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JLFC 001B John L. LeFlore
John LeFlore Collection (JLFC), Acc. 270
Interviewed by Margaret Laverne and Melton McLaurin on August 7, 1970
1 hour, 2 minute audio recording • 14 page transcript

Abstract: In this recording, John L. LeFlore is interviewed by Margaret Laverne and Melton McLaurin to discuss the Civil Rights Movement and the history of Mobile, Alabama. The interview begins with Mr. LeFlore discussing the legal strategies in the Ed Tate case, and more generally the racism that Black railroad workers faced in terms of pay, promotions, and working conditions. Mr. LeFlore also recounts the story of the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipping Company (ADDSCO) riot, and describes the ways that he and others fought to challenge racist hiring policies at the docks and discriminatory work training programs in Mobile. Mr. LeFlore also shares some thoughts on his journalistic experiences documenting lynchings in the U.S. South.

This collection includes several interviews intended to provide deeper context to Mr. LeFlore's papers, which he donated as a manuscript collection to the University of South Alabama.

Preface: This is a transcript of an oral history recording archived at the McCall Library of the University of South Alabama. Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a verbatim transcript of the spoken word, which has been minimally edited for readability.



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JLFC 001B John L. LeFlore
Interviewed August 7, 1970

This is a verbatim transcript of an oral history interview recording, composed and formatted in accordance with the McCall Library transcription style guide.

Verbatim transcription is a style of representing as closely as possible the exact wording and phrasing of the speakers on the recording, though false starts, repetitious phrases, and other minor edits have been made as needed only for the sake of clarity and readability. Readers of this transcript are strongly encouraged to listen to the recording.

Please note that if any text is **bolded** in the transcript, this indicates uncertainty of either spelling or accuracy of transcription regarding what was said. Italics indicate emphasis, or are applied to titles and similar proper nouns.

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Interviewee: John L. LeFlore

Interviewers: Margaret Laverne and Melton McLaurin

Date: August 7, 1970

[A portion of the original audio seems not to have been digitized, but is transcribed]

ML: Mr. LeFlore, today we would like you to discuss efforts, especially during the World War II years, to upgrade employment opportunities for Blacks in the Mobile area. We understand that significant steps toward this goal were taken in several areas including railway, ship lines—the shipyard, and vocational schools. Could you possibly begin your comments with the Eddie Tate Case and other railway cases?

JLF: Thank you, Miss Laverne. Before making commentary about the Tate Case, perhaps I should attempt to give you a background that led up to the Ed Tate Case. Up until World War I, when the federal government took over the railroads, there was substantial wage differential between Black and white firemen, Black and white brakemen and other bi-racial categories in the operating department of the railroads. That was South-wide, and of course most of the employment on the railroads for Blacks was in the South. The railroads perhaps made substantial profits at the expense of Black workers because they were lower paid for the same work. During World War I, the federal government took over the railroads. President Woodrow Wilson appointed his son-in-law at that time, William Gibbs Macadoo, as director general of the railroads. Of course, the federal authorities could not very well say it was palatable to have a differential in the wage scales of white and Black workers doing the same work. So, the federal government equalized the wages of white and Black firemen, white and Black brakemen. Now it is interesting to note that up until this was done and for a few years afterwards, white locomotive firemen—and you had steam locomotives in that day, and men had to use shovels in order to put coal in the firebox of the locomotive, and it was a rather back-bending work, it was a laborious job, so very few white men wanted that kind of work. In order to appeal to the ego of whites doing that sort of labor, and at the same time to give them a chance for advancement, they were known as an apprentice engineman, which meant that they would step up to the position of engineer. But Black firemen were forever circumscribed to the back-bending work of shoveling coal into the boiler of the locomotive. White brakemen were known as apprentice conductors. So, there was a differential in the wage scale and the railroads found it of course more convenient to use a large number of Blacks than whites. However, with the change brought on by the federal government, in 1918 I think it was, the wage structure was equalized. It appears that the railroads lost interest in the protection of Black workers in these jobs. During the post-World War I period, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, which is still a very powerful labor organization, and the railroads in

the South, apparently conspired to have what was known as the Southeastern Carriers Agreement. This agreement between the railroads and the Brotherhood—and incidentally, this particular union at that time catered primarily to white firemen—the agreement was that 51 percent of the men on each division would be white, thereby giving the whites the voting power to direct the employment policies of the railroads in whatever direction and toward whatever objective they saw fit. And of course, the objective was, it was later revealed, to run the Blacks off the roads. The salaries were decent; perhaps they were about the best paying jobs that the ordinary Black man could secure back in that day. And a systematic effort was devised by the Brotherhood to have the railroads, in the operating departments especially, and in the skilled job areas, strictly white. The campaign was very successfully carried out. There was terror, there was violence involved, especially in the states of Mississippi and Louisiana when black firemen were shot down at night whenever the locomotives would stop at “waterspouts” as they called them—that was a colloquial expression—but at water tanks for the purpose of refilling the locomotive tank. It was necessary—**[Existing digital audio begins here]**—for the fireman in that day to crawl on the back of his tank and, with the use of a light, to put the spout over the opening in the tank, and of course for the purpose of filling the tank with water. Any number of Black firemen were shot down as they went through this performance of their responsibilities. Many of them died. It is a part, as we said, of a reign of terror correlated with the overall conspiracy to drive Black men from the railroads. The railroads of course did give their support to what the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen was doing. They began disregarding the seniority of Black firemen and Black brakemen, and the situation became so tragic for the Black man, that very few of the railroads had Black men in regular trained operations positions at the time that the Ed Tate Case was developed. It was a matter of desperation that drove the Black firemen together; they formed an organization in Jackson, Tennessee for the purpose of fighting this sort of thing, realizing they had nothing to lose and all to gain. They came down to Mobile, Alabama, to confer with those of us who heading the NAACP at that time. It so happened that we attempted to get a conference with the person who is now president of the Gulf, Mobile and Ohio Railroad, Mr. G.P. Brock, who was at that time in charge of operations for the Gulf, Mobile and Northern Railroad. Of course, subsequent to this occasion, the Gulf, Mobile and Northern and the Mobile and Ohio merged to form what is now known as the Gulf, Mobile and Ohio Railroad. Mr. Brock refused to grant the conference on the grounds that the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen represented the firemen, although no Black fireman could join the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, and it was the union that was driving the Black firemen—or, Black men—off the railroads. An appeal was directed to the then-president of the GMNM, Mr.—I think his initials

were "I.W."—Tigrett at Jackson, Tennessee, which was Mr. Tigrett's headquarters. Mr. Tigrett directed Mr. Brock to hold the conference with the representatives of the Black union at that time, and those of us who represented the NAACP. No satisfactory solution was offered by the railroad to the plight of Black firemen, and it was decided by the firemen and us to go to court. The NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund in New York was then a part of the overall NAACP. A very brilliant constitutional lawyer, Charles H. Houston, headed the battery of able attorneys who were going to challenge—who *did* challenge—the right of the railroads and the white union to run Blacks off the roads without any regard for their seniority, or their right to work. During the process of preparing the hearing, it was decided to change cases, and the Ed Tate was dropped. And instead, the case of a Black fireman connected with the Norfolk and Southern Railway, by the name of Tunstall, was substituted. And this case was styled as "Tunstall vs. Norfolk and Southern Railway." This particular case went to the United States Supreme Court, and the Court in a landmark ruling decreed that Negro or Black fireman seniority was inviolable; that the railroads had no right to disregard the seniority, that these men were entitled to jobs on the basis of the number of years that they had been in the employ of the carrier, of a particular carrier; and that no agreement made between a given railroad and the union could supersede the railroad's responsibility to respect the seniority of its employees regardless of race, color, or creed. It was a most significant victory, and it was one which enabled Black men to regain their seniority, and permitted others to become employees of the railroads. This sort of program continued effective until there were new avenues of employments opening to Blacks, and a decline in the interest of Blacks to become connected with the various rail carriers in the South; and of course, in view of a change because of new laws, we would say, throughout the nation. Blacks today do not hold—it appears in the employment field that Blacks today do not have the same desire to become employees of railroads as they did a decade or so ago. As we have mentioned, this is due primarily to the fact that there are other avenues of employment to Blacks that would equal or surpass the wage opportunity, or the wage potential, that one would find with the railroads. There was still discrimination—a *new* discrimination—in the matter of employment opportunities for Blacks in recent years. As an example, a Black train porter by the name of Eugene Johnson of Montgomery was recently put into a job as a bridge tender, the first of his race, because of efforts on our part; in view of the fact that this man was completely cut out of service when the railroads began cutting back on passenger trains a few years ago, and the porters were the first terminated. There was no substitute job offered to porters by the railroads. In most every other category of employment, when employees were cut out of their jobs because of a cutback in service, there were new jobs opened for them on a basis of seniority. But this was

not true with the train porters, and Eugene Johnson was left on the streets of Montgomery without employment despite more than 20 years of service with the Louisville and Nashville Railroad. We urged him to apply for a brakeman position with the L&N, and this was done, and it was quite obvious that Mr. Johnson was overlooked primarily because of race or color. In view of that particular circumstance, we filed a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission charging this carrier with racial discrimination and violation of Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. In addition to that, with the proper federal authorities in connection with contract compliance, we charged this carrier with violating Executive Order 11246. The matter was finally settled, and Eugene Johnson became the first bridgetender in the employment of the L&N Railroad in at least the last 40 or 50 years. It was because of this and other cases that we, and perhaps some other people, may have presented to proper federal authorities that the railroads in this section have begun to open new employment opportunities to Blacks, primarily young and middle class Blacks. As an example, it was found in conference held the other day with proper federal authorities, that 9 of 14 switchmen employed during a given period by a certain rail carrier in this area happened to be Black. Other carriers have called on our office and other offices for Black employees. There remains and continues a steady decline in the matter of Blacks who have regular runs on the railroads operating in and out of this area. The same holds true, we understand, in other sections of the South: that young Blacks today are not as inclined, they're not as enchanted, with railroad employment as their forebears were of 30, or 40, or 50 years ago. Of course, it is well known that the legendary song of Casey Jones involves a Black fireman in that particular wreck. Today only a few Black firemen remain on the railroads. This is not so much because of rigid barriers that may be found against their employment today, but is because very few Blacks have a desire to become railroad employees in the operating department of the various rail carriers in the Deep South.

ML: In relation to Thurgood Marshall's telegram of May 26th, 1943, would you like to discuss efforts to obtain better positions for Blacks in the shipyard at Brookley, as the war industry became a major part of the Mobile economy? You may wish to refer to the riot of May 25th, 1943.

JLF: Thank you Ms. Laverne. I remember quite vividly the situation which produced that riot. The vast majority of the white employees of the shipyard came from the rural areas of Alabama and Mississippi. And the people were very definitely of a type who lived under the influence of the Dred Scott decision of 1857, that Black people had no right which whites were bound to respect. It was their intention to keep

Blacks in the most menial jobs possible at the shipyard. At that time, the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company here was building a number of ships for the federal government. In addition, the company retained its repair yard. Employment at this shipyard at one time totaled more than 26,000, we understand. It was actually the major industry of the Mobile area. The whites, as we mentioned, who were in employment there, desired that the Blacks would hold the most menial jobs. As a consequence, when we were able to get what was then the War Manpower Commission to put a welding school at the foot of Government Street for the purpose of training Black men for welding jobs, there was strong opposition to the effort. We pushed it, we persevered, and the school was finally located there. Many of the men who finished the welding course went to work at the Sun Shipbuilding Company at Chester, Pennsylvania, and we sought employment for—and did finally get approval, through the Fair Employment Practices Committee—that Blacks would go into Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company in skilled capacities as welders; that they would be assigned a certain number of ships on which to do their welding; also, that Blacks would be upgraded or hired as shipfitters. This precipitated a riot. Whites who were very—despite the fact that Black boys were fighting, bleeding, and dying on foreign battlefields, this made no impression upon the whites who were workers at the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company. They developed a riot, and reports were that a number of Blacks were killed. Of course, this proved that this was not true; a number of Blacks were injured, some rather badly hurt. We asked the federal authorities—we wired the Fair Employment Practices Committee; we also wired the Defense Department—to send in investigators to cover the trouble in Mobile. A wire was also sent by us to president Franklin D. Roosevelt in connection with this matter. The trouble became so serious at the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company yards, it was necessary for the federal government to send troops in from Brookley Air Force Base, where they were stationed, to restore order. Clarence Mitchell, who is now director of the Washington bureau of the NAACP, flew into Mobile as a representative of the Fair Employment Practices Committee to make a study of the situation. It was found that approximately—I think our reports will show that more than a hundred Blacks were hurt, some rather severely, by the white mobs that ran rampant at the shipyard. The troops were able to restore order, and the Blacks continued to work in their skilled capacities from which these whites had attempted to bar them. The Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company continued to build ships until the end of the war, and then the yard returned to a repair status. There was a determined effort on the part of the company and the union, our findings disclose, to again relegate Blacks to menial jobs. This was rather successfully carried out until, during the last years of the Eisenhower Administration, we filed a complaint with proper authorities in

Washington against racial discriminatory policies at the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company. We contended that Blacks were being denied equal job opportunities. We also found that the ratio of Blacks in the overall employment of the shipyard had dropped substantially, and that they were not employing as many Blacks as they had been in previous years on that particular basis. We were able to continue this fight through the Kennedy and Johnson administrations, and today—or last year, rather, we were able to achieve an affirmative action agreement with the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company. Today, as a result of this effort over the past eight or nine years—nine years—we have Blacks working as machinists, as boilermakers, as electricians, as clerks, and stenographers, and as foremen, and in almost all capacities that they're able to qualify. This does not mean, however, that there is not still job discrimination at the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company. It does not mean that there isn't job discrimination in almost any facet of employment that you could name where men are employed in large numbers. But the situation today is one which is quite hopeful, and there's a growing indication that we are about to reach an era where people are going to be respected on jobs for their qualifications, and that the race, color, or religion will be a secondary factor. The Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company, in our judgment, represents an indication of what can be achieved when people perhaps know what they doing, persevere in what they doing, and do it in a manner that would be conducive to the best interests of an entire community, or of an entire state, or of the entire nation.

ML: [Inaudible at 22:02; audio fades in]—opportunities for Blacks in the Merchant Marines. Three documents in the collection are dated March 28th, 1944; January 3rd, 1946; and February 24th, 1948. Would you please comment on the problems facing Negro seamen?

JLF: Ms. Laverne, that was a very interesting period, and it was, I would say, a stubborn challenge with regard to the right of Black seamen to sail the seas on American ships in any capacities that they were capable of serving, and at the same time to be able to enjoy ordinary port privileges related to housing, and other factors which would affect a seaman while he was in port, on an equal basis with others. We especially remember that there was a very—we would say a thoroughly organized effort on the part of some of the unions to keep Blacks out of certain jobs aboard ship. As an example, back in that day, the Seafarers International Union had a very rigid policy of discrimination against Blacks, a policy which was protested, against which we filed protest a number of times with proper authorities, and also with the Union headquarters in New York. We believe that as a result of our complaints and federal intervention, that the situation eventually cleared up in the Seafarers

International Union. So today, if the reports we have about the Union are correct, Blacks are able to sail in any department for which they may qualify as seamen. But it has not been too long ago, in the [19]40s, 1946, that there were several ships in this area—one was the *Martin Johnson* at Pensacola, and the *Hiram Bingham* at Pensacola, and one was known as the—right here at Mobile, the *Frank Dodd*, where Black seamen were just, they were persona non grata. There were several other ships at Pensacola, and several other ships at Mobile, that were likewise affected. Our direct confrontation with this question was offered by the *Frank H. Dodd*. The *Frank H. Dodd* came to Mobile from San Francisco. It was a Matson Navigation Line ship, and aboard when it came into the port of Mobile were a Negro first cook and a Negro steward. Well, the steward takes the official capacity of an officer, and whites had to serve him; they had to clean his room and things of that sort. This apparently was resisted, was disapproved of, by the whites who were aboard ship—at least, by the vast majority who were aboard ship. We immediately contacted, upon learning the plight of this steward, the federal authorities in Washington. The steward's name was William K. Vance, we understand, and he was the chief steward aboard this ship. This union to which Mr. Vance belonged was not a racist-type union at that time—I think it was the Marine Cooks and Stewards—but there were two unions which had seamen aboard the ship that had very strong anti-Black policies at that particular period. They were the Seafarer's International Union and the Seamen's Union of the Pacific. These two unions had a larger part of the crew than any of the other unions who had members aboard this particular ship. This ship was scheduled to sail from Mobile in the early part of January 1946 with a cargo of food commodities for Greece that was being shipped under the Marshall Plan. Twenty-four hours before the ship was scheduled to sail, with only the steward being the sole Black person aboard, the white members of the Seafarer's International Union and the Seamen's Union of the Pacific struck the ship; they left. They refused to sail with a Black seaman. They didn't leave the ship; they refused to sail. We immediately contacted the federal authorities in Washington. We also wired President Truman and told him about the situation, and we wired the man's union in San Francisco, the Marine Cooks and Stewards, which had at that time a man by the name of Hugh Bryson as vice-president. Mr. Bryson was a two-fisted fighter for equal justice for everybody. It may be incidental to most of us, that Clarence Mitchell, who is now director of the NAACP's Washington Bureau, was at that time director of field operations of the Fair Employment Practices Committee. So, we were able to have the ship tied up here for an entire week because of the discrimination against this Black steward. When Mr. Mitchell came into Mobile, we were able to work out an agreement wherein the crew of the ship was changed, and instead of sailing with an SIU/SUP crew, the ship sailed with an NMU crew—the NMU would be the National Maritime Union's

crew. And instead of one Negro or Black person being aboard when the ship sailed for Greece, you had a model crew, a mixed crew, in its entirety. You had black AB's and Black ordinary seamen, with white AB's and white ordinary seamen. You had Black and white men in the steward's department under the direction of the same steward, the Mr. Vance, that the previous unions—the SIU and SUP—had attempted to put ashore and to put off the ship. It was, in our opinion, a very significant victory—another significant victory—in this long fight for equal rights for Black people. It was in another category, that of the right of Black seamen to have equal job opportunities, that we felt an important victory had been scored, that played a very tangible part in leading up to the status enjoyed today by Black seamen all over the United States.

M: Mr. LeFlore, Ms. Lavorne referred to one of the documents dated February 24th, 1948 which also concerns a Negro seaman and the Seafarer's International Union. It has to do with beaching a Negro seaman. Would you comment briefly on that particular incident, please, if you have recollections about it.

JLF: Thank you, Dr. McLaurin. I recall very well that this was another area in which we had to continue developing a persistent fight. We don't like to continue referring to the Seafarers International Union, we're doing it without prejudice, but we're doing it because it is historically important, I believe, in order—for one, to grasp how far we've come today, we've got to look at how far we were back yesterday. The Seafarers International Union, in 1948, in many of the ports, had a very rigid policy of disregarding the seniority of Black "book members," as they called themselves. These were men who had been in the union over a period of time, and had won the right to become book members. Shipping was slow, and as these Blacks would come in from various ports throughout the world, they were not reassigned to ship out. The men who were book members were scheduled to have, or it was supposed to have been, that they had seniority over the men who were just trip card members. But in the instances affecting the Black seamen—and at that time the Seafarers International Union just about exclusively kept Black people in the stewards' department. But even there, their seniority was not respected: white trip card members were given preference over Black book members. And as a consequence, we filed another complaint with the federal authorities in February 1948 against this sort of discrimination, and we also filed it with the Seafarers International headquarters in New York, and with the NAACP labor director at that time, the same Clarence Mitchell. Mr. Mitchell has been a very versatile sort of a person, and he has been most helpful in furthering the rights of Black people—far more so than he's been given recognition for having done. He's been a very integral part of the struggle of Black people for their rightful place in American

society. And the federal government did send someone in here to investigate the condition; we also were able to have investigations made out of the SIU headquarters—

[Break in recording]

ML: —topic in the Seamen's case is concerned obstacles placed in the way of a proposed hotel for Colored seamen in Mobile. Would you care to comment, please?

JLF: Thank you, Ms. Laverne. The United Seaman's Service, which had housing facilities for American seamen throughout the world, established such a facility here for seamen during the war days. One has only to remember that German submarines were taking a heavy toll of Allied shipping, including American ships; that German dive bombers would fly out to sea to attack cargo ships carrying war materials and foodstuffs to Europe. This was very taxing physically as well as, it also was a challenge to the nervous system of seamen. The United Seamen's Service, cognizant of that fact, began constructing or leasing facilities for American seamen in ports throughout the world. One such port was Mobile. The United Seamen's Service would set up a local committee. And in this instance, the committee was composed of a large number of whites, and three or four Blacks. And I think, if I remember correctly, the Blacks were the late Dr. Benjamin F. Baker; I think the retired school principal, Mr. C.E. Powell; John L. LeFlore; and perhaps one other. The whites included your public officials, especially those who were connected with the city, and with the county, and other prominent white citizens. The question arose as to the housing of the seamen. Those of us who were Black on the committee, and who were a minority, insisted that all of the seamen would be housed under the same roof. At that time, the place selected for a seamen's hotel was the building which is now occupied by the First Federal Savings and Loan Association on St. Joseph at St. Michael Street. It was known as the George Self Hotel. But despite the fact that Black boys and white boys manned the ships; and when they were attacked by German submarines or divebombers that they fought, they manned the guns together that were aboard the merchant ships; and if the ship happened to be hit, they bled and died together; the power structure here in Mobile at that time could not reconcile itself to feeling that there should be complete equality while these men were in port at home. The plea of the three or four Blacks on the committee was turned down by a majority of the whites, including at that time city commissioner Ernest Megginson. And of course, Mr. Megginson's viewpoint apparently was not favorable toward housing the seamen under the same roof. So, we had to set about to locate a place for Black seamen,

which we found on Dearborn Street between Dauphin and St. Francis. This facility was named the Dorie Miller Seamen's Hotel. It was rather repugnant to us—quite distasteful, in every particular—to have to submit to this sort of humiliation because those who represented the power structure at that time in Mobile could not accept the fact that all men are equal, and that Black seamen and white seamen should have been permitted to be housed together in American ports at home, just as they manned the ships together at sea; fought, bled and died together if necessary, when their ships were attacked by German submarines or German planes, in an effort to destroy what we regard as a democratic way of life, by destroying the nation's military might. And also, the effort that we were making as Americans to feed Europe, especially that part of Europe which was allied with us in the war against the Germans at that time.

ML: During the war and post-war years, there were several efforts made to open vocational training to Negroes. Two documents in the files are dated November 11th, 1940, and March 16th, 1946. Would you care to comment on these efforts to open vocational training?

JLF: Yes, I would, Ms. Laverne. Apparently, Blacks were taking a more serious attitude toward the necessity of developing the nation's full manpower productivity for the purpose of winning the war than the whites. We say that for this reason: there was discrimination against Blacks about vocational training opportunities. This was an almost intransigent situation. Whites, those who were in authority, just would not capitulate—if we may use that sort of terminology—to the opening of equal vocational opportunities to Black people. It became necessary for us to direct a letter of protest to the then-National Defense Advisory Commission head, the late Sidney Hillman, on this question, and that was in 1940. Because of that, and because of the efforts we continued to make before the War Manpower Commission and other federal agencies—also, protests we continued to file with the president of the United States—we were finally, as I mentioned previously, given a school for training Blacks in welding. The whites who were being trained—there were schools available for whites. Oh yes, there were a lot of schools in Birmingham and Montgomery—Birmingham and Mobile especially. They were being sent to high-paying jobs as far away as Honolulu, Hawaii. But the only jobs that Blacks could get anywhere would be in the most menial capacities, as laborers, as helpers, and similar categories. As I mentioned a few moments ago, we were able finally to get a welding school here, and we were able to get in-plant training for Blacks, and certain other skills—a limited number of skills. When the war was over, these opportunities ceased to exist; the schools were discontinued. Then, the veterans began coming back. Training was set up for white and Black

veterans on a dual basis. The only training that was available for Black veterans who had fought in the Pacific Theatre or European Theatre of the war was at a cooking and baking school. Certainly, it was an insult to the dignity of Black people that our own government condoned and permitted this sort of condition to exist, which meant that all the Black boys who desired training would take training to become cooks and bakers. The whites, of course, had training open to them which would prepare them for employment in the various skills of that time and day. As a consequence, we continued to file complaints here, people in other areas filed complaints, until finally this sort of school disappeared from the scene—that is, the cooking and baking school for Blacks. But for a long period of time, that was all for a number of years—rather, in the post-war period, post-World War II period, that was the only training available to Negro veterans returning from having fought for their country. It is interesting to note that in our files is—as you have related, Ms. Laverne—a letter from a Black war veteran to us on the date of March the 16th, 1946, in which he states: “I’m a veteran of World War II. I wish to attend a vocational school. I’m wondering why there isn’t a vocational school here for the benefit of the Colored race. We have about 150 men eligible for this type of training, and no place to take up the training. In my case, I am disabled to take the job I had before I entered the Service.” Now, we can well understand the frustrations of these people who have been out to fight a war for their country, and to come back and find conditions in their country that were far more intolerable than perhaps the enemy itself would have imposed on them if they had remained on foreign soil. This is one of the hypocritical situations about American policy—or we would say, American mores, as it relates to race relations affecting Black citizens of our own country.

ML: Mr. Leflore, we understand that you have investigated, at times, incidents of personal violence such as lynching. Two such cases in the files are dated May 28th, 1940 and June 5th, 1940, in Mississippi and Tennessee. Would you care to comment on these cases and any other?

JLF: Thank you, Ms. Laverne. There had been some trouble up at State Line and Waynesboro, Mississippi between whites and Blacks at that period, and there was an attempt to lynch a Black man at State Line—either State Line or Waynesboro, and of course, there is a close proximity between the two communities. We did go up there—when I say “we,” I mean I went up there—to cover an investigation, and found that the whites had precipitated the trouble and that they had imposed on the Blacks to the extent that some of the Blacks resisted what was happening. And in their resisting it, one man was thrown into jail, and there was an attempt made to lynch this man. We had to go up there to cover the attempted lynching and to

give a report at that time to, at that time, to the NAACP in New York, and to the Department of Justice in Washington. We also covered, in the same year—well, we didn't cover this, but we went to Brownsville, Tennessee, as part of a speaking tour for the NAACP. Brownsville is in Haywood County—and this county, of course, has more Blacks than it does whites, even today. The question of Blacks participating in elections was off limits. Whites just didn't intend for the Blacks to register and vote, and every effort was made to prevent them from doing it. At the time of my speaking engagement there, the Blacks were urged by me to register to vote; that in the ballot, there was power: power to rectify some of the injustices that had been heaped upon Blacks over the years. The people took my advice. They attempted to register to vote after I had left Brownsville. The next week after I left, they attempted to go down and register to vote. This so incensed white citizens of that community, that several of the Blacks were threatened. These people who headed up the NAACP, I recall very well Rev. Buster Walker was president of the NAACP at that time. While I was at the NAACP national conference in Philadelphia at this time, Rev. Buster Walker and several of the NAACP members had been forced to flee Brownsville because of threats to lynch them. One man was actually lynched there because of the effort of Blacks to get registered to vote. And these others fled for their lives to keep from being lynched in Brownsville, because their only sin was that they wanted to vote. Now, in a previous period, two years before that, we investigated the lynching of Wilder McGowan at Wiggins, Mississippi. Now, Wiggins is the home of Dizzy Dean, the former Cardinal baseball pitcher. Wilder was lynched because of, from what we were able to uncover in our investigation, he resented the fact that white men, on weekends, would come into the Negro quarters—Blacks stayed in quarters in Wiggins at that time—and would demand the better-looking Negro girls. Of course, this was for the purpose—their only purpose was to have taken the girls out to seduce them. This has been a very definite part of Southern mores over the years. It was more pronounced a few years ago than it is today. A few years ago, up until about 1930, say at least 40 or 50 years ago, many of the white men who were wealthy had two families. They had an illegitimate Black family, and their legitimate white family. But the Black family gained nothing with the exception of having a few crumbs given to them by the white father who sired them; the children had only a few crumbs. In some instances, the white men did provide for their Black children, sent them to various Black colleges throughout the South, but in most instances this was not done. Wilder was lynched for an alleged crime that was later discovered was supposed to have been committed by a white man. But it never mattered, because the Black man's life had been taken, and the community of Wiggins went about its business as if nothing had happened. In 1946, I investigated the lynching of four people at Monroe, Georgia. This included George

Dorsey, who had just come back from the Pacific fighting for democracy, and who had done nothing whatsoever, his wife, and Roger Malcolm and his wife Dorothy Malcolm. Roger was the only person who had done anything whatsoever. Roger had cut a white man for whom he worked. The man didn't die, and the story as was told to us—or was told to me at the time of the investigation—that Roger was a sharecropper; he and the man for whom he worked had a dispute. The man lunged at Roger with a hayfork. Roger's agility enabled him to step aside, and at the same time, he cut his employer with a knife. As we said before, the man didn't die. Roger was put in jail at Monroe, Georgia. Monroe is just 26 miles from Atlanta. He stayed there until a farmer in an adjoining county, J. Loy Harrison, made an agreement with Roger's wife Dorothy, with the brother-in-law who had just returned from the Pacific: George. George Dorsey was Dorothy Malcolm's brother. It was all, the four people who were lynched were all members of the same family. There was Roger's wife, a very pretty little woman—not Roger's, George's wife. George Dorsey's wife. And the three of them, Dorothy, George, and his wife, went to the jail in Monroe with J. Loy Harrison, the white farmer of adjoining Apalachee County, who paid Roger's fine, whatever sum was required, to have him released. Mr. Harrison put the four Blacks in his car, and instead of going down the main highway toward Apalachee County, Mr. Harrison went down a dirt road. There, a mob was waiting at the river bottom. A river separates Monroe and Apalachee counties. A mob was waiting at the river bottom, seized the four Blacks, and lynched them. That was my assignment to cover, and I went into Monroe, Georgia the next day after the lynching. It was not a very pleasant experience, but it was one of the many challenges that people in civil rights have to fulfill, if they going to be true to the cause that they represent of trying to make conditions better for all people, irrespective of race, color, or creed. I stayed in Monroe for 22 hours to cover my investigation. The lynching of those four people shocked the nation. It was on July 26th, 1946. Mr. Truman, at the request of the governor of Georgia, sent 25 FBI agents into Monroe. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation had 75 men into Monroe, and the Monroe area. But the irony of the situation is that neither the highly regarded FBI or the Georgia Bureau of Investigation came up with a clue to the lynching. A lynching that, in my judgement, if they had carefully questioned J. Loy Harrison, could have been solved without any great difficulty. There is another irony of the story: the FBI could not pin anything on J. Loy Harrison at that time; but the next year, the same Mr. Harrison was arrested for making illicit whiskey and failing to pay a federal tax on it. This lynching was one of the ghastly and tragic happenings of the mid-twentieth century. We've had more than 5000 recorded lynchings in our country since the Civil War. Lynchings were a pastime in America until recently. We feel that any student or any citizen who does not know of this tragic, and ghastly, and fiendish part of our nation's history should get some books

and read about lynchings that have occurred in our country since the Civil War. Right here at Citronelle, a score or more years ago, we investigated the attempted lynching of a Black man there. We also investigated the shooting down in the Grove Hill, Clark County jail of Moses Jones, by the then-Sheriff Jenkins Hill, in what appeared to be an attempt by the sheriff to do away with persons who had been involved with him—allegedly involved with him—in a whiskey scandal in that particular county. We shall not go into details, but it appears that the sheriff, in order to silence Moses Jones, who had agreed to testify for the federal government which had the responsibility of prosecuting Sheriff Jenkins Hill, had his life snuffed out, so that he wouldn't be able to talk, true to the adage of "dead men tell no tales." That these few incidents represent some of the many of a score of questions of violence that we had been assigned to investigate as a part of our responsibility to the civil rights cause. In covering the Monroe, Georgia lynching, we were given, or I was given, a citation for the thorough story that they claim that we got at Monroe, Georgia. We have pictures of the victims of the Monroe, Georgia lynching, and would make them available—of the victims, rather, of the Monroe, Georgia lynching—we would make them available to students or others on request.

[End of recording]

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