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Eddie Jenkins, Memphis State University BSA, 1969

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Eddie Jenkins- Do you all have a specific line of questions?

Joan Beifuss- Yeah well we start off with biographical stuff and that sort of thing. This is January 4th 1969, we are talking to Eddie Jenkins- at the office, the interviewers are Walter Wade and Joan Beifuss. Eddie is a student at Memphis state university and was one of the organizers of the black students association. (Tape Break)

Joan Beifuss- Ok Eddie maybe you can tell us a little bit about, were you born in Memphis? Did you go to school here?

Eddie Jenkins- No I was born in (muffled) Mississippi.

Joan Beifuss- Oh were you in that negro community down there in Mississippi.

Eddie Jenkins- Yes you see I don't know if I am correct or not it might be the biggest or one of the biggest all black towns in the country. My father moved to Memphis shortly after and because I have been here all my life.

Walter Wade- Where did you go to high school?

Eddie Jenkins- Booker T. Washington high school.

Joan Beifuss- What year did you graduate from high school?

Eddie Jenkins- In 65.

Joan Beifuss- And then did you come right on to Memphis state?

Eddie Jenkins- Well no I stayed out and worked a year and came into Memphis state in 67, year 67 and 68 was my freshmen year.

Joan Beifuss- How about how big a family do you have?

Eddie Jenkins- Well do you mean...

Joan Beifuss- Brothers and sisters before you got married?

Eddie Jenkins- Well it is just three of us living, there are three living and 4 dead. 6 boys and a little girl and it is just three boys living.

Joan Beifuss- Are they older than you?

Eddie Jenkins- No well they are younger than me, I have a little brother one is 13 and the other one is 11.

Joan Beifuss- What does your dad do Eddie?

Eddie Jenkins- He is a landscaper contractor, works for himself. He sells (muffled) insurance is what he does now. He works for a firm here real estate firm here in Memphis in this building.

Joan Beifuss- And you are married now with a little girl?

Eddie Jenkins- Yes, I have a little boy. He is a, on the 12th he will be 19 months old.

Joan Beifuss- Did you meet your wife at Memphis state or in high school?

Eddie Jenkins- Well it was one of thee high school things where I was a junior and she was a senior. So in fact she was the one inspired me to come to Memphis state because she came out in 64 she graduated in 64 and come out of Memphis state in 64 and I graduated in 65. She kept saying you ought to go to college, you ought to go to college. I was planning to go into the service....

Walter Wade- You may have to speak up a little bit to be heard.

Eddie Jenkins- Instead of going into the service I came out and took the examination and got into college. I came on out and started school here at Memphis state.

Joan Beifuss- Were you already married then?

Eddie Jenkins- Well no, we got married shortly after.

Joan Beifuss- Do you want to say your wife's name just for the...

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah, Martha.

Joan Beifuss- Perfect how about your little boy what is his name?

Eddie Jenkins- He is junior, Eddie Junior, we call him tiny.

Joan Beifuss- Then when you came to Memphis state what were your first impressions about Memphis state or what had you heard about Memphis state before you ever got here as far as black students went?

Eddie Jenkins- Well my first thing is you have to get over being a, you know you I don't know if you call it (muffled) or what but having never gone to school with white people, you have to get used to going to school with white people. You feel like a fly in the buttermilk even though you are looking at black people all around you it is not enough where you feel like well it is really a bunch of us here even though you known that there is. You should feel like the fly in the buttermilk when you go into class and you feel set apart. And of course being a freshmen you could, people in there they had the freshmen attitude and I guess you are about as new to them as they are to you and they have a tendency to you know to reflect the sentiments or the attitudes of the community and we know the attitudes of the community how it might be bias and so on and so forth when they generally don't necessarily associate with negros and in that light, this is what is reflected in school of course you have

the older people the sophomores and juniors and seniors and so on. Possibly in classes how really don't take notice one way or another who don't seem affected by your presence. They really don't care if you are there or not but really I feel like sort of like a fly in the buttermilk. But at the same time here I am still with the attitude man I must be really getting somewhere because here I am out here in the white folks school.

Joan Beifuss- Let me cut back a little bit further, Booker T. Washington is an all black school, had you had any kind of contact with white people at all before you came out to Memphis state?

Eddie Jenkins- Well no not on a....very little and how you mean contact?

Joan Beifuss- See them on the street and that kind of thing but did you work with, were their white people?

Eddie Jenkins- Well before I came, well see I worked a year and I worked for Pickpack and everybody that was over me was white. Of course eventually I had a black supervisor because I went into produce and they have a bunch of black men, you know that is where black men go if you want to rise with the company you go to produce and you have risen with the company. You might get to be a produce manager which is really nothing.

Joan Beifuss- Why produce?

Eddie Jenkins- Well I, well you know I guess black people supposedly have a green thumb all this business and you know and it well they put to where you can really produce you know, you either produce or they get rid of you and you can see where you can produce in produce. They have the things where they come out and say oh you know, blah blah blah you are up this week or you are done and you know you do all you can to make bread for the man. But you really don't get anything because the produce managers in the union too and the union doesn't really do anything for any of them because the man has the union copped. So the way it is, what they do if they consider you to be a good man and they want you to go places with the company they put you under the produce manager. He is a manager because he has one somebody under him and usually it is a black produce manager and it is another black cat under him and if you are good there when they get a vacancy and they often get vacancies because the produce manager sooner or later find out that he has risen to the height of their career in the produce department and the salary is not going to increase because the union has all there thing fixed up and there is no such thing as a bonus, only the managers and stuff get bonuses the non-union members. So what they do is a lot of them quit and for various reasons they might fire him and so on and so on. There is a quite a, what you call it? I guess you say influx, out flux produce management.

Walter Wade- Turnover.

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah turnover. Yeah, quite a turnover of produce managers. And if it is a really good one he goes in and he stays and of course he is gradually building up and they are gradually expanding so they will still have this turnover produce management.

Joan Beifuss- Which union is it?

Eddie Jenkins- Well, (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Which (muffled) store were you at?

Eddie Jenkins- I was at number 9 Bellevue and MacElmore at the time, I worked over there for two years and they of course after the whole thing the strike and the PSA and the whole bit, they figured that my attitude and I guess being loud spoken. They said my attitude was one so that they could change me into a store where they didn't have any negroes at all and they, and since I was by that time I was what you might call (muffled) I had been produce, see I was in produce. And just to show you the attitude they had a supervisor and he was over all the produce managers and he drove a company car which was always a brand new car and the whole bit. He wore a suit everyday and all he did was walk around and so if a produce manager was out sick he might go in and work his department for him and stuff like that and he saw to it that the produce managers did certain things right and he worked with the new produce manager and showed them how to do this and how to do that and so on. And in fact the produce manager, he was the man and I had told the manager of the store that I was going to school, and that I was planning to go to school. As a matter of fact when I first started working I told Mr. Don the head of the company, he says will you work a year? I say yeah I will work if it is a year until the next school term. And if I by any chance I get into school then I will be going to school. He said ok, in our company we can make provisions for you going to school and still maintain adequate work hours. So I said ok. So I went to work full time and then bought oh I guess about the last of August after I had taken the test and got my results back and it came out here and I found out that I could get into school. SO then I started making preparations to go to school. And I told him as soon as possible, in fact, what my produce manager urged me to do was not to tell him I was going to school and if anything either to quit or just tell him all at once and be prepared to quit if he starts talking along the lines of trying to fire me. So I said no, well I approached the man that I would tell him. So I went on and I told him that I was in school. The man just said ok I am glad you told me as soon as possible, he was personally he and I had a little trouble because eventually he was the reason why I quit but other than that he is a pretty straight guy. And he tried to be understandable and all and I guess he figured I would work enough to keep. Anyway he told the produce supervisor, the produce supervisor he was...I don't know anyway, he was one of these undercover guys you know he really didn't dig black people trying to make it I guess because he had fired another guy, the guy had went through the same thing I did had told him about it and all and he had fired him. So I guess he was planning on doing the same thing to me. And under the produce manager's insistence this produce manager, he had been produce manager about 6 or 7 years so he was really, he was really to be

considered with the (muffled). Under his assistance and I guess when the manager saw, he didn't fire me. He talked to me and asked me why didn't you tell us before now that you were going to school, now we are going to have to train somebody and all this bit to make it seem like the company was going to fall almost because I wasn't there. So I talked to him and I said I told him as soon as I could and I told him about the thing that I had talked to Mr. Don and what Mr. Don and I had agreed and all this and he still wasn't too hot he kind of reared me a little bit about that. I think he still wanted to fire me, but the funny part about it was that he wanted to take a guy that was going to go to school that was working part time in the first place, a man that I had trained and leave him in the produce department. See we start out with two guys in produce and just run it in. We had a, the summer that I was with the produce man we were running it was just two of us and we were running the biggest, we were bringing in the biggest percentage that the store had even done in produce. Bringing in the biggest percentage. Which means that most of the time, I spend most of my time running and I spend a whole lot of hours working sometimes off the clock to me the demand of the customers. And still get paid for 40 hours and sometimes it would go over but the produce manager they wouldn't allow him to allow me to go too much over so you had to stay within a certain bounds, of course I was running 442 and 43 hours over but I might have been working 47 hours to help the produce manager and here I am, he is trying to keep himself up and I am trying to keep him up and peel myself up to because by the time I quit to go to school I was in line for the produce manager. In fact I was the top assistant in the chain. But we had added a man, we had added a third man and so the supervisor wanted to take the 3rd man that I had trained and he was my assistant and wanted to take him and put him in my position and stick me out in the grocery department. I had been out to the grocery department once but he wanted to put me back in the grocery department and leave him back there. By the way it was Earnest.

Walter Wade- Is that right?

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah, that's the one. And so the produce manager wouldn't do it and in fact the produce manager was the one that had this 3rd guy put back out there. And he insisted that he wouldn't do it and he didn't like it and ironically about 3 months later the supervisor got fired for being drunk on the job, he had a little alcoholic problem. But after that I worked with (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- Would they do adjust your hours then for your school hours, or do you adjust your school hours to your working habits.

Eddie Jenkins- Well no they adjusted my working hours to my school hours see because I didn't have a schedule after 5 and eventually what they had to do because I had, ended up having biology lab and so on, they eventually had to let me like I was every Thursday I think my second semester I would just come in whenever I could. Which means I get out of lab, I had lab until 6:00, from 4 till 6 and anywhere between that we might get out and that is why I would come in. Of course it was a pretty good set up and I guess that is why I kept the job as long as I did because it was basically a pretty good set up and it fitted in with my school work.

Joan Beifuss- Well do you work at the (muffled) now?

Eddie Jenkins- Well no I quit about 4 months ago because the same manager that really got me going and really gave me the opportunity that went along with me when I started school, for some reason it seems, I mean it wasn't anything racial don't suppose, way down somewhere it might have been a little racial thing it might not have hit by me being black. But there was a personality class somewhere because he was one of these hardcore managers, in fact he was one of the top managers in the continent and he is known to really...he gets production. He, oh I think there is a big psychological sign in front of his eyes that says production now how good you are producing, production. And he really drives the people that work for him, in fact, he has a tremendous turnover as far as employees are concerned because people come in and they work and all that he don't fire they quit. And you just get these few that become so afraid or so determined to show him that they can be just as tough, they can take just as much as he can put on stay. And but basically you get a bunch of guys, who eventually fear him and this is some thing that I never did, I never feared him because he had a tendency to walk up and he had beautiful technique he would walk up and he would grab a man by the arm and he would talk through his teeth like he really was getting ready to almost bite you in the face or something. And the guy was shaking and everything was (muffled) this that and the other and Mr. Ustery said this it was almost like god was talking, in fact, they eventually got around to calling him god you know. I would look up and say well here comes god because this was the way the guy reacted, he was feared, he was respected but at the same time he was feared you know because they knew that if they upset Mr. Usher they were going ton get fired and to me I only looked at it like this Mr. Usher was another man and big deal. I mean I had feelings and if Mr., Usher fired me, gee whiz I can get a job anywhere. Pickpack being one of the top companies in the city, in the south for that matter and probably in the nation I could get a job anywhere after working for Pickpack and with my work experience and my record, I knew. So I really didn't care about Mr. Usher, I mean I respect him, I respect his ability and I recognize his ability and evidently he respected me, because I mean he never came down on me I never had to go through any of his....I remember a time or two he might of used some profanity with some of the guys. I don't think hew ever spoke directly profane to me because if it was on my mind and he was bugging me I would let him know. I think it was a personality clash because I was like maybe a straw in his bed you know. Because he had, the thing would have been well on if it hadn't been for me not begin afraid, maybe if I had been afraid.

Joan Beifuss- Now is that over at, Bellevue MacElmore this is where the NAACP ran the boycott?

Eddie Jenkins- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- So they have a number of black employees now?

Eddie Jenkins- Practically all the store is run by black employees, out in the store the stock, all the stockmen and all the sac boys are black. You have white checkers and you have a few whites in the meat market.

Joan Beifuss- has that been since the NAACP boycott?

Eddie Jenkins- Yes.

Joan Beifuss- Well then where are you working now?

Eddie Jenkins- No I am with Joan Bickstar down the street number 9 on McElmore, in fact, it is I guess 10 or 12 or 13 blocks down. And it is an all black firm. We have a token white employer.

Joan Beifuss- Was it all black before this fall? Or was that also a result of the...

Eddie Jenkins- Well see what happened was after the disturbances...

Walter Wade- He had all his windows busted out didn't he?

Eddie Jenkins- Well yes.

Walter Wade- Didn't I go by there and see all those windows boarded up.

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah and actually what happened was that when we had the garbage strike and all this stuff we had national, national was in there and the community literally drove national out because they burned the washeteria next tot eh place and they were trying to get the store. In fact, I talked to some of the guys and they said man you know every time you throw a cocktail (Walter Wade- muffled) for some reason it wouldn't burn for nothing. It would go out. And so what they did, they actually drove National out of the community because they broke the windows they dried to burn the store they burned the washeteria next to the store and they made various attempts and during the period when they had the curfew and all this I guess just being maybe the biggest white establishment in the community in the immediate area, this is the thing that was attacked in fact believe it or not, Pickpack, I don't think Pickpack I mean they had some threatening phone calls but I don't think Pick pack was ever touched. In fact, I know they were never touched because I was there, nobody else threw a brick and they never attempted to burn the place and we had never found any evidence that they attempted to burn the place or anything along these lines.

Joan Beifuss- Eddie is it possible to set any point when you were younger when you realized you were living in a black ghetto. Is it possible to pinpoint something like that?

Eddie Jenkins- Well it is kind of hard, one thing about it is you can't specify age when you come, when you get to the point when you realize that you leave, that there are two worlds the white world and the black world. You see white people, you know you see white people and you say (muffled). And you wonder where they come from

and you wonder where they go because you know that they don't come to you and go to your neighborhood. The only thing about it the only white people that you see are the insurance men, the cleaner men, bill collectors and so on. All these guys are selling something you know and they come in and at the time when I was a kid even these guys exploded like people. The insurance rep because I remember I will tell you about the time the insurance man, my mother and him had a little riff and got upset and he comes in and he says you have got to pay your insurance and it is so and so and you have to pay it and blah blah blah, the whole bit like he is collecting off of her. He is going to come in and scold her you know and she is making him, she is dishing out his bread for his living. I told you about the time that the cleaner man came in a friend of mine his grandmother and he came in and he sat down on a bed and she told him to get up and get his butt out off of her bed that she wouldn't go to his house and sit down on his bed. And he called Auntie, he called all old people auntie. Well auntie she told him I am sorry but I am not your auntie, I ain't got no white folks in my family you know. I mean you know stuff like this and I mean this is where you began to realize that you are supposed to be down here and white people are supposed to be up here because when black people do these kind of thing, these things are noticeable and these things are, these are the things that let you know that black people are supposed to take a subordinate position, these are the things that they are not supposed to do like the insurance man that got smart on my mother and all, well he came back and he started in with the same old bit again and first my (muffled) well he was white see so he could come back again he could still come, he could just dish anything out and still come back. So he came back the next time and my old man was home waiting on him see. He came in and he talked and he tried to get tough and my old man wouldn't take it my old man put him out and in fact the kicked him off the porch. But this was, and I guess this in my mind sort of formed my attitude, of course, it was kind of funny, one thing that was kind of ironic was the fact that we started from some sort of community relationship and I remember wishing because the railroad tracks divided the black and the white neighborhood.

Joan Beifuss- Whereabouts did you live?

Eddie Jenkins- I lived over in, I don't know if you call it southeast Memphis over by Magnolia schools, we call it the neighborhood Magnolia, it is next to Castilla Heights and I guess you call it Magnolia. It was over near the Cloverdale area over here off south Parkway. And over on South Cooper really, because I lived off of South Cooper (muffled).

Walter Wade- Oh yeah I know where.,

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah over there in the railroad, you know I live right next to the railroad man the railroad ran right down by my house, trains going all night and all that bit I guess that is why noise doesn't bother me. Everything around us was black, the (muffled) store down on the corner was black all the stores in the neighborhood was black and there wasn't a white establishment in the neighborhood and except for the insurance man and the cleaning man and so on and son nothing, everything

is black. And when you went down to the stores of course there was white people there and you know you knew, one thing that you formed the attitude that you had to go to whitey to get everything. This was one attitude that I know was formed and I remember the white guys, very seldom did a black guy get a bb gun. Every once in a while he would get big enough to get a bb gun and I was always wishing that I could get a bb gun because we used to have wars with the white guys on the other sides of the tracks. They come up on the railroad tracks and there was a field near the railroad tracks. In fact, a guy used to plant cotton and corn and stuff out there and he had a mule in the back of his house. All this is right here in the city. He used to hire people to pick his cotton and there was a bayou that ran down from the field. The field was between the railroad and the bayou and we used to go over there and hide in the field and we used to make bow and arrows and slingshots and we used to war with the white boys. They would stand up on the railroad tracks and shoot us with bb guns and we used to war with sling shots. It sounds like the savage and the civilized, they got the guns and you got the make shift things you know. And we had to shoot up the hill and they had to shoot down the hill.

Walter Wade- Just like the (muffled).

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah really and we went through this bit and then we had this thing that we had a great big hill and I used to slide....well on that side of the hill they had a lot of trees and we had weeds on our side of the hill. And so they used to slide down the hill with cardboard. So we used to sneak through the thing and we should throw rocks at them and then they slide down the hill on a cardboard and the next thing they know they be ambushed by a rain of rocks you know. We shoot bow and arrows at them and stuff like this and we got bb guns they shoot them with bb guns and they do the same thing to us. Sometime there are a whole lot of them up there and a black guy would get caught up on the railroad track and get beat up you see and then we catch one or maybe two or three of them worn maybe and over on our side of the tracks and he get beat up too. We didn't dare go across the other side of the tracks every once in a while we would get bold and it would be about 16 or 17 of us we would go up on the railroad track and we wrote about 3 or 4 of them off the railroad tracks and then they would go back over to the neighborhood and do a little circle and they would come back with a whole hoard of guys and run us back over to our side.

Walter Wade- Did you take this seriously? I mean was this, would you regard this as typical of a gang fighting back and forth or did you feel there was hostility underneath it all?

Eddie Jenkins- No the only thing was that they were aware and we were very much aware that we were black and they were white. This was the only reason we did it because they were white. If it had not been so....

Walter Wade- If it had been a negro gang over there you wouldn't haven't been pecking at each other all the time?

Eddie Jenkins- Well if it had been a negro gang there would have been some communication you see because eventually there became some lines of communications anyway but way underneath there was always this wish that I could get a chance to communicate with the white guys on the other side so I could go up on the railroad track and not worry about getting ran off and since the white guys had the bb guns so I could play with one of the bb gun and all this thing. So it was really more or less a....

Walter Wade- It had racial overtones?

Eddie Jenkins- Yes, yes, you know what you really want or for some reason you would like to see how it is on the other side of the fence. The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence and we didn't know if it was really greener or not but we knew that they lived in better houses than we did. This was one thing, they had a better looking neighborhood.

Joan Beifuss- Did your mother work when you were a kid?

Eddie Jenkins- Well, yes, off and on she worked for, she worked about 3 years for Lamar Laundry. There is another place I came in contact with white people. My mother worked and she would talk about her boss and my oh man she would get gas at the service station right next to the cleaner and I remember going in there and talking to the people and so on and so on. But I mean other than that I always realized that they were, that to me one of the first realizations was that everything you got you had to go to whitey to get it. If you got gas, you went to a white service station and got gas because there weren't that many black service stations. When you bought groceries if you really wanted to get any groceries worth any while you went to a white man to get them because there were very few black stores. All black stores were little. In fact there were no big black stores, so when you went to a grocery that was any size and if you are really going to get a bargain you went tot eh white man to get a bargain because I remember my mother always complaining about how high the corner store was that you could go to. Big white grocery and get it for this that and the other.

Joan Beifuss- Did your mother and dad ever say anything about not getting into trouble with white people anything like that?

Eddie Jenkins- Well no, the only thing I tell you here in this area this is where my grandmother a combination of people my relatives from the south, this is where they came in. I remember my grandmother and my other used to discuss incidents of violence. In fact, when I first really realized the how widespread and to what degrees violence was inflicted upon black people. When the (muffled) case came along.

Joan Beifuss- How old were you then?

Eddie Jenkins- I don't know let's see when was that? About 55?

Joan Beifuss- 53 I think, maybe it was as late as 55?

Walter Wade- I can't remember now.

Eddie Jenkins- Well anyway I was just old enough to read, I might have been 6, 5, 6 or 7. Somewhere along in there. Anyway my father bought a Jet and it had a picture of the guy (muffled) and the white people. I remember looking at the picture you know and this was when I first became aware that white women were really something unusual. White women were a prized commodity because here the guy whistles at a woman and he gets completely butchered and I remember this because my people talked about it for weeks and my grandmother would still mention it periodically. She talked about it she was infuriated, the whole bit And they really went through the thing he talked about you know and of course this I asked questions about and I had all that I couldn't read myself they read it to me and so I got some kind of idea of actually what is going on and the possibility that you know in other words that once I became a man that I could smile at a white woman and die for it, just for smiling. I even look at one hard, and so I guess this is the first case of my knowing not necessarily feeling but knowing any sort of fear for the oppression that I might experience at whitey's hand. So I guess this is the first instance, instance of violence against black people that I really noted. Of course after then I began to take note of a situation where white people had hung black people down in Mississippi and how things were during the depression and so on and so on back in the early years when a black man did this and a black man did that. I remember one case where my father had mentioned where was black man, a white man had came in and this guy lived on his place and he asked the man why wasn't he out working. It was early in the morning it was a bout 6:00 and he asked the man why wasn't the man out in the field plowing and the guy said my wife hadn't cooked yet. So the white man goes in the kitchen and slapped the man's wife and asked her why she hadn't got his breakfast on so he could get out and plow that field. And he cussed her out and all this bit and he come out and told her up and get that boys something so he can get on out there and he walked out to the gate and that is as far as he got. The black man blowed him down with both barrels in fact he mangled him he cut him in half. But and this is, and then the man left, he got away. The black people got together and they got him out. This is my first recollection of black retaliation and organization,. How black s can work together to do this that and the other. And they cited other instances to me of this, that and the other and they cited instances to me where I guess it was a white man he was so powerful in the community he did this and he was a low down guy and I think he had some people killed, or he killed a bunch of people and how they eventually, how the white mobsters eventually killed him. He was so feared and he was so terrible until he wore bulletproof vests and all of that and I don't know how car was fixed up but anyway he wore all this stuff and he had bodyguards and the way they got him with a sub machine gun. Which means that, when you think of submachine gun you really aim you really get it you know. And so this is where they got him so this to me, this was my first recollection of thinking anything about whiteys violence against whitey, immaterial whitey's violence against black people and the incident about the

man shooting his boss black people's retaliation of white and their organization to get the man out and so on.

Joan Beifuss- Howe about in high school did the kids, was there any kind of talk about black organization in high school?

Eddie Jenkins- No, basically no. I think really because I think it came a difficult period in high school. A period where we came after the sit-ins and where you know especially here in Memphis they all this you could do all these little token things. You could go to a counter and they didn't always like to serve you but you could, because I remember going to some lunch counters and you know being the last to get served and stuff like this. But you could go and we didn't come in the period where there was actually the action because I think the action was about 57, 58, 59 somewhere along those years where they were actually having the sit-ins and the pray-ins and marching and son and so on. And I remember wishing for a period when we could actually participate because when I was little I was too small to participate and my parents didn't participate and so I always wished I was big enough to participate because some of the guys in the community the teenagers in the community at that time, did participate in these things, in fact, the girl out on the street at my mother's I guess you might call my mother her god-mother. She was almost like a sister to me, she participated and in fact a lot of teenagers from our church participate in these things se and they were right in it full force when the NAACP first came into Memphis they were right there, they jumped in it and they were the people really in these things. So I was close to these people who were actually out there fighting which gave me a desire to want to be out there and by the time I got into high school there was no need.

Walter Wade- It had kind of quieted.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled).

Walter Wade- One phase was over and there was a (muffled) period before there was another.

Joan Beifuss- did the teenagers that participated become kind of heroes to the younger kids?

Eddie Jenkins- Well yes, yes, you think you go to, they go to jail. Before you have been told don't do so and so because you go to jail you know and this is one thing that earlier in the black ghetto that black people learned that whites are the authority figure because there were few black policemen and whenever they came out or whenever they came to be arrested it was always the white cop that came in, he came in tough you know,. This is the way they want to institute fear in the black here. I think they had some tendency to want to project a fear about he future so they say if I scare this nigger kid now well, some man in my position no trouble later on and parents of course black parents use the police to scare their kids. I am going to have you put in jail, the boogie man, the cop was almost like the boogie man. I am

going to call the police and have them come get you. If the police came down the street, we were little kids if the police came down the street everybody got quiet and watched the cops. Kids had a tendency to kid and stuff like this because we had seen the cops run guys in the black community and so on and got out somebody get shot and we knew about them beating guys up you know. This was common place, especially when you live in a neighborhood where a lot of guys drink and a lot of guys go to jail for getting drunk and they beat them up. So and into I had this, my old man had gotten beat up, my old man had bought a sweater from a guy who he thought was a traveling salesman and he turned out the sweater was stolen. The cops took my old man and my old man told them where he got it from and gee whiz they almost beat him to death. Since he stuck to his story and he didn't have any other to go to, and they tried to make it confess that he stole it and then they checked his record and everything and found out that he wasn't lying and they turned him loose and they told him they were sorry. I mean they beat him all night you know with night sticks and he said they kicked him on the shins and the whole bit, they, I guess everything they could do to him without killing him you know. And then they turned him loose the next day and they told him they were sorry and I remember I have always wondered about this kind of justice but this was, early recognized the white authority figure in the black community. And the police is one of the first authority figures and of course all the others fall in line in the white people have everything and you have to go to white people to get it. If you want anything worthwhile you have to go to white people to get it.

Joan Beifuss- Can you make any kind of assessment of the attitude now, do black people still feel that way?

Eddie Jenkins- Well generally yes.

Joan Beifuss- The older people?

Eddie Jenkins- Well not necessarily older people, younger people feel that basically whitey has it. But I don't think they feel that, they feel that the thing is that they don't, now they know why whitey has it. They don't feel like whitey has it because whitey is suppose to have it or because that is just the way it is, they know that whitey has it because whitey hasn't given us a chance to have it. And with his attitude they go and say well I (muffled) they buy from what, they buy from whitey. They go to whitey preparing themselves I think to one day looking forward to the day that they won't have to go to whitey. Or that even if they go to whitey they will be getting a share of the pie too you see. I guess this is why black people, there is a tendency that black people will go to stores earlier when they first started having black clerks and black cashiers, black people usually flock to that store because they say, they got colored folks down there and they run in because then they feel that you know well I may as well go here and help my color. For instance, even this summer when I worked at Pickpack out here in east Memphis I had I guess 75% of the black trade was all in my line plus the white trade. I guess it is a kind of a (muffled) on top. I had 75% trade because I was the only black guy in the store, for awhile I was the only black guy in the store and I checked and it was kind of funny

because they could see me everywhere because I did everything, I worked in produce, I worked stock, and I checked. Then they brought me in and they put a black guy in the meat market and of course really I think the meat market guy was biased I don't know. But then they fired this guy and it got another guy back in the meat market and they were really crazy about him, he was, but the funny, ironic thing about him was this guy had beautiful straight hair. I went to school with the guy, he had beautiful black straight hair, it was real wavy and curly and it was naturally looked almost like he had went to some beauty shop and got it all done up, the most expensive you know. It was beautiful man. And he was light skinned and they just loved him. Boy they were crazy about William. He quit, no they had this other guy, had this other guys before him. He was a whiz everything, he was just a whiz. I don't know whether he had experience or what but man he was ready. He quit. He quit and went somewhere else. Then they got this other guy, Cornell was the guy with the beautiful hair and oh man old Cornell was the greatest. You know it(muffled) but I think Cornell quit. But you know with this tendency in the black (muffled) to go where we see a black (muffled) really I think they were lying but they wanted to get over to me how much they appreciate you being here, they say. You know I sure am glad that they got some colored folks down here at this tore because I was going to quit. And they never stop and think and look around and see how many black people that there are and that there was just one of me. These are things that they don't think about.

Walter Wade- Event he talking means something to them, they don't quite see that.

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah and they run their mouth of course and I am trying to, yeah, I am running through the bit, sure they got to get some soul in here. And they go on and they come back and they appear to be happy of course they got two or three more black people in there and eventually before I left they had 3 black checkers and then they had this guy in the meat market and then they had this guy working front end and working stock too. So that means there were 5 black people in the store eventually. This manager he was the first one that actually introduced black people into the check stands for ht e(muffled). And he said I brought black people in over here at Bellevue and McElmore and they said it couldn't be done. They said it couldn't be done out here in east Memphis and I am going to show them that it can be done and I think your attitude is the right one,. Of course he needed somebody who could work here too you know. So you know that made me the ideal guy since by that time I was half way used to white folks and I wasn't going to say (muffled) or so all this business. I guess you he wanted somebody that was you might call fairly hip or something and this is where I came in on that deal. But the fact of the question I think the attitude has changed. Ina way it is basically the same we realize that black people still rely and it is a fact that basically whitey has everything. But we are moving in and we are beginning to share, I think we are beginning to share where it is not so much that whitey has everything it is more that we have to get to the place where we are able to share more of what whitey has so that it becomes ours rather than whiteys and it becomes whiteys and mine rather than just whiteys buy himself where I have got to, to get anything I have to go to him and get it. And he

is dependent on me, they realize their importance now and whitey is just as dependent on them to come to him to get what they want as they are that they have to go to him. So that it is more than interdependence rather than being dependent on whitey.

Joan Beifuss- Do you think the threat to go in and take it has been opened up?

Eddie Jenkins- Well..

Walter Wade- You mean the threat of a riot or...

Joan Beifuss- The threat of the black people to simply go in and take what the white man has if he is not going to share it.

Eddie Jenkins- Well don't think, no, when you say take, I don't think it is so much the threat of going in and taking what he has, I think it is a threat of, I think it is the attitude that black people are willing to destroy what he has which is not going to benefit him or them either, because I mean the attitude that they don't have as far as we are concerned what we have we can do without. And we are going to put you hear with us. I think this is a fear that opens things up, because I mean as far as taking is concerned. Well yes, I have to retract that, yes, to a certain point.

Joan Beifuss- That is true I guess you really couldn't take it I guess it would really have to be rather destroyed...

Eddie Jenkins- Yes because it is much easier to destroy. Well you can only take so much, before the cops.

Walter Wade- The cops are going to be on you.

Eddie Jenkins- But you see....

Walter Wade- But if you burn it down that is irreversible.

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah.

Walter Wade- They can't come and reclaim the merchandise because it is already burned up.

Eddie Jenkins- This is effective as a burning.

Walter Wade- Getting back to the Memphis state situation. I certainly think that it has changed a lot since you were a freshmen.

Eddie Jenkins- Yes.

Walter Wade- Of course you started the black student association is one of the things that has made it change and the increased negro enrollment has been another thing. How would you compare or contrast the situation now as against when you first came to Memphis state.

Eddie Jenkins- Well first I think that the situation that we have today...

Joan Beifuss- let me ask you when you first came were there a lot of kids from Booker T. that came in with you? Did you have a lot of friends that came to Memphis state with you?

Eddie Jenkins- Well no not with me but, in fact there were just a few, but there were a few people who had came, there were a few people who I had recognized who came in 64 with my wife and there was some that came in the year I graduated in 65 and of course the people behind me and I knew a lot of people behind me and there was some few who came, it was just a sprinkling you see. And I had gone by living in east Memphis I had known people from 3 high schools, from Hamilton, people that went to school with me and grammar school and went to Hamilton, people that went to school with me in grammar school and went to Melrose. And then I moved up and I knew people that went to school with me who went to Carver, really before high school and then the people that went with me to Washington. And so what had happened the people that I had met, many people that I had known somewhere else you see and this helped a whole lot. This was personally to my advantage and probably to other black students disadvantage having, me never having living in one community all their life and had went to one school all their life. But I think I had this advantage of having the acquaintances of having 4 high schools in the Memphis area and (muffled) before high school. It wasn't very much problem. Usually if I met someone there was someone that they knew that I knew and we could relate along these lines. Or they at one time or another had gone to some school that I had gone to. You know always something that would link us together because even in a city as big as Memphis is, people, it is relatively small in a sense because people relate on locality and they relate as far as schools they relate as far as people and they relate as far as incidents or activities are concerned because many of the people I met on campus were, I ran track in high school, a negro athlete, former athletes or they were on the drill team of some thing like that. And you know could always look into our lives or activities and find something in common and we laid along these lines and this is what we did. But as far as the attitude, I think the attitude was apathetic and biased when I first came. I think, that before the black student association was formed the attitude was still apathetic and biased. I think it is just apathetic now. Really I do. I mean it.

Walter Wade- I know I wonder the stories you are going to tell.

Eddie Jenkins- Well we know it is biased, we know it is biased. To a certain point, no doubt about it we are going to have a certain, I don't know if you call it faction or fraction on the campus that is going to be biased. We know we are going to have rednecks on campus but then when you have a apathetic, when you have a silent apathetic people and you have got outspoken biased people, you have people who are biased and really don't want you to know that they are biased but who in control and who can manipulate and do those things where you recognize they are biased but no one is going to say anything about it and then you know what kind of situation you have. But when you have a situation where you have some, well you

got, if you know if they are too biased there is somebody who is going to say something and you got something that is going to meet that course but then they have a tendency to, I guess you call it bag down and to be you know a little quieter. So when I say the attitude is simply apathetic I am saying that overall the people who might be outspoken and biased or the people that might have a tendency to show their prejudice, just seem apathetic.

Walter Wade- I see, they are just being quiet.

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah they just quiet.

Walter Wade- In other words (muffled) as a spokesmen as a group for the negro student is going to say something now whenever they see something overt and therefore the people that are biased keep in mighty quiet about it because they know now that they can't get away with even subtle forms of discrimination because the black student association would call their hand.

Eddie Jenkins- Well yes well or better still you have what it is, the individual black student feels a certain strength because he knows that there is an organization. I mean there is organized strength within each individual whether they use it or not. They realize that there is a an organized power structure.

Walter Wade- It represents them.

Eddie Jenkins- Yes. Well before hand there was no (muffled).

Joan Beifuss- How much time do you have left?

Eddie Jenkins- Oh I, it won't take but about. I have got 20 minutes.

Walter Wade- You are already late.

Joan Beifuss- 20 minutes left. Ok then how did the black student association come about at Memphis state?

Eddie Jenkins- Well first we got together and we started talking about the activities. Black students should be concerned about the attitudes on campus about the practices and actions on campus and nobody ever did anything about it, excuse me. So...

Joan Beifuss- Where was it most apparent, can you give us some examples?

Eddie Jenkins- Well I can give you the most talked about example of all and the most publicized example. Like football team. I think it grew out of a need to identify with the campus. We were here and we got tot the place that we felt we had to identify. Because as I constantly tell people all the time I got tired of going out and saying Memphis state, are we out at Memphis state, and guys from Lemoyne and Owen and guys from different out of town from black colleges would say you mean they are the Memphis state. The white folks because you ain't (muffled). Where are your

black football players, where are your black basketball players, where are your black cheerleaders. How can you say that you are anything at Memphis state because we don't see them. They don't, there isn't anybody to represent you and so we got tired of not being represented you see and of being there, tolerated but not really there.

Walter Wade- (Muffled) of the student body or campus activities. And systematically excluded from all these things that really do represent the school.

Joan Beifuss- (muffled)

Eddie Jenkins- Yes it represents attendance at the school, for instance when I first came out here you know I always dreamed of you know if you are around educated people they talk about the frats, teachers and so on they talk about frats. Man my fraternity (muffled). SO you come across the attitude I am going to get into a frat. Well you come out here and you got all these white frats and guy came up top me and said would you be interested in our fraternity. Frat oh yeah man, all thee frats. I come to find out that there is one black fraternity on campus and so I become disillusioned. And then I know so many in the fraternity and I said gee whiz, it is not so much that I want to join a fraternity because it is white, it is because all these fraternities why do we just have one? On black fraternity. Surely if this is an integrated school, surely it has integrated fraternities. And so I mean this is, this is one of the things...but like I said the most publicized thing the football team because football is the biggest thing in college life, so is the football team. This is and we started talking about the football team and we talked about all the other things and we talked about student government and we talked about this and we talked about how black people weren't really doing anything on campus and the first thing we said, we said that what are we going to do? We are not going to, we can't (muffled) the football team, we can't knock the cheerleading squad, we can't knock the basketball team or the angel flights or any of this until we have some people to go ahead and try and we realized this. We sat down and talked about this and we said that we are going to get together and we are going to quit sitting in here and being intent to be home and we are going to become a part of this thing. One way or the other. And then we are going to demand that they let us become a part of this thing because we have a right to become a part of this thing and the black student association started out really and ironically it started out as a group of black people getting tired of just being here and wanting to actually become a part of the establishment. Instead of being anti establishment we wanted to become a part of the establishment.

Joan Beifuss- Who were some of the people that were in on it at the beginning?

Eddie Jenkins- Well there were, I guess it was the people who actually started out didn't even really end up doing anything, they were people with the loud mouths. Because what we did one day we said we were going to have a meeting and we told everybody that we are going to have a meeting you know and like I said we still got the grapevine and the grapevine goes. And so one day at 12:00 boom we had a

meeting and (muffled) don't say anything (muffled) I start to get up and go say something. Don't say anything so I sit on and I watch and we had the people they gathered around we call all the black students and they started talking.

Joan Beifuss- Was this on campus?

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah this was in the old student center over here in the ghetto over there.

Walter Wade- In the ghetto.

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah we had a black section you know.

Walter Wade- Yeah. Well anytime at noon if you wanted to had a meeting if you would just go to the at section.

Eddie Jenkins- Yeah, yeah, there are cats playing cards and some body says put those so and so cards down you know the whole bit (muffled) put them cards down and we are going to have a meeting. We said we have talked about it and we decided that it is time that we became a part of this campus and they say we know....they brought up the point that they had been, how do you call it, I can't think of the word. That they had been, oh, purposely excluded and that at the same time that we had not demanded, we had not went and actually really put out enough to become a part and that we should organize and maintain some communication among ourselves through organization so that if someone did go then we would have some insurance, we would have some backing that the person would not go alone and have to stand up in front of the whole establishment by himself in an attempt to become a part of the thing. Any student in the group who qualified could become a part of the thing and we sit out to qualify and so on and so on. And you had the people some of the people who were in the black student association that was Ro Ivy I think he was one of the head spokesman there was a guy named, oh I can't remember his name, it was Fred somebody and he never did anything after that . In fact he was one of the guys that when we had the march out here on campus he was one of the guys that really got me riled, he was one of the guys who was talking against marching. I was talking about marching, anyway there was Ron Ivy, Ed Winterherald because one thing that really got me was that wee were sitting around and we had talked about it, but wee had talked about it quietly and Ed...(Tape End)