

*SPEAK NOW: MEMORIES OF THE CIVIL RIGHTS ERA*  
RECORDING SESSIONS

*Charles Brenner*

Moderated by LeAnna Welch-Dawson

Wednesday, June 15, 2011

William Winter Archives and History Building

Jackson, Mississippi

MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY  
Post Office Box 571  
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Scope Note: The Mississippi Department of Archives and History in conjunction with the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Freedom Rides and to complement the Department's exhibit "*Freedom Rides: Journey for Change*" conducted recording sessions with local citizens to gather oral memories of the Civil Rights Era. The participants were also given the opportunity to have their photograph taken in front of the exhibit. The recordings were conducted in the spring and summer of 2011 at the William F. Winter Archives and History Building in Jackson, Mississippi.

DAWSON: Ok Speak Now recording 014. This is LeAnna Welch-Dawson with the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. Today's date is Wednesday, June 15, 2011. Now sharing his Civil Rights Era memories is Mr. Charles Brenner. Welcome.

BRENNER: Thank you. Well I...the memories I have were of when I was not even a teenager, living in Leland, Mississippi, and I do remember watching TV and seeing a lot of burning and different cities and riots and stuff like that.

My daddy was an insurance agent in Leland and he was all upset and worried about the Civil Rights Movement and the Kennedys. He was a segregationist and he was not a member, that I know of, of the Ku Klux Klan or anything like that, but mainly was just kinda like a business type. And, he had a telephone in his car and he was an insurance man and he was worried about the properties that he insured burning down in Leland because supposedly there were Civil Rights activists there, which he called "agitators." And, so, I think my dad helped the police sometimes or you know, know what the Civil Rights people were doing because he was driving around in his car and, like driving down the streets in the, in the black neighborhoods and where the Civil Rights workers were meeting and stuff, he was trying to tell the police you know when their meetings were breaking up and stuff like that, so he had a telephone in his car, this was in, you know, it looked like a telephone and I guess it had a whip antenna or something on the back but, he had it so he could when he was out in the farm districts and stuff, talking to farmers about their insurance he could call, you know, back to the office or whatever, so he you know would call the police and tell them about that and he was really worried about these "agitators." And actually he was researching how we were gonna move from the Delta, because he was just so scared of the majority black population and them being radicalized and all that. And I didn't really have a clear picture, I mean I was, you know, 11 and 12 years old. And when they did integrate the schools in 1970, I had worked the previous summer in, in the... agricultural you know fields, like working with black people chopping cucumbers and harvesting cucumbers and stuff like that, so when we integrated the schools...I was working for his secretary's family. They had some farmland and so they were experimenting with cucumbers. We were out there, me and my brother, working with a lot of black children and so when we integrated the school, and I went to Lincoln School, me and my brother went to the public school and my sisters went to the private schools. And my mother taught at the...in the traditionally black school so that she could afford to send my sisters to the private school, and, but the first day of school there were National Guards people just kinda like standing in a line with shiny helmets and, so my dad wasn't the only person worried about it. And nothing really happened. I found out that really black people were just as smart as I was or as smart as I thought I was and I, you know, remember some scholar there named Stanley, you know was really smart, intelligent

student. And I had some pretty good teachers too, so and some teachers that were not so good but anyway, to make a long story short, my mother did okay teaching. She had Mr. Bibb who was like a coach. He would discipline the children in my mama's class that acted up so she didn't ever have to paddle anybody and that was during the days when you did get a spanking at the school house and so...and Mr. Rollins was the principal. But we did move to Tupelo. We moved to the Hills. And there was the kind of racial violence that my dad was looking for where there would be a white majority. And so that's about it.

DAWSON: Ok. Well, thank you for taking time today.

BRENNER: Ok, well thank you for listening.

DAWSON: Ok.

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