

An Interview with
MR. JAMES ELIOUT CARTER
August 3, 1978

Interviewed by
Daisy M. Greene

Mississippi
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purpose of the project was to interview local residents
and record their views and recollections of Washington
County's history.

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August 3, 1978. This is Daisy Greene interviewing Mr. James Eliout Carter for the Mississippi Department of Archives and History and the Washington County Library System.

Mr. Carter, when did your interest begin in Civil Rights?

CARTER: Well, in 1972. Well, it was actually in 1965 before I got interested in Civil Rights. After the Voting Right Act was passed I started with the Voter Registration. Of course, I was an early registrant myself. I registered in the early 1940s. It was quite a problem then for people to register. However, I was registered and we only had people who were Republicans to register at that time, but somehow or another we had a man who was on that committee by the name of Mr. Anderson and I was under the Democrat --

GREENE: Which Anderson was that?

CARTER: I can't think of Mr. Anderson's name, but he was one of the persons connected with the Washington County Savings and Loan Association. You might remember his name.

GREENE: Sam Anderson.

CARTER: We were questioned. A few of us were questioned by the Democrats. We had to do some explaining. However, I registered in the Democratic column at that particular time, and I started from then on to, you know, voting in all elections. Not only were we able to vote in Democratic

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elections, see, but we had been able only to vote for the president of the United States. That's the only thing that negroes would vote in - the black people were voting in at that time was Republican for president, and then after we registered and we got in the Democratic party we started to vote for people on the state level and the next was the city and the county level.

GREENE: You said it was a problem for people to vote. Why was it?

CARTER: At that time the only thing that black people were registering for was for the Republican and president elections and, actually, most negroes who were voting at that time voted Republican, but after the 1965 Voting Act was passed black folks started to trying to get in the Democratic party and get in all parties, see. And I was in that bunch early. I was with the "Black and Tan" party. When Isenhower was elected I, was one of the group that went to California with the "Black and Tan". Out there in the elections the delegation gave the "Black and Tan" party the controlling vote for Mississippi. That really made me interested in being a voter and a qualified elector for my state and participate in national elections. So, from that time on I've been in most national elections by the Democrats. After having a problem with the "Black and Tan" and with the "Lily Whites" out there, we came back and we had a person that was a qualified voter and really a Civil Rights man, named Mr. James Edwards. We gave him money to go down and participate with the Republicans and he had to go to the back door of the hotel and

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everything else to get in.

GREENE: That was in Jackson?

CARTER: Jackson, Mississippi. After that I got out of the Republican party. However, he still hung onto it, but I got out of it and declared myself a Democrat. From that time on I've been a Democrat. Of course, I've worked in Voter Registration over a period of years, getting people registered and getting them on the book because I know that's the only salvation for people being respected as citizens, and the only thing that you could do as a tax payer, and the only thing people were going to listen to were people who were able to vote people in office or out of office. Of course, I've worked and I've got people registered and I've never charged anybody a dime for carrying them up there, going up there with them and helping them answer the questions and everything else. Of course, we had a pretty liberal clerk at that particular time. He's dead now but his name was Mr. Cocke.

GREENE: What was his first name?

CARTER: His last name was Cocke. I can't --- Ed Cocke. It's C-O-c-k-e, that's what it was. He was the Circuit Clerk at that time. Somehow or another he would give me an opportunity to do some things that most people wouldn't do. I would just bring them up there and he would let me help the people answer those questions, and then he would go on and register them. One Monday when the Ministerial Alliance had a meeting, I went to the meeting and told them to go to the Court House to register. They said they would but they were shy about going. However, I

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told them that if they would come up Tuesday morning, I would be there standing on the steps and escort them into the Circuit Clerk's office. I did so and they all came and I told Mr. Cocke that we had some ministers out there, and I wanted them on that book because they couldn't tell their people about the responsibility of being first-class citizens if they weren't registered to vote themselves. He told me, "Now, Mr. Carter, I'll do it. If you'll help them answer the questions, we'll put them on the book," and so he did and I helped answer some of the questions and helped them to get all straightened out. He helped them to qualify themselves and we got ten ministers on that book that Tuesday morning. They were the happiest guys I ever met because they got on the registration book and they started telling their people that they had to register to vote, and I thought that was very interesting. After that I started to making speeches at churches and things and throughout the county and then started to going to Jackson to meetings and working with the Board of Registration. Several months after that --- Well, that was later, Mr. Hannah, the president of the University of Michigan, was selected on this commission, you see, the Civil Rights Commission. We were subpoenaed down to Jackson to the Voter Registration committee and I think Mr. Bivins, Mr. Edwards and myself went down to testify - the problems that we were having in voter registration.

GREENE: That's Joe Bivins?

CARTER: Joe Bivins and James Edwards and myself at

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that time. However, a committee had testified sometime before that - his name was Dowdy and I think Henry Myles, I believe. They and a couple of more fellows went down there once, but that was at the local level. However, this was the national level in which I was testifying, discussing problems for people to get on the registration books. Then finally the next year they passed the Civil Rights Act and we didn't have any more problems. All they had to do was get the clerk to register them. Washington County was one that didn't have as many problems as most counties had.

GREENE: Well, let me ask you this. These questions that you referred to - were they unduly hard?

CARTER: At that time, yes it was awful. A person would have to be able to read and write and maybe be about the seventh or eighth grade before he could answer those questions. They were questions that would take a person in the eighth or ninth grade ---

GREENE: Did whites have to pass those tests in order to register?

CARTER: I'm sure most of them didn't have to do that - no. They weren't going to let that many white people come in there and leave without being registered voters. I've never seen one turned down. I have been up there and carried black people up there all time, and they would always stand in line and wait. Most times when the whites would come in there they would soon be able to get out, and you wouldn't know when they were having a voter

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registration drive. I know that they didn't have the trouble like our people had, the black folks had when they went to vote.

GREENE: I have heard that in the 50's there was an effort made for courtesy titles to be given to black women in the banks. Do you know anything about that?

CARTER: I was part of that. I'll tell you what --- I've always dealt or worked in Civil Rights from the forties on. The first thing, you know, I was one of the youngest persons that was selected on the Advisory Board of Selective Service and that was up in the forties - about forty-two I guess. However, getting back to your question, your question was what?

GREENE: Have you heard that in the 50's there was an effort made for banks to give black women courtesy titles? Do you know anything about it?

CARTER: Yes. I was a part of it. The late Dr. Leon Britton and the late Dr. DeLane and Mr. Holmes and myself ---

GREENE: Do you remember Holmes first name?

CARTER: Yes, W. M. Holmes. Why I had a problem. Every time a black woman would go down there to make a deposit in the bank, she was always called by her first name and, you know, they didn't have any respect for her, but all the white women going down there they would put theirs in Mrs. so and so and Miss so and so. I really got sick of it and my wife had mentioned it to me, so I decided that we would get a committee and go down and talk to the bank about it. Black people at that time were putting a lot of money in the First National Bank and that was

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the bank that we decided that we would go to. We got Dr. Britton to go along with us and DeLane and myself. So when we walked in the bank --- At that time I walked in the bank and some of them had their hats on, you know, but I'd never worn a hat much until 1945 or 1950, I never wore a hat. But some of them had hats on. They were standing there and someone announced to the president of the bank that there was a group that wanted to talk with him out there. Then he came out and he said, "You all want to see me?" and I told him, "Yes, we want to see you." He said, "Well, it looks like you'd pull your hats off." I told him, "Yes, we'll pull our hats off when you invite us into your office, but not out here where everybody is making deposits." "Surely not, these are intelligent people out here, and I know they are not going to pull their hats off, but when you invite us into your office I'm sure they will give you the respect and honor and will pull their hats off." He didn't say anything else but just invited us in and we went on in and we discussed it. Of course, it got aired out and from that day on it wasn't too long before black women got the courtesy of any other depositer. When they started in that bank, it started in all banks and evidently they got together and decided that --- all banks got together, and after that all women regardless of color were placed in the same category as anybody else, Miss or Mrs. That's the way it got started and I was one of the first to head that request, and help support it.

GREENE: Mr. Carter, did you come in close contact with the freedom riders in the sixties?

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CARTER: Why, I surely I did. I'll tell you what. You know, when they first came to Greenville, they were white and black from all parts of the country and they first stopped at Jackson, Mississippi and then the next group came to Greenville, Mississippi. They were the first two Civil Rights groups that came down into this country, in the early - that was sixty-five. I'll tell you what I did. I had an office upstairs. I rented them my office upstairs and they had all their office work done. Then I rented them my house. I had a house and I rented them my house, they didn't have any place to stay, so fifteen or sixteen went down there on Edison Street and stayed in my house - 459 North Edison.

GREENE: Was it difficult for them to find places to stay?

CARTER: Oh, certainly so. Well, I tell you. I can remember the first people who had them in their homes.

GREENE: Who was that?

CARTER: Mr. Edwards and Dr. Frisby and myself - that was three of us who started to let them live in our homes or rent them a house to live in. I had an office downstairs and they turned that into - they had sleeping bags and white and black would sleep in there all night. Of course, there were those big glasses up there and the police department and everybody would be looking out for them, you know, to see that no one bothered them. Sometimes there would be as much as seven, eight or ten of them sleeping there on the floor. Those youngsters

from all over the country out of school, they just wanted to know what in the "heck" was going on, and for the heck of it they came down. I thought that was one of the best things that ever softened up people's hearts - how those youngsters come down getting out among black people and pushing for rights in this country. And, they really did help. If it hadn't been for them, we'd probably been in the same position we were back in the thirties. People always had the Republicans, but you only voted for president. That's the biggest thing you ever did, see. The Democrats they didn't ever think about you.

GREENE: Did Jerry Britton have them in his house?

CARTER: Possibly so, later on.

GREENE: But you're talking about the first.

CARTER: I'm talking about the first - the first two.

Later on they started to finding plenty places to stay. Yes, even a few white people even let them stay with them, but that was late. The first person that went to the white church lived in my house, a black person attended the Episcopal Church over on Main Street. Yes, she was from South Carolina. She drove down there Sunday morning in my car to service and that's the time that the deacon of the church, they tell me, that he said if a black person ever came in there he was going to resign. I can't remember now whether he resigned or not after they announced she was there. You know, Mr. Hodding Carter pushed for Civil Rights, and I know he was tickled to death to know that she was there in some kind of a way. I don't know whether he quit the

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church or gave the books back or what happened, but they were real friendly because she was a light young person. You couldn't hardly tell whether she was white or black.

GREENE: She wasn't asked out of the service?

CARTER: No, she stayed there through the service and then they announced that she was there. How happy they were. They kind of got upset, but soon came to themselves.

GREENE: What were some of the Civil Rights activities?

CARTER: The most of them worked in Voter Registration; they helped to get people to register. They hauled them to the Court House, carried them up there though. Young white people were helping to carry them up there, go to the Court House to say they wanted to get registered. That's what they did.

GREENE: Did they have classes to instruct them?

CARTER: Yes, they found out the questions that were being asked in some cases and they would carry them over those questions, and they could tell them how to fill them out. You know, fill them out for them, you see. They'd get the blanks - two or them - and would have the blanks already filled out. The only thing is they couldn't put the answer down all time, but they'd give them the most answers. Then thereafter the clerk got kind of liberal after this Civil Rights thing got a little heat - he didn't want to be tied up in Court - so he got where he would just let them fill it in and the questions began to get easy, and things like that. They worked. They did a lot of good in Mississippi. Well, they done a lot of good in the South, people from all over the country.

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GREENE: How did the blacks accept these white people?

CARTER: Well, they accepted them. I think they really appreciated those younger people coming down here and then they had some ministers that came down, white, that came down to help. I remember that Larry Walker was one of the Civil Rights whites. How he worked with the Voter Registration Drive and of course, the Delta Ministry came down late but Larry Walker from California - I believe he was - but I know that he came and worked a long time with us. He was very interesting. At that time-what happened, there were a lot of people arrested for sit-ins and that kind of thing.

GREENE: Oh, yes. Let's talk about the sit-ins.

CARTER: Well, here's what happened. They arrested a lot of them, white and black. Of course, the trial was coming up and they had been boy-cotting and walking the streets, you know, picketing down town and the merchants had really gotten kind of sore about it because they wanted the city to do something about it. What happened they had a lot of whites and they all got out on bond and left, you see. The District Attorney was going to call and get them all back ---

GREENE: You mean they had left town?

CARTER: Yes, some of them left town. Some of them went to New York and California and everywhere else all over the country, but what happened when they got ready to call them back --- I found out that they were going to call them back and, of course, I went and talked with Rev. Evans and a few more ministers and I

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told them, I said, "Well, if they come back here, you talk about some picketing - it's going to be some more picketing down town; that got into the merchants ears that that was going to happen so they got with the Chief of Police -- We had a pretty good Chief of Police at that time, and he got to talking to the Prosecuting Attorney, the City Prosecuting Attorney, and they told him that the merchants didn't want any more boy-cotting if they could help it. Well, I told them the only way we could keep from having a boycott was not to let these folks come back, because once they came back to Greenville they weren't going to pay the fine they were just going to boycott again, you see, They didn't believe it but Fannie Lou Hamer was hopping and very popular in Civil Rights and she came over here from Ruleville. When she showed up at the Court thing, instead of them having a Court they just dismissed everything, you see, and they didn't have to have it because they were going to call them folks back to pay the fine. It would have cost about \$2,000.00 and we didn't have that kind of money, so they decided then just to let them forget about it and pay a small amount for what they had. They paid maybe \$100.00 or \$200.00 with the money they had. They just dropped the thing because the merchants were frightened stiff. They had suffered enough, you know.

GREENE: Did it really hurt their business?

CARTER: Oh, yes, indeed, because we had -- we had women , one of them is dead now, Lizzie Howard. She was an outstanding woman in Civil Rights, and she was possibly 65 years old

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at that time, but she could walk them streets and she'd grab people's pocket books if she'd see them going up in those stores and start whipping them and all that kind of thing, just frightened some of them stiff. I know some black women that tried to get in the stores, and when they came out, Mrs. Howard and her group attacked them, see.

GREENE: You mean she would snatch black women's purses and packages if they broke the boycott?

CARTER: Yes, if they broke the boycott. They sure did do that. Not only her, she had some more people that worked with her, but she was one of the outstanding ones. It tickled me because she was an elderly woman.

GREENE: Yes.

CARTER: She was really a woman who worked right with us. I was sorry when her death came because she was one of the outstanding women that supported Civil Rights.

GREENE: When Lucy Howard was molesting people for shopping, breaking the boycott, what was the attitude of the police?

CARTER: Well, I'll tell you. Her name was Lizzie Howard. I can remember her real good. She was a --- They didn't particularly bother her because you see -- If they had arrested her, she had about 25 or 30 women that was doing the same thing that she was doing. If they'd get after one of them -- the women didn't want to be caught, because when they got back to their community that would be bad on them. They didn't want

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people to hear that they had been down town shopping, see.

GREENE: Oh, you mean the black women didn't want to be caught?

CARTER: The black women didn't want to be caught, you know. They would try to slip in them stores, you know, but after they found out that Mrs. Howard really meant business, it almost stopped the stores. They didn't do any business down town. There wasn't but one store that was not molested, and that was P. D. Condon Drugstore. Condon's was the only place down there that was respected by black citizens. With the boycotts and everything, he was always nice to people and Blacks never did stop trading with him. He never had no problem.

GREENE: They didn't boycott his business?

CARTER: They never did -- No, because he worked black people in the store and he always had about fifty percent black or probably more working in the drugstore there, and he continued. He never had any problems. He sure did. Some of the merchants down town, you know, they suffered quite a bit, but I guess they were kind of glad when it worked out like it did.

GREENE: I notice that there are quite a few Blacks in the Court House and in the banks.

CARTER: Well, what we did. You see, after we got our voting strength worked up --- I'll tell you something real interesting --- When Mayor Archer was mayor, we didn't have a single black policeman in Greenville, Mississippi at that time We didn't have but 725 qualified voters on the registration

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rolls at that time, but at that time they didn't have a whole lot of white people. The 700 could change any election.

Whichever way the black folks would go that would change the election at the City and Mayor Archer was our mayor at the time, so they had the police down there - I mean, Chief of Police, Mr. Hollingsworth, at that time, C. A. Hollingsworth. He was the Chief and so we had gone down there to talk with them about putting on some black policemen, so Mr. Taggart said he didn't want to antagonize Mr. Hollingsworth, and he was concerned about Mr. Hollingsworth how he would feel about it.

Mr. Hollingsworth happened to be there at that particular Council meeting. Now Mr. Hollingsworth told them that it would be perfectly all right with him to put on some black police. He said "We will be the only other place in the whole state of Mississippi had one black police at that time." I think over at Indianola or either at Gulfport down there, they had one. We were lucky. We were fortunate. We gave them, you see, a two week's notice before the election --- Well, we told them if they didn't, if they couldn't do it, then all the black people were going to vote for this other group. They were running for mayor at that time. I think Mayor Gray was running against Mayor Archer so they told them to give them two or three days and they would let us know, you see. On the third or fourth day they called me up and they told me that they made a decision to hire two black policemen, if we would support them. I said, "Now, if you're going to hire them you are going to have to put

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them out there on the street for the folks to know that you plan to do that, because other than that they are not going to take no chance any further." About two weeks after that Mr. Carson and Mr. George Davis were hired as black policemen. They were the first two black policemen that were hired on the Police Department.

GREENE: That was about 1952.

CARTER: Yes, it must have been around 1952. Yes, probably around 1952 or somewhere along in there.

GREENE: How did they handle the situation?

CARTER: Oh, they did fine. They did a beautiful job and everybody was proud of them. The white people were kind or proud that they got on there as policemen. They made two good policemen too all the way out. Both of them are retired right now. Both of them are retired from the police department because they served their time, you see, but what happened really, from then on we had no problem. As long as you have some qualified electors - voters - why we can do business. That's the way it got started with black policemen in Greenville, Mississippi.

GREENE: What is the percentage of blacks on the police force?

CARTER: Well, right now we have approximately about --- Let me see, I think you have about 15 or 16 black firemen and we had to holler for that but we got it. Yes, I was part of that, you know. On the Police Department I expect we've got about 25. I expect approximately 25. I don't know what's the exact

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amount but I know that we've got quite a few. And we've got Malcom Wynn, who is a detective, and Lt. Alfred Rankins.

GREENE: He's very young?

CARTER: Yes, he's less than 40 years old. I'm pretty sure he's about 40, and we've got them in high ranks too and lieutenants like that.

GREENE: You said something about the firemen.

CARTER: Well, we had a problem getting firemen. The first fireman that was put on was a boy -- I don't recall his name. We called him "Shine" for a nickname. I can't think of his name, but anyhow, he was the first one that was hired. See now, here's what happened, the man promised --- The Mayor at that time, Mr. Pat Dunne ?? - Can you think of his name?

GREENE: We'll leave it blank. We'll get it in there.

CARTER: Yes. But, anyway, he had promised if he was elected he would - there was a man running against him, see - he promised if he was elected that he would hire black firemen, see. So we went on and supported him and took a chance. After a couple of weeks he hadn't said nothing about getting the black fireman on. Well, I'll tell you, Shine -- We called him Shine, but his name was Simpson, so Simpson kept running up there to me saying that you know you promised me that if I'd ---

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CARTER: After some time Simpson kept coming up there -- I decided I would call the Mayor. I said, "Look, Simpson really supported you. He got out here with those placards up and down

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the street and you promised that you were going to give him a job as a fireman with the Fire Department, but you haven't done anything about it." I said, "Now I'll tell you what Simpson's going to do. He's going to call the Democrat Times and he's going to have a placard and the reporter is going to be talking about your promises." I said, "If he'll ever do that, you'll never get elected again. You need to keep your promises." So he asked me where did Simpson live and I told him I didn't know, but I thought I could find out. He told me to get in touch with him right away. So I got out there and found "Shine", as we called him, and I said, "The Mayor wants to talk to you." He went down to the office and the Mayor asked "Shine" to give him three or four days and he would get him on. So sure enough in about a week he was hired as the first black fireman in Greenville, Mississippi. He came out on the streets on the fire truck so black folks could see him. From that day on they hired, and increased the number of black firemen. It was a slow process. Every time an election would come up, we'd just keep pushing every Mayor that was elected. We'd ask City Council members if they would support, or continue to support getting black people in the Fire Department and increase the Police Department with black folks, you see. We made a success because we have in Washington County more black policemen in proportion to its population and size than you find in any county in Mississippi. We've made a lot of progress and we hope to continue to make it.

GREENE: Why was there such a delay in using black

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firemen?

CARTER: Well, I'll tell you what, I think it was a matter of whether you wanted black firemen to be sleeping in the same place where the other regular firemen worked. I didn't think that would be a problem because that was one thing I cautioned Simpson about. I talked to him the minute he was hired and I told him, "Now what I want you to do, I want you to go clean, take a bath every day and keep yourself clean. They expect you to be nasty and filthy and dirty and that is probably the reason why they don't want black firemen. You've got to be sleeping in the same bags that they use, and you've got to be there with them together. You carry your food and don't be drinking beer. If they offer you any beer, don't drink it, see, and if they offer you food -- You carry your food from home or either go to the cafe and get it. You want to keep yourself clear and in that way you won't have any problems. He said, "All right." and finally they hired him. We made a success of that and I hope it will continue.

GREENE: Mr. Carter, when did you begin to get state and national recognition as a citizen of Washington County?

CARTER: Well, it was in 1967 and 1968. That was along the time Medgar Evers was active. Quite a few of us - Joe Bivins and myself and a lot of other people who were working in Civil Rights got connected with the NAACP. Then we began to have our state meetings down at Jackson or local meetings here in Greenville. Of course, people were checking on those who were very

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active in Civil Rights and Voter Registration. That was probably the biggest thing that helped me to get connections. I remember one time, Mr. Lyndon Johnson was president of the United States, he summoned a group of people from Greenville, Mississippi on this Voter Registration thing. I was one of the ten. In the whole state of Mississippi there weren't but ten blacks summoned, and I was one of the group to attend the meetings at the White House. From that day on I made connections and I met a lot of people on the national level. That was one thing that caused me to get recognition in that area.

GREENE: Let me interrupt you. Could you tell me specifically what went on at that meeting you attended, when Johnson was president? What was the nature of the discussions?

CARTER: The nature of the discussion was how people should go back to their community and continue their voter registration drive. The President had a lot of appreciation and said he was sorry about what had happened in Mississippi and throughout the South. He said he was going to do all he could to straighten things out, and he did. He did a lot of good, all that he possibly could in the South when he saw what was happening. The Kennedys were people that Blacks had a lot of respect for because they came down South and did one of the most helpful things. They really gave a lot of input, trying to see that black people were treated fairly and different from what they had been. I had a lot of respect for the Kennedys at that time. From then on I have attended -- I think, let me

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see, I attended the first election of Eisenhower and I went to the Convention of that election.

GREENE: Oh, you mean the inauguration?

GREENE: Yes -- No, at the meeting, but I went to the inauguration when Eisenhower was elected in San Francisco and then I went to the inaugural - this last one - to President Carter's in Washington, and when Kennedy was elected. I went to all of the inaugurations and the big Conventions they had, the Convention in San Francisco and Chicago and in other places. I was invited to these Conventions before -- You see, that's before the elections. I worked for the candidates when I got home trying to get them elected. Mr. Jimmy Carter's, who was elected President -- his Peanut Brigade, you know, going all over the country was most interesting, and I think it did a lot of good. A lot of people had faith in Mr. Carter and I think he's done a lot of good. He's had his problems, but I think the man means right. It was very impressive for a man from the South to get elected. I think that was the most outstanding thing to ever happen in this country for a man from the South, the deep South, to be President of the United States.

GREENE: Did you see many Blacks at Carter's inauguration?

CARTER: Oh, more than I've ever seen any place that I have attended, any national meetings. There were black people from foreign countries and everywhere else that I know of, off the islands and everywhere, all were there for his inauguration.

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GREENE: What about the inaugural ball? Were there many Blacks there?

CARTER: Oh, yes. They were in everything that was related to the inaugural - black folks were there, and even at the Black Caucus -- they had all the senators and representatives of black people. Carter was there and a lot of more people, people from all over the country, whites were there - the senators and representatives were there. They certainly were. You'd be quite surprised at how many people came to the Southern Regional Council. You know, Martin Luther King's program. I went to -- I attended a meeting in Atlanta last year and I attended one down on the Gulf coast, the first one south, at Biloxi. I attended that one and quite a few people were there. I ran across a lady who knew Jerry, young Jerry Brown and she was telling me that he was going to run for governor and that she was hoping that he would win. She asked me if I knew him and I told her, "Yes, I remember when he came down and spent two weeks in Greenville. He stayed in my home, he and another white person from California. She told me that it was her son who was with Jerry. We just had a big time. She was so happy to know somebody that knew Jerry and her son. So, sure enough, Jerry did get elected as governor of California,

GREENE: You said something about an arrest. How did the Police Department handle it, when they have so many arrests?

CARTER: Well, I'll tell you what happened. I don't know why they arrested Jerry in Jackson, but I think Aaron Henry

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got him out on bond and that's when he came to Greenville. That's what the lady from California told me that they arrested him in Jackson.

GREENE: What was he doing?

CARTER: I don't know. They were just young people and they were just probably helping the black people around there, and you know the whites didn't like it too well. In fact, being out of state too, but they did help Blacks. They came in Greenville and stayed a couple of weeks ---

GREENE: At another time I'd like for you to tell me about the Sit-in at the Air Base.

CARTER: Oh, yes.

GREENE: It's rather late now. We'll pick that up on another occasion.

CARTER: Okay, we'll get it another time.

GREENE: And I'd also like you to discuss your work in selecting jurors and something about ---

CARTER: Well, I've been appointed on the Jury Commission. We check the books and the people who are on the books - all the people who are on the books - and we go over them and you get -- It's really fool proof, you can't mark them, to know who is going to serve on the Jury. You purge the rolls, you see, and tell about how many people are qualified for Jury service. Now the last time there were over 6,000 names in the jury box, and we don't know what name they are going to call. You have to do it in a manner so you never know who is going to be drawn. If a

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person is under age, then you just have to skip down to the next name and take him. But you never know. It's fair. In that way --- It used to be that they would get the same old people to serve on the Jury all the time. There'd be certain groups that would hang around the Court House to get a chance to serve on the Jury. Most of them were white people, no black folks at all, but now --- You go to the court and you may see more black people called for Jury service than you do white, or you may see a few more whites than you do blacks. But now it's no case that you don't see a large amount of black people and white people on the Jury. It's done fair. The Jury Commission --- I think that's one of the best things that has been set up by the government to make them do the right thing in Jury selection.

GREENE: I notice that there are quite a few Blacks working at the polls.

CARTER: Yes, what happened there, I'll tell you. When a black person decided to run for office, then we --- I talked to young Dr. Page. He came out from the army and he's quite interested in Civil Rights. One morning I called him and told him that we had a black person who was going to run for office and now was our time to --- I knew the law said that you must have black people in all parts of the election. We went on and talked to the Election Commission, and at that time he was glad to see me. I told him that we had some people running, that we didn't want to throw the election out, but if they didn't let black people work at the polls and be part of it

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then we would have to carry it to court. So he told us that we had a perfect right for us to do it, and all we had to do was to find somebody that would work at the polls. That's when they started to hiring black people at the registration and polls. Any time you have an election now, you always have black people and white people, and they work together beautifully.

GREENE: In some small towns, blacks do not handle the books. They just simply stand and make lists of people who have registered.

CARTER: Yes, but we have a different set up here. The man who is Circuit Clerk, Mr. Henderson, he has a deputy under him. Now, what's that lady's name working there? I can't think of her name. I just saw her this afternoon too. She's a black woman but, anyhow, she's next in charge when he's out.

GREENE: Are you talking about Pryor?

CARTER: Yes, Mrs. Pryor. She's the next in charge there.

GREENE: Estella Pryor.

CARTER: Yes, Estella Pryor, and she's next in charge when he's out. We've got black and white working up there now not only in the Circuit Clerk's office, but also in the Chancery Clerk's office. We did that through Voters Registration and held our people together in getting them to organize themselves to vote for whoever said they were going to do the most for black people. That's the way we lifted ourselves, by having qualified electors.

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GREENE: I notice it is just like going to Coleman High School, going to the Court House.

CARTER: That's the truth. They are really up there, and they do a beautiful job. I was up there this afternoon and I talked with Mrs. Pryor. On Jury Commission, there's only three of us - one black fellow, a white man and a white woman and myself. It takes us about three weeks to go over the books and get them straight for the Jury for the whole year, but we usually work it out. We have been doing that for the last four years.

GREENE: Do you know of any freedom riders who came to Greenville years ago and liked it so well that they have come back here to stay?

CARTER: Well, yes, they're coming back South. More of them are from the South. I've met quite a few of them that have come down to Jackson --

GREENE: Victor McTeer?

CARTER: Yes, and Victor McTeer, who is one of the prominent lawyers here in town now. The only black lawyer that I know of but he come from --- It's not Boston ---

GREENE: Maryland? Baltimore -

CARTER: Maryland - Baltimore Maryland. He's down here practicing law. He is a very intelligent person and he had a case in the Supreme Court and that's something that Negroes haven't had - not since I can remember. I never heard of a Negro carrying a case to the Supreme Court. He had it and won it, see.

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GREENE: What was that case?

CARTER: Well, it was relative to the school teachers being deprived of their rights. You know, maybe they would get pregnant and get out of school and they couldn't get their job back, this, that and the other, and they'd had problems like that, you see. The whites didn't have that, but the blacks were always having problems, but they carried it to the Supreme Court. All the teachers get the same respect as the whites and that's - especially for Mississippi - I imagine that if a case is won by the United States Supreme Court, other states fall in line so they would not have trouble. McTeer is a young man, very brilliant and he's got a law firm in the City of Greenville - Johnny Walls, McTeer, Bailey and Bucks have the law firm. Of course we have now -- We started off with -- years back about forty-five years ago a lawyer came here by the name of Onett Johnson. He stayed here about two or three months, but he couldn't make a living and left.

GREENE: Is that the one that stayed with you?

CARTER: No, it was not. He's not the one that stayed with me. His father founded Prentiss Institute in Prentiss, Mississippi. Since then the law firm of McLemore and Wall has been opened here on North Broadway. They came here less than ten years ago. McLemore lived with me until he could get set up and, -- Well, right now they have about eight, seven or eight, black lawyers in Greenville, practicing and doing very good. The Legal Aid Service has sent a few in here now and I think they have about

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five or six.

GREENE: Will you tell me more about the Legal Aid Service?

CARTER: Well, the Legal Aid Service is here to help people who are not able to get a lawyer. Their Civil Rights have been taken away from them and they are not able to pay a lawyer. They take them in and handle their case and don't charge them anything, you see. They have been a lot of help to poor people too. A man may run a stop sign and they charge him a whole lot, or may be caught driving drunk, or something, just little ordinary things. Maybe you're out there for theft or stealing and maybe where they ought to charge \$50.00, they charge him \$200.00. They might take advantage of them.

Those people out there are doing a good job too. I think that that is one of the finest things that ever happened in the South - these lawyers coming down here and setting up that Legal Aid Service. They have really helped people out, poor people, who cannot afford a lawyer.

GREENE: How do you explain this, Mr. Carter?

CARTER: They've got black and white that work with it too. That's another thing that helps.

GREENE: In recent years we hear so much of suits, black people entering suits. Years back that was unheard of. What's happening?

CARTER: You see, as soon as somebody finds out that there is a lawyer in the community, and you've got a good paper

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like Hodding Carter's explaining what is happening, Negroes have become aware that if their Civil Rights are violated, then they've got some protection because they can go to that Legal Aid Service. Then Legal Aid Service will take it and handle the case for them, or either sue and get some money for them, see. That has happened, and that's the reason why they have been very helpful to poor people that didn't have a chance to help themselves by getting free services from these attorneys.

GREENE: What's the role of the Delta Ministry?

CARTER: It's more of a Civil Rights organization, you might say. It works in the field of Civil Rights. It has done a good job in Greenville because we really need people to help things going. It came here a little late. Father Henry Parker was good and they've got a person by the name of Owen Brooks here now. He still works in the field of Civil Rights and they've been working on this apportionment thing, you know, for the state of Mississippi. Now that's something else that has occurred ---

GREENE: I didn't get that word.

CARTER: That's the state being apportioned to see where people can live in a certain area, you know, and you can vote in that particular area, see. You see like it is now people can vote at large and all of that. That ought to be cut out, see, and that's one of the Delta Ministry's projects - they've been working on. They've been working along with these lawyers who are handling that stuff. I heard in a news cast that J. P. Coleman has sent it back to them again, to do some

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straightening up on it, but they haven't gotten it back like it ought to be, so it's got to go back, and they've got to do some more action on it. I'm sure they're going to get that done because when these people come up for office, if they don't then they are going to have re-elections. They are going to have to get it straightened out, and I'll be glad when it happens. It makes it much better when we have the ward system instead of at large, you see. We've had that problem over a period of years, but we've got to get away from it and I think we're going to get out of it. It will be just as simple -- The main idea, if I live in this area and enough of us in here decide we want you for a Councilman, ward leader, or whatever it might be, to be elected, you'll have a chance. The people in this area can vote for you, and it won't be somebody across town, down there ten miles out there, two miles on the other side of town voting for you or against you. That "at large system" is a bad system anyway.

GREENE: Are you tired?

(End of Interview)

FINAL BY V.B.

September 15, 1978.

Interviewer's note:

Mayor Pat Dunne appointed the first black fireman - Walter Simpson.

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