JU: Motivate us to do good things and think good thoughts about ourselves. So by being there with him, he had a greater influence on us so that we wouldn't just fool around. There was nothing to do. So I thought that was a great thing to do because we wanted a change. [20:00] We just didn't want to go to the back door all the time. You want to be able to sit in the front seat like everybody else. You want to be able to sit to the counter and have, and not go to the window. You want to sit at the front of the bus and not at the back. So he encouraged us in that way that we could deserve more. We, everybody deserved the Constitution.

AH: He was a good leader.

JU: A good leader, very good person.

AH: He, he motivated, he motivated all of us. He, he didn't, he didn't say, "Look."

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: "We don't want, I don't, I, I, you know, the good people don't want y'all doing this," or this and that. He motivated, he –

JU: We deserved that.

AH: – he made us feel, he made us feel like we were doing something right, that we were doing something right, and he backed us up a hundred percent in that. Regardless to whether he gave us his permission to do it, he still came and stuck by us and said, “I’m with you all regardless. I’m going to be with you all to the end.” Dr. Hayling was just like John, I tell everybody this, like John with Jesus. He never left our side and I love him to this day for that. I will love him to this day for that and I love him for being our leader because he was a great leader. He was a good leader and I love him to this day for that because he made a change in our life. Even though we went to reform school –

JU: Reformatory.

AH: It made, still made in our life. It made a difference in our life because we can say to the world, “I am somebody.”

JU: Alright. Even though that happened to us when we was fifteen, and sixteen, fourteen. Now we’re just like two little old ladies, but we still have that drive and passion in our heart for Dr. Hayling and for what we did. We know what we did was right.

AH: That’s right.

JU: There was nothing wrong about that. It’s just people with hatred within their heart. They just because, uh, I always because, uh, God created me brown and you a different color, it doesn’t require for you to have something I can’t have. We’re all here and all deserve the same thing.

AH: And, and another thing that I want to –

JU: That’s it.

AH: That has not been said, Dr., we, when we got out of jail –

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: January 1964, we were out of jail at least three months before Dr. King ever came to St. Augustine. That's what I've been trying to tell. Dr. Hayling was our everything. He was our leader even to bring Dr. King in because Dr. King's movement did not start until three months after we were out of jail and we got out of jail January the 23rd, 1964.

JM: It was a homegrown movement.

AH: You know.

JU: Yes, it was.

JM: Yeah.

AH: And he, he, he, to me, he is the inspiration and the father of St. Augustine and a little beyond because really to tell you the truth, if it wasn't for his knowledge and his knowhow.

JU: His sacrifice.

AH: And his sacrifice, because he sacrificed a lot.

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: I mean a lot. For us.

JM: How'd the two of you make sense of, um, of, as best you can recall thinking back on this – you're, you're adolescents, you're fifteen, sixteen years old, how did you make sense of all of the violence and hatred that, that was exhibited in the community? How, how did you think your way through that? How did you explain that yourself or ?

AH: Now, I'll answer and then she can. I, I made sense of it because see, we had God in our lives.

JU: Alright.

AH: And we had spiritual songs that we sung that uplift us. You know, the songs that we sung, it was uplifting songs and we bypassed the hatred.

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: Because before Dr. King came, we were singing, "I Love Everybody," before he even got here, you know. So we, we was taught by our parents and Dr. Hayling that we can overcome without the violence, you know. [25:00] We, you know – the violence was afflicted on us, but we did not afflict violence back.

JU: Being locked up for so long in isolation once we arrived at, um, reformatory school, we were seventy-seven days in the county jail. We was fifty-two days in isolation at the reformatory school. We didn't have nobody but each other to talk to and we had a Bible they gave us, but spiritually we was already anointed by the Lord. That's why I tell people I learned how to pray at an early age. While you was out doing whatever, that's all I could do because I was locked up, confined, and with Audrey Nell for fifty-two days. The lady just opened the door early in the morning to get her Bible verse.

AH: And I used to sit, and I, she used to just sit and look at me. I used to sit in the window and make up songs, sing all kind of funny, made-up songs.

JU: [laughing] But you know, that's, that's why I say it. They say, "Well, how'd you learn this?" And I'd say, "Well, you know, I spent all of my time with Audrey Nell locked up. Nobody else don't need to claim, 'I was with JoeAnn.'" "No, you weren't." I know who I was with for seventy-two days, then for fifty-two days just, just locked up, you know. People don't realize. I said, I'm sorry if I say this. I don't mean no harm. This is the way I feel. If we would of had been white children, we would have never, my parents would have never had to suffer me being taken in the middle of the morning to a reformatory school. They never would have had to

suffer seventy-two days in the county jail. They would never have told my mother, “You have to sign a petition for your child because she’s Communist and radical. What she’s doing is unconstitutional.” That’s what the judge told us, but I always say, “It’s alright. We battled the storm with the help of the Lord, and what we was doing was right.” So I just tell people all the time, “Whatever you do, do what’s right because it’ll always come out in the end right.”

AH: Willie Carl’s mother and I have to put this in here, Willie Carl’s mother, she was, had a bad heart.

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: A bad heart and, uh, when the judge sentenced us, she fainted.

JU: Passed out.

AH: Inside the court and, uh, no matter, and I think about Ms. Nora [Singleton, mother of Willie Carl Singleton] all the time now, no matter how hard it was on her, she never signed that paper.

JU: Paper, mmm hmm.

AH: And it broke her heart. She never got over that, but she never would sign that. Her son told her, “Mama, don’t sign it.” She stuck with that, but it was killing her inside. And when they took Willie Carl and Sam away and they came up there that morning to bring us our breakfast, the pain we heard in Ms. Nora and Ms. White’s [mother of Samuel White] voice was unbelievable. Like I told my mother and Ms. White, “We heard your pain, Ms. White and Ms. Nora’s pain.” But JoeAnn and myself, we seen our mothers’ pain.

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: When they came up to that school and seen our bloody knees.

JM: Bloody knees from – ?

AH: Scrubbing the floors.

JU: Scrubbing, cleaning the floors.

AH: We had to scrub floors on our knees. We had to wax floors on our knees until the, and bus – buff them until you, they, until you see your face in them. If they're not right, you've got to go back over it and do it all over again. That's the, that was the state's punishment.

JU: State law, um hmm.

JM: How well do you think you, you, each of you emerged from, from all of that in the, in the, in the short term? Did you feel when you finally were released in January that – ? How, how, how did you feel in terms of what that experience had cost you or shown you or – ?

AH: What, what it did, it showed us that we needed to do more. So that's what happened.

JU: We did more.

AH: That's why I was back in jail with Dr. King.

JU: Three months later.

JM: Right.

[Laughter]

JU: That we still had a lot of work to do.

[Laughter]

JM: We can't, we can't have the, all of the same St. Augustine Four here today because both, um –

JU: We only have two of us. The other two are deceased.

JM: Yeah. Mr. Singleton and Mr. White are, are passed, yeah.

JU: They're deceased.

JM: Um, their experience, it seems, was harder still in, while they were incarcerated. Is that generally your perspective on – ?

JU: They did not share that with us. They didn't share their experience with us.

AH: Well, I'm going to tell you, me and Willie Carl stayed. He stayed, uh, when I had moved out, out West and his mother [30:00] stayed around the corner from. And when he came home from the, from the service because he joined the army and when he came home, his mother would tell him, "Audrey Nell lives around the corner. You'd better go see her." And so he, uh, he said, "I had to come around here to see you because if I didn't come see you, Mama would have had a seizure. And I said, then we talked and then I asked him, I, I said, well, you know, I sit around and I say, "Willie Carl," I said, "You know, you never talked, you never talked about, uh, Marianna." I said, uh, "You never told me, told us the story of, of what happened that night. You never, you and Sam never said, you know, what happened to you all that night when y'all left, left us there, you know, in the jail."

And this is what he said to me, God rest his soul: "Audrey Nell, don't ask me about Marianna.

JU: Umm hmm.

AH: If you ask me about Marianna, I'll never come see you again." I said, "Are you serious, Willie Carl?" He said, "I'm serious. Don't ask me about Marianna any more." So me and JoeAnn, we took it upon ourselves to ask Sam up in, uh, so we thought we was fixing to get us a story.

JU: St. Pete [St. Petersburg, FL].

AH: In St. Pete. So we said, I said to JoeAnne, we've been asking. He's going to have to tell us up here. He practically told us the same thing.

JU: Mmm hmm. He didn't want to discuss it.

AH: And I was like, [crosstalk] I told JoeAnn, I said, "JoeAnn, I wonder what happened to Willie Carl and Sam. What did they do to him?"

JU: Like they had a bad experience.

AH: Like they had a really, really bad, bad experience—

JU: They had to.

AH: That was *unbelievable*. Hurting –

JU: They had to have a bad experience.

AH: – that they could not talk about.

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: And they would not talk about it. They took whatever happened to them –

JU: To their grave.

AH: – to their grave. And I think to this day, I think that had a lot to do with things that happened that they was gone too soon.

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: That they was carrying a lot of pain that they didn't want to talk about like me and JoeAnn. Me and JoeAnn talked about our, because our experience was bad, but it wasn't as bad as – we can imagine that we have found out from, from other people that Marianna was doing some terrible things up there to the young boys. So we put two and two together and said, "Our friends suffered for freedom, suffered for freedom. Just for something that they were born with anyway, they suffered, they suffered."

JU: Mmm hmm.

JM: You, um, you, you've said a moment ago and, and we know that, that soon after you go right back into, into –

JU: Jail.

JM: The Movement.

JU: Yeah, right back.

JM: So tell me about how you thought your way back into more direct participation and direct action.

JU: Dr. Hayling had Dr. King show up in June of 1964 and we went right on back into, uh, demonstrating and participating.

AH: First, Dr. Hayling, this is what Dr. Hayling, uh, sent for the four of us and—

JU: To meet Dr. King, yeah.

AH: Yeah, to meet Dr. King.

JM: Tell, tell, tell me that story if you would, please.

AH: Yeah, to meet Dr. King and we came, Willie Carl, Sam, JoeAnn, and myself, and met Dr. King that night. He was sitting on the couch. It was a little plastic couch, Dr. Hayling, I remember just good, it was a little red, red couch. He was leaning back and, uh, Ralph Abernathy was sitting over in a corner and Dr. King was kind of sitting in, in, uh, in the corner, kind of leaning. He had a little hat kicked to the side. I remember this good. He had his little hat kicked to the side.

JM: Hey.

AH: And when we came in, he got up. And, uh, Dr., Dr. Hayling told him and he said, “Oh, I know about these four young people.” He said, “I want to tell you. I want to hug you all and tell you you all went beyond the call of duty.” He said, “Job well done. I am so proud of

you. I am so proud.” Even though whatever happened to Samuel and Willie Carl, they still went back to jail. They still, they still went back to jail with Dr. Martin Luther King, SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], because we went to jail under the NAACP –

JU: The first time --

AH: [35:00] – in 1963, but went back to jail in 1964 under Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Dr. King’s organization.

JM: Yeah. Ms. Ulmer, how, can you tell the story of, um, of that, that arrest with Dr. King, that, that, that protest? And we’re, we’re pretty much on the spot where it happened.

AH: I was the one went to jail with Dr. King.

JM: Oh excuse me.

JU: She went to jail with Dr. King, not me. [laughs]

JM: That’s right. That’s right. That’s right.

AH: I, it seems like I was already, always in the mix of everything.

[Laughter]

AH: For some reason.

JU: With Dr. King.

AH: I was always in the mix with – but what happened was Dr. King was at, uh, at, uh, St. Mary’s, uh, Church and he spoke that night and, uh, Miss Peabody [Mary Parkman Peabody, the 72-year old mother of the then-governor of Massachusetts] and Dr. Hayling and all, they, we was in groups. They all was in groups. And, uh, I was standing up against the – I had no intention of going to jail. I’m not going to lie to you. [laughs] I was standing up against the, the church and he turned and he seen me and he looked at me and he said, “I want my little hero to come and go with me and my group.” I was saying to myself, “Oh no, no, oh.” [laughs] I finally

said, “Oh not tonight.” And I, you can’t say no to Dr. King. So I went to jail. It was me, Dr. King, Rev. [Fred] Shuttlesworth, and there was, uh –

JU: Was it Ralph Abernathy?

AH: Ralph Abernathy and there was a young white woman. I don’t, I can’t recall her name, but we all went, we, we all went, uh, in, in, in, uh, I don’t know whose car it was, but anyway, we all pulled up and went up there and I was standing up there. I had my little purse. I was, ooh, we was, we was, at that time, I was dressed, boy, I’ll tell you. At that, and, and a young lady named Diane Mitchell, and we went up and Dr. King said, uh, “We would like to enter to be served.” And, uh, Brock [James Brock, owner of the Monson Motor Lodge] said, “Niggers, didn’t I tell you all I wasn’t going to?” [laughs] Why y’all keep bothering me? Didn’t I tell you?” Then he stood there. Then he said, “Dr. King, I’ll let you in, have a cup of coffee, but the other ones can’t come in.” Dr. King said, “No, if they can’t come in, I can’t come in either.” He said, “Well, I’ve got to call the police,” and he hollered back there to somebody: “Niggers [are at it]”? uncertain short phrase at 37:37]. Those cars was pulling up, putting us in, putting us, throwing us into cars, throw poor Dr. King in the car with the dog. [laughs] And the dog, he was, the dog loved Dr. King so much, he kissed him.

JM: Mmm.

JU: Mmm.

AH: He did, he kissed him.

[Laughter]

AH: Those people had dogs and then they, they named the dogs. They had the dogs walking beside us saying, “Niggers walking.” [laughs] They was horrible here. We had some horrible and we never would have thought that the white people here, we all thought everybody

loved one another, everybody just got along, until we decided that we wanted to integrate and, and go sit at their counter. No, they really went completely crazy. They wanted to kill up all of us. But you know, going to jail with Dr. King was a good experience that night. I remember, I remember when we got in jail and, uh, him and Ralph Abernathy and he woke up that morning and, uh, he had told us, uh, because we was in the cell next to us, women's, all women's was in the cell next to his, and he said, "Good morning everybody." And, um, we said, "Good morning." And he said, "I want you all to bow y'all heads."

JU: To pray.

AH: In prayer. And we'll, and, and, and he prayed and, uh, he started singing this song: [sings] "Woke up this morning with my mind set on freedom. Woke up this morning with my mind set on freedom. Hallejuah, halleju, halleju, halleju-u-u-uah." And the next thing we know, we heard the doors opening. They was taking him out, taking him to Jacksonville, and then the, that night, I got out and Jackie Robinson had came to town and I said, "Why are all those people down at St. Paul Church?" Because I lived on Central. [40:00] That was the name of the street before it became MLK [Martin Luther King Jr. Street]. And, uh, they said, "Oh, Jackie Robinson the baseball player is speaking down, down there." So I walked down, down. You couldn't get in. It was packed in there. You just couldn't get. There was no, no, no, not even standing room. So I was outside sitting on the Catholic church, you know, the little stoop out there, and so somebody came running out the, running out the, uh, church hollering, "Audrey Nell, Audrey Nell, he's talking about you all. He's talking about you all." And I'm like, "What?" And they was pulling me through, just pulling me to, you know, to him, and when I got up to him, he just grabbed me and hugged me. JoeAnn, Willie Carl, and Sam, they were still in jail.

JU: Yeah, I was still in jail.

AH: They were still, they were still in the jail and, and he just said, “Oh, I have, I never would have thought that four young people would be this, have this much courage.” He said, “So I’m going to give you and your young friend, JoeAnn, a relaxing, a relaxing time at my home in Stamford, Connecticut, for two weeks. I’m flying you there first class.” We didn’t know what first class was. We’d never been on a plane.

[Laughter]

JU: But he sent the tickets to Dr. Hayling.

AH: Yeah, he did.

[Laughter]

AH: We was sitting up there.

[Laughter]

AH: We was sitting up there, me and JoeAnn, boy, we was just laughing and the lady came and said, “Do you all want to look at a movie?” JoeAnn looked at me and said, “Movie?” [laughs] We had never been on a plane in our life.

JU: Yeah, that was my first time.

AH: That, that was our first time ever being on a plane and we were, I said, “JoeAnn, look at that. We’re walking out like the movie stars.” And when we, when we landed in, uh, in, uh, New York, oh boy, we were just, there he was standing there waiting on us, uh, Jackie Robinson. We didn’t, uh, I said, “Dang, JoeAnn,” I said, “That’s him.” Because JoeAnn had never seen him and he came and he picked up. I think Sharon was with us. Yeah, his daughter was with us, uh, and then he stopped us at a shoe store.

JU: Yeah.

AH: Aw, he just, these people were good to us. We just didn't know how to act. I mean, that man had more radio stations coming down to interview.

JU: Oh yeah, we had a lot.

AH: Yeah, we had a lot of inter, and who interviewed us, uh, uh, I wish we could get that. Who interviewed us the most was his daughter.

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: His daughter and her, her friends. They, we would sit out on the patio and that man had more, uh, uh, radio stations there than we could, we can imagine. We did a lot of interviews in Connecticut.

JU: And pictures with him.

AH: And pictures with him.

JU: That we can't get.

AH: That we can't get.

[Laughter]

AH: I asked Ms. Robinson, she said, [in Ms. Robinson's voice] "Oh no, they're in our archive."

JU: It belongs to the archive.

AH: They do belong to the archives of the Jackie Robinson Foundation. I said, "Well, can you get a, go in there and get a little copy and send them?" "No, I can't, Audrey." [laughs] She was such a sweetheart, the daughter was to all of, uh, the whole family treated us very well.

JU: Very nice.

AH: Very well. I mean, we learned things that I don't think we would have ever would have learned. She, she made sure we went to, uh, museums.

JU: Oh yeah.

AH: Now she, yeah, she made sure. I, for me, I didn't want, Susan, her, the daughter, she didn't want to go to the museum, but Ms. Robinson made her take us to the museum, Empire State Building, and, and then she, uh, took us to the sandal place where they, she wanted us to see how they made sandals [this is a reference to a shop in Greenwich Village] and all kind of stuff like that. They, they just was just pure wonderful people, beautiful home, never seen a home like that in my life. It was just, just pure gorgeous. It was, everything was gorgeous, even including the lake. The lake was gorgeous. [laughs] And, and, and David [David Robinson, Jackie Robinson's son], I have to put on tape, David, if you ever see this tape, you and that horse got on my nerves. [laughs] He rode a horse all the time. Now he would never bother JoeAnn too much, but he would aggravate me. He would follow me and aggra – I said, "David, go somewhere else, go." And he was, how old David was?

JU: He was little. He was like seven or eight when –

JM: Jackie Robin's son, Jackie Robinson's son.

AH: Yeah.

JU: He was little. He was a little boy.

AH: A little boy. He was sickening. [laughs]

JM: When you all came back from, from New York and settled back into, to St. Augustine, we're now past the Civil Rights Act's passage in July of '64 and all. Did, tell me about, um, what happened here and did, the extent to which things did and didn't change in the near term and how you felt about that.

AH: Well, to me, everything stayed the same, but what I did was, uh, I enrolled in, uh, Florida Memorial [College] thinking that, uh, you know, the college was going to still [45:00],

you know, be here. You know, I, I said, “Well, you know, this is,” because we, we, we, we, uh, JoeAnn, matter of fact, everybody went to college, uh, but Willie Carl. Samuel went to Florida Memorial in Miami. JoeAnn went to Edward –

JU: Edward Waters College [Jacksonville, FL].

AH: Waters College. And, uh, when, when this college moved, when they moved the college, I couldn’t go with the college because I didn’t have the finances to go to Miami, you know, with the college. So I had to drop out of the college, you know. But Samuel, I think Samuel had about three, three years of college or maybe more. More, yeah. Samuel, Samuel was brilliant. Samuel was very smart, very. I have to give it to him. He was – he had a brain on him. For him to went out the way he did, it, it, it, it really broke my heart. I, I, I think about him now because we had a lot of talks and Samuel was very, very inspirational and about the brotherhood and all about the brotherhood, and he loved to, to talk about how the, how the world needs to change and, oh, he was just –

JU: [uncertain word at 46:22]

AH: Yeah, he was very, very – now Willie Carl, he died in ’95 and I didn’t get a change to – because he was in Germany. He died in Germany and, uh, his mother had his body shipped here, from Germany.

JU: I moved away.

JM: You moved?

JU: Yes, I’ve moved to Jacksonville. I went to school over there. I met my husband and I just stayed over there.

JM: Yeah.

JU: Yes, sir.

JM: Was part of that, was part of that, were, were you, were there parts of not being here that were actually helpful?

JU: Yes, because I told my mother I was going to move to a city if I ever got married. So I wanted my children to come up different from what I did. I wanted them to have, uh, privileges. If they wanted to learn how to swim, they had pools, all kind of pools. They could just go. They couldn't tell nobody, "You can't come here," because we didn't have a pool, I think. What was that college, Florida Memorial, had a pool and the YMCA and we couldn't go to the YMCA because we were black. So that was [laughs] no, no pools for us. So that's why I told my mother. So I just moved to the city for my children's sake so they could get a better education in the city. So that's what I did.

AH: Well –

JB: Joe, could we stop for a second? We've been going for awhile.

JM: Okay, okay.

[Pause in recording.]

JB: We're rolling.

JM: We're, we're back after a short break. Um, Ms. Hamilton, Ms. Ulmer, I, I think maybe after we turned off or just before, after our break, I wanted to ask you about other things that – important ways you think back on all this history when you, when you talk about it and think about it and other incidents, episodes, themes. I just invite you however you might want to comment. Ms. Ulmer?

JU: Well, I just think about the things that we did and we know that we did what we thought was right and we demonstrated in a way that we just didn't hurt nobody. It was just a passive demonstration. It was a non-violent movement and we just gave our all in all, and we

did what we thought was right and I still say to this day we was right and we didn't hurt nobody and going to jail, if we have to go again, we did, and we just did what we thought was right in our heart. That's what we wanted to do: make a difference. It was time for a change. If you don't do anything, you stay in the same old rut. So we just had to get out and do what we thought was right and we did. It started a whole chain reaction. Dr. Hayling had to get somebody else in besides himself and Florida Memorial College and us little sixteen demonstrators. He called in a bigger force. So we just started the kindling of the fire, wanting, yearning for what was due to us and we made a big dent and impact, but we finished up with Dr. King and the passing of the civil rights bill [Civil Rights Act of 1964].

JM: Do you think it changed the way, did it change the way you were thinking about what your, what the path of your life might be, what you wanted to do with your life and – ?

JU: Well, really, it changed the path of me thinking what it would be for my children. That's what I wanted because my life had already, I was fifteen and I moved away after the demonstrations and went to college. So I wanted my children to have a chance better than what I had coming up. So I moved to Jacksonville. I liked it and I stayed there and reared all my children, I reared four children there.

JM: Yeah. How about yourself in, in a leadership role [50:00] as a woman? Did it change the way you thought about – ?

JU: No, I'm very outspoken. I'm, I'm just an outspoken person. When I see something happening and it's not, you know, appropriately right or whatever, I'm, I'm the first one to voice the opinion of, "That's not right. You can't do that. Uh, you should do this and do that." No, I, that's just me. I just force my opinion on things now more because I always tell my kids, "When you're right, you're right. When you're wrong, you can't say anything. You just have to accept

what they give you, but always be right and try to do what's right and then you can go ahead and voice your opinion." Now I'm sorry, but that's just something within me. That's the way I feel about it. [Pause] Well. [Laughter]

JM: Ms. Hamilton, tell me other parts of this story that, that are really important to make sure are in the record when you think back.

AH: Mmm hmm. Well, when I think back, well, when I think back on the, what we went through, we went through a lot and we thought we was going to accomplish a lot.

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: But to me, we accomplished a little, especially in St. Augustine. St. Augustine, to me, remains the same. They gave you a little; then they snatched it back. To me, that's my opinion, you know. And as far as my life and the, and the, and the, uh, and the community, I feel like with the Civil Rights Movement and the part that we played in the Civil Rights Movement made a, made a difference to a certain extent, but it, it also made us lose a lot of our history and that's the hurting part of it all. And I'm happy to see that our kids has a better chance of equal opportunity now than they did before, but to me, I see as I look back on my life back in the sixties and the, uh, early '70s, to me, it was a good life.

JM: Mmm hmm.

AH: It was a good life. The only thing, we were second-class citizens. That's what we wanted to change. We wanted to change to let people know that we are humans. We, our ancestors were the, was part of having built this country.

JM: Hmm.

AH: And that is the reason we made this stand. We were tired of being treated like a nobody and a second, as second-class citizens when we had just as much right as the white man.

JM: You raised your family here.

AH: I raised my family here.

JM: Yeah.

AH: Mmm hmm, yes. My daughter, she moved to Jacksonville and my son, he eventually moved to Jacksonville. I have a son, uh, he stays in Gainesville. So you know, they're grown, but I raised them here. My son, my baby boy, went to St. Augustine High and he was the quarterback for two years at the St. Augustine High School, you know. They almost were champions, but they didn't get there, but they was almost. But anyway, uh, St., St. Augustine, to me, is the same old, same old. It had to get rid of our Dr. Hayling and they had to get rid of the ones that voiced opinions and put their foot down and said, "Oh no, I'm not taking this. I'm not going to go for this." There wasn't, Dr. Hayling was not a yes man. He was not a yes man.

JM: Are there ways your, your record of activism, uh, had implications for you later in your life here in, in St. Augustine?

AH: Yeah, to a certain extent, yeah. [55:00] But I, I, I made a good, I made a good living for, for me and my kids. I made a good living. But I could have made a better living if I hadn't had that record over my head, you know, but sometimes God opens door for a reason and maybe that record, it may not mean anything right now, but one day maybe it will at, because at least, I have one they didn't destroy.

JU: Alright.

AH: They didn't destroy it and to be presented at my housewarming with a FBI file –

JM: Mmm hmm.

AH: That was the hardest thing. I couldn't believe when David Nolan, the historian [Nolan lives locally and has great expertise concerning St. Augustine movement history], stood up and said, "I have a gift for you. I have your FBI file." And I'm like, "What are you talking about? FBI?" And he got Dr. Hayling and they were all over it. I was like, "What in the world is this? You mean to tell me we was monitored by the FBI?"

JU: Yeah, as children.

JM: You said as?

JU: Children.

JM: Yes, indeed, yes, indeed.

JU: Fourteen, fifteen, and sixteen.

AH: I mean, you, you should see the pages.

JU: Mmm.

AH: Of this FB – I mean this is, he gave it, he handed me this big old stack and I'm like, I was so stunned. I was like, "Are you serious? An FBI file?"

JU: This happened when, 2009?

AH: 2000, uh, uh, when, yeah, 2009. No, it wasn't 2009. It was 2008 when the housewarming, that's the only time.

JU: I thought it was just disgusting.

AH: I never knew, we never knew, I never knew that.

JU: We didn't. You just found that out.

AH: And he had, and he, we had just, he, they had, the, the dedication of my house and that was a gift from him to me. He said, "Ms. Audrey, I want to present you with your FBI file." My mouth flew open and said, "What are you talking about? What FBI file?" And he handed

me this book and I opened it up and the first thing hitting me in the face was Dr. Hayling [laughs]. R. B. Hayling. All kind of stuff in this, in this FBI file. I got it at home.

Robert Hayling: She has a Habitat for Humanity house and she has a plaque in her front yard marking that site as a historical site.

AH: A historical site.

RH: With her picture and her history on it.

JM: I'm not sure the mikes would have caught Dr. Hayling's comment. Could you just quickly repeat that or, or should I, that, that your home is a Habitat for Humanity home and it bears in its front yard a plaque talking about the history and your role in that history.

AH: Yeah, and it's also a memorial. I live out by a cemetery and in the back of it is, uh, Samuel, Willie Carl, and JoeAnn's mother and, uh, uh, quite a few other civil rights activists that is buried in that. So when they told me about the plaque, I said, "Well, I would prefer the plaque to be a memorial for the ones that's buried in the back, uh, of the, in the cemetery back there, especially for Willie Carl and Samuel." Now Ms., now JoeAnn's mother is back there, but now

—

JU: Samuel's.

AH: Samuel's mother is back there buried beside him and, uh.

DH: Ms. Hattie White.

AH: Ms. Hattie White.

JM: Yeah, yeah. Uh, Ms. Ulmer, I, I have a final, a final question and then I'll run by final thoughts from you both. You've been up the road in Jacksonville for these years.

JU: Mmm hmm.

JM: Um, until very recently, there was, there was almost literally nothing in the local landscape of public history and this is a city after all that really presents its history as, as the drawing card for so many tourist visitors. There was almost nothing in the landscape that spoke to the Civil Rights Era and quite recently, a monument now is in the plaza, um, to the foot soldiers of the Movement [the St. Augustine Foot Soldiers Monument, a memorial sculpture located in the Plaza De La Constitucion in downtown St. Augustine, unveiled May 2011]. And I wonder if, I wonder how you think about that placement [60:00] and its significance and its –

JU: Well, in 2004, the 40th ACCORD [formally the “40th Anniversary to Commemorate the Civil Rights Demonstrations, Inc. (40th ACCORD),” a non-profit established 2003 to promote awareness of local movement history; placed thirty historical markers known as the ACCORD Freedom Trail Project] did an acknowledgement of the St. Augustine Four. They acknowledged us as the four youth who were sent away to the reformatory school and they invited people to come. They had a big celebration and our former lawyer, um –

AH: Son.

JU: Son came and he spoke.

AH: Earl Johnson.

JU: Earl Johnson Jr. Earl Johnson was our lawyer during the demonstration, and Mr. Due [Mr. John Due, father of Priscilla and Patricia Due]. So before we was acknowledged to everybody in, I work for the state, so nobody really knew what JoeAnn was all about until it was publicized in the newspaper, but I used to go to my sister’s school because she is a teacher and do black history. But when it hit the newspapers and everywhere, they was like, “Oh my God, JoeAnn, we know.” I don’t have to go around with a sign on me saying how I feel. That was in my heart and I didn’t believe I had to share that with nobody, but after I shared it with everyone,

they shared it and acknowledged us and we just became a twosome. Oh, Audrey Nell and JoeAnn, would did you do this? So I think it made a big impact on our life later after they had acknowledged, but we felt like, I'm going to tell you the way I felt. I don't know if Audrey Nell felt that way. We felt like what we did didn't really make a difference to nobody because nobody gave us no good feedback.

AH: They swept us under the rug.

JU: They just kept us like, "Oh, where did y'all went? Reformatory school?" They had things and they did it for themselves. They didn't acknowledge us for nothing and, and that made me feel bad. I told Audrey Nell, it'll be alright. It'll be alright in due time. But I really think what we did was just the right thing to do and I don't care, you know. It's, it's, it's alright whether they acknowledge us or not. God knows our heart and we did a whole lot to make, you know, life better for everybody. That includes for our family, your family, anybody that's prejudiced, letting them know the way we feel. We deserve everything that we get because we are human too. Just because we're a different color doesn't mean I don't deserve that or you deserve different. No. The First Amendment, we all deserve the same thing and that's the way I feel. I, I, I just felt that what we did was right and I'm, I'm just sorry if I hit on people or hatred and they feel bad and they just figure they're just – animosity, they just got all that hatred in their heart for the, if you're not of your color, then I'm wrong, but that doesn't, that's not the way it goes. A lot of people live that way and they think and I probably work with, uh, some of them side by side, but you kept your thoughts over there to yourself and after JoeAnn left the room, I always say you probably say, "JoeAnn's a good old you-know-what?" But it's alright because JoeAnn treats everybody nice. I, I haven't got time for it. You know, it's just depressing.

AH: But I'm going, I'm going to say this. The 40th ACCORD was the first –

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: To put anything downtown concerning –

JU: Oh yeah.

AH: The Civil Rights Movement and, uh, what happened to us as teenagers. It, before the foot, the foot soldiers put –

JU: Oh he didn't see that.

AH: – put the, uh, monument down there, the 40th ACCORD had already acknowledged us downtown on the wall next to the Woolworth's. Gwendolyn Duncan [president of the 40th ACCORD organization], I have to give her props for getting all these monuments out –

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: – the way that she has did because if it wasn't for her and, and, and, and her, her belief in talking with Mr., Mr., city commissioner, former city commissioner, Twine [Henry Twine], and Mrs. Katherine Twine, they gave her a vision. She called me and I told her, I said, "Gwendolyn, if you want to know anything or need to know anything, you need to get in touch with Dr. Hayling –

JU: Mmm hmm.

AH: You need to go and talk to Dr. Hayling because Dr. Hayling." Because during that time, they were, they, they, they were having a anniversary here. I said, "You talk to Dr. Hayling and he'll put you on the right track, [65:00] uh, for whatever need to be did in St. Augustine." Because they swept the whole Movement up under the rug, not just the St. Augustine Four, but the whole, whole movement of St. – if they could have got rid of everything. They pushed down the Ponce [that is, razed the Ponce de Leon Hotel] out there on U.S. 1. They got rid of that. They pushed down the Monson [Motor Lodge]. They got rid of that. Now they

changed the Slave Market [as the principal historic structure in the downtown Plaza has long been known]. Anything that they could get rid of conc – concerning the Civil Rights Movement, they got rid of until certain people in this town like Barbara Vickers, Dr. R. B. Hayling, Gwendolyn Duncan, and her members said, “No, we are not having it. We are not having it. Somebody is going to know what happened in St. Augustine. Somebody is going to know because we’re going to make sure.” Thank you.

JU: Thank you.

JM: Thank you both so much.

JU: You’re welcome.

JM: You’ve been very, very generous with your time and it’s a great honor and privilege.

Thank you.

AH: You’re welcome. [Clapping]

[Recording ends at 1:06:20]

END OF INTERVIEW