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Maxine Smith, Memphis NAACP, 1968

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Joan Beifuss- This is an interview with Mrs. Maxine Smith the executive secretary of the national association for the advancement of colored people in Memphis. We are at 234 Hernando, today is June the 13th. The interviewers are Bill Thomas and Joan Beifuss.

(Tape Break)

Joan Beifuss- For instance I cannot (muffled)

Maxine Smith- Oh my southern accent comes through.

Joan Beifuss- I was going to say I sound like a flat fish when I talk really.

Bill Thomas- We talked to let's see reverend Kyles the day before yesterday. No the day before yesterday and Jacque Wilmoore last night and my goodness I am sure until midnight.

Maxine Smith- He is about to leave here I understand.

Bill Thomas- What?

Maxine Smith- IU thin he is about to be transferred.

Bill Thomas- Yes, he is leaving he said the announcement was premature but he was leaving. (Tape Break) Alrighty. I think basically comes just sort of as a talk and your memories of certain things. We thought that we might, we knew about he dinner and Reverend Kyles went into that in such good detail and everything and yet, and then Mrs. Yellin talked to Mrs. Kyles, in fact she was over there a full day or something. So I tell you if we could sort of jump tot hat point and then we will come back.

Joan Beifuss- What we have been doing is having people start at the beginning of the garbage strike or prior to that and going through it chronologically. But we have been finding that by the time the people get up to the actual assassination point they are so exhausted from talking, so we are switching it now and we start that Wednesday that Dr. King was...

Bill Thomas- Yeah because this is so important to document that one day and maybe even the Wednesday night before, so could you possibly think back to the Wednesday before and that is when Dr. King gave the mountaintop speech. Did you attend that meeting?

Maxine Smith- I got there at the end of the meeting due to a conflict in meetings that was planned. Another meeting that was planned but we picked up reverend Kyles from that meeting and came over to the usual strategy committee of COME that was holding nightly meetings.

Bill Thomas- Did you hear that speech or was the speech over?

Maxine Smith- The speech was over when I got there and I only heard it on the radio, I wasn't in the auditorium when Dr. King made the speech.

Bill Thomas- Oh but you did hear some of it?

Maxine Smith- I have heard the speech on the radio since then.

Bill Thomas- Some people have mentioned that after that speech oh goodness there was quite a bit of emotional feeling about it.

Maxine Smith- Well it was an interesting thing when we got to the church shortly before the meeting let out that NAACP was having a membership campaign kick off meeting that night which accounts for the chronicle (muffled) we picked up Billy Kyles was out looking for a ride and his wife Gwynn was heading home in their car. The first thing that Billy said was that Martin disturbed me tonight. He has never talked about death and threats to the extent that he did tonight and he recounted some of the things he said in that van to us and as you know reverend Kyles knew Dr. King very well and I think his acquaintance with him accounted for his disturbance about this and by this time the speech was coming over the radio so we heard parts of it on the radio that night while we were en route to the strategy committee meeting to make plans for the march that was to be taking place in a few days. And we heard several people that had attended the meeting remark about this type of thing that was quite unusual for Dr. King. And hearing the speech that night and some the next day and maybe even some after his death I could see very well what they were talking about.

Joan Beifuss- Did you attach any significance to their reaction at the time or did you just think people were kind of jumpy or...

Maxine Smith- Actually I didn't. I didn't attach, I am trying to remember a few nights, I think at the strategy committee meeting on Sunday night perhaps you see this Wednesday night the pastor at Beale St. Baptist Church reverend Jordan, I don't know if you have heard this before asked in this meeting, do we have to march? We were planning a big march and he said he woke up crying and it was a lot like a premonition to him. And the only thing he could credit this too was the fact that something was going to happen to Dr. King in Memphis and he was so sincere, he was real disturbed to say to this group to say do we have to march, was pretty ridiculous because the march was the thing. He was sort of bluntly answered by a member attending the meeting. And I felt a little sorry for him, I tried to reassure him that I felt we should have the march too that in this work you can't operate on fear, you have to keep going. Maybe there must have been a discussion on threats that people got an I certainly had a number of them certainly in my earlier days before they got to be too many people that could be called (muffled). I have had many threats on my life and it is some thing you never think about and I was trying to say to reverend Jordan that if somebody is going to get you I don't think they are going to call you and tell you. I don't think you are going to be (muffled). My point was trying to comfort him and explain to him not quite as bluntly as some of the

others, as a matter of fact I think somebody was really a little bit ridiculous to suggest from their reaction....but I don't think I ever would have thought of that again I am not sure had it not been for the terrible consequences or the assassination of Dr. King.

Bill Thomas- Had there been a lot of threats, had the NAACP office gotten them?

Maxine Smith- Well they would get so routine with us I don't think about them, just in the last, cleaning my files in the last two weeks I started saving some of these leaders because I generally didn't read them and I don't know why I decided to save them but I am beginning to but I don't get them too much at home but they go to Vasco's office to my mother in laws address who has the same name as my husband and many of them would get many crank calls. Whenever there is any sort of activity the crank calls and the crank letters pick up. There have been threats on my son's life, I just discard that because you just don't have time to think of that type thing, not that these things won't happen but if you go around putting all your energies thinking on that you can't function really.

Bill Thomas- How old is your son?

Maxine Smith- He is 11. And I this letter that came I think I discarded it, I am sure I did, it went to my mother in laws house. And the threat was that he would be gotten going to and from school. So they obviously don't even know where he goes to school if the letter went there. I think that is just a part of the, if I can even go back because there is such a parallel I mentioned this to you, the last thing I can remember saying to (muffled) and I think I told you when you were here we happened to be in Mississippi in fact it was 5 years ago yesterday the memorial service was an the last thing Vasco asked me was we left and he was shocked, I think we were the last people he talked to, I know this because he was headed home when he left us and do you have a fear for your life. He told us how even the police officers had even tried to run him down but he shrugged it off because that just gets to be a part of your activity in the freedom movement.

Bill Thomas- Well since we are into that period we were interested in the (muffled) thing and the fact that Josh Butler tried to be (muffled) as you were closely connected. Can you remember now back then what was there a meeting?

Maxine Smith- It is Jackson Mississippi was involved in a tremendous freedom movement during that period. At that time as I remember there had been no breakthroughs in public facilities and public accommodations, this was in 63 of course. Memphis had some break throughs. They were having nightly mass meetings similar to what we had during the sanitation strike and similar to what we had in Memphis back in 61 and 62. The national office of the NAACP was giving them as much help as they could. So our directive branches in New York called and asked for Vasco, my husband if he would go down and speak. So again reverend Kyles, Vasco and I went down to Jackson. And that was one of the most emotion packed mass meetings I have ever attended I have just never seen spirit that high,

maybe it was because it was in Mississippi and the police men were sitting there and black Mississippians were totally unafraid. And in 63 people were a little more afraid then they are now in 68, maybe that accounts for my impression but I haven't seen them that high spirited and I think Vasco gave a good address that night. Afterwards...

Bill Thomas- What did he speak on do you remember?

Maxine Smith- I guess it was just one...I really don't know. General rabble rising speeches and actually they didn't need too much rabble rousing because what (muffled) I think he probably paralleled what we had done in Memphis because this was just on the heels of the same type of activity in Memphis and not to give up that type of thing.

Bill Thomas- Did you feel like that there had been some breakthroughs in Memphis at that time?

Maxine Smith- Yes this was in 63 our first big breakthroughs in Memphis came, we entered into negotiations in November of 62 if I remember. That is when we called off our downtown boycott, what we determined our freedom movement that had gone on in Memphis for 18 months, direct action program. Boycott of stores, daily picketing, sitting in, weekly freedom marches of some kind but the stores had sort of given in 62, November of 62, and a few weeks at the lunch counters and what not begin to open. After that in Memphis sometimes even with the threat of the repetition of that type thing we opened the theatres the restaurants the movies, before the civil rights act, 64 actually. I think we were about a year ahead of the civil rights act. So Jackson was in the midst of the same type thing and this was being conducted by the Jackson branch of the NAACP. And of course as you know (muffled) was the field secretary for the state of Mississippi.

Bill Thomas- He spoke that night too did he?

Maxine Smith- Yes he made remarks that night there were several people who I can't remember all of them but I definitely remember there was a youth director, I can't remember his name but he was connected with one of the colleges and he talked about how the police had made him, how they had beat him and made him spread his legs and had taken the club and just hit his testicals and he shook his hand at the policemen and said you made one mistake you didn't kill me because I am coming back and in this nightmare after we (muffled) just waiting for morning I must have dozed and these words came out this youth director's words that met this face that I saw and things were so confused that night that we were just waiting until day breaks so we could, we were advised not to go out, we wanted to go immediately to the mayor but that we wait until daybreak to go.

Bill Thomas- Well Mrs. Smith can you tell us how did you hear about (muffled) death.

Maxine Smith- Well (muffled) had left after another thing you don't know why you do some things, I hugged him and expressed my pride in what he was doing and told him to keep his determination and don't let anything stop you from (muffled). Billy Kyles was staying and of course this was before hotels were open, at the home of another ministers whose name I cannot recall. My hostess and I after clearing up, we had some food sort of tidied up the room and went to take Billy Kyles to his place where he would be staying and we came in laughing, I think we had just got into the car and she had two pretty cars and we were out coming in and saying somebody might blow up this place with these three cars in our driveway. And at this point Vasco came to the door and reached in and come in right away and the call had come just that quickly. I don't remember now who made the call, that Metger had been shot.

Bill Thomas- So this was just a matter of maybe less then a half hour or so?

Maxine Smith- Right. As I remember I used the figure of 20 minutes so it must have been approximately 20 minutes because he was about 10 minutes from her house.

Joan Beifuss- How old was Metger Evans?

Maxine Smith- He was 37 years old he was young.

Bill Thomas- Were you all going to meet again that evening or anything, was there any further function?

Maxine Smith- We were going back to Memphis the next morning. We were just waiting for morning to go back to Memphis but they were having nightly meetings in Jackson. I went back down for the funeral that weekend, I think it must have been that Saturday. I can't remember the days now but that was another, that was my first first-hand witness of a riot I guess you could call it.

Bill Thomas- And that was June 12th?

Maxine Smith- Metger was killed early in the morning on June 12th.

Joan Beifuss- And you couldn't leave, you didn't leave the house again that night?

Maxine Smith- No early the next morning, oh just out at the crack of dawn we got out because for some reason somebody, we were in touch with there was advice that everybody stay off the streets. There were a number of NAACP lawyers handling cases, there had been numerous arrests. We were in touch with them, the police, and..

Joan Beifuss- Did you have any police protection that night after McGregors was shot?

Maxine Smith- I don't think so no. I remember we called Memphis and told Mr. Turner about it. It was a rather hectic night. But we did go back to the funeral 2 or 3 days later and I don't remember just the date of the funeral. And the significant

thing about that as I said that is the first time I had seen, I guess March the 28th was my second time, a riot. And I found myself in the middle of the police and the negros, rocks going over my head. That was the most amazing thing I was just, I don't know fascinated was the word, but to see negros in the middle of the street throw rocks and bricks at policemen that were completely armed, I don't know yet why they didn't fire back but they could have just wiped them off they had nothing but bricks and bottles...

Bill Thomas- Well we will get to that in the chronology. After the Wednesday night thing I understand Dr. King just left the meeting after he had finished his speech. Was he gone when you got there?

Maxine Smith- I don't think he had because we all sort of left together and somebody took him back to the hotel and we came down here to the minimum salary building. Now those things aren't significant at the time. I do remember A.D. his brother came and it seemed that was sort of a desire to see his brother, sort of one of these things that we can't explain. I remember him. Coming up to the strategy committee meeting.

Bill Thomas- Dr. King's brother then?

Maxine Smith- Yes and he was completely unexpected but he just decided that he wanted to see him again and he came in after the meeting on the day when, Thursday now I may have told you this before. It happened I was talking about Dr. King if you remember there were some law students who had come here to help us interview people related to police brutality and it was sort of in my care. I was responsible for their...

Bill Thomas- Well being...

Maxine Smith- Yeah getting them lodged and fed and working out the schedule and getting them in contact with people. And one of the youngsters had gotten a sore throat and I had called one of my doctor friends for a little free medical aide which I got and I was just bringing him back to his hotel, they were staying at the Linden Lodge which is just around the corner from the Lorraine.

Bill Thomas- Now when was this?

Maxine Smith- This was Thursday evening at 6:00. Just in that time and as we stopped for a traffic light at the corner of Wellington and Mississippi, a squad car with the sirens, I really think it was a sheriff deputies patrol car sped by us and I just jumped and said let's follow these cars. Having non idea where they were going and I got to talking and I said oh I am late I am to have dinner with Dr. King. I should have been there, this is how I knew it was around 6:00 because Billy had told us to be there between 5:00 and 6:00 as I remember and just as I said this we weren't really intensively following the patrols car but we just happened to be going to the same direction, we had no idea that the patrol car was going to the Lorraine hotel and I said they are going up to his hotel now. Still this has no significance to me and

we were on 3rd and they had gone up whatever street that is that runs right beside the motel. And a few feet, yards or something down the street I saw John Henry Ferguson who is of here today running and very excited and when I see John Henry because I get concerned because when police see him they almost automatically start hitting him you know he is one of those he had been arrested probably 8 times in the sanitation movement. Incidentally he was one that had this \$50,000 bond, one of those in this (muffled). Anyway I said what is John Henry up to. He was actually he had run out of his shoes, he had his shoes in his hand and as I remember he was out running into cars and so I stopped in the middle of the street and said John Henry what is wrong.

Bill Thomas- He had his shoes in his hand?

Maxine Smith- Yes I guess he had just run out of them and he had picked them up somewhere. And he said they had shot Dr. King and so I said get in the car John Henry and that's when I realized why the squad car just a few seconds before was headed in that direction and we got to the hotel just as they began to seal it off. Of course we couldn't get in and I don't know I just remember parking the car and running. I don't know where I was running or why IU was running all of this is somewhat of a blank to me now,. But of course the rest is history.

Bill Thomas- And where did you go, or do you know where you wound up?

Maxine Smith- I remember getting to the minimum salary building and I came up here I was just looking for answers and of course nobody knew anything at that point.

Bill Thomas- You didn't know at that time how serious it was?

Maxine Smith- No nothing. And I eventually had to go home because I had called earlier and told my housekeeper to leave and I would be there to see about my little boy shortly because taking the boy to the doctor had delayed me some what and I knew I had to go home I knew he would be upset and listening to the radio and I went home and that is where I sat it out and eventually heard the weird.

*Did you call the Kyle's home since the dinner was set?

Maxine Smith- Yes I can't remember, Billy came there at some point during the evening. We called everybody we knew and there was difficulty even getting lines, there was some communication which was fuzzy in my mind.

Bill Thomas- Where was Dr. Smith?

Maxine Smith- He came in shortly after I did.

Bill Thomas- Tot the house?

Maxine Smith- Yes he did as soon as he could get away he knew we would need him too and in the midst of all this confusion I got a call from one of these law students

one of which I had just taken to the doctor, somewhere along the way two of them were missing and they were quite disturbed and after much seeking we found that these were the two suspects that had been arrested.

Bill Thomas- Can you tell us their name?

Maxine Smith- They were white...I don't remember their names.

Joan Beifuss- Where were they from?

Maxine Smith- One of four schools they, I could perhaps get that information.

Bill Thomas- From here?

Maxine Smith- No, no they were from some are from Ole Miss, some are from Duke, you see two different groups have come in but they are law students who came in to help us do some research on police brutality and they were staying at Linden Lodge where I was taking the fellow.

Bill Thomas- And one of these was one of the ones with the sore throat?

Maxine Smith- No, no, the one with the sore throat that was just one of his companions he wasn't one that was arrested but the two that were arrested had come with Himont he same mission.

Joan Beifuss- How did they come in, did the NAACP ask for help from law students?

Maxine Smith- Well there is some sort of and again the name of the law student organization escapes me. There is a law student organization with members in law schools across the country and organized to give this type of help to communities. That a law student could do and you don't need a lawyer, just somebody with some sort of know how. I can't remember the name but some sort of organization of law students. And they will come in if an organization such as ours can pay their expenses, there is no fee or anything involved.

Bill Thomas- So how did you learn that these two, they are both young men I would assume.

Maxine Smith- Yes the two white, see I think there were about 8 whites and 4 negros, there was a group of 12 as I remember.

Bill Thomas- How did you learn that they were missing?

Maxine Smith- Well other members of the group called me, see they had my number to contact me for anything, any problems or questions they might have. And they were quite concerned you know the curfew had been put on and they were missing and they couldn't find them anywhere. So we just started calling and we finally, I don't remember where all we called but we were told they were arrested and could be held for 72 hours.

Bill Thomas- Did you know what they were arrested for or anything?

Maxine Smith- After going as high up as the police department we could find through people we knew we finally found that they were suspicion of the assassination of Dr. King.

Bill Thomas- And they were law students which had been brought in by the NAACP to help.

Maxine Smith- So they were released that night, we got a promise that they would not be held for 72 hours when we told them who they were.

Bill Thomas- How long did they keep them do you remember?

Maxine Smith- They were released oh around midnight or after because they were in touch with me when they were released, so they got out of town right away the next morning.

Bill Thomas- Oh they left town?

Maxine Smith- Yes the whole group left town and another group came in.

Joan Beifuss- Have you heard from them since then? The two that were arrested?

Maxine Smith- Yes one stayed a while he had friends here, I don't know, I don't remember the boy's name, so much ahs happened but he stayed here a few days, friends of his family. One I know was from Ole Miss. Seems that the other one was from Duke, but he stayed and came to the office several times, I mean I was in touch with him the whole time and was quite an experience. The kids were terrified of course.

Bill Thomas- Do you think you could find out their names for us?

Maxine Smith- Yes I am pretty sure I can..

Joan Beifuss- Were you and Dr. Smith all alone that night, that Thursday night after King died?

Maxine Smith- Yes. As I said Billy Kyles came in and he had some of the people that had come in town for he was trying to get them situated, but generally you know the curfew was put on, the curfew went on that night so generally just our family was there.

Bill Thomas- Mrs. Smith do you know how Vasco, Dr. Smith found out about Dr. King?

Maxine Smith- I don't remember now, perhaps it was on the radio I just don't remember. IO don't know if I called him or what?

Bill Thomas- Do you remember what went on, did anything go on earlier in that day? When did you hear about the dinner?

Maxine Smith- Billy Kyles had been to the office or something because he was here an hour or so and invited us to be there.

Bill Thomas- And that was on Thursday?

Maxine Smith- This was on Thursday.

Bill Thomas- Thursday.

Maxine Smith- I don't know what we were meeting on but he was here for some reason and I remember we had a long session in my office on some thing. Maybe on things in general or perhaps an informal session. But he, it seems he wasn't, I think he was actually going to the motel from my office. Because he wasn't going home because the sick boy came up and I would have been at his house had it not been for.....but all this was getting close to dinner time.

Bill Thomas- This was later in the day.

Maxine Smith- Yes.

Bill Thomas- Yes I think reverend Kyles told us that he got down there a little earlier and sang with the band for a little while.

Maxine Smith- Yeah I remember him mentioning he had told them a little earlier than he had told Gwynn knowing how off the schedules could get some time. So actually as I remember he left my office and get on...we have talked about this since, the closeness, we were together with Metger. And we were about to be together with...

Bill Thomas- Dr. King.

Maxine Smith- So we suggested that we should maybe stay apart. Billy and I have talked about this just how close we were to, somebody remarked about his man impulsively kissing Metger the night before he left. Seems that there was another one in there somewhere but I can't remember another but I had walked with oh miss, Meredith, James Meredith. I had walked through the state line with him and as I joined the march and hugged him there was television cameras. But when you get to the place you can (muffled) you keep your hands off my husband you bring bad luck to everybody you touch.

Bill Thomas- Now this was Meredith's march?

Maxine Smith- See we had gotten to know Meredith quite well during in fact the new York lawyers had sort of put him in our care leading up to the Ole Miss entry. He spent quite a bit, a lot of time at my home leading up to...I think they didn't want reporters to know just where he was, but we had contact with him.

Bill Thomas- Well was he at your house, he left from Memphis and made that march to the (muffle), was he...

Maxine Smith- Well he came back in our car, back to Memphis and back to our house that night. He stayed with a cousin, he didn't stay with us. Vasco, I had walked and Vasco had walked some but somebody had to have a car you know the march returned to Memphis that night .

(muffled)

Maxine Smith- So he came back with us that night.

Bill Thomas- And then did you go with him again?

Maxine Smith- The next morning I didn't go. No I wasn't with the march that Monday when he was shot. If you remember the first report was that he was dead. And so I was given I am so glad the lines didn't get through. The job was calling his wife to see what she wanted, permission to do some thing with the body. I don't know how I get these jobs, I was in the midst of trying to get her on the phone.

Bill Thomas- Say you do seem like you are bad luck.

Maxine Smith- And of course we were quite relieved to know that it was a....and of course that when I was going home on the evening of April 4th, I was convincing myself I think out loud really that you know (muffled) scratched Meredith and this is what happened to Dr. King. I think I was just trying to convince myself of that.

Joan Beifuss- Did you know Dr. King personally?

Maxine Smith- Well we were on the campus in college 3 years together.

Bill Thomas- At Moorehouse?

Maxine Smith- Well Moorehouse is undergrad school for men and I went to Spellman the undergrad school for women.

Joan Beifuss- Oh.

Bill Thomas- (Muffled).

Maxine Smith- and I finished in 49. I can't say I was a personal friend of his from his speaking appointments. I was closer to his sister who was on campus with me she finished a year ahead of me in the same class as mine. She is his older sister. She was here of course since the assassination. I have often remarked that ML as we called him in those days, was a very quiet boy. He didn't project himself into anything. It is just amazing that so much came out of him and it was there all the time of course, but had he not been the son of the biggest Baptist preacher in Atlanta and had I not known his sister so well he may have been never fell on the campus you know. My room mate from college she works with, she is Carrie Clarke's administrative assistant and through him some large sum of money was donated to the cause and

she called and asked me where to send it, And we visited, she works with the (muffled) foundation, oh about 30 minutes on the phone the night after Martin was killed. And we just reminisced of, you know we could remember him with this big umbrella he carried all the time and we remarked how quiet he was.

Bill Thomas- in college he had this great big umbrella he would carry around?

Maxine Smith- That's right, always he had this umbrella. He was just a quiet little boy, he was just a young kid.

Bill Thomas- Yeah (muffled).

Maxine Smith- He finished college at 19. He was just reverend King's son and Christine's little brother, that was just how we knew him. As I said he was quite quiet.

Bill Thomas- Well since we have stepped back in time a little bit why don't we go ahead and you tell us about yourself Mrs. Smith where you were born and how you got to Memphis and...

Joan Beifuss- Can I fill one more thing in before we get back tot hat. Can you tell at all how you felt when Dr. King was dead.

Maxine Smith- Maybe I will need to go back to some of these other deaths too because I can't really understand how I felt on Thursday night, I finally gave away to a whole lot of tears which is a bit unusual; for me somewhere Thursday night. And I think which helped me. On Friday morning I suggested to Jesse Turner that we just close this damn office up because all of this was useless. I was completely bitter.

Bill Thomas- And did that (muffled) him?

Maxine Smith- No I think I go through these emotional stages just prior to Metger's death I had felt the same sort of frustration and there is a lot of frustration in this work. You sometimes think that a whole lot of effort is being extended in vain and I was at one of those periods just prior to Metger's death and I was going to stop and go home and take care of my family. But my reaction was quite different after Metger was killed. Then I wondered how I had the nerve to say I am going to, whatever I have done to stop Metger has given everything, but somehow I never admitted Metger was dead until November 22nd of the same year when John F. Kennedy was killed. And we were here when all the news broke and the word that he was dead finally came I closed myself in the office and hit my hit upon the wall and said Metger is dead. And I can't understand that yet Metger was 5 months or so in the past and Metger was not on my mind but John F. Kennedy was on my mind. I think this was the first time I really admitted and I went through a very low period then. I think I questioned powers much greater than all of us and I think I lost whatever religious faith I had because that just seemed to be the fate of those who tried hard to fight for the things we believed in but somewhere along the way I passed through that mood and that period. But I was completely bitter after Martin

King was killed. I was completely disappointed that Memphis didn't completely burn down. I know I am not a burner, sometimes I wish I were.

Joan Beifuss- Sometimes I think it is easy.

Bill Thomas- Probably thought...

Maxine Smith- I saw the only cure to the evils is complete destruction of the whole system. Of course that is not the answer, I know that. Actually I think when I came to your group think I was beginning to (muffled) . As I said that morning that workshop I had generally stopped going to groups like that and on Tuesday evening of this week I went to another group at the Holy Communion Episcopal Church, very conservative group out there and I knew that would be a more hostile group. But I think I am back on the right track, if there is a right track that whatever can be done, people who meet like this must have some concern. It may be misdirected and they may not understand it but if we can help in anyway we have to continue. I just know we have got to keep on.

Joan Beifuss- Are you still bitter?

Maxine Smith- I am bitter but I don't...I still basically feel that it is hopeless but maybe some of the bitterness is left.

Joan Beifuss- You just kind of tired?

Maxine Smith- Well I am really weary. I just don't see any solution to our problems.

Bill Thomas- Things really have to change a lot.

Maxine Smith- Actually there has been a lot of surface changes. But now that we are getting down to the gut problems I don't really think anybody is really willing...enough people I won't say anybody to really attack them. When I look at the hang ups we have on just really recognizing that we have problems. I think the issue on police brutality is one of my biggest problems and it symbolizes a lot of others but I think very few people want to admit that we have that problem. And it alarms me that we, that our system of government has let it continue. I think they have really spawned the type of thing that (muffled) this, because no positive steps have been taken to eliminate it.

Bill Thomas- (muffled).

Maxine Smith- And when I, I get pretty disgusted you know when I see editorials and announcements from the police chief, we are going to protect our policemen. Well that is well and good but let's protect the citizen's you know, let the police do their job. And at this meeting that I mentioned on Tuesday night that was where we were farthest apart. Nobody really believed what I was saying. And they had their versions and it was just no meeting of the minds. The beliefs are being attacked by the black community., They have been called nasty names and I don't think they are prepared to accept...as long as we get from people in top positions the attitudes I

don't think other people are going to sympathize with the problem or try to do anything about it, the community certainly could do something about it if it were recognized as a community problem. And I maintained that Memphis is indeed lucky (muffled) because I am a Memphian and all my roots and stakes and worldly possessions are here too, what little they may be. But on far less serious encounters with policemen have we had Watts, Newarks and what not, I can't understand yet why in 67 this 15 year old boy was shot in the back and he was at a dead end a fence and killed why didn't they get upset over that. This is one of many incidents and nothing happens to policemen guilty of these things.

Bill Thomas- You all documented quite a lot of the evidence that was presented to the hearing, the brutality hearing?

Maxine Smith- Yes I have all those complaints. I think we had filed 7 of those complaints and a few more still and a man came in today, we still get some resulting from that.

Bill Thomas- I wonder if copies of some of those would be available?

Maxine Smith- I have filed copies (muffled) to make copies on.

Bill Thomas- Well if we could go back a little more and you could tell us a little about yourself.

Maxine Smith- Well I am a native Memphian.

Bill Thomas- Gosh I think you are the first one.

Maxine Smith- Yeah I was born and went through the public school system here.

Bill Thomas- And where did you go to school?

Maxine Smith- Elementary school I went to Porter School which was an elementary school at that time and to Booker Washington for high school at the time there was just two negro schools at that time, high schools, one in north Memphis and one in south Memphis. Booker Washington and Manassas were the only two.

Bill Thomas- this would have been about when?

Maxine Smith- I finished Booker Washington 45. And from there I went to Spellman College in Atlanta Georgia for my undergraduate work.

Bill Thomas- and your father..

Maxine Smith- My father was a postman, he passed away when I was 9 years old.

Joan Beifuss- Where did you live when you were little?

Maxine Smith- On the corner of South Parkway and College. Just where the expressway goes. There is a filling station there now but that was where I was born.

On South Parkway. I don't know yet how my mother managed to educate three children.

Bill Thomas- Do you remember anything about your childhood in Memphis were you aware of prejudices and...

Maxine Smith- I was willing the group just Tuesday night and I think this is where we started misunderstanding each other. My first recollection at being mad at white folks occurred when I was, would have to visit my father who was a patient, he was a very sickly person. That is my best remembrance of him was being sick all the time. And he was in Kennedy Veterans Hospital., I thin Baptist memorial has a unit over here on Lamar (muffled). But that was Kennedy V. Hospital at that time. And I was quite young because I was 9 years old when he passed away and I was 7 or 8 at that time. But we would leave school, the three children and walk over to see him. And I would go to the women but you would have to tell (muffled) who you wanted to see. And I would ask for Mr. Joseph Adkins. And the clerk goes you don't refer to niggers as mister around white folk and as I told the people the other night I have been mad ever since. They accused me of being full of hate.

Bill Thomas- And you were about 8 then?

Maxine Smith- I couldn't have been over 8. Because as I said he hadn't been in the hospital the year he died and I was 9 when he died.

Joan Beifuss- Who said that to you a nurse?

Maxine Smith- The admittance clerk, there was a window, we had to get a permit. So I was determined every time I would go I want to see Mr. Joseph Adkins and she said if I didn't stop she wouldn't give me permit and I would tell her I knew my way up there. This was my first conflict with racial discrimination.

Joan Beifuss- Were your brothers and sisters younger?

Maxine Smith- They were older because I was the youngest.

Bill Thomas- And how many were there?

Maxine Smith- Three. But I was the spokesmen for some reason and that left...I didn't really get a chance to really explain to this group...(Tape break)

Maxine Smith- That this wouldn't, I wouldn't remember it as well had it not been a continuous pattern. If you remember when I was arrested and I complained the director for fire and police about the lack of the use of courtesy. Nobody seems to realize the importance of this. It may seem like a little thing but it is degrading type ting and it has just been all my life this has been. You know I haven't had accounts downtown because nobody wanted to put Mrs., it is better now but say before 1960, negros were just not addressed and it was jut an effort to try to keep you inferior.

Bill Thomas- Any other, do you remember any other occurrences such as that like in your childhood that really teed you off that you recognized as being unfair.

Maxine Smith- I think that one stands out more when I was younger you know neighborhoods were pretty much integrated and there was the constant bricks being thrown when we would pass in the wagon on the street because that didn't leave a mark on me as this woman at the hospital. I think one thing that was significant to me because I was much older and this was when I was getting ready to go to grad school. I had also finished college at 19 and this is not much work for a 19 year old person to get so I went to graduate school. I guess that is why I went to graduate school. And my field was French., Because of the fact that UT would not accept me just because I was a negro, the state had to pay my tuition to Middleburg College which is a very outstanding school, far superior to University of Tennessee.

Bill Thomas- Oh really?

Maxine Smith- Though I think I benefitted I got a much better education as a result of discrimination but I was a little bit bitter.

Joan Beifuss- Middlebury Vermont?

Maxine Smith- That's right. That is where I did my masters in French, just because I was black I had to go all the way to Vermont.

Bill Thomas- UT would not accept you?

Maxine Smith- No UT did not accept negros at the time but the state....

Bill Thomas- Had to provide an equal..

Maxine Smith- Had to provide and I would not have been able to afford, my mother certainly would not have been able to afford because it was a real strain on her to afford the room and board. Because somehow she had managed I was the last of three to finish college.

Joan Beifuss- Where did your brother and sister go to college?

Maxine Smith- My sister went two years to Lemoyne College her and two year to Tennessee State in Nashville. My brother well his education was a little different because the government took care of most of his. There was this ASTRP, Armored Specialized Training Program Reserve I think for kids coming out of high school at 17 and they got their first year of college he went to Howard University and after that he had to serve his time in the Army and later he finished at Wilberforce.

Joan Beifuss- Did you work when you were at Spellman in college?

Maxine Smith- During my junior and senior year, I know I was a lab assistant. I happened to major in chemistry in college and did my masters in French. I ended up

working in the civil rights movement. But I was a lab assistant, must have been my senior year in college. It still amazes me on very meager earnings.

*What did your mother do?

Maxine Smith- She was then and is still secretary for Metropolitan Baptist church, this is the church I grew up in.

Bill Thomas- This is a salary job?

Maxine Smith- Yes, very very low salary. And there was some sort of pension, my daddy was a veteran of World War 1.

Bill Thomas- Still pretty meager.

Maxine Smith- Very very meager, when I look back I see now that she didn't have a change of anything during those years and I don't think children really realize and being at home the last child to leave, my sister is with all her virtues was a very demanding child and I could see any requests (muffled) made some effort to make it. She fulfilled her request but I could see what a burden it was, so I was determined that I would never do that while I was in college.

Joan Beifuss- Did you kind of grow up around the church then, I mean were you there for lots of Sunday school and youth meetings?

Maxine Smith- Constantly and of course we couldn't go to the movies on Sundays, other kids do. My mother was, the family was very steeped in all the meetings of the church, Sunday school, 11:00 service. DYPU, was what is called an evening service but I have no regrets about it all. At the time I didn't know Vasco, he grew up in Memphis but he is just about 10 years older than I so we were just in different circles all together, there was a lot of difference then. And he was being read in the same counter family. In fact, his father now is a minister. But I have no regrets.

Bill Thomas- That is Vasco's father?

Maxine Smith- Yeah, he doesn't in the CME church, he doesn't pastor now. He didn't accept the church because well daddy is 75 about 75 years old now and he just didn't want the responsibility of a church.

Bill Thomas- So how did you meet Vasco?

Maxine Smith- That is a real interesting thing.

Joan Beifuss- At a prayer meeting?

Maxine Smith- Well he was at a Methodist prayer meeting and I was at a Baptist prayer meeting and now we are in the Presbyterian church. There was a lady, I think she is dead now but I never remember it all and I don't even think Vasco even met her. Who claimed both of us as her children. I understand when I was in the cradle world a very small child in the church what happened is it is called a cradle roll. She

was one of the ladies in the back of the babies and the young children. I of course do not remember her form then. She was hospitalized, Vasco's mother, he comes from an amazing family really. Worked at a hospital at night and this lady has always had some kind of mental difficulty, slight not severe. But she wouldn't eat and the nurse's were mean to her and I think Vasco's mother was a maid at the hospital, I am sure that was all she was. That she would ask the nurses to let her feed them because they wouldn't sufficient time and she said I have a baby at home and if you will eat you can have my baby, and that baby was Vasco. And so through the years she called us her children and when I was in school ad working away from home after I finished completing my masters degree I went to work in Texas for a state college in Texas and then from there to Florida A and M college down in Florida. And I just knew her, by the phone, she had long since dropped out of church. She was sort an annoying person on the phone, nosy busy body. She would tell me about her other child that she wanted to meet and that was the last person I wanted to meet. This went on for two or three years, this is while I was in school and I was determined not to meet anybody that she knew. But I think after two or three years and I think the same thing was going on at Vasco's house, we both got curious. And I had just finished college and was home just a week or two before going off to Middlebury, to graduate school. Because I went to summer school and stayed on through the next year. Through curiosity he finally called and we met. As I said I was about to leave to go top school, this was a Wednesday, that was his off day and still is. He practices Dentistry in Dyersburg at that time. He was home on Wednesday and the Nat King Cole show was here. He came by to see me after the show and I had a date to go to that show. And for 4 years we corresponded because I wasn't at home, I did my masters and then I worked away from home and I would see him on holidays and breaks in school and we blossomed. But we never, we often said we must go by and see Mrs. Collins but we never did and she passed away somewhere shortly after we married or shortly before. She was the great cupid.

Joan Beifuss- What was it like going up to Middlebury after being in the south.

Maxine Smith- It was actually I think Vasco could relate this better, I will go a little beyond that. Well Middlebury is an entirely white community. There is one negro woman who lives in the town. There were four negro students in the school, so I was thrown completely into the white world.

Joan Beifuss- And that was really the first time you had really ever been thrown into a white world.

Maxine Smith- That's right. But it never struck me as being anything different really. This is what amazes Vasco and I will come back to that if I can. When we married Vasco was in service, Uncle Sam finally called him to get those two years he owed and he was in the air force when we married.

Bill Thomas- Was he a dentist in the air force?

Maxine Smith- Yes. For his education he owed uncle Sam two years. And all of our 99% of associates in the air force were white because they were the people in the dental corps with him. And I didn't know he had been concerned about how comfortable he was in service two or three months before we married and he was concerned about me adjusting and the wives greeted me, the new dental wife and I never blinked an eye. And he was amazed because he hadn't adjusted and so he attributes this to my year at Middlebury but there had been no problem. Maybe I didn't know it was supposed to be a problem. There was one incident at Middlebury that sort of hurt. It did hurt maybe quite minor but during the summer session, graduate students live on campus but the graduate school is very...well the whole summer session is you have a school of French, a school of Spanish, a school of Italians, 5 language schools, Russian German maybe. And a friend of mine from Spellman and I went together and of course we requested that we be room mates and we were the only two negroes in the dormitory but some how everyone got to be the hang out place in the dormitory. There was just no problems, we never thought of problems. In the winter this French school is just 14. Well the first, we had assumed that we were accepted for the whole year and there was some problem about us being accepted in the winter because the school is very small, the school of French is very small for the September session. And when the vice p-president of the school called us in, when we became aware there was....the first thing he was the one American, all the professors were French. That maybe, they were just visiting professors for the summer but he was in an administrative position, he was vice president of the school. He said I don't want to think it is because you are negroes. We had never given it a thought until he mentioned it. Our French teacher from Spellman who had accompanied us there who was very outstanding and brilliant and one that had been the first negro to be accepted to Middlebury. Well she fought our battle to the very end and we got in. She threatened to raise (muffled) because we discovered it was because 2 out of 14, well 2 had been accepted and 4 out of 14 was just a little much. Because then we found out that Middlebury had separate toilets for Jewish girls. And at one time nestle up in Vermont had its problems also but through something we were accepted. But that didn't throw us and in the fall session we had to live in one of the approved homes of the university and going to class one day we passed some very small children, children of professors. And as we passed they said Hollum on parade. And these were children that my room mate is as light skinned as you are and has red hair and to a child has seen just one negro all his life they wouldn't have known she was negro really although it is quite obvious that she is. But this really affected us strongly because this type of thing we had forgotten really.

Bill Thomas- And this brought it back.

Maxine Smith- And that really somehow it turned little things, like we wonder why the garbage strike was the thing here you know brought people together in Memphis. That affected us and the head of the French school, we were upset and didn't go to class. And there was some questioning as to what our trouble was and the father of these children was asking us to come back to Middlebury at the end of

the year because I guess similar incidents had happened before. But that is the, those two are the only reminders we had that...

Joan Beifuss- Now Middlebury is kind of an isolated school isn't it?

Maxine Smith- Yes. It is in Vermont in a typical New England village surrounded by mountains.

Joan Beifuss- It is beautiful isn't it?

Maxine Smith- Beautiful, that is finally got to California and those are the two parts of the country, the type of beauty acquired beauty in Vermont I would choose any day. We of course lived with a white family and the one negro woman was one of the approved homes and I guess she was approved to take care of any negro students that came. So she automatically wrote us a letter and I got this letter, Dear Mrs. Adkins I do not allow drinking, smoking, or foul language in my home, and I was guilty of all three. Maybe that attitude, I said why has she decided that I have come to live in her home. I think all negroes prior to us, graduate students, had lived with her. And when we went down the list, (muffled). So we had to find these homes ourselves, but we didn't have a wonderful experience with the Glen Family. She herself is a native of England and she had not been out of New England since she had been in America. There were no negroes there, but Mrs. Manning the one negro woman there and she had not been in touch with the problem. But it was quite interesting the, we were one of the first pictures these race pictures was called lost boundaries, I think that was the name of it. Where a negro doctor passed as white and he saw his only chance to maybe become an outstanding doctor was to maybe pass for white. And all the problem, I can't remember the picture but I think the picture was lost boundaries. But we took Mrs. Glenn to the movie that night and race had never been mentioned there and she came out weakened. The picture brought out, she was just curious do nice girls like you have to go to the back of the bus. She thought there reserved places for nice people like us. I think we gave her all she knew about the race problem.

Bill Thomas- Her first real confrontation.

Maxine Smith- And we were quite relaxed in the family, she had a grown son and for weekends we would go to Yale, in fact Muriel got her husband there, Vasco's influence was too great on me. And we would be so excited at the table we would just relax. Ooh we could hardly wait we are going to a nigger dance. You know we were just that relaxed with the family and you know that was a taboo word. So we got back and they said hey how was the nigger dance? And so we said wait a minute. We say it but you don't. But we gave her, we laughed we gave Mrs. Glenn her first lesson on (muffled).

Bill Thomas- On what?

Maxine Smith- Spoccare, that is another term we call ourselves that you better not do. Her hairdresser, New York was I don't know how many miles but 10 dollars one

way was how we figured it in money and of course there was no negro beauticians in Middleton. So Muriel and I sort of had to help each other and we asked Mrs. Glenn for a hot plate so we could hot comb our hair. And she was quite disturbed that she hadn't fed us enough and that we were buying food to cook in the room and they believe in feeding you well up in that part, and they did. And so she was real upset, what was wrong with the food, she doesn't know we were cooking. We said Mrs. Glenn if we didn't put heat on our hair it would look just like Mrs. Manning's. She was going natural then, another negro woman had hair like ours but she didn't straighten it. I don't even know if you all know what I am talking about.

Joan Beifuss- I didn't know you didn't with a hotplate?

Maxine Smith- Well you usually don't but you need heat and you put a comb on it and the electric....

Joan Beifuss- You heat a comb is that it?

Maxine Smith- Yes. But we had to explain to her and now when our hair gets wet it looks like Mrs. Manning's until we put some heat on it. So if a cloud came into the sky she would meet us on top of the hill with something to cover our heads because she didn't want us to look like.... She was a wonderful person and it was a good experience for both of us, she learned and it didn't bother us at all, she bothered her son who was a wiser, thought it would bother us to talk about it. But we were glad...

Joan Beifuss- Where is your college room mate now, does she live in Memphis?

Maxine Smith- No she lives in California, I saw her two years ago for the first time since we left Middlebury at an NAACP convention we met in California in 66.

Joan Beifuss- Is she working for the NAACP in California?

Maxine Smith- She has had some family problems and a divorce and she was a little bit in a state of turmoil at the time. Her husband they were both quite active in NAACP.

Joan Beifuss- Well then now after you left Middlebury then you went where?

Maxine Smith- I talked in Texas at prairieview college which is a state college for negroes in Texas. I taught there for two years.

Joan Beifuss- Prairieview A and M?

Maxine Smith- That's right. It is 40 miles from Houston.

Bill Thomas- And then where?

Maxine Smith- Florida A and M university. Tallahassee for one year.

Joan Beifuss- Teaching French or biology?

Maxine Smith- French. The closest I got to my two majors was that I taught scientific French. A French course to biology majors but...

Bill Thomas- Ok we have you born and off to school and a major in Biology.

Joan Beifuss- Trotting around the country.

Bill Thomas- And a masters in French and happily wedded.

Joan Beifuss- Then you married Vasco and came back here after the army.

Maxine Smith- We came back here, we married in 53 and spent two years in the air force and came back to Memphis in 55, June or July of 55.

Joan Beifuss- Did you consider not coming back to Memphis?

Maxine Smith- For some reason we were quite anxious to get home and we asked ourselves why, I think home is just home. I guess there is a sentimental mentality. Not in a serious consideration but we discussed it but we wanted to get back to our friends and families.

Bill Thomas- Now I think when I was here before you were telling me, did you and somebody attempt to get into MSU?

Maxine Smith- Yes I think that was my grand entre' into this freedom movement.

Bill Thomas- Will you tell us about that?

Maxine Smith- When we first got back here it has always been in college I was a member of the college NAACP.

Joan Beifuss- Up at Middlebury?

Maxine Smith- No up at Spellman, they didn't have one there. As a child my mother always and still is a to a great extent the winning of the prizes for winning the highest number of NAACP memberships. It has sort of been a part of my life to be a part of the NAACP, I can remember the first electric toaster we got that was how we got it she won it for writing memberships and that was the grandest thing I had ever seen really. NAACP was pretty inactive and in fact we had difficulty finding somebody to please let me join. I managed to join.

Joan Beifuss- What year would that have been?

Maxine Smith- 55. And in 57 Marge Sugarmon and I had 6 month old babies at the time, Laurie was quit interested in education she had married before she finished her undergrad work and I think had ambioned as evidenced itself since during this period we knew that we weren't, well we were members of the NAACP group we were not actively engaged. We would go to a meeting and I was young then and there was 15 or 20 old people then and they didn't, maybe it was me but there wasn't enough to keep a great interest there but we would keep a membership and

maybe out of the boredom I went along...we knew that the NAACP had filed suit for admitting the negroes at Memphis state. This had been a long slow thing, this was the first suit now I know that the NAACP filed in this area. So Laurie was interested in pursuing her education, I wasn't, but I always wanted to be part of something different and as I said I think I was raised for a feeling for this type of thing. She said some on and try to go to Memphis state with me. I said suppose they accept me? And but despite that I decided to go on and try. Actually Spellman had offered more French than Memphis State. In my undergrad there was just no French course that I hadn't had in undergraduate school, so I think I said I would take some Russian or something or some German I think I said I could take, I had to have two more languages until I had my doctorate.

Bill Thomas- Now you had your masters?

Maxine Smith- I had my masters at that time. Laurie had just had her bachelors. But may I throw in she was Phi Beta Cappa from wealthy and I would think should be capable of meeting the requirements of Memphis state. I don't have that kind of honor. Spellman is a pretty good school, one of the best schools we have actually and I had finished 2nd in my class there and Middlebury is a top language school. I had made it through there and I thought I had the stuff it took to get into Memphis state also,. And I did the photos all over I got real mad when they told me I wasn't good enough. So we put up a stiff fight and as I said we did this quite independently, we contacted nobody.

Bill Thomas- Just went out?

Maxine Smith- Just went out, it was not a NAACP project and I really don't know yet how the newspapers got wind of it. I don't know if you were here during those years and I know you weren't...

Bill Thomas- No.

Maxine Smith- Because youbut it got to be quite a thing in the newspaper. I do thin that although we didn't get in we made it far easier.

Joan Beifuss- How high up did you go at Memphis state for instance did you talk to the president eventually?

Maxine Smith- The president we always made appointments to see him but he never was in. I don't think he had any good answers for us really.

Joan Beifuss- What reason did they give you for not letting you in?

Maxine Smith- I don't remember specifically but it had to do with qualifications, you weren't quite good enough. It was something that we fell short on in the qualifications.

Bill Thomas- I am unfamiliar with this period, did you go out every day?

Maxine Smith- Did we go out, we practically lived there. That is why I think I got so mad because it was so hot and you know cars weren't air conditioned, well we didn't have air conditioned cars and just going back and forth and they used all sorts of excuses because none of it was race you know. The usual bit but this is when we were invited to serve on the board of the NAACP. This was in 57, the summer of 57. And the fall of 57, I think this is the first time in some time that women had actively served on the board of the NAACP.

Joan Beifuss- Who was the chairmen of the NAACP then?

Maxine Smith- I thin it was Lockard, attorney Lockard, H.T. Lockard was president of the NAACP then. I am pretty sure it was H.T. Lockard because I have been here for 3 presidents, reverend Cunningham and then Jesse so it was Lockard at that time. And sometimes to at the latter part of that year, in the fall of that year we were invited to serve on the board and we were asked, I think Jesse Turner had just been elected chairmen of the board at that time. The president and chairmen of the board were two different people, the constitution has been changed since then.

Joan Beifuss- Just for the record when did Memphis state let negro students in do you remember?

Maxine Smith- The following fall.

Bill Thomas- And were you...

Maxine Smith- This was 57 and 58 was the first...

Bill Thomas- Did you go ahead and go or what?

Maxine Smith- No well at that time Laurie had applied to go to Johns Hopkins. And so I had no real interest really...And some were accepted so I didn't push it any further. But as you know Mrs. Shivelin is the first and the only negro that I can remember, she wasn't good enough o be a student.

Bill Thomas- Now just of the record (muffled).

Maxine Smith- Spanish. She has since then gotten her masters degree and her doctorate degree.

Bill Thomas- At Memphis state?

Maxine Smith- No at Johns Hopkins.

Joan Beifuss- She is spending this summer in Spain.

Maxine Smith- Yes she is leaving next week for Spain.

Bill Thomas- Well then when did you become executive secretary?

Maxine Smith- I am trying to remember that. I chose membership committee when I first got, they asked us standing committees we have 13 of them and for some reason I chose memberships. This was in 57, maybe our term started in 58 I don't remember (muffled) 57. I think during the first year for some reason. But the membership of the branch grew from about 300 to 3,000 and the branch started really moving somewhere along there the freedom movement started. This must have been 58 when my term started on the executive board and I stated as member chairmen until 62 when the branch had grown to the point in size and programming that they needed a staff worker. So I was asked to serve as executive secretary of the branch.

Bill Thomas- So you became in 1962.

Maxine Smith- 1962 I am pretty sure over Vasco's objections.

Joan Beifuss- Now when was the push started here, desegregate the restaurants?

Maxine Smith- That was in 61, our first sit-in movement and I served as coordinator in that movement, we did not have what we call a freedom movement and the first sit-ins were March 1961 and they went on to November 1962 and there was an 18 month period.

Bill Thomas- Were most of the targets restaurants?

Maxine Smith- Well the first, there was some 40 kids arrested in the first arrest in Memphis occurred out of the art museum in the library. I am black this was during the period where sit ins were sweeping the country.

Bill Thomas- Art museum and library.

Maxine Smith- Uh huh down at the two branches of library Mclean branch and this one...

Joan Beifuss- What was going at the art museum.

Maxine Smith- Well negros couldn't go to the art museum, but once a week.

Bill Thomas- Like the zoo.

Maxine Smith- Like the zoo it was once a week that we could go and so we dared go, the kids dared to go on a day that wasn't our day. There were three places, two groups went to the library, two different branches the Mclean branch and the branch down on Front and another one went to the art museum. And that touched off an 18 month period of activity.

Joan Beifuss- Did you go, were you arrested at any time?

Maxine Smith- During that period I was never arrested. I cannot understand why. Vasco was arrested twice and I really developed a complex because it was very fashionable to be arrested and I was right there all the time but I never got arrested. I

can't understand it but I was never arrested during that period and there were some 400 arrests.

Joan Beifuss- Now that was all, that was all nonviolent, when they arrested they just sat down?

Maxine Smith- Yes, there was no violence to speak of, through the police.

Bill Thomas- Now how did that effort what the art gallery was integrated?

Maxine Smith- Actually in addition to that the lunch counters, see this spread on through lunch counters but we had to file suit in federal court for all of those things. For every tax supported institution in Memphis and Memphis branches I had to file suit and sometimes we implemented the court action which was always woefully slow with direct action, say the busses. But Memphis state was never really settled in court, the court suit. I think Laurie and my effort gave the impotence of direct action. Perhaps as I remember, se the bus suit Vasco was among those who were arrested on that. Although we had filed suit, although we had sit-ins at the libraries we had filed suit. It was a long, long expensive, very expensive fight. I don't know where yet we got all the money because of court costs and everything had to go all the way to supreme court.

Joan Beifuss- These things opened up before the actual supreme court decision was reached on them?

Maxine Smith- Not all of them. Memphis state and the city busses, but court ordered to desegregate the parks. That was when they closed the swimming pools, court ordered they desegregated the libraries and we had to go back in the courts to get the toilets desegregated because then they are going to have negro, black and white toilets in the libraries. As I remember and I think I am accurate on that it was court orders. I was criticized a the meeting I attended on Tuesday night for my criticism of Judge Boyd. We protested his nomination to Memphis light gas and water commission because he was the only federal district judge here and he heard all of our cases and he ruled against us in every case. And I was accused of making emotion packed broad statements that couldn't be true by saying Judge Boyd ruled against, so that statement could very easily be documented. All you have to do is look at the record and were not for superior courts...

Joan Beifuss- Was Henry Lobe the mayor then?

Maxine Smith- Henry Lobe was the mayor, during this big effort and though he was not at all sympathetic. City government was not, we made gains in spite of Henry Lobe and city government.

Joan Beifuss- Did he actively oppose, were you in contact at all with Lobe?

Maxine Smith- It was useless as I remember there was an effort on the part of...we used a combination of things. NAACP, not NAACP but the black community during

those years voted in a pretty solid block. That is before the white power structure started trying to separate us and we have succumbed to this effort to a great extent, but the black vote was pretty solid. I have lost the point I was making. But oh yes, but that threat we have always represented approximately a third of the vote and I think that political threat kept those who would oppose us vigorously at least quiet. We didn't get any help, but we didn't have (muffled) Wallis wasn't around in those days but that type. Because anybody no matter what his political views are would respect a third of the vote.

Joan Beifuss- Well then why the see neither one of us here then, why did Lobe come out of his term was mayor with such a racist connotation attached to him?

Maxine Smith- Well eh was a racist then.

Joan Beifuss- But he was no more racist then a number of other people was he?

Maxine Smith- He must have had a worse reputation but actually indeed he was not, because we got no help. During those days you just got no help from the white community period. And he let it be known he was segregationist. But I don't think he is any more segregationist than anybody else really that were in city government at the time but some who since then are supposed to be our friends are on city government and when attempts are made at meetings and for help with these problems we got no help. I was about to say the court suits the political muscle we had, the direct action, the economic boycott, it was a combination of all these things and all these projects that we engaged in that brought us a degree of success that we had to use all of it.

Joan Beifuss- Do you have any idea how effective the economic boycott was?

Maxine Smith- Oh sales, during that time I think that is in the paper from the federal...I think from the federal bank reserve in St Louis, maybe I am off to who published it but each day there was an indication of how much sales were up or down and we went up to sometimes as 40% off and so you know that is hurting.

Joan Beifuss- And it held that boycott held for 18 months?

Maxine Smith- That boycott held it really held. And at the end of that period, actually before the boycott started before the sit-in movement we had met with the officials about jobs. Trying to get jobs..

Bill Thomas- Yeah I was wondering going into this Mrs. Smith and approaching the strike, but one of the things, the situation the climate prior to the strike seemed I am sure that now this is propaganda and this type of thing, the surprising thing I guess is that many people was the idea that they thought relations were good and progress was being made and that there had been much violent activity and what not. So but now how did the NAACP see the situation?

_Maxine Smith- Well we saw it just as it is as everybody sees it now. I say to groups during the strike that I am so glad to see all of us concerned and doing some thing I just can't understand hwy we haven't been this concerned. I think the housing fee in Memphis have only been concerned about image and not how we feel as a people. And unfortunately, maybe it is because black people have been denied so much so long we get pretty happy when we see (muffled). You know somebody says well Macy's in New York doesn't have many more than that. But that is neither here nor there that is completely irrelevant. And we have been lulled, we as black people have been lulled...

Bill Thomas- So then you do think the negro community sort of shared this feeling that things weren't too bad.

Maxine Smith- Generally yes. There was a minority who felt differently. I think I mentioned to you and Jesse Turner goes back in city administration before me, but personally I can remember fighting for the garbage men for these same points that were in the settlement through Farris, Pete Sisson, and back to this city, I say through 3 city administrations. We went down and we pleaded but you see these things are kept quiet, didn't get the community concerned. With the school how long have we fought for the cafeteria workers. 3 years ago those people made 58 cents an hour and we got them (muffled) and they gave them minimum wage, just during...whatever federal minimum wage is but even before the minimum wage law was passed we got them up to \$1.25 now. Just during the sanitation strike.

Joan Beifuss- Would the feeling in the negro community say last year that things were going along fairly well would that account for the lack of votes that Willis got in November, or in October I guess.

Maxine Smith- I think that is a trial, in my estimation that is a certain opinion. It is more deep seeded than that. Because of our culture and because of what has happened from us from Jamestown on through negros have subconsciously, not always subconsciously have been taught to reject themselves. We just do not feel that we are good enough to be the top man. I think it is a healthy thing now that we can with pride refer to ourselves as black people, you see this indicates a pride. I mentioned, I explained this to my land lady about spocares I referred to. When Muriel and I were in the dormitory, we didn't want the girls to know our hair wasn't like theirs so we went through a lot of trouble to get it straight when they weren't looking which I see as pretty ridiculous now. But you know that was years ago, I am glad to see my 11 year old son, become proud at school he is the only black child in his class and he told me the other day mommy I had to tell Mrs. Smith how to talk she said nigro and I told her the word is negro. I said to myself no wonder he brings all C's home. But that was certainly, and he wears his hair in the natural and he just never wants to get a haircut anymore and he has all his little tikis and his little narus and although these things themselves don't say a lot but they are symbolic of a pride that has been lacking. This is why our fight for multiracial textbooks is so close to my heart because our kids and I think white kids and black kids just need to know the black race better and kids are not taught anything good about negros in the

school system by commission or omission they are just not taught. And of course you know the points I have made on that and I think it is coming it is healthy an image that we as black people can be proud of. There used to be a tremendous amount of discrimination within my own race.

Bill Thomas- Such as?

Maxine Smith- Light skinned negroes didn't want to mingle with dark skinned negroes.

Joan Beifuss- Is that ending now?

Maxine Smith- Oh it is almost unheard of now. As I say when you are talking to a group of negroes the yellow negroes are out of style now. But oh they used to have these fine tooth clubs where if a fine tooth comb couldn't float through your hair you know you couldn't be a member. Schools and colleges were even said to some of your lead negro colleges to not take too many dark skinned girls, you know college sororities. There were two that they said would take the light skinned and the other two were founders of the dark skinned girls. I am very glad that this is no longer true. You just find hardly any trace, but I think that is a part of the rejection and the lack of knowledge that we have of ourselves and just the complete rejection of anything that is black. The world black has been repulsed. Now that is getting to be, a man from the Memphis world and I think he just wanted a sentence and I got so carried away he had to find a cut off section he wanted to comment on the use of the term black. I feel very strongly about that but this type of thing on A.W. Willis ask the question you see I get carried away. I think that is a rejection of what is black. We don't have the self assurance and we are easily very easily persuaded and influenced by white elements.

Joan Beifuss- Now wait a minute Willis lost in the primary, you come across several people who consciously said they hoped or they voted for Lobe in order to have the confrontation object.

Maxine Smith- I was one of the 6 in my precinct that voted for Lobe and I certainly no Lobe lover.

Bill Thomas- What were those reasons?

Maxine Smith- For the very reason and it just happened sooner than we expected. It happened in February a month after he took office. He was symbolic and ironically enough the whole trouble had started with the first injunction against a man who was issued by Ingram.

Bill Thomas- Oh really.

Maxine Smith- Yes when he was mayor. And I think if any good can come out of Lobe staying in office certainly a lot of bad will. Martin King is dead but he did sort of call for unification of the black community because even though the conditions would have been the same under William Ingram, the black community would not have

united. The vast majority of the people would not have opposed William Ingram. He is the most amazing politician I know.

Bill Thomas- He is that.

Maxine Smith- He has a way of completely captivating, he has completely captivate the black community and he has absolutely nothing for them.

Bill Thomas- I was so surprised.

Maxine Smith- And that is effort under foot now.

Bill Thomas- (muffled) love for Ingram after he muffed the poverty program.

Maxine Smith- A lot of people were critical of us NAACP because we just fought it because we knew it wasn't right. At our expense we made trips to Washington to try to get OEO and they were about to buckle on the political pressure. Just no program could be run at the willow and pleasure one man and of course we were criticized for daring to defy judge Ingram. That was when he became famous as Judge Ingram.

Joan Beifuss- Does this...(Tape End)