

*Civil Rights History Project
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Interviewees: Eddie Holloway

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Location: University of Southern Mississippi, Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Interviewer: Emilye Crosby

Videographer: John Bishop

Length: approximately 2 hours, 23 minutes

START OF RECORDING

Female 1: From the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

EMILYE CROSBY: Good morning. I'm Emilye Crosby, and we're here at the University of Southern Mississippi with Dean Eddie Holloway on December 2, 2015, as part of the Civil Rights History Project, which is cosponsored by the Library of Congress and the National--the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture, and with me are John Bishop and Guha Shankar, and well, good morning.

EDDIE HOLLOWAY: Good morning.

EC: And thank you so much for doing the interview with us today. Could you start by telling us when and where you were born?

EH: Eddie Holloway, born 1952, September 26, Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

EC: Can you tell me about your family and growing up?

EH: Yes. My mother and father, Beatrice Holloway--actually, she was a Jimison before she moved from York, Alabama, and my father, Willie Holloway, was native to Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

EC: What kind of work did your parents do?

EH: My mother was a beautician, and I guess when her joy of fishing became as prominent, she could say she was a local fisherman. But my dad was a service provider and worked at the Meridian Fertilizer Company, which was a precursor to Coastal Chemicals. They made various and sundry fertilizers, and I think the home office was Yazoo City, Mississippi. His claim to fame, and my bragging point, is that he worked there for in excess of sixty years.

EC: Oh my. That's a long working life. One place.

EH: Yes. He told me when he went there, they paid a dollar a day and bet you couldn't make a dollar a day.

EC: So, was it piece--did they pay for piecework, or--.

EH: Well, he indicated that his task primarily was delivering fertilizer by the barrel from one location to the other. And the work was so extreme--again, the pay was a dollar a day--that they would bet you another dollar that you couldn't make a day.

EC: That you couldn't actually last the whole day?

EH: Yes, so that was two-dollar-a-day work, and through the course of time, he became the office custodian. And even after the days of his retirement, the insurance of the company required that personnel be present at all times, so he stayed on the location as a watchman, if you will, just prior to his final illness.

EC: So, he worked almost his entire life?

EH: His entire life, yes.

EC: Did he like working for that company?

EH: I think he loved, maybe not the work, but the people. I've until yet to find anybody that will make a statement ill of his, his being. His day-to-day walk. Many tell me that he would not sign a contract. He said, "That's my word." And I occasionally see people that still recall him for those attributes.

EC: So he was somebody people trusted?

EH: Until now, he's the best person that I ever remember meeting.

EC: Your father?

EH: Yes.

EC: That's a wonderful feeling, I imagine. Did your family live on Mobile Street?

EH: 904 Mobile Street.

EC: And where was your mom's shop? Was it at--.

EH: My mom's shop was attached to the house. Bea's Beauty Salon.

EC: Can you describe Mobile Street?--I'm sorry, Mobile Street, for us?

EH: Mobile Street was a self-contained street, as I remember it. Unless there were extreme needs, most of your needs were met inside of that Mobile Street area. There was a movie theatre. There were probably twelve to fifteen restaurants of some kind or the other, or taverns, or clubs, or night clubs, or restaurants. As many beauty salons or barber shops. There was a physician. Physician's office, a [5:00] dentist's office, a pharmacist. A couple of haberdasheries. Tailor shops. At least six cleaners. Four churches, a television repair shop, a watchmaker. At least four motels, if you will,

or hotels, if you will. A couple of dance halls. And I would say the professionals of Hattiesburg lived in that area.

EC: And was that really the heart of the black community?

EH: That was. That was the black community.

EC: Right there in that circle.

EH: Correct.

EC: Were the residencies and the businesses, were they sort of interspersed, or was there a sort of a stretch that was just businesses with, and then residencies?

EH: Yes, there was probably a four to five, maybe more, stretch of businesses, and for the most part, the businesses were not comingled with residential living unless there would be a residential structure on the same lot behind or beside a business.

EC: What was it like for you as a young person to grow up in that atmosphere?

EH: I remember happiness. It appeared from a child's eye, to live across the street from a school principal or to live next door to a teacher or to live across the street from executive types, if you will, that staffed the insurance office, on Mobile Street, or to go to church with the same people that lives in the catchment area of your house. There were always plenty of motivation intrinsic as well as external, if you aspired to be.

EC: Did you frequent the businesses? I mean, would you be in that part of the community, would you go to the movie theatre or--.

EH: I would go to the drug store. I would go to the cleaner's. From the time of my mother's birth, every Saturday I would go to William's Cleaners to sit with Ms.

Thelma Williams because she cleaned my clothes from the point of my mom's death, so although I was not required to go up there I felt an obligation to go to sit with her because she would be there dispensing clothes by herself.

EC: So you'd keep her company?

EH: Yes.

EC: Was it busy? I mean was it a vibrant area?

EH: Mobile Street was so busy. There were points when you would have to exit the sidewalk to get into the street to traverse, because it was a catchment area for a thirty-mile radius. All of the people in the McLain, McLaurin, Beaumont, Richton areas--Wiggins--they would come to the Mobile Street area for beauty purposes, for clothing, for groceries, every Saturday. Yes.

EC: Did Camp Shelby, was there business from Camp Shelby in the community, too, or...

EH: Yes. Now, but the time that I'm speaking of, Camp Shelby was not an active army training facility as opposed to the service for Mississippi train personnel.

EC: OK, so was it just a training facility during World War II, and then--.

EH: It was a training facility for World Wars I and II, but it primarily went for summer training camps and other trainings. It's always been an active training facility, but with less activity on the national front.

EC: So is that like National Guard--.

EH: National Guard, National Guard preparations. Of course, at certain points, National Guard personnel would come from various and sundry other states, but in terms of what I understood it to be, at a point when there were 100,000 military

personnel at Camp Shelby that would come into the city, that hasn't existed for quite a while.

EC: I know that--I've heard that during World War II, it just really boosted the economy.

EH: Sure.

EC: Where did you go to school? What were your schools like? [10:00]

EH: Well, initially, I would have to say that my kindergarten, Maddie Robinson Kindergarten, which was two and a half blocks from my house, on New Orleans Street, and following that, [I] enrolled in W.H. Jones Elementary Junior High School, which opened in 1958, was my first grade year. I stayed there through nine years, and then went to Rowan High School, located on Royal Street, but later changed to Martin Luther King Avenue.

EC: So you mentioned that W. H. Jones Elementary and Junior High opened in 1958. So I'm assuming it's one of the schools that was built after the Brown decision.

EH: Correct.

EC: Were you aware of that, at the time, sort of where that--the impetus to sort of, once the court ruled on integration, Mississippi tried to make separate but equal more real?

EH: OK. No, I was not, at that time. In 1958. But shortly after, somewhere prior to [19]64, [19]65, I remember hearing some of the educators discussing that. As I told you, my mom died and Mrs. Sip, who was president of the Mississippi Teacher's Association, lived across the street. There was the MTA, and an MEA. One catered to the African American teachers and the other to Caucasian teachers, but in an out of those

houses--and I was--I would say I was not the most athletic type that would always be playing in the street--I would be in with one of them, somewhere in an encyclopedia or, and obviously not welcome to listen to their conversations, but finding myself intrigued by some of the things that they were saying. So as a result of those things, I did learn of the state's effort to stymie full, wholesale integration or desegregation by the building of schools such as W. H. Jones and Lillie Burney, and that was a wave that continued throughout the state of Mississippi.

EC: You mentioned the two separate organizations for teachers. For people that don't know, can you say which ones, which one was which?

EH: I think the Mississippi Teacher's Association was primarily African Americans. I remember being out of school, and I remember that two days, Monday, Tuesday, were set aside for black teachers, and Thursday, Friday, was set aside for white teachers.

EC: Where did they--so, when you say set aside, did they have a meeting?

EH: A meeting place in Jackson.

EC: OK. And so the white--which did you say? So, white teachers would meet first, and then--.

EH: Well, I can't say which one--.

EC: Which was which?

EH: But they did not meet together, right.

EC: You mentioned earlier that your mother passed away. How old were you when she passed away?

EH: Eleven.

EC: At that point, you started spending more time with some of the teachers in the neighborhood?

EH: I was always involved, or connected, by virtue of her being a beautician and most of them would come around, and as I've told you, the majority of my teachers were members of my church. So, even prior to her death, I would go to church with them because they lived next door, or I would go to teacher's meetings because they lived next door, or I would be there with one of their friends. Excuse me, one of their children, and would go along with them. So, church was almost an extension of the school.

EC: Can you describe that a little bit for people, sort of, the interconnection between church and school?

EH: Well, Mrs. Moore was my choir director, if you will. Her sister-in-law, Mrs. Wilson, was my choir director. Mrs. Moore--Mrs. Dice was my third grade teacher, and she was my Sunday school teacher, and I would go to church with her every time she went. Mrs. Knight, my fifth grade teacher, was my Sunday school teacher, and they were all superintendents of the Sunday school or educational services in our church. Ms. Murdice Roux, who worked in conjunction with my second grade teacher, [15:00] was a Sunday school teacher at Mt. Carmel Baptist Church. So, throughout the course of my earlier years' involvement, they were the same faces at different places. So, in Sunday school or in church, they would know whether I was doing well in elementary school, and vice versa. And we were anchored in the community, living next door, three doors down, across the street from--. So the educational voids that may have existed in my house were filled by virtue of my wanting to meet the expectations of those that were taking me with them everywhere.

EC: So, I sort of want to go in a couple directions. So, it sounds like from a very young age, you hungered for education. Is that a true assessment?

EH: Yes. I don't know what I hungered for education, as opposed to I really wanted to be informed. I really wanted to know. I knew that there were things of importance that I did not know, and I could see the way that the teachers and the principals would dress. I would observe their cars and see their walk and their gait, and the spunk of which they would get about, and I know I remember wanting some of that. So, it appeared that the pathway to getting that was to in part be like them.

EC: Sounds like you very much looked up to them.

EH: Correct.

EC: You said whatever educational void there might be in your home. How far did your parents--were they able to go to school?

EH: I don't know, because my dad told me that he did not go to Eureka School. He said he went to the little red building. And from all I can gather, the little red building was really a little yellow house. Now, it may have been red at a point for him, and I've tried desperately to find out about that little red house. With the history of Eureka High School, I do find that there was a little red house. But I'm sure at that time, sixth grade or so, my mom, I don't know, but I knew--I remember one of the struggles that I had was every day when I'd get out of school, my dad would have a cardboard table on the porch waiting for me to get my lesson before I could go out of the yard. We really struggled. He referred to a zero as an aught. That griped me to no end, to the point of me absolutely saying, despite his ability to count, that he was archaic, that was old fashioned, that wasn't current, I don't need you teaching me.

So, that was an everyday challenge for me. So I think from that assumption, and from his writing, that I gathered that he was not formally educated, and certainly not like Ms. Sip or Ms. Cole, or the Wilsons. He didn't go, and he wore overalls to his work every day. That didn't remove my love for him, and it still today doesn't distract from me saying he was the best person that I know until this day, but I knew he was not formally schooled.

EC: Are there things that you learned from him, lessons that you want to--.

EH: Oh, goodness. My daughter today at thirty-one, thirty-two, has asked me to write things down that he said. I've had a life of challenge, and I don't say that with regret, and I don't say that, certainly, for any pity or concern, but I cannot recall a life's challenge that--in a moment of silence or being sequestered from other person, places, or things--that I can't recall something my dad told me that'll help me out of that. So, I think he was extremely wise. I think--I'll remember, this had nothing to do with it, but I remember getting my first [20:00] car, and a guy came by riding on a bicycle with a big boom box, and he said, "Eddie, I hear you got you a car." I said, "Yes." He said, "What kind did you get?" I said, "A Monte Carlo." He says, "Man, that's a Chevrolet." I said, "Yes." He said, "Why you didn't get a GTO?" I said, "I don't know anything about a GTO." I said, "Well, what's wrong with the Chevrolet?" He said, "Man, that's a poor man's car."

I went on the porch, I said, "Daddy, is a Chevrolet made for a poor man?" He said, "Well first, son, why you asking me this?" I said, "Well, a guy just told me that a Chevrolet was a poor man's car, and a Pontiac was for a rich man." He said, "Was it the guy that just stopped by here?" I said, "Yes." He said, "I'm ashamed of you, baby." I

said, "Why?" He said, "Son, he's on a bicycle." So, he taught in silence. Very kind. Never a gruff word. I don't think I've ever heard him say damn, or hell, but I can recall his wisdom. Does that make sense?

EC: Yes. It must have had a big impact on your family, to lose your mother.

EH: Yes.

EC: You said you were an only child?

EH: Only child.

EC: Do you have any memories of those days, about how you and your father coped with that?

EH: Well, it was an abrupt set of circumstances. My aunt came the same day from Alabama, and her daughter and husband. She remained with me until the last day of school. And they took me to Alabama. That has to be the beginning of my civil rights history. They were wise, but totally uneducated, formally. But they lived and breathed civil rights. Voting. Watching the news every day. Oh, did they love Martin Luther King and all of the civil rights workers. And they were consumed with getting an education, becoming educationally astute. And to fight poverty. They instilled in me a heaping dose of pride. Pride in person. Pride in appearance. Pride in *esprit de corps*. Never borrow. Never request. Never beg. Put your best foot forward. Every day.

And that was so overwhelming to me. They would take me to the lower echelon areas of the city of Birmingham and take me to the steel mills on payday, and to see the people coming from the long companies to get, to be paid prior to the people getting their checks. They would show me the mothers with kids on their hips, waiting for the men to be paid, and I remember--I was talking about it just yesterday--they said, "Ed, in our life

and in our death, don't embarrass us like that. We'll be gone. We never had children, but you uphold our standards. [25:00] You save every month. You go to church every Sunday. You work every day. You don't beg for nothing. Earn your respect." That has come with a penalty, because all that I've traversed and been with didn't understand that. So it never has been that I've been so egotistical that I saw myself better than others, but I guess I have tried to live up to Annie's and Lewis's and Aunt Punch's [?] edict that your mother's gone. We won't be here long. You might have to depend on yourself.

EC: So they lived in Birmingham, then?

EH: They lived in Bessemer, which is twelve miles from Birmingham.

EC: And this must have been [19]60--.

EH: Sixty-four, sixty-five. Every holiday, every weekend, or every period of time when school was out, I'd take that train that next morning at eight o'clock and go there. Bicycle, baseball glove, and in the earlier years they would send my books, because the principal lived diagonally across the street, so he would know my classes that I needed, and they would box those books and send them to me in Alabama.

EC: And how long did you stay with your relatives in Alabama?

EH: Every summer.

EC: Every summer.

EH: Yes, all but times when I would get a job of sort, or I could--I disliked it. They were so strict. I mean, sometimes two, three, four baths a day. Even to the point of ironing your handkerchiefs and your underwear. They were meticulous. They ironed their paper bags for Lewis to take his lunch to the steel mills. So, they said that if you would show a wrinkled bag, it would indicate that that bag had been used before. So,

yes, their concerns were to an extreme, but I never lost focus of what their intentions were. I know I grew weary of them, and--.

EC: As a young boy? A teenager? Young teenager?

EH: A young boy. But I knew that I would always need to go see them. I knew that I would always need to call them. While in school here, they would send me clothes, some of which I would want to wear, others I'd want to get rid of. [Laughs]

EC: Were you allowed to do that, or did you have to wear them?

EH: Oh, I could not, because they would come down and want to see them, so I just didn't wear them--I didn't wear the red socks or the pink socks or the yellow socks. [Laughs] But I knew, on a given day, I would get a letter or a package, or a phone call of love.

EC: You really knew you could count on them.

EH: I knew that I had everlasting friends and relatives, and they would make sure I knew that, that the others around me didn't care like they cared. [Recording stops and restarts.]

EC: You just mentioned that your aunt and uncle would send you these packages with the bright colors and stuff.

EH: Yes, and some magazine. I don't know, JC Penney's or Sears. They would see combinations. A yellow shirt, yellow socks, red shirt, red socks. Oh, and that's what they would send me in the mail, and I tried it. But as I told you, I won't wear red socks anymore.

EC: What happened when you wore them?

EH: Oh, they asked me, did I step on a nail, that my ankles were bleeding?

EC: And that was it?

EH: That as it.

EC: Find a friend to share those red socks with. You said that they really introduced you to civil rights, or were very fiery about it. In [19]64, so if you're in Birmingham--or Bessemer, right next to Birmingham in [19]64, that would have been right after the big demonstrations?

EH: Correct.

EC: Did they participate in that?

EH: No, they did not march. They would be ones that would've given as much money as they could. Would've gone to the church meetings. Would have participated by virtue of their social clubs [30:00] that they belonged to. Those clubs would make donations, to funds that would be used to bond people out of jail. I can remember that interest consuming them inside of the walls of their home, but they weren't ones that would be rallying in the street. They would have been, at that time, sixty plus years of age. I was telling my family the other day, goodness, they were sixty-five when they took a little old kid in, at eleven. So, how gracious, how gracious.

EC: That sort of explains at least some of their expectations for you, right?

EH: Correct.

EC: Did you ever, did they ever--I don't exactly know how much was going on in Birmingham at that particular time, but did they ever take you to mass meetings?

EH: No, they took me to the 16th Avenue Baptist Church. They would take me to the Say Hey Burger restaurant, and that was Willie Mays's. They would take me

to the Birmingham Black Barons's stadium, where Willie Mays played. They would show me the beauties, if you will, of Birmingham.

EC: When you say they took you to the 16th Street Baptist Church, were they talking to you about the bombing there or would you--.

EH: Yes. And other civil rights locations.

EC: What did--do you remember what you thought about that, as a young man? You would have been almost the same age as the little girls.

EH: I don't think I understood what was really going on at the time. I knew that there were separate facilities. I knew that I would have to work as hard, if not harder, to share in the beauty and the wealth of the country. I know that I would have to, according to them, to be able to assimilate with attitude and with presentation. Because they--every day, manners, table manners, greetings, posture. Those silent teachings that I may have not fully understood, but was trusting of them enough to accept. Going to church. Going down and asking the church to pray for me because my mother had died and to give me wisdom and knowledge. Ask for wisdom and knowledge, that was every day. Ask for wisdom and knowledge, because once you leave us to go back to Hattiesburg, you don't have that. You don't have that.

And they were speaking of relatives as such. And they were ethno-centric. I mean, they wrote the word on that, and I'm not so sure that they did not try to take me from my dad. I think he, that was never a discussion of my consciousness, but I sensed, by virtue of him always saying to me, "Never let anybody talk you against me." Now, I'm not sure of all of that. As time progressed, I wondered whether he was my real father. But I was not able to affirm that. They never told me that. I asked them that.

EC: What made you think he might not be?

EH: I had heard scuttlebutt in the street. But never was able to confirm otherwise. Birth certificates, all of that. I mean, it's solid. But I remember praying that if he lived to 100, never let that become an issue in his mind that I heard that.

EC: Because you certainly didn't have any sense that he didn't treat you like--I mean, he treated you like a beloved [35:00] son?

EH: He was the best person I've ever met in my life. [Recording stops, then starts again.]

EC: So, you talked about your relatives coming and supporting you after your mother passed away, and earlier you talked to me about the community, right, around, and that you had a lot of teachers right there who really kind of took you under your wing. Can you talk about that a little bit?

EH: Yes. I think those teachers knew that the path to economic education and life freedoms all connected to education. And for some odd reason, I believed it. I believed because they told me that, and I believed because my aunt and my cousins told me that, and I believed it because my dad would always say, "Get your lesson, get your lesson, get your lesson." Additionally, there were what I called porch people. So, when I would walk from W. H. Jones, as I walked past all of those houses, the people on the porches would say, "You get your lesson today. You going to be smart. Be smart." So I knew that there was some connection between getting your lesson, earning a living, and having more than it would take just for a meager lifestyle.

EC: It sounds like you were getting encouraged in that direction everywhere in your life.

EH: Those porch people--just wrote an article about it. They were there, and they always asked about school. I don't know why. But I think they knew that the core effort to making life better started with school. One even said--and I told you I didn't play a lot of ball, didn't go here and there--but I would listen to what those old folk would say. One told me, "Son, there's a reason that people are killed when they try to go to get an education. It must be something in education that will set you free." I never knew what that meant, but when you looked at the integration of school or going to the separate facilities of sort all over, the kinds of things, it really had an education connection.

EC: And so they were really talking directly about this resistance to school desegregation?

EH: I think that's what they were talking about.

EC: When people are that determined to keep you out.

EH: There was some high value to it.

EC: You mentioned earlier that you heard that when you first went to school, to the new school, you didn't connect it to Brown. You were a young person. But that over time, you heard the teachers talking about that. Do you recall what they said?

EH: Oh, and I later affirmed it with the University of Southern Mississippi, that it was known and strongly forecast that desegregation and integration would be a reality. But that in the state of Mississippi and other likewise states, massive efforts to stave that led to the funding of new schools so that it became a bargaining point, if you will, that would stave it off for years to come. I mean, so I sensed that by hearing Mr. Burger and all those other people talk about that, and then learned to see that as a truth.

EC: Do you recall, were they happy? I'm sure they were happy to have the new building, but did they--I guess, how did they feel about the new buildings, versus an actual integration in the schools? [40:00]

EH: I think they were exuberant about the new building, because the real stalwarts of education, I don't think pushed integration. I think they thought, with equal footing, financing, and resources, Rowan could be as good as Hattiesburg High, so I don't know that from those old warriors, that they pushed and promoted desegregation from the perspective of, we're happy to be integrated. Did that make sense?

EC: Yes, sir.

EH: I think they wanted the everyday attendance, monies, to be equal. I think they wanted new books and, as opposed to one microscope in the biology lab, to one per kid, as in other schools. I remember seeing one new textbook in the month of October or November, in 1968. And that was a geometry book.

EC: How did it sneak through?

EH: Well, they didn't have any to send us. We always got our books from one of the other predominantly Caucasian schools, but I'm sure that they didn't have any anywhere, because obviously September passed and October too, so we finally got new books.

EC: So you were a couple months late getting there, getting your books. You mentioned Mr. Burger. Can you tell us about Mr. Burger?

EH: I think he was a visionary. Before his time.

EC: What was his role in the community, for people who don't know who he is?

EH: He was an educator and principal at Eureka, Rawls Street High, and Rowan High, and as I have said, there had to be a connection with him being so intellectual, for the reason that he chose Cornell University to do graduate work as opposed to Brown, or the University of Missouri, or Indiana, like many others. The current superintendent of public schools in Hattiesburg had gone to Cornell, and Dr. Burger mastered, if not the classes that Dr. Blaire had, and I think demonstrated he was on par, if not above and beyond, his abilities. So I think the freedoms that Mr. Burger were allowed, or given, or took, led him to build a school system in Hattiesburg second to none, though not integrated.

EC: And so you think it was a very deliberate choice on his part to go to the same graduate institution?

EH: I think so.

EC: You mentioned earlier that Hattiesburg was one of the few places in the state in the [19]40s that had high school, twelfth grade, for African Americans. What was the impact of being one of the few places that had that?

EH: Well, I recently had a conversation with Mr. Burger's son and others. There were people coming from a catchment area of around fifty miles to live here, if they had a house or a bedroom available, so that their kids could achieve a high school diploma. Otherwise, eighth, ninth grade would be the end of it, and Hattiesburg was just a feeder program to Alcorn State University, since the lion's share of our educators were from Alcorn. I'm sure there were those that wired Mr. Burger to that, and then I'm sure Mr. Burger wired others to that.[Recording stops, then starts again.]

EC: You mentioned that your Alabama relatives were very interested in voter registration. Was your father--did your father try to register?

EH: My father never voted. I never was able to get him to vote.

EC: Did he talk to you about why he didn't want to? Or wouldn't?

EH: I can't recall comments to that. But I [45:00] think he valued his relationships with whites of power. I think he didn't want to do anything where he would be seen as different. And he would say things like, "I'm paving the way for you." And that he did. I don't know of anywhere I went downtown, as a sixteen-, seventeen-, eighteen-year-old, that some degree of openness didn't come to me as a result of a relationship that he had.

EC: And when you say downtown, that's the white community?

EH: Correct, correct.

EC: And so, people there had an idea who you were because of your father?

EH: I think so, to an extent, yes.

EC: Which makes it a safer place for you.

EH: Correct. I think I still had to earn my way, but I don't think I had to jump the thorned edges that many others--I don't think I would have to go through three tiers of screening as to allow me to buy a watch on credit, because Willie Holloway had an account there. Or to the service station, or to the nurse--I mean, to the pharmacy, or places of that kind.

EC: Did you go downtown much?

EH: Yes.

EC: So, there were things that you could get downtown that you couldn't get on Mobile Street, or--.

EH: Oh, I mean, you had accounts at Sears, JC Penney's, Belk-Whitley. You had accounts. My mother had accounts at various and sundry stores. Ben's Tailor and Shop. Various other places that I would go with him.

EC: So more selection?

EH: Correct.

EC: You mentioned that your mother had the beauty shop. Did you spend much time there when she was still living?

EH: Yes, for the most part, in there, when she was dressing hair, as they called it then, yes.

EC: Did you listen to the conversations? Did you, what was that like as a young person?

EH: Yes. At that time, children were not afforded the rights to linger. But I would pick up on snippets of hot topics.

EC: I talked to Ms. Connor the other day, and she said that--actually, I don't think she said it the other day, but I read it in an interview she had done--that some of the civil rights workers were specifically trying to talk to beauticians and midwives and encourage them to join the movement. Do you know if anybody talked to your mother about that?

EH: I don't recall that. Now, Ms. Connor lived three doors from me, so I was in and out of that house. Matter of fact, I just came from seeing her son in a convalescent home Sunday, so I came up in that house as well. Denny [?]. Frank, and I.

EC: Yes, you were roughly the same age.

EH: Same age. I think, fifteen, twenty days apart.

EC: Wow, so almost like a twin brother.

EH: Correct.

EC: Did any of your teachers talk about voting in the regular schools? Or the--

EH: Only when I got to the ninth or tenth grade. Ms. Burger, Ms. Sandefer [?], Mr. Burger, Mr. Clarence Magee. That, those were topics of voting, at that time.

EC: So they would encourage students to register?

EH: Well, we weren't of--.

EC: When you were of age?

EH: Yes. We weren't of age at that time, but topics of voting were discussed in class.

EC: Do you know if that was part of the real, the formal curriculum, or is that, they're taking liberties to do that?

EH: I would think there would have been more liberties than courses on civics.

EC: Of course, they have that now, but my understanding is that it was a taboo subject--.

EH: Correct.

EC: --according to the white superintendents.

EH: Right, and the book, [50:00] *Count Them One by One?* Which is an account of the voting rights efforts in Hattiesburg.

EC: By the Justice Department Attorney? Is he the one that wrote the book?

EH: Yes, out of Boston, yes.

EC: I'm sorry, I missed what you were saying about the book.

EH: Yes, I'm just saying that at that era, that era in time, Theron Lynd was a discussion all over the city of Hattiesburg. People talking from time to time, and it centered on African Americans voting. But even prior to that, there were a group of fifteen or more that attempted to vote. But--.

EC: So, you remember those conversations in the community about that?

EH: Oh certainly, yes. Oh certainly, yes.

EC: What did you think about it?

EH: I accepted that black folk couldn't vote. I accepted that there were separate facilities. I didn't accept that that would be permanent, but I accepted that that was the status quo. I accepted that there would be those that would agree to that, but I knew that that wouldn't be permanent. That in time, things would change.

EC: What's your first memory of race? Or, of an understanding of, sort of, the rules of white supremacy?

EH: [Pause] I don't know of the first. I remember of a consciousness of being invited to USM to attend a quasi-student council something something of students, and being the only African American present. Now, there has never been an account or a time that I can't recall that I was black or different. I was always--I mean, my folk in Alabama made me aware of that, that you always remember that, and this is the way you act as a result of that consciousness. But probably sitting in that meeting, I remember it

was hot and I had on a wool coat. [Laughs] And that was the only coat I had, and I remember saying, "One day, I'm not going to have to wear this wool coat in May."

EC: In Mississippi.

EH: Yes. But I've always, if there's any gift that I've had--and I say this without ego--I think I've always thought of possibilities, and I've always thought of reframing a situation despite the current circumstances of it, that there would be--there's a way out of this. I remember reading that you're successful if you've got six payments of your salary in a mayonnaise jar in the bath. And oh, have I felt so fortunate since I [made?] that.

EC: Do you have it in a mayonnaise jar? [Laughs]

EH: A little bit. [Laughs]

EC: Keep it handy, right? What are the first civil rights activities that you remember in Hattiesburg?

EH: The marches and the mass meetings. They were almost nightly, mass meetings, from True Light Baptist Church to Saint Paul to Mount Zion Baptist Church to Palmer's Crossing, and the marches.

EC: Did you attend [55:00] the meetings?

EH: I attended the meetings. But again, I was young. One of the luxuries, if you will, was after my mom's death, being able to go fairly freely.

EC: Your father didn't have the same sort of--.

EH: Well, you were just going to be at home. My mom would go on the back porch around, gosh, it had to be five minutes to 6:00 or something, but she would whistle and that means, you could hear it two or three blocks away. That was--.

EC: Your signal?

EH: --let's get home, or certainly, the street light didn't catch you away from the house. She was a strong-willed person. I say today that all the wayward kids needed my mom for about ten minutes.

EC: That's all it took.

EH: Didn't need a police officer, just my mom. So after she passed, then I was able to go to some of the mass meetings, but not carte blanche. I mean, I had to be back in at 8:30 or 9:00, or there would be a responsible person of which my dad would let me go with, and one of those summers, relatives came from Muskegon, Michigan, and they were down, and I had probably more leverage, more fun, more freedom, than I'd ever had.

EC: What were--I'm guessing your dad didn't go to the meetings.

EH: No, my dad didn't go.

EC: What were the meetings like for you, as a young person? What was it like to be at the mass meetings?

EH: It would have been the first time I'd been in an integrated meeting with whites. It reflected, to me, hope and freedom. [Pause] You know how they say they train elephants, and babies, they put chain around one of their feet, but over time, after they're inculcated into that mindset, that the chain turns into a small string? It's a mindset. Well, just hearing that the Freedom Riders, and just the name--they were Freedom Riders, that they were coming to set us free. But I have to say this. My dad, despite his hesitancy to be involved in what we call the Civil Rights Movement, he never spoke to me in terms of, I had limits of achievement. I mean, he never said--I wanted to

go to Hattiesburg High School, and Ms. Connor's son, Denny, went. The kids, Jeffrey and Tiny, that I lived with after Mom died, went. A lot of them went. I wanted to go.

And my dad says, "Baby, let me ask Ms. Edna." She was a white lady that managed the office at the fertilizer place. Until this day, I don't know whether he lied or not. But I couldn't wait until he got back home. I said, "Dad, what did Ms. Edna say?" He said, "She said things are going well where you are. You need to stay there." I can't discount that. But I know I couldn't have been more happier than being at Rowan High School. I don't think, because Denny came back, Jeffrey came back, Jesse came back, all those that I know went came back and didn't graduate. Or failed.

EC: Oh, you meant from Hattiesburg?

EH: Yes, or faced some kind of challenge.

EC: Were you disappointed, when he said that?

EH: Yes.

EC: And so, when you say now, today, you couldn't have been happier than you were at Rowan, is that in retrospect or did you have some sense of that even at the time?

EH: I don't think I would've had the pride. [1:00:00] At Rowan High School, [there] was pride. Give a man a fish, he'll eat today. Teach a man to fish, he'll eat for a lifetime. That's what those folk would take that stage every day and tell you. He who knows and knows not that he knows not, he needs to be taught. I wouldn't've gotten all of that. I wouldn't have gotten-- I look at Denny, I look at all those others. I'm not negative to them. But that was what I needed, where I was. So if Ms. Edna made

that decision, or if my daddy made that decision, that was the right decision for Eddie Holloway.

EC: You said that, you mentioned Denny and others who transferred--and this is, I assume, freedom of choice--.

EH: Yes.

EC: --to the white school, Hattiesburg High, and that all the ones you know came back to the black schools.

EH: Well, let me say, not all, but a significant number, for whatever reason.

EC: Did they talk to you about why they came back?

EH: No. But even today, as we get together, in reunions, those that went to Hattiesburg High, for whatever reason, still come to our reunion. Why? I've never been man enough to ask. "Why don't you go to your own reunion?" But, there was something. Does that make sense? We just had a gathering this past summer. All of them came, and I wanted to say, "Well, you didn't go to school--you didn't graduate with us." But I never, I wouldn't have said that.

EC: The children who transferred over there, do you know what their motive--you know, did they make that decision, did their parents make that decision?

EH: I think in part their parents. I think they thought the grass was greener. The water was colder. And they may have gotten better pedagogy, but not love, understanding, a third eye or a third ear. I can assure you of that.

EC: Do you think any of them, any of the parents, just thought somebody had to do it? Do you think they really thought it was better, or that they--.

EH: Oh, I think they thought it was better. I think by far. I think many parents thought it was better. I mean, because I heard them say.

EC: I mean, is that because of the equipment, because it's white? Is it the resources at the schools?

EH: I think all of the above.

EC: And did the--I think I asked you this already, but I'll ask it again--did they talk to you about the kind of harassment that they experienced in those schools?

EH: Yes, I've heard just a conglomerate of things like that. I have to believe it, because they say it. But I have never experienced that in my life. I was the first student out here as a resident assistant. I was the first student of color as an office assistant. I was--and I don't say this with ego--I was the first to staff Elam Alms Residence Hall, which was an upscale, 455 male residence house, home that was private, swimming pool, turn back service, food catered by Marson's. I've never experienced any of that.

EC: What year did you come out here?

EH: Nineteen sixty-eight, washing dishes, right in that building.

EC: How'd you get that job?

EH: I was standing on the corner and I asked a man, "Do you know where I can find work?" And he called me later on that evening.

EC: You were in high school then?

EH: Yes.

EC: Was this during the school year, or a summer job, or--.

EH: Summer. [1:05:00]

EC: Summer, yes. What was it like to work over here, doing, working in the kitchen?

EH: I was washing dishes. I'd washed dishes at Southern Air Hotel. I'd washed dishes at the Grace Motel.

EC: So you had some experience.

EH: I was washing dishes.

EC: And so, I'm assuming all of the black workers--all of the workers were African American, in the kitchen?

EH: Yes.

EC: So, were they people you knew, part of the community, or--.

EH: Or knew me, or knew me.

EC: You said that you were the first resident assistant. What year did you come out here to school?

EH: Nineteen seventy.

EC: Did it make a difference to you, coming here to school, that you had actually already worked on campus?

EH: No. Actually, Ms. Sip and Mr. Burger and all of those that I've referenced, they wanted me to go to Jackson State or Alcorn. My choice to go to USM was because of my father was living, and I needed to be somewhere where I could aid and assist him. My dad remarried.

EC: How old were you when he remarried?

EH: Fifteen.

EC: You enrolled out here at Southern in 1970. That's about five years after the first African Americans on campus, is that right?

EH: Correct.

EC: And I believe you said that you knew both of the young women who were--.

EH: They came to my mother's beauty parlor, and their mother, mothers and grandmothers, did.

EC: Did you have an opportunity to talk to them about their experiences before you came out here?

EH: We sung in the church choir.

EC: Yes, yes. So, what did they say about it?

EH: I never had direct conversation with them, other than, I would say that Elaine Armstrong and I were relatively close. Ms. Branch was an older person, so she was fairly, really remote to the fiber of the school. Elaine lived on campus, sung in the choir, traveled with the team. The choir, to Mexico, the whole works. So, I don't think I needed an explanation. I was fairly independent at that time. I remember taking a bus, getting off the bus out here, taking off school that day, letting the counselor know I was going to be out, coming out here, applying for school to take the ACT test and kind of-- the rest of that was history. And I said if I didn't make, if I were not admitted, I'd try William Carey or--so I had probably had, at that time, met a couple of people that I worked during the summers on recreational facilities, and they were students of USM. They would have been graduate students, but--.

EC: Are these white students?

EH: Yes.

EC: And you had good relationships with them?

EH: I cannot sit here and tell you of woes that I've had with white folk.

When I applied for the resident assistant's job, they moved me from room 364 Scott Hall to 411. I asked, "Why were you moving me?" And they said, "You applied for a resident assistant's job." I said, "Yes." And they said, "We don't have one at this time, but we'll see if you'd like it." Well, I was--I think I was insightful enough to know that they were putting me on 411 because it was an all-white floor, and to see if I could relate to white kids. So, and those guys became my best friends. Edward Wong and all those guys, and the next year they offered me the head residency for the entire hall.

EC: So, were you an RA that year, when they moved you?

EH: Without pay. [1:10:00]

EC: [Laughs] So you did a year of voluntary RA, and then became--.

EH: Didn't like it, that it was volunteer. But knew that it was a pathway and a stepping stone, that my day would come.

EC: So, you lived on campus even though--.

EH: Scott Hall.

EC: --you wanted to stay in town to be near your dad?

EH: Yes.

EC: What made you decide to live on campus?

EH: Well, I could get my meals. And I didn't have a car.

EC: So it was a lot easier to stay on campus?

EH: Correct.

EC: So, one of the things we sort of have skipped is the freedom schools. How did you get involved in the schools?

EH: Well, all up and down Mobile Street were freedom libraries. Around at that time, it was called the black folk's library. It was really the community center. There were freedom school efforts, and then there were freedom school efforts at the True Light Baptist Church. [Pause] I would go, but not every day. I would go get a book or, from the library, I would go to some of the meetings. [Pause] But those folk in Alabama? They really instilled in me a sense and response mindset. I remember going. I've never told this. But many of those kids appeared to be just emaciated in poverty. Their appearance--a sense of—without. A lack of knowing of where they were. Being driven there because they were going to give them some food. Aunt Punch, Annie, and Lewis had taught me against that. They said, "Go buy your own baloney. And don't eat any bread unless you touched it, only."

So I didn't participate like the other students would participate. Many of those that participated, their parents were involved, so I didn't have a parent connection. But I knew to go get me a couple of books. I knew to read the encyclopedias of different things like that, but I didn't do a lot of that stuff. I marched. When I would sense danger, I would leave. If we were marching one night, uptown, and we get there, and I see people that represent the Klan with guns, and I knew all the other guys with me had their Coca-Cola bottles, broken up beer bottles, I'd go home.

EC: So they were going to defend themselves?

EH: Yes. I don't want to say I was an outlier, but as long as I can remember, I've been an independent thinker. I hope that's best to describe it that way.

EC: It sounds like it. Did you ever sit in in classes? Did you ever participate in the--not just the library, and borrowing the books, but the freedom school classes?

EH: Yes, I would go when they would talk about civility, civics. I would go sometimes when those people, they would bring in guitarists and they'd play, and [1:15:00] all, but I didn't go--I think I got the essence. I would go around with some of the people, knocking on doors and asking them, would they register to vote? I would like to say that my involvement was kind of structured, if you will. Does that make sense?

EC: Mm-hmm.

EH: OK.

EC: Do you remember how people would respond, or how you felt when you were doing that canvassing on voting?

EH: A preparation for that was how my dad saw it. He didn't--.

EC: So you worked on your dad first?

EH: He didn't want any part of it. He, though he was not oblivious to the issues of race, he may have seen himself beyond that. I don't know. We never discussed it. But I always said it, "What's the benefit of this? What's the benefit of that? How might it impact the masses?" So, I would be prone it, if I'd go to the doctor, Dr. A. T. Tatum's office, and they in turn would say, "You have to go to the back door," and I would say, "No, sir, I'd like to go to the front door."

EC: What kind of response would you get?

EH: Well, they asked me out. I'd call the Office of Civil Rights in DC, and Dr. Tatum called me and said, "Son, I held your grandmother in my arms at the time of her death and I've known your daddy. Best man I know. But you can't come back to my

office.” And from that point on, I don’t know whether I was a snitch for the government--probably never told this either--but I would receive calls from the Office of Civil Rights for twenty-five years, on voting location changes, on my opinions on anything changing the boundaries from schools and things of that kind. So, quietly, I filed objections to separate medical facilities over around the old Methodist hospital and Petal, Mississippi.

EC: I know that, I know one of the things that the Civil Rights Act, and then I can’t remember what the name of the legislation was that provided more federal funding for medical facilities, but part of what both of those did was provide this kind of recourse, right, where there’s federal oversight. When you had that encounter with the doctor, was that like the late [19]70s-- I mean, late [19]60s, early [19]70s?

EH: Early [19]70s. Now what they did was, they locked the door from entrance, but you would have to go through the front and go back to the same room. I remember really being bothered by my dad still went to him. His sister still went to him. And all of those teachers that lived across the street and that I taught still went to him. I remember that as almost overwhelming.

EC: So they would go to the white doctor instead of Dr. Smith?

EH: Yes. They would go to Dr. Tatum, A.T. Tatum. And they would go in that front door and go back to that back.

EC: Do you know why they would see him?

EH I’m sure family lineage. It may have been also, he allowed pay, if they didn’t have insurance. I think he--I really think he was a quality physician. Good strong track record. Probably had more African American clients than otherwise. I never saw anything ill about his services.

EC: Do you have any idea how he would answer--I mean, I'm asking you how he would answer--but he's saying he held your grandmother when she was dying. There's so much intimacy in that. That's a very intimate thing, and yet you can't walk in the front door.

EH: Well, my conversation with him is that [1:20:00]--I remember like it was yesterday--I said, "Dr. Tatum, I share seats with your daughter. And we, today, are in a political science class, and we enter the same door. Her name is Nancy and my name is Eddie. And she's such a nice person." So we bid goodbye. I didn't do that without fret or fear. At that time I was, I managed the front desk of Scott Hall. I had access to master keys for all of the rooms in all of the halls, so I would stay in various and sundry rooms at night, in fear, and it may have been a false fear, but--.

EC: That's a lot of access, for you to have had, a key to get into all the rooms.

EH: That was not public. It was only because I worked in the front desk.

EC: Do you remember other incidents like that, where you were challenging those boundaries?

EH: I've always challenged boundaries. I've always applied. I've always asked for what reason. I've always thought that if I could equate the other applicants, that at some point in time--I'm sure to some extent I would rationalize it as providential, if I didn't get it, the next man will. At least I opened the door. I applied for a scholarship, if you will, for a specialized service training of your choice to help your impoverished condition. I can't recall the name of that scholarship, but anyway, I made it to the third round of that, and had to go to the Sheraton Hotel in Jackson, and it was new

for an African American, back then, but I always wanted to be. And my dad would always say, "Now, you can't be jugged up around white folk all the time."

But I didn't desire to be jugged up onto whites, I just desired access to--but during that interview, the guy said, "Mr. Holloway, how are you? I see you're from Mississippi. What do you think of this? What do you think of that? What do you think of this? Do you know James Earl Eastland-- James O. Eastland?" I said, "Yes, he's a senator." He says, "What do you, what do you think about his service?" I said, "Well, he's one of two senators, state of Mississippi. Mr. Stennis and Mr. Eastland." "Well, how do you think his service"-- and I said, "I think he's an able service provider."

EC: You were doing your best, right?

EH: I'm doing my best, and whatever, whatever. And he said, "Well, I don't think much of him." I said, "Oh, OK." He said, "He authored the Farm Subsidies Act whereby farmers are paid not to grow crops, and he had"--I said, "I know what you're talking about." I said, "He had enough land he had amassed to make ten farms, and he was able to develop wealth from that and on and on and on." He said, "Do you know something else?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Sir, you are not going to be awarded this scholarship because you sat there knowing what you just told me. And you accommodated me. Leaders walk a weary limb outward."

EC: What did you make of that?

EH: That there are places where you've got to take risks and tell the truth.

[Laughs]

EC: So did you apply that lesson?

EH: Ever since then, yes. I've learned to frame and reframe, and do it in a way that it's accommodating and [1:25:00] not so abrupt that it'll take me out of the formula.

EC: You sort of walked that line of how to say your piece but do it in a way that somebody might be able to hear.

EH: True.

EC: You talked to me earlier about, you thought that Mr. Burger was really a visionary. Can you talk about--I can't remember, I think we mostly talked about that outside, not in the interview. Can you talk about his role in the community? I mean, I guess we did talk on the tape about his going to Cornell.

EH: I think Mr. Burger was on a difficult walk. It was required that he remain on the inside, but he was conscious of those things that were paramount to the outside. A great debate that's under the surface now is his role or his inactivity, or whether he had a role, in Clyde Kennard's effort to come here. I'm not sure. I've asked Dr. Lucas. I've asked Vernon's son. Dahmer's son. I've asked as many of the elderly as possible. I've heard that since the opposition was so strong for Clyde Kennard to come here, that a group of people said, "We'll work to keep Clyde out if you'll finance the junior college and let it be on the financial doles of the state." That's a lofty--that's in perpetuity, you create a college.

EC: You're going to pay that debt for a while.

EH: Right. That seems like the creation of a Burger, because it would have been Prentiss Institute, the junior college that's now defunct. That's where he came from.

EC: He had been at Prentiss?

EH: He lived--that's where he's from. And the hallmark of African American education was in that Prentiss, Port Gibson area. Mr. Burger was always in a negotiating posture. He was always leading in chaos. So the end product of his work was a stellar separate but almost equal educational system, where the average daily attendance and cost per kid was significantly less than any other, so I hold him in high regards, just knowing the little that I know.

EC: What he was able to accomplish in the context of the system. You mentioned Mr. Lucas, and asking Mr. Lucas. Now, is that Aubrey?

EH: Yes.

EC: And he was the registrar at the time?

EH: Yes.

EC: Is that correct? Has he talked about what happened when Mr. Kennard tried to come out here?

EH: He told me that, "Eddie, at the time, Mr. Burger spoke with legislators and the wealthy." That he was a direct individual, and that I had, he had, limited discussion with him on the involvement of Kennard in the process. Don't know whether that's totally accurate or not. He also said that Dr. McCain told him that the state of Mississippi higher education should be fully desegregated or integrated, but the place that it should start should be the University of Mississippi. And that we are one vote away from the closing of this school. So, the delicacy of our standing with the stakeholders is such that it ought not [1:30:00] start here, that we could be closed overnight. That's what Lucas told me.

EC: Why would Southern have been at risk of being closed then?

EH: He explained that, he explained that our status with the state board was of that nature. I don't think--and I'm led to believe, if he's correct, there was more than just whether Clyde Kennard came here, but if any disturbance here--.

EC: That would be the last--that would be the excuse?

EH: Right. Now, that's what he's constantly told me over the past 30 years. That McCain did say, he says--he said McCain said that Ole Miss should be integrated and lead the way, and it would be perfect if Ole Miss would be winning the SCC that year.

EC: So, a successful school could, desegregation in Mississippi [inaudible] a good football team?

EH: Whether all of that's correct I don't know, but that's what, in very serious conversations, he's told me.

EC: Does he raise that, or you raise it, or, I mean--.

EH: I've called him and asked him. We've met.

EC: Because of course, he's one of the people that's still living that was actually present for some of that. Growing up, were you aware of his case?

EH: Oh, yes. They talked about it in the beauty parlor, and but again, keep in mind, through my mind's eye, a man going to go to Southern. At that time, I only knew of one black that was at Southern. His name was Mr. Pally, and he sold peanuts, so he would come out here and stand and sell peanuts.

EC: Big difference. Did your parents talk about it at all?

EH: No, not in my presence. But the ladies would, in the beauty parlor. Now keep in mind, Ms. Jean was instrumental, always, in the NAACP, so you always had that from Ms. Jean, and she was a beautician also. Up on Mobile Street, in the 500, 600 block of Mobile Street, and they had a shoeshine parlor and her church, which AME, African Methodist Episcopal, has always had a lead in the civil rights.

EC: I'm glad you brought her up again. We've interviewed both Ms. Jean Connor and Mr. Clarence Magee, who I think you also mentioned, and was a teacher. It would be great if you could describe them. So we could sort of have this cross over with the interviews.

EH: I think Ms. Connor was a willing worker. She was hands and feet to the movement, by way of records, by way of history, and involvement. She was kind of a... Ms. Bethune[?]. [Pause] I remember Mr. McGee. He was my tenth grade science teacher. I never was privileged to conversation with him, until fifteen, twenty years ago, with his NAACP involvement. I think his intentions are honorable. Somewhat dated. And what I mean by that is, [1:35:00] there are some people that would think that the only place you can get a quality education would be Alcorn. And their love and insight for Alcorn supersedes the highest order that Harvard University would offer.

EC: Alcornites are fierce.

EH: Yes. So I think his limits would prevent insight growths.

EC: So, this is a good moment, I think, to talk about Southern and how much it's changed in the last fifty years. When I was growing up in Mississippi, there was still, in the [19]70s and early [19]80s, my impression was that there was still a pretty stark divide between the three major white universities and the HBCUs. And though even at

that point I think where we went to school, there was the impression that Southern was the most welcoming of the three white institutions for African American students, can you describe Southern today and how it fits in this, or how it's changed?

EH: Well, an inside joke is that USM is Mississippi's fourth HBCU. I don't know whether that's kind or not to say-- I think it's positive from the perspective that we do a tremendous job to assure access and we do a tremendous job to provide services to students where they are.

EC: Is it an open access school?

EH: In terms of entrance, ACT and all? No. It has the same entrance requirements that Ole Miss, and State, and Alcorn value.

EC: So all the schools have the same--.

EH: All eight have the same. The difference might be that one institution might commit that we're going to recruit sixty percent from out of state, and their financial strength allows for that to occur. So, they might have sixty percent of their incoming students from the state of Texas and those may have not been admitted to the University of Texas at Austin, Texas Christian, or Southern Methodist, or Rice, but they may bring twenty-eight ACTs. USM's catchment area is roughly 120, 125 miles. Primarily first generational. I hope this does not sound egotistical. But I know what I needed when I got here in 1970, and since my arrival, I've tried to broaden that across the full breadth of this institution.

From going to Dr. Lucas day one saying that we need an Office of Inclusion, to talking to athletics about in-service training for guys that work with students at risk, from constantly talking about the need for campus-wide services in civility training, because

many of the students that would come will be rough on the edge and they'll do things that will jeopardize the educational setting. To creating an office of the students with special needs services, to deal with those idiosyncrasies that kids come to school with that average faculty knows nothing about. To be on a twenty-four hour call to manage the almost [1:40:00] all-foreseeable and all-predictable, and I think as a result of that, over time, through, be it efficiency or the combination of all, the word has gotten out that you can get from here to there by going to USM. If that makes sense.

EC: Mm-hmm. I didn't ask you what you did when you graduated. Have you worked at USM most of your career?

EH: No, I left USM and went to William Carey University and ran a program called Students Services. It was for the academically high risk that had deficits in three cores. Academic, social, and financial. And we tried to make sure that financially, their needs were met, that there was tutoring to help with their deficits, and there was counselling to help with their social efforts. Ran that program for three years and we went into a catchment area of thirty miles to bring in 100 kids that were eleventh and twelfth graders to William Carey, plus we would work with them when they were there. Then I left, never wanted an education again. And went into alcohol and drug treatment.

Ran four clinics. Augusta, Columbia, Purvis, Columbia? And here, at night. And actually came her in 1979 to work until a friend completed his doctorate in two years at the University of Texas at Denton. So--.

EC: And that was how many years ago?

EH: About thirty-seven.

EC: [Laughs] But who's counting? When you were talking about Southern and access, and you can get a good education, you can get where you're--what's the percentage of African American students on campus?

EH: Closing in around forty percent.

EC: Forty percent. And am I right that there are more African American students at Southern than any other school in the state?

EH: Correct?

EC: Is that right? So that's got to be a tremendous shift from fifty years ago.

EH: Certainly. But I think we've been accommodating. I think, I really think on the Student Affairs side, Dr. Paul would have been here, the scope of time. I would have been here and Dr. Lucas. It's been a goal and aim to afford kids access to.

EC: So do you think--I mean, my sense is, and it's somewhat superficial, but that even after James Meredith went to Ole Miss, that the people that followed him continued to really struggle, that it was not a particularly--that it remained a hostile space. But it sounds like you came to Southern five years after the first two students to desegregate it, and didn't find that kind of a hostile--do you think that Southern made a different commitment?

EH: If you look at the struggles across the country, be it with housing affordability, be it with somebody here in this town, or somebodies, despite our challenges, cut those sharp edges off. I think Mr. Burger was a part of that formula. I think Dr. Noonkester. William Carey. I think they collaborated to integrate William Carey to be the first private college in the state to do so. Mr. Burger selected those students from Rowan High.

EC: What year was that? Do you know?

EH: Nineteen sixty-five. I think that had been a discussion beforehand, with Dr. Burger. Dr. Noonkester. I think Dr. Burger, Mr. Burger and Dr. Lucas, and the powers that be. [1:45:00] I think it got cross-haired with a lot of people looking at Mr. Burger moving here and there. That's why I said, his walk, I think, was so delicate.

EC: A push here, and sort of manage here, and --.

EH: Right. I think another person involved in that, though a lot of people spoke ill, Mayor Chain. And others. Moran Pope, a former mayor here. Leading proponent of USM. I think there were enough people that kept talking.

EC: Do you think the firebombing of the Dahmer home and murder of Mr. Dahmer, did that serve as a wake-up call for people that they'd-- I've heard that at least, you mentioned the president of William Carey, that Ms. Dahmer said that he helped try to raise a little bit of money to rebuild the house. Did the white community react to that with sort of, like, "OK, this really is too far." That is, I guess, the impression I got, and does that then create more space for the people who want to do something?

EH: I think there's been more willingness to work together than not. I think in the midst of fray, and controversy, over time that I'm aware, there have been the currents of conversations with folk talking. That has worked to us not becoming as some other cities have.

EC: You mentioned when we were talking earlier that you were on the, is it the Civil Rights Museum Commission? What's the title of the--.

EH: The Mississippi Civil Rights Commission.

EC: Can you talk about the Commission, and its work?

EH: Yes, it's a Mississippi legislative act that one, called for the creation of a civil rights component into the curriculum of the public schools. We work from the Mississippi Center of Reconciliation with William Renner [?], Ms. Glissiam [?].

EC: The McComb schools have done a lot of that, haven't they?

EH: The McComb schools have done a lot, yes. So, we meet monthly, sometimes quarterly, looking at ways and means to best do that. I also sit on the Mississippi Coalition against Sexual Assault, whereby we look at employing tactics, skills, and programming that prevents stalking and violence against women.

EC: Is that a new commission, or has it been around for a while?

EH: No, it's six to eight years. So we've pulled together all campuses in the state to be an arm to minimize ill acts of women, female, as well as others, and a respect for humanity and so all of those things, I think, have led to a--and all of my fortunes, I've tried to bring them locally. A guy that I met in 1970, white guy, said, "Eddie, I've paid for you to be a member of the--and you've been accepted to Leadership Mississippi." Never heard it in my life. So I went. It's a six-month program on developing leadership and making Mississippi better, and you look at some aspects of the state. Its status, where you would think it could get better and you map and design ways from those study committees that you could make that happen.

Well, once I completed that, came and organized and formed Leadership Hattiesburg, a wholesale [1:50:00] integrated body of young professionals. We're in our twenty-fifth year of staffing twenty people, up and coming, to make Hattiesburg better. And as I say before I'm not saying that there are no ills, that there are no situations of impropriety or inequities. And maybe I'm blind to some. But I believe that attitude,

understanding, hard work, not knowing every time that you will get what you want, that you could impact humanity by way of race, I'm not saying everywhere I've gone that I've felt welcome, that I've just, there's been an ingratiating, that Eddie's here. But if I sense that, there'll be another time when I'll have an opportunity to say hello, and to build a bridge.

Now, sometimes that's misunderstood. That's seen as kissing, hugging, inappropriately. But I say, you build a bridge, and it may not be strong enough for me to go across it, but maybe tomorrow someone else can. [Recording stops, then restarts.]

EC: Is the Civil Rights Commission involved with the Civil Rights Museum?

EH: Yes. There are two separate boards. We met with them four or five months ago to see the elements of their preparation for the Mississippi History Museum, and the Civil Rights Museum, so Ms. Glissiam is connected to all--.

EC: She's one of the connectors?

EH: Right. And many members and former members of both, they're all interconnected, yes.

EC: Can you--I don't know what the latest is, but can you just tell us a little bit about the plans for the museum?

EH: I'm not familiar with all of the plans, other than what I was privileged when I went to their--they had hired the architect for rendering, they had hired the programming group to make sure that Mississippi's story was inculcated into the fiber, but for me the challenge would be that you must exit with a dream as opposed to exit with an agony.

EC: How do you tell the story so--.

EH: So that was my challenge, that people, when they exit, they should not be so marred with the negatives that they don't have a dream for the future.

EC: Well, certainly, a lot of the movement activism in Mississippi is inspiring, even if the results aren't always what people hoped.

EH: True.

EC: [Pause] So what-- I mean, you spoke to that, I think, a little bit with your comment just now, but what do you want people to know about the Civil Rights Movement?

EH: I think the Civil Rights Movement was a breathtaking, eye-opening opportunity to see tomorrow from where we stood. And to take advantage of those resources that those brought from yonder, here, to aid and assist us. I think the ingenuity and/or the strength was with those that were still here. But because they were so linked and wired to their oppressor, or their oppressors' strengths, that it would have taken longer had there not been a voice of freedom [1:55:00] coming from a wealth of places that could speak to that for us. So it gave us a greater opportunity to see life from a distance and to see new possibilities and new beginnings.

And I think those that were wholesale against it could no longer just see it as those people that were basically here, that we are taking care of, and how are they disrespecting our efforts, but that--it allowed Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, to see that we are behind in the wholesale efforts of equality and services to the least of us. And that unless there are some economic gains and heaping doses of educational advancement, we

will not have a society of people that are able to pursue dreams that will allow them to reap the freedoms of what this great land affords.

EC: That would be a great stopping place, but I did think of another question I wanted to ask you about the movement era, and I don't know if you would know, but did you know about the Spirit?

EH: Yes.

EC: Can you talk about them?

EH: Well, coming up, I never knew who the Spirit was. I did know that during the times when schools were, or places were businesses were boycotted, that if you break those lines, that the Spirit will visit you during the night, and things of that kind.

EC: So what did that--for people who don't know who the, what the Spirit is, what would it mean to be visited in the night?

EH: Oh, goodness. I mean, you never knew who the Spirit was. It may be your next door neighbor, it may be the person across the street. I remember the Spirit by virtue of me wanting to start cutting hair at 11 years of age, and I couldn't go to a store and buy hair clippers, so I ordered them, at age 11, from National Bellas Hess. I don't know if either of us are old enough to know. It was a mail order business. It was a precursor, maybe, to Best Buy and others, but you could buy hair clippers and pans and luggage and other things, and it came to the store. On Front Street.

EC: It didn't come to your house.

EH: But I couldn't go down there and get it. I remember calling and they mailed me my Wahls clippers to the house. So it was a source of economic steering,

where it called to the attention of those movers and shakers in our community that people have galvanized, they understand economics to an extent, and that if you don't afford them access or at least representation in your stores, that their dollars will not be good enough for you. And unfortunately in this country, wealth is a motivator. Herzburg says that money is not a motivator, but that it can be a demotivator, that in times, if it demotivates, people will act that. I was against the effort of the kids there at University of Missouri. I always had a favorable opinion of the University of Missouri. Dr. Arvarh Strickland, profound--.

EC: He's from Hattiesburg, isn't he?

EH: From Hattiesburg. Wrote the school song of Euro and Eureka. Was just premiere there. Maybe a half dozen of our faculty members had gone to journalism there, but I don't think any of that would have galvanized until the football team said no, and that wasn't a million--that was probably fifty million that weekend, had they not played, so the dollar--.

EC: That was going to be a big cost.

EH: Right, right.

EC: What would--what would the Spirit do if somebody would, somebody from the black community, would go into one of the stores that [2:00:00] was being boycotted?

EH: From what I remember, they may break your windows at your house, or your car. Or may publicize something ill of you.

EC: In Hattiesburg, was the Spirit also involved in self-defense? Did they do protection as well, or was that separate groups?

EH: Well, I don't know whether that was--the defense, they used to call that the Deacons of Defense, or whatever, and whenever there would be dignitaries come like Dr. King or Dr. Vivian or Shuttlesworth, or some of the other people coming to the area, they would provide security that would double dose that of their own security, as well as what your local authorities would give.

EC: Are there other things you can think of that I haven't asked about that are important?

EH: Well, if we're reflecting on me, in terms of my thoughts relative to leadership and relative to civil rights, that I think we, in my mind, people that were on the inside of the Civil Rights Movement maybe were less herald, but were able to negotiate and accomplish far more than maybe many that had great posture, and absorbed the television screens. Somebody had to do the work, and I've always thought it best, for me, to work from the inside. And to work from the strengths that we have, build bridges, have open lines of communication, and from that will come great outcomes. I would hope that the University of Southern Mississippi, as it looks today, is in part because we did it right, and is in part because I've not been a silent observer. I've gone to Dr. Lucas, I've gone to Thames, I've gone to all of the presidents of things that I see that would benefit this institution, and in particular, African American students that would come with a wealth of needs.

Still, most of our communities are separate when it comes to residential, or of our religious faiths. Still, many students bring to the platform deficits. And in particular African American students. And we must be purveyors of good teaching, insightful teachings, and to know that if it's preventable, if it's foreseeable, you can prevent it. If

it's predictable, you can better manage it. So if you're going to have students come in with low ACT scores, transfer in from junior college with great needs, that you should have a service of a kind to aid and assist them. That their failures are in part on them, and their families, but another part of that is on you because you got them here and you didn't do what it took to salvage them.

EC: Thank you very much.

EH: Thank you. I hope in some way my comments have made sense.

EC: Absolutely. I very much appreciate your interview and your time with us. So, thanks.

EH: Yes, yes.

[Recording stops and starts.]

EC: You just mentioned knowing the Ladner sisters from Hattiesburg. Palmers, right? Can you tell us about them?

EH: Well, let's see. I shared dinner with them several months ago. We went to the unveiling of the photo of Clyde Kennard, in DC. Coming up they were just household stories, of their works at Jackson State and Tougaloo. That Palmers Crossing was a stronghold for civil rights efforts. Kelly Settlement, Palmer's Crossing. A lot of people saw those communities as communities of need but the strengths were that those people owned their property, and they found, I guess, they answered the question that God was making people but he wasn't making more land, so they got them a piece of land, and the connection of Brown University with Tougaloo. [2:05:00] I met Ms. Holahan [?], Caucasian lady, the first Delta in the country. Graduate of Tougaloo. So I've just always been a student--.

EC: Is that Joan Trumpauer ? I don't know what her last name is now.

M1: I think she still goes by Trumpauer.

EC: Well, she's got another--.

EH: There's a Hollahauer.

EC: Oh, Mulholland.

EH: Mulholland, yes.

EC: OK, so I know who you're talking about. Yes, because she was out there at Tougaloo, with them.

EH: Right, yes. But they still have relatives in Hattiesburg. So, just from reading of them, that's one thing that I failed to tell you. I'm sure they missed this at Hattiesburg High, and other schools. Those instructors would link you to the precursors, and if there was a person living in Detroit doing well from Hattiesburg, or Pennsylvania, or New York or California, or --. They would give you that connection. And for me, I would always say, "Gosh, they got to that location from right here."

EC: It's interesting, because I think, I think both of them, but I know Dora's been very explicit with me--that she found it so upsetting that with two colleges here in the community, she had to leave for her education. So it's interesting. Sort of from your perspective, coming behind, you see where they go. And from their perspective, they wished they had the opportunity to stay like you did.

EH: Yes. Well I just--and again, for me, I never focused on color. I was sensitive of color and race, but I never focused on it. I never became a slave to--oh, let me tell you, I bet you they're not going to like me to have that mindset, or I've got to do this and I've got to do that because--or you know how it is. Or when I walked on and I

saw that all my instructors were Caucasian, I knew they would feel this. I've never had that. I've been conscious that I'm African American, but I didn't see that as a minus. Does that make sense? I saw that there may be things that they don't know that I need to share with them, or they may be experiences of which they have not been afforded, and I may need to share that with them.

It's kind of like, in closing out--was in a sitting and a psychologist came out laughing. Said, "What's going on?" "You're not going to believe it." I said, "What?" She says, "I was doing this, doing a psychological assessment on this little girl. I just had to come out of there. I wanted to laugh in her face." I said, "Well, what happened?" She said, "I asked her to name three animals. And she said, 'Milton the Monster, Godzilla, and the boogey man.'" And she says, "That's pathetic." And I say, "No." I always had to go to bed at night in a dark room, or the boogey man was going to get me. Godzilla was the only movie we had at the Star Theatre. It stayed there ten years. So, in that kid's mindset, those were three animals. Did that make sense?

So, that kid was OK. [Recording stops and restarts.] I was talking about the student who was in trouble and had been exited from a process, and actually, probably skilled enough to play on Sunday, if you know what I mean, but because of his attitude and what he had said, led to him being exited the process. I think my style has always been to share information for insight purposes. So, if this guy had an opportunity to play for USC or for University of Texas or Oklahoma, but his grandmother said, "No, go to USM, that's closer to me," and he made that commitment, and here she comes up and [2:10:00] is diagnosed with a possible terminal illness. He didn't go to class, because he called her and she said she was feeling real bad, but he called the instructor and asked

what would be covered. But on the report that he didn't go to class, he was aggressively--properly, though--disciplined, but to the point of his pain, he made some very awkward, inappropriate statements to the power that be.

I never thought that I was going to change that power of opinion, but for future references, he needed to understand that this was a grandmother in the absence of a mother, and a father, who said she was sick, who said, "Come to Southern Miss," instead of those other lofty programs. Had the power person asked the right questions, it wouldn't have gone to the extent that it did. So what I've attempted, throughout my walk, is to help those have the necessary insights to ask the right questions so that they can gain from their view of where the people or the person is, be it fighting, be it aggression, be it any of the deficits that our kids bring with them. They are not excuses for which they should lie on, but they are reasons by which conversation hopefully will make them benefit. Did that make sense?

EC: Yes.

EH: So I would hope as a result of those experiences with our students, we have developed a reputation that students will come from extreme circumstances knowing that although this is a historically white institution, they will have access to the best and brightest, and that the doors will open both ways, and they will find accommodations.

EC: That seems like one of the successes of the Civil Rights Movement.

EH: Yes.

EC: Thank you so much for your time, and for sharing with us today.

EH: Thank you so much, to each of you.

Female 1: This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

END OF INTERVIEW

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