

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW

The following tape interview is with Judge Wade H. Mc Cree, Jr., Circuit Judge for the U.S. Court of Appeals, 6th Circuit. The interview is biographical in nature, detailing information about incidents in the lives of his grandparents, his parents and his own life up to his marriage in 1946.

The interviewing was done by Tara L. Tappert, the law librarian for Federal Court, Eastern District of Michigan. She is currently a library science student at Wayne State University, graduating in August, 1976. The interview was conducted as a project for a course in Archival Administration.

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**Judge Wade McCree by  
Tara L. Tappert**

**Side 1.**

**TAPPERT: Today is May 26th, 1976 and this is an interview with Judge Wade McCree, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit and the interview is held in his office in the Federal building. The interview will basically cover his childhood up through college and military service and his marriage. Can you tell me about your parents and how they met and their names and where they were married and all?**

**MC CREE: My parents, one of whom survives today,were respectively Wade Hampton McCree, for whom I was named and Lucretia that's L-U-C-R-E-T-I-A Hanna Harburg. Mother always had a childhood nickname - Lula and has used that almost exclusively to the point that very few persons know -- persons know that her real name is Lucretia. Mother was born in Springfield, Massachusetts and attended Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, following her graduation from Central High School. Springfield, in the first decade of this century. My father is a native of Tennessee. He was born in Ashland City, Tennessee. Community that's now absorbed into the metropolitan Nashville area. He also attended Fisk University and they met there when they were both students.**

**TAPPERT:** Well, what kind of background did your parents come from?

For blacks to be going to college in 19- early 1900's was pretty exceptional.

**MC CREE:** I suppose it was and it still is somewhat exceptional. My mother's forebears came from Virginy and at the end of the Civil War, they moved to Philadelphia -- I beg your pardon -- to Springfield, Massachusetts where my grandfather was a caterer and also worked for some while for the Massachusetts Mutual Insurance Company in a custodial capacity. His principal income was from his private business as a caterer and then later he became a clerical employee of the state and -- then the family moved to Boston. And he worked in the State House until his retirement. My mother was one of three siblings; a brother who died about ten years ago, who moved to New Orleans where he became a chef in a rather fine restaurant there. Her sister died during her high school years -- of course, I never knew her. My father was born in a large family of thirteen siblings. His father had been a Civil War Veteran. His father had --

**TAPPERT:** Your grandfather?

**MC CREE:** My grandfather was in the Civil War. We know very little about his early life except that he was born in slavery. In one of the Carolinas. He -- according to my father -- always just said 'the Carolinas' and never specified whether it was North or South Carolina. He escaped from slavery and swam the Ohio River some where near Evanston, Indiana and worked his

way up into the state of Illinois where he applied his skill as a blacksmith, an ability he acquired during slavery. When General George Thomas was recruiting a union force in Illinois to participate in the campaign that Grant was waging in Tennessee, my grandfather volunteered. The armies in those days, of course, were horse-drawn, not as they are motorized today, and a blacksmith was an important person in the Civil War Army, as is a mechanic in today's mechanized and motorized armies. And my father would shoe horses and repair wagons and do the necessary things to keep the army rolling. Well, he went into the south with General Thomas' army. He fought at the battle of Franklin; he fought in the battle of Nashville; and he fought in the battle above the clouds at Chattanooga on Lookout Mountain at which time all effective Confederate resistance was destroyed in Tennessee. He ultimately went on to Atlanta and to Savannah in Sherman's March. At the conclusion of this -- of his military service, he returned to Tennessee and purchased a farm in Ashland City, outside of Nashville, where he raised the family of which my father was a part. He also apparently had been married before, but my father said very little about this. And I never knew my grandfather because he died when my father was a teenager. He was active in local civic affairs; he was very active in affairs with the Republican Party as were most Civil War veterans. His moment of glory occurred when he was designated as an alternate delegate to the Republican National Convention that nominated President McKinley.



**TAPPERT: Mc Kinley. 1880's?**

**MC CREE: Oh about -- something like that.**

**TAPPERT: 1880's. Let me check that.**

**MC CREE: Uh- He was a blacksmith by trade and a farmer and he had a large family of several boys and girls and was very insistent upon them obtaining an education. And my father went up to Fisk University campus and incidentally, Fisk University was founded just at the conclusion of the Civil War. It's more than a hundred years old now and uh -- my father found employment there working as a handyman, in the home of a Professor Morrow, the same name as Anne Lindbergh's family. Professor Morrow was a professor of German and my father acquired a fluency in German by virtue of having worked in that home. He attended school during that time. Dad used to speak about his college experience as majoring in outside work and that might be pretty close to the truth. But that's how he happened to meet my mother and how he happened to go to school. He also later helped four of his brothers and sisters attend school.**

**TAPPERT: Great.**

**MC CREE: Either by furnishing their tuition or in the case of his youngest sister, by having her live with us later on when we lived in Des Moines, Iowa, because she attended Drake University.**

**TAPPERT: Um- what was I going to ask you? Was your father the eldest?**

**MC CREE: No. My father was about the fifth in the sibling chain. I have**

an uncle Frank who is older; an Uncle Fred who is older; an Aunt Kitty who is really Katherine, who was older; and Aunt Lula who was older and then Dad fit in. He --

**TAPPERT:** So, your parents then met at Fisk and how did their romance get going?

**MC CREE:** Well, Mother graduated from Fisk with a degree from the normal department; that is, the Teaching department and obtained a teaching job in the South. There were very few schools and very few educational opportunities for Negroes in the South in those days. Many of them, in fact almost all of them were private in the sense that they received no public assistance and they were largely funded by philanthropic interests in the North and East and mother went first to Daytona Beach, Florida, where she taught with Mrs. Bethune, who's a very famous figure in American education, at what is now the Bethune Cookman College. Mary Mcleod Bethune was an unofficial advisor, many years later, to Franklin Roosevelt during his administration. Mother went to Daytona Beach, Florida, and taught at a girls boarding school Mrs. Bethune had established there. She didn't get along too well with Mrs. Bethune because she was very interested in changing the social status quo. Particularly, she was outraged by the practices of absentee landlords who always kept their tenant farmers in debt, and of course, she was teaching some of the children of these tenant farmers. On one occasion, she and another woman from Springfield, who was a teacher, assisted an entire family to escape to the North by buying them

a rail ticket and placing them on a train which was stopped at a whistle stop, because the family would have been detected leaving from the regular station. When the landowner found that the man who was making him rich, somehow traveled to Pittsburgh, he began an investigation to see how it happened. Unerringly, the clues all led to my mother who admitted that she did it out of her very needed salary. Mrs. Bethune thought that it would be better for her to leave the community rather than to bring down the wrath of the community upon the school. So, mother left and taught for a year or two at another similar school in Calhoun, Alabama. Meanwhile, my father had gone to Iowa. Dad graduated from the Liberal Arts College in 1911 and during his summers, he used to work on the railroads as a dining car waiter. A very popular thing for young people to do. As a matter of fact, Judge Davenport, who is retiring tonight at an affair given by the Detroit Bar Association, used to travel up to Montreal as a dining car waiter. It was a job that I was able to get once, before the end of trains. Dad used to do this regularly and he used to run through the middle west. On one occasion, he was serving a college professor who recognized my father as a young man pursuing an education, as my father's manners were really quite elegant. He was, in every way, a very gentlemanly person. He inquired whether my father was going to school, and Dad said, "yes, he was". The professor asked him what he was interested in doing and Dad said "he'd hoped on day to be able to become a pharmacist". It turned out that the

passenger was Dean Kuever, I think he spelled it K-U-E-V-E-R, who was the dean of the College of Pharmacy at the University of Iowa. He told my father to come to see him when he graduated and to see about matriculating there. Dad did that and had everything but the necessary money. He had credentials and the ambition and resolution. Dean Kuever made it possible for Dad to attend by allowing him to sleep in the laboratory used by the School of Pharmacy, and paid him for cleaning up the laboratory when the other students were through with it. This took care of his tuition and my father attended and graduated from the University of Iowa School of Pharmacy in 1913. He then he felt he was in a position to marry and he went back to Boston, which was my mother's home, and claimed his bride. They were married in 1914 -- I think it was September 9, 1914 and they returned to Iowa where they operated a drug store that he established. He and a Doctor Edward Carter, (who spent his final years here in Detroit) owned the drug store together. My father didn't have the capital. Doctor Carter did and it was the first drug store that any Negro owned or operated in the state of Iowa. It was located on Center Street and it turned out to be a very popular place because Fort Des Moines was the facility employed by the Army during World War I for the training of Negro officer candidates and they were all sent there, regardless of component: cavalry, infantry, engineer, artillery. There were no recreational facilities, so my father opened up (above his drug store) a hall where he had sort of a private USO operation

for the young men who attended the officer training camp at Fort Des Moines. Consequently, every Negro officer in World War I was acquainted with our family, because they were all, without exception, trained there. Excepting those who received battlefield commissions. However, if any of them attended Fort Des Moines, they were friends of our family and I have a list of, oh, a very large number -- two or three hundred of them, only a few of them survive today. Dad was also active in other civic affairs. He helped open a branch of the YWCA which in those days was racially segregated and served the Negro community of Des Moines. He was also active in organizing a chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in Des Moines. He was recognized for some of his business acumen. He had an invitation to join the Chamber of Commerce, which he did. However, when the war ended, -- the expansionists, the reckless expansionist activities of all Iowans, resulted in a disastrous Depression. Iowa farmers borrowed money from Eastern bankers to buy marginal land to grow wheat and corn, because they could sell it at maximum prices -- when people are fighting a war, they don't care what it costs. When peace time came around -- there was no market for this marginal -- but for the products of this marginal land region -- they began to lose them and thus, more closure swept through the midwest. 1920-21-22 were bleak years, and of course, my father, being a merchant, and a druggist, was dependent upon the general health of the economy. So he sold his drug store

to a man who still operates it. James Mitchell was a World War I army officer candidate whom we met when we came to -- (Interruption) Yes, James Mitchell was -- is his name and he was an officer candidate during World War I at Fort Des Moines. His bride who came there with him, very pretty girl, Azalea Mitchell -- Azalea, like the flower, lived in our home for almost a year because there wasn't adequate housing for Army wives in World War I, any more than there was in World War II. The Mitchell's were very close friends of ours and they bought the drugstore and still own it. Dad applied for employment in the Federal Government as a Federal Narcotics Inspector. He took a civil service examination and did very well in it. In those days, the Federal Narcotics enforcement had two general divisions: the Inspector Division and the Agents Division. The Inspector Division consisted principally of visiting drugstores to check their drug inventories against invoices from the pharmaceutical houses and prescriptions from patients to see that there was no slippage. The agents were police officers. They were concerned with street traffic and pharmacists were employed in the Inspector's Division and that the division for which my father applied. After he was qualified, there was a great reluctance to appoint him, because thinking of America's racial climate in those days, -- the Commissioner of Narcotics was fearful that white druggists would resent my father going into their drugstore demanding to look at their books, despite the fact that he would be doing it in the name of the United States. But Senator Guy Gillette

of Iowa, (just like the Gillette razor blade) interceded in his behalf as a constituent, and Dad was appointed. After two or three temporary assignments in places like Denver and Omaha, he was assigned to Hawaii, which was a multi-racial community, and one, where fears of Washington bureaucratic heads might not be realized. These were two lovely years in Hawaii. I was then six years old and we lived in Hilo, which was the largest city on the second biggest isle -- on the biggest island -- on the island of Hawaii. Of course, Honolulu is the big city and Honolulu is on Oahu, which is not the big island. Hilo is a lovely town. It didn't have the Navy in it as Honolulu did, and of course, Hawaii was a territory in those days. We lived first on Konoa Street and later on Kapiolani Street, named for Princess Kapiolani, who was later queen. She was a very revered Hawaiian royal family member, before annexation. We lived at 111 Kapiolani Street. I can still see the house in my recollection and I attended the English Standard School which was a public school about a half mile from my house. I used to walk with my neighbors every day. It was a very idealic two years. I could swim every day of the year. We used to go to Coconut Island to swim and my father was very popular in the community. My mother taught school at Liameah Junior High School, because there was a shortage of teachers. Since Mother taught school well, we usually had someone at home with us children and always selected was someone who was a student. I remember a series of girls who were attending junior high school or college. Fumiae and

Hilda remain particularly in my mind. Fumiae was Japanese; Hilda was Hawaiian. They were more or less companions or governess or whatever you want to call it with the children, My three sisters and I were there.

**TAPPERT:** O. K. I want to ask you something about your mother teaching.

**MC CREE:** all right.

**TAPPERT:** In the South. What was the girls school like?

**MC CREE:** Well, I principally have her word for it. It was a boarding school -- it was a school to which daughters of farmers in the community were sent. There were day students, as well as boarding students; the wealthy ones, the ones who were better off --not real wealthy, could stay overnight. The others would go home. There were classes and regular academic subjects and almost all the girls did some work (which was part of their tuition). They cleaned up the school, of course, did some cooking, did some ironing, washing the necessary linens that were used about the school. Mother taught academic subjects. Mother has a fine mind. She's 89 years old now and she still has a very fine mind. She used to teach English and mathematics and history and such -- Latin and Greek. She was a very fine student then, and a very patient teacher.

**TAPPERT:** It wasn't like a finishing school?

**MC CREE:** Oh no, these were children. You've got to fix this time period. This was 1910-11 and 12. The grandparents of everyone of these children had been a slave. In many instances, so were the parents.



**TAPPERT:** Oh, these are all black children?

**MC CREE:** Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

**TAPPERT:** Oh.

**MC CREE:** America was two nations in those days. It's almost two nations now. It's just made slight progress away from that, but it was -- there were just two nations in those days and the South -- very few, if any, southern cities at that time spent anything for public education of black people. As a matter of fact, the first public schools in the South were started by the reconstruction governments that were instituted by poor whites and recently emancipated slaves, because both had been kept out of this very stratified society of the land plantation owners. And it was the coalitions of the poor whites and the recently emancipated black people who first started the public schools, libraries, and hospitals in the south. Part of the so called redemption of the south by the plantation owners was accomplished by driving divisions and creating divisions between the poor whites and the poor blacks who were making common cause for their common betterment . As a consequence, both of them just suffered terribly for the next half decade because they were kept apart in racial apathies, and they both were exploited by a numerically inferior -- uh -- I almost said aristocratic community, but it was only aristocratic in the sense of their own pretenses. Well, some were, there were some aristocrats but mostly, it was just a landed group of haves and have-nots, and there were no schools in this community for Negro children at all. Then, that's why Mrs.

Bethune was such a fine heir; she had this vision of starting a school like that, and her school was supported by, as I said, northern and eastern philanthropists. She would go north periodically and appear in churches, principally in churches, but before her civic groups and make appeals for funds and they would raise money and give it to her. She would take it back and buy books for the students and pay the teachers salaries. That's the beginning -- of the education of all black people in America. Fisk University was started the same way by persons in the missionary aspects of the Congregational church. It founded an organization known as the American Missionary Association to distinguish it from foreign missionary associations. They went throughout the south and founded a series of colleges, many of which survive today. Fisk was one of them and the first classes at Fisk University, well this would be back in the 1860s, were held in some old Civil War barracks which were on the premises. Later, as the school prospered, -- or it really never prospered, but as it forged ahead, they were able to build more permanent buildings and its first building, it still stands, Jubilee Hall, is a women's residence. It was built by funds earned by young Negro boys and girls who went about singing throughout the world. They were known as the Fisk Jubilee Singers. They were one of the most famous singing-collegiate groups in the history of the United States. They really brought the Negro spiritual to the attention of the rest of the world. Queen Victoria had them sing at a command performance. She had a

court artist paint a portrait of them that now hangs in Jubilee Hall. A gift she gave them for their efforts. Of course, it became very fashionable for everybody else to do this, and the money they raised went back to the school to build this building. The thing that Mother was in -- in Florida, with Mrs. Bethune, was a much smaller, more localized version of this same activity. This was the only education that was possible for a black child in that community. The reason it was principally a girls school is historical too. Few of the farmers could let the boys go to school. I mean they needed them to work on the farm. And for this -- and this in a measure, is responsible for the heavy matriarchal character of black families in America today. In the south -- although the head of the home would be a man, because he had to run the farm, his daughters were the ones who went away and got the education. Then after they left the farm, they went North where skills other than just physical strength were a premium. The women had all the education and they became the school teachers and there were other factors responsible for this too. They were teachers and social workers and office workers and so forth. The men could only get unskilled jobs in the auto plants and other industrial employment, that was unsteady and irregular. The women had the steady, regular employment and the man was greatly discriminated against, in getting anything looking like white collar work, whereas the women were not nearly as much as men, because in a sexist society -- as well as a racist society, the men didn't represent a threat.

**TAPPERT: The women didn't.**

**MC CREE: Did not represent a threat because no woman represented a threat. But the men did because --**

**END OF SIDE 1.**

**Judge Wade McCree by**

**Tara L. Tappert.**

**Side 2.**

**MC CREE: I'm making reference to a Bi-Centennial volume of the United States census. It states in 1770 there were, in round figures, two million whites and a half million blacks living in the thirteen colonies in the outlying frontiers of Kentucky and Tennessee. Now this figure was -- and this percentage was diluted because of two factors: the slave trade was stopped in the early part of the 19th century and European immigration began. European immigration continued -- or it began in greater numbers and became the greatest source of American human power -- continuing through the Civil War. As a matter of fact, here in Michigan, there were so many immigrants from Germany during the Civil War (and there had been the wars of the Pollatinate and the Rhineland in 1848) the German regiments who were recruited for the Union army, used to get their general orders bilingually. In German and English. I ran into this doing some research about twenty-five years ago here -- thirty years ago, perhaps. But this was the great influx to -- with a consequence and this continued in just growing numbers until 1914. The war in Europe cut off effective European immigration. By that time, the black population of America -- instead of being one-fifth, was one-tenth, and it**

had been diluted just by these great influxes of Europeans who were white. So the factors in the North, as the Industrial Revolution came along, were manned by, for the most part, white European-Caucasoid immigrants. The black population of America, which is one of the oldest populations, remained in the South. When World War I began, it was the cutting off of immigration. The submarine blockade and so forth -- and the manpower needs for the army and the increased industrial needs, it was necessary then to get large numbers of persons in the northern cities. That's when the first big movement of Negroes to the North began. It was just a very minor trickle after the Civil War. There were some, but it wasn't a mass movement. Chicago, New York, Detroit, and Cleveland all received their first large black populations, in the period from 1916 on -- when we -- from 1917 on -- got into the war. That was the first big flow. Prior to that time, the black family had been very much an intact, rural family in the South -- impoverished and deprived of all of the rights of the Constitution vouchsafed them, but intact in terms of having a male head, a female head, and the children with their various duties. The girls went to school when anyone could go to school, because the boys' labor was required on the farm. It was in the North that the Negro family became disorganized because of the irregularity of industrial employment and the lack of any skill and the exclusion by labor unions and craft unions in those days, for membership to acquire skills. Then the next big migration was during World War II.

**TAPPERT: Right.**

**MC CREE: But those were the two significant migrations.**

**TAPPERT: O. K.**

**MC CREE: So, the first part of the 19th century -- it was the 20th century was not a period of great movement at all; it was a period of very little movement.**

**TAPPERT: O. K. So, let's go on and talk about your childhood some. You told me that your folks lived in Hawaii when you were six, and stayed there for two years, and then where did you go?**

**MC CREE: Yeah. Well, maybe I ought to back up and tell you what my family consisted of.**

**TAPPERT: Oh, o.k.**

**MC CREE: My family early consisted of two sisters and a brother. I beg your pardon -- two -- well, two sisters and I, so that's a terrible construction. There were three children in our family: two girls and a boy. The oldest was a girl: Elizabeth Ann McCree. "Betty" we called her, who is now dead. Then I was second, and a sister, Katherine, was third. We three were the whole family until 1933 or so, when a brother was born. He was ten years younger, I guess than my youngest sister. But the three of us went to Hawaii together. We were very close, my older sister and I, particularly. We were only seventeen months apart in creation, and we used to have a great society together. My younger sister grew into it, but only in due course. The three of us were born in Iowa, went to Hawaii, and attended school there. From Hawaii we went to Chicago.**

There was a policy of rotating people in the Department and we were transferred back to the mainland. It was felt that Chicago might be an appropriate place to assign my father. This was the beginning of a period of dissatisfaction with his job that continued to build until his retirement. After he went to Chicago, there was a reluctance to use him in the capacity for which he was hired. He would have Inspector assignments with drugstores that were owned or operated by Negroes, but they wanted to give him Agent assignments, and my father just was not a police officer in his attitude or his aptitudes. Although he did it well, apparently, because he used to get splendid ratings. But it always seemed incongruous to me to see my father pretending, for example, that he was a lawless person or something to gain the confidence of some fellow, because he was the most unlikely person in the world to engage in that form of occupation. But he wasn't a prude. My father never smoked or drank and as I said, his manners were just elegant. He was -- everyone remembers him as a very fine gentleman. It was just one of his basic characteristics. We lived in Chicago for four years, and attended school there. When it was time for my sister and me to go to high school, my sister first, my father was understandably concerned about the quality of the high schools in Chicago. This was during the Depression. The Depression had just occurred. This was shortly after the crash in '29 and he obviously didn't have any money to go to private schools. I think his income then might



have been about \$180.00 a month. His government salary, which was quite good, considering it was the Depression, because it was regular. He requested a transfer to Boston and obtained it because he knew about the schools in Massachusetts. We went to school in Boston and that's where I, and my sisters went to junior high school and high school. Then my younger brother was born there in 1932 or 3 -- I'm not certain -- 1932 or 3. I remained there as long as I was a member of my family's household. I left there to go to college in 1937 and never really returned as a member of my family, except for visits. The relationships were, and always have been warm and close, but summertime meant getting a job and being away, so we used to write letters all the time. We were great writers. I have stacks of letters that my father sent me and they were just marvelous and inspiring. Things telling me what he was doing, and inquiring about what I was doing, and expressing his hopes and aspirations that he had been unable to fulfill, but he hoped that I and the other children would be able to do. Letters back to him were always reporting about what we were doing, and we were just great letter writers among ourselves, too. The family stayed very closely knit that way. The last parts of my father's life were very unpleasant, from his viewpoint. I can realize it now, because he had acquired enough seniority to have been made a district supervisor, but the racist policies of the Bureau of Narcotics, particularly, Commissioner Handslinger, were such that he was just determined that Dad would never be a district

supervisor. And the same thing was true, up until a very few years ago. At that time, it was realized there wasn't a single Negro Federal judge in the United States, and there were very few Negro state judges. Just in New York City -- and I know the first one -- a Judge Watson. He was an old friend of ours who was the first appointed Negro judge in the United States except for the Reconstruction Period. My father would be transferred about from one city to another whenever they could find someone with more seniority than he had. He would be in Philadelphia for six months or he would be -- he was even here in Detroit for a year, working. The family stayed in Boston because it was easier when we were small children to move about, but we were in high school and it was just difficult. My father knew that these were short-lived assignments and it just wouldn't make sense to pick up and move. I remember when I first became a District judge here, fifteen years ago, Judge Levin who was then the chief judge, remembered my father as a witness in the matter in his courtroom. One of the last cases before my father retired, and he sent for the pre-sentence report, and I saw the probation report where my father contributed his analysis or his evaluation of the defendant. This would have been just at the end of World War II about 1945 or something like that. Because, shortly after -- I think that was the year my father retired. He would come home, of course, at Christmas and Thanksgiving and Easter, and whenever he could otherwise. It wasn't until I became a father myself, a husband and a father

myself, and found that I had to do a great deal of travel, that I could begin to imagine the unpleasantness this occasioned him. I travel under quite different circumstances and it's never a prolonged absence, and I can always come home and have funds to do it with, and I'm in charge of my travel. He was not in charge of his travel and there were just many other factors. I really come to appreciate the sacrifice that he made in terms of personal convenience for his family and the children and my mother. He only wanted to be secure because he certainly didn't want to let his job go during the Depression, because there were people without work, and it was very difficult. Although we never made any money to amount to anything, we never suffered any privations, and then all of us were out of work -- two or three always did.

**TAPPERT:** Besides, you know, during the Depression, I could see why he would of stayed with the Narcotics Division. Why would he stay -- was he -- did he have some degree of contentment with that work?

**MC CREE:** Oh, he enjoyed the work as an inspector because it was another way of employing his skills as a pharmacist. He had to know prescriptions, he had to know drug invoices; he had to know how to take inventories; he had to know how to compound or not to compound -- but to analyze substances and it called on his considerable skills, so he was very much interested in it. Just as I'm a lawyer and I'm doing one of the things lawyers do, when I serve as a judge. I could -- I have taught in Law School and when I did that, I was doing another

thing that the lawyer did. Now, if I was employed, not using my legal skills, I would be unhappy and this is what happened when he was required to do the agent's work and he was required to do more and more of that. He was required to be a policeman -- sort of an undercover policeman and -- it just wasn't part of his personality or his training. I think my father might have been a good teacher. I know my mother was a superb teacher. My father used to get into some terrible quarrels with the Bureau of Narcotics hierarchy, which is another reason Mr. Handsinger didn't want him around. I remember vividly in the early thirties, my father was concerned about the inroads of narcotics into the cities of the North. And there was very little of it. When he first went in, most of the people used to investigate and arrest when they had him doing agent's work, were Orientals, and there was a very little traffic in narcotics among Americans, white or black until the early thirties.

**TAPPERT:** Was this like the beginning of organized crime?

**MC CREE:** Oh, no. There was organized crime. There's been organized crime for years.

**TAPPERT:** Oh, year. But organized crime as in narcotics?

**MC CREE:** Well, they only got into narcotics after there was a market. I mean organized crime - uh- so called when I was growing up in Chicago was rum running. It was uh-alcoholic beverages. This was the Al Capone gang and so forth. It was uh- lotteries, numbers and whiskey was organized crime. It was the period of prohibition when persons couldn't get

legalized liquor and this was there the money was. Narcotics traffic didn't amount to much, but he early perceived the dangers and he called for a program of education and he worked out a series of lectures. He wanted to go around to the high schools and give them information before the young people were started on this and uh- this was a source of great annoyance to Mr. Handsinger, whose idea was to send -- arrest people-- wait until they did it, arrest them, and send 'em to prison. And he was annoyed that someone disagreed with his policy, but my father was a persistent person and he wasn't always the most politic person. He went over Handsinger's head on several occasions to talk with United States senators whom he happened to know along with congressmen. My father was a very widely acquainted individual and he would talk to them about it and they would ask questions -- why isn't the Department doing this? My father was not appreciated for his temerity to do this. But I don't mean to suggest that he was an unhappy man. I think essentially my father was a very happy man. He enjoyed his family very much. I'm just sorry that he - enjoyed his grandchildren -- my children, my sister's children. He died in 1969 before any of his grandchildren had done a great deal, but he would just take great pleasure in the fact that I have a daughter who is a lawyer and, oh, he would enjoy being a great-grandfather--to see my grandson. My sister, Katherine, had a son who graduated from the University of Michigan Law School on May 21st of this year -- May 20th. She has another

boy, her only other son, who is a third year student at the University of Michigan Medical School. He would have taken a great deal of pleasure in that because he believed in education. These would all be sources of great pleasure to him. I know he was, whenever one of us would make a good grade in school on an exam or something, it would just warm his heart and I used to wonder, how in the world does this man derive so much pleasure out of just something like that? And I know my son looks at me the same way, but my son just received his grades from the University of Michigan, he's a junior, he had all A's and a pass. He took a pass, oh, he had an A-. Three A's, an A- and a pass in a pass-fail subject, and I said, man, that's just terribly good. He says well, you know, it's all right. But he just can't understand the pleasure that one derives when you see your children or his grandchildren do this. I still haven't heard from my daughter - my son's twin sister, to know what her grades are. But she's up in Ann Arbor, so she has an excuse, until she comes in this weekend.

**TAPPERT:** O. K. Let's see. I wanted to ask -- you attended the Boston Latin School and I understand that was a really good high school during the thirties and forties. Did you enjoy going there?

**MC CREE:** Very much. Boston Latin School is the oldest public school in the United States. It was founded in 1635, the year before Harvard College was founded, and just fifteen years after the pilgrims landed in 1620 and it was a public free school.

This was one of the reasons my father moved to Boston because he wanted his children to have the opportunity to go to schools like that. It's an examination school in the sense that you have to qualify to get in, by an exam, but it's a public school. I got in to by a flute -- because we moved there on Columbus Day -- I'll never forget the day --1932 and I was supposed to be in the 6A-- they put me in the 6A in a local school -- they put me in the sixth grade and it amounted to really 6B because it was the fall semester and I told the teacher that I had mastered all the material she was teaching then -- and she said, all right, we'll try you out -- we don't have a 6A here. We'll try you out in the 7B and so she put me in the 7B and I really wasn't particularly enthralled with the instruction. On Thanksgiving, we had a visitor who was an old Bostonian, who had known my mother and her family there, who had said "why don't you put him in Boston Latin School? and my mother said, "Oh alas". I think Dad was away then. He might have been So anyway, we went down there and they said, "well you're supposed to take an examination to get in, or you've had to be certified as the top one in your class or something like that. You haven't even been to 6A. You didn't even finish the 6th grade and you're in 7B on trial". So, my mother said, "well, just give him a chance and see what he can do" and they said "well, how in the world can he make it?" The students here are in the seventh grade because it was junior high and high school who were studying Latin. He says they were in the second declension with nouns and they were

in the third conjugation of verbs. They were reading "Fabuli Faculac" -- simple fables or simple stories and so forth, and how is he going to catch up with that? She says, "I'll teach him at home. I'll help him catch up". So they said, "Well, we'll put him in on trial with us -- but he won't be here long." My mother says, "Well, you just let him worry about that." She says, "if he isn't, it won't crush him." And that's how I happened to get in because I wasn't there for the beginning of it. Although my younger brother went in, of course. I went through the six grades of it and my mother did help me. She would just say, "well, Frank you're gonna have to learn this. This is the first declension, these are nouns ending in A, they're feminine in gender, and learn the endings and the reasons for these cases and how to employ them and so forth. Might as well get your words in" and I did. I enjoyed the Boston Latin School. It was an all boys school. Now, they had a court order to admit girls, but they had a girls Latin school. It was right across the street and it was about the same kind of school, but a couple hundred years younger -- but still almost a hundred years old. I was there during the trecenton era of Boston Latin school, the three hundredth year which was in 1935 and that was the beginning of my junior year, I guess. It was just a very fine school. It was rigorous in the sense of having a great deal demanded upon, but it was fun. We had a good football team. I wasn't good enough to play on it; and we had a good track team. So, there were other



aspects of it besides -- I wasn't fast enough to run on that, either. But it was a good -- it was a first class high school.

**TAPPERT:** Did they have any special events for the tri-centennial?

**MC CREE:** Oh, yes. We had the tercentenary -- it was a big thing. We had a full year of celebration -- something like the country's bi-centennial now. But you see, it's more than a hundred years older than the United States, and it had a list of very distinguished graduates: John Adams, Sam Adams, John Hancock, Ralph Waldo Emerson, some of the Longfellow family, George Santianna, in recent years and Leonard Bernstein, who is the director of the New York Philharmonic, who was just two years ahead of me. I knew Leonard Bernstein. The school has some very distinguished graduates. Among its graduates here in Michigan is Clifton Wharton, who is president of Michigan State University. Clifton and I used to walk over to school. I guess I showed him the way probably the first day he went there because he's several years younger than I am. He came back to Boston just to go to the Boston Latin School. His father was the United States Consul on the Canary Islands and there was no place for him to go to school there. So, he was sent back to go to school and live with his grandmother in Boston. She was a neighbor of ours. It was one of the ways a poor boy from a poor family could attend a good school.

**TAPPERT:** Fantastic. Well, you picked Fisk. I can imagine that your parents had a lot to do with your decision to go there.

**MC CREE:** Well, yes and no. It's really kind of an interesting thing.

My sister, Betty, the older sister, had gone to Fisk. She was two years ahead of me and she was there and had a very good experience, so I was curious about it. Principal problem was money, although at Fisk -- the tuition was \$150.00 a year -- \$75.00 a semester and I guess the whole package, for room and board and everything else -- you could probably do it for \$500.00 for the year. Room, board and tuition, travel-- everything. But that was a lot of money and that was about a fourth of what my father made. Although I intended to do some work, and did, there were some problems. So, we looked around and I discovered that Iowa would permit me as a native to attend on instate basis where there was no tuition.

**TAPPERT:** In Iowa?

**MC CREE:** At Iowa for Iowa people. Oh, there was no tuition at any of the California schools until three years ago -- or maybe -- it was in the Reagan Administration that they began first to charge tuition, and if you could get into UCLA or Berkeley or Davis, or any one of the universities, you went free. You might pay a fee or two but there was no tuition and here in Michigan, of course, the difference between Michigan instate, and outstate tuition is substantial, so there's this outside subsidy, too. Well, in Iowa, then, there was no tuition at all. So, I applied and I don't think they had ever had anyone apply from the Boston Latin school before. They were very much interested in my application and they admitted me. They said "We'll give you a scholarship for whatever the fees are. We'll

waive the fees” so, this was just fine. So then, all I had to do was worry about my room and board. I said, “Well, is there some way I can earn my room and board?” They said “Yes, you can work as a waiter in one of the dormitories.” And I said, “that’s just fine, I have worked during the summer at Parker Hotel in Boston doing bus work.” In fact, I had left school early that spring, (Boston Latin School) to be a bus boy. I had to get off as a busboy to go back to Latin school to graduate when my class graduated. I worked ten hours that day before my class graduated. Well, here’s what killed it. I sent a picture to the University of Iowa to complete my graduation. They weren’t aware that I was a Negro. And they said you can’t live in a dormitory in Iowa. We do not allow Negroes to live in the dormitory in the University of Iowa. This is 1937 and so they said, “We’re sorry. You’re admitted to the university, but we’ll give you names of some women-- some old ladies around here -- nice widows who would take students in their homes and everything and don’t charge very much. Oh, I said, “I need a job to earn my room and board.” That’s what I was interested in. So, here it was the end of August and school was about to start and I was all set to go to Iowa. My boss from the Latin school yearbook had under my name -- Iowa -- as the school of choice and my sister was getting ready to go to Fisk, so I said, “gee, I better see whether I can get in there. I sent a telegram down and asked about admission. They said “yes, there was still room and we will give you a freshman scholarship, and yes, you may have a

job waiting tables in the dining room." That's all I wanted. That's how I happened to go to Fisk. I waited on tables all four years . I was there and I had my scholarship. That's really how I happened to go to Fisk.

**TAPPERT:** How did they have scholarships available so readily?

**MC CREE:** Well, they weren't available so readily -- but there was some scholarship money. After all, it was just a hundred -- it was just \$75.00 a semester. That wasn't giving away a great deal of money.

**TAPPERT:** Was the money for your living expenses?

**MC CREE:** Well, I worked as a waiter, because some of the students there were fully paid students.

**TAPPERT:** That's great. That's a shame that in 1937 they would --

**MC CREE:** Oh, just as well. I thoroughly enjoyed my years at Fisk. I'm sure I received as fine an education there as I would of at the University of Iowa. Probably better. Fisk in those days had a first rate faculty. It was a small liberal arts college and the training was good and the experience was also good. I had never been in a predominantly black environment before, and although Fisk had no racial restrictions on attendance, we just had one or two white students who would usually be faculty children or visiting exchange students. Our faculty was interracial and -- but the environment was predominantly a Negro environment -- a black environment -- community was and it was a very interesting and instructive to have this kind of experience, because I had lived in a very polyglot community in Hawaii as a child, and Chicago wasn't really as

**ghettoized as much then as it is now. The school I attended in McCosh (?) was of a racial mixture -- I don't know. It was such that you couldn't say anything predominated. I guess probably no other students (noise covers rest of sentence). So, in at the Boston Latin School, there might have been about three Negroes in the whole school when I was there.**

**END OF SIDE 2.**

Tape 2 - Side 1.

Tappert-McCree.

**TAPPERT: What did you major in when you went to Fisk?**

**MC CREE: My major was history and my minor was economics although I had almost as many hours in economics as I had in history. And I almost had a third minor in English.**

**TAPPERT: Do you remember any of your professor with fond memories?**

**MC CREE: Oh, very well. As a matter of fact, I have seen some of them and kept in touch over the years. Theodore Currier, who was a young man from Maine (French-Canadian ancestry) went to Fisk in the early 1930s and was one of the best teachers I ever had. He never earned a doctorate because by the time he had finished investigating his field, he said he didn't think there was anyone competent to examine him. He was virtually a one man history department, although, at times, there were other people in the department -- he dominated it so much that it was a reflection of his spirit and his scholarship. Currier was the professor -- the major professor of one of America's outstanding historians today -- John Hope Franklin, who dedicates many of his scholarly writings to him. Ted Currier sent about a dozen Fisk students (who were majors of his) to the Harvard Law School. I would think his impact on Fisk students is probably as great as that of any other teacher who has been there in this half century. I would have to say as**

great -- because there were two or three great teachers in Chemistry and Physics. Dr. Imes in Physics and Dr. Brady and Dr. Tally in Chemistry who had an equivalent impact. Then there was a Professor Addison T. Cutler who taught Economics and was Chairman of the Economics Department. Toughy, that was his nickname -- Toughy Cutler -- went to the University of Cincinnati after he left us and taught there. I've had the pleasure of having him as my guest at the University Club in downtown Cincinnati, and I've been out to his home to dinner. I've been going to Cincinnati with the court of appeals. He died just a year ago, his widow, Ruth, survives him. Those two teachers I particularly would call and have kept up with. Currier is still alive. I had a teacher, a Miss Cashin-- Lillian Cashin -- who is as fine an English teacher as I've ever had. She was as good as anybody in Boston Latin School, and so were Currier and Cutler.

**TAPPERT:** So, you feel that you really got an excellent education, then, at Fisk?

**MC CREE:** Well, I thought so. I had very little to quarrel with my education there. I remember a Dr. Kuhne -- Agnes Kuhne who taught German.

**TAPPERT:** Was he the --

**MC CREE:** This is a woman -- Agnes -- Fraulein-- Dr. Agnes Kuhne. The German I learned from Fraulein Kuhne in 1937 survived through World War II, and served me well on several occasions then, and even permitted me to make myself understood when I taught in Salzburg, Austria in 1969.

**TAPPERT:** What attracted you to a Law career?

**MC CREE:** I don't really know. That's as truthful as I can be about it.

I had to decide to do something as I was winding up my college years and of course, the war had begun then. It began in 1939 in Europe when Hitler invaded Poland. I had to decide to do something and I was involved in student government at Fisk. I had become president of the student body, as a matter of fact, of the student government body, it was, and I was impressed by the or intrigued by the limitations as well as the potential of law, so, I think that had something to do with it.

**TAPPERT:** What do you mean limitations?

**MC CREE:** Well, I recognized that law can't accomplish everything. Law is a very useful tool but that it has limitations and restrictions. I just thought -- I guess subliminally, I thought I'd like to know more about it. But I really can't attribute my choice -- my selection of law as a career to any particular episode or incident.

**TAPPERT:** It was --

**MC CREE:** It certainly wasn't the fulfillment of any family ambition for me or anything of this sort.

**TAPPERT:** You were involved with the school newspaper, too?

**MC CREE:** Yes. Well, the school magazine. We had a school magazine called the Fisk Herald. It's been in continuous publication for oh, 75 years or so. I was an associate editor of the Herald. I was not editor-in-chief. I used to contribute pieces: essays and occasionally poems, mostly sonnets.



**TAPPERT:** It seems that would have taken care of your English background interest.

**MC CREE:** Oh, yes. It was a very gratifying experience to see some of my efforts in print. And I've continued to write since then. I still write sonnets and occasional essays. Unfortunately I exhaust most of my creativity writing opinions and there's very little left to do something just for fun.

**TAPPERT:** So, you went to Law school right after you graduated from Fisk?

**MC CREE:** Yes. I applied to Harvard Law School where I was admitted and was given a scholarship -- tuition -- and I was able to live at home because Harvard is in Cambridge -- and it's just across the river from Boston, much as Windsor is across the river from Canada. I used to ride on the subway every day to get to Law School and I did it the first year of law school. It was a very distinguished class. Kingman Bruester, who is now president of Yale University; Elliott Richardson, who is Secretary of Commerce; William Coleman, who is Secretary of Transportation --

**TAPPERT:** Is he related to Jim Coleman?

**MC CREE:** No. It's not at all- uh, let's see. Who else? Oh, Al Sacks, who is the Dean of the Harvard Law School, was a student; the just resigned Dean of the University of Chicago Law School-- Phil Neal was there. It was really a very distinguished group of people and I thoroughly enjoyed Law School. I didn't finish it and I was pulled out before the second year got underway -- to go into World War II. I did four years of

active duty in World War II. I was in Italy for about the last two years of it and then I returned and took my degree in -- well, my last exams were in December, '47. I didn't attend the commencement exercise, although my credentials show my graduation as of 1944. When a person was pulled away for the service, his degree was given the date that he would have earned it were it not for the interruption of his studies.

**TAPPERT:** You said that you really enjoyed Law School.

**MC CREE:** Very much.

**TAPPERT:** Why?

**MC CREE:** Well, it's very stimulating. The idea of trying to see the reason for rules of law, to test them for their fairness, their efficacy; to be involved daily in the exchange of views with some of the brightest people in America. This includes students as well as the faculty. It was just a very challenging thing to do. It's exciting. It was never dull. It was always like lightning crackling around.

**TAPPERT:** Did you feel a marked difference between the atmosphere at Fisk and at Harvard?

**MC CREE:** Oh, yes. But I don't know whether it's - it would be - would have been any different, if I had come from another small liberal arts college. It was a difference between -- primarily between a small liberal arts college and one of the finest professional schools in the country. Everyone at Harvard Law School was number one or two or three in his class. And were all top flight academic performers. They were all persons of unusual intellectual gifts and great communicative skills. They

were purposeful; they knew just what they wanted to do. At least they wanted to study law at that point. Their teachers were the very top people in their professions who were interested in honing their minds on the minds of the students and what they did regularly. It was different in that respect. At Fisk, as in almost any other small liberal arts college, there were any number of people there for any number of different reasons. Some were there because their parents sent them; some were there because they had to do something -- they were out of high school and they didn't want to work or there wasn't any work to do or they just wanted to mature rather gracefully. Many just wanted to sample, as one should, in a liberal arts college, from the smorgasbord of learning that was afforded one there. And it was different in that sense. I don't know whether it was any more difficult. You really can't compare difficulty because there were different kinds of things. I never felt myself in competition with any students anyway. I always used to compete with myself. I mean I'd set my own pace and decide what I wanted to do and it wasn't a personal encounter. An encounter -- it was an encounter between me and the subject matter and not between my progress and that of another student.

**TAPPERT:** Did you mostly study by yourself or --

**MC CREE:** Oh, no. Law is best studied in groups and I studied with other people. Enjoyed every minute of it. I suppose one of the principal differences between -- among the law school in

America is the caliber of students. If one goes to Harvard, he's going to study with a group of students who are going to stretch his mind to its utmost and there will be any number of groups, all of which afford that opportunity. If he goes to a school of lesser repute, there will be one or two very good students, but there won't be that many good students, the sufficient number to have several groups like this. I think that's certainly one of the principal differences. But the advantage of going to law school is to be able to study in group situations. At least, I think it is.

**TAPPERT:** Did you live at home when you were going to Harvard?

**MC CREE:** I did the year I went before the war, because it was convenient. I had -- it didn't cost me anything. It would have cost me less. I made a contribution, of course. And I didn't mind traveling the subway. It didn't bother me. I still ride the bus around Detroit. Either walk or ride the bus. I rarely drive if I can ride a bus or walk. After I returned from the service to finish up, I was married then so I had my own place, I had a little apartment but that really wasn't an apartment either. It was part of a house. I had a part of a house that was occupied by a Radcliffe College employee. Not a teacher -- not sure just what she did there. She did something at the dean's office.

**TAPPERT:** I wanted to ask you about attitudes, racial attitudes. There would be a difference between going to school in the South for undergrad and then coming back up North and going to

Harvard and how people would look at you as a black person.  
Did that have any effect on the way you saw yourself or --

MC CREE: Not really. The South was a hostile place when I was in school there, but Fisk was an oasis. Fisk was in the middle of Nashville much as Wayne University is in the middle of Detroit, but the campus has boundaries more than Wayne has boundaries. And it was possible to stay on the campus for weeks on end without ever going into the city. And I used to do that frequently. Nashville, like most Southern cities, was more civilized than the countryside and it recognized that Fisk was a municipal asset. We had a finer Fine Arts program on our campus than existed in the whole state of Tennessee. We attracted artists, white and colored, vocal -- instrumental of great ability and reputation. The so called finer people of the Nashville community used to come in to hear these concerts and so forth. It was a self contained community. We had our own social events there, our little dances and our athletic events and so forth. So I wasn't really out in what could have been a very brutal part of a hostile, rural South. I was spared much of that experience although I had traveled through it sometimes. So, in that respect, it was different. The race of a person has never made any difference to me. Anymore than a person's religion -- (Interruption). Before we were interrupted -- I said that a person's race is no more significant to me than his religion or his shoe size or his weight or height as far as my interpersonal relationships with him are concerned. I grew up in a family where I was taught that the

real value of a person was his intrinsic worth and from the time I was a smallest boy -- a small child, I remember my grandparents saying something like uh- handsome is as handsome does. And little phrases like that indicated that it was a person's behavior and attitude that was important and when we lived in Hawaii, this was a very cosmopolitan community. My next door neighbor and best friend was a fellow named Tumutsu who was a Japanese fellow and I had friends of all races and religions. I lived at one time in a predominantly Jewish community and even worked as a Shabbis boy, that's you know, the Gentile who goes around and performs the chores on the Sabbath that a devout Jew cannot for himself, and I picked up dimes and quarters doing that. I indicated my father's experience in Professor Morrow's home, when he was growing up -- going to college. I just never had any particular problems myself with this. Now this doesn't mean that I haven't had some unpleasant racial incidents that other people have attempted to inflict on me. I told you what happened when I was admitted to attend the University of Iowa and then was told I couldn't live in the dormitory and that cost me my job and kept me from going. When I went into World War II, I left Law school with Bruster and Richardson and people like that, and was put into a racially segregated army. It remained that way as long as I was in the Army except when I went to Officer Candidate School. It cost too much to run one on a segregated basis so they integrated it. That was in Fort Benning, Georgia. But

that was my only integrated experience in the United States Army. I could have let that destroy me but I never let it bother me. When I finished Harvard Law School, I finished well in my class. I had a letter of recommendation to what was then one of the -- I guess it still is -- finest law firms in Detroit. They invited me for an interview, and when they saw what my race was, indicated they would try to get me a job with one of the colored lawyers in town. I still see the man who said this to me. I saw him not very long ago. I'm sure he's still embarrassed about it. I feel sorry for him that he had to have such an attitude. He has since integrated his firm, at least on a token basis, but I feel that was his misfortune. It certainly wasn't mine because I ran into a number of fine instances. I don't like racism wherever I find it and I don't like bigotry. I don't like the white bigot; and I don't like a black bigot; I don't like a green bigot. But I don't have any personal problems with my friends -- I have friends of all races. If you visit my house -- you'll find people of any race or any religion there. My children are the same way in their attitudes. My employees are the same way and I just don't think of people in terms like that.

**TAPPERT:** That's a fortunate thing as I would think, especially during the time you were at Fisk, the mind of the South was not an open mind.

**MC CREE:** Well, it still isn't, but neither is the mind of America. I don't delude myself about America. America is a racist country. The thing that distinguishes America principally from other countries as far as race is concerned, is that its fundamental document -- its constitution -- commits it inevitably, or ultimately to becoming a non-racial community and it has a sufficient number of decent people who not only believe in that, but have sufficient power to prevent the country from becoming involved in the kind of racist mischief that Germany did in World War II. I think America, as any other country, had the capacity for apartheid. It has the capacity for genocide, but the people who are on the Supreme Court and there are a few people in Congress. There are some people in the executive branch of government; there are some people in the clergy; there are many decent people in ordinary walks of life, who, because of our Constitution, because of our tradition, aren't going to let that happen. But it has in small areas and I don't delude myself about it. I just don't allow myself to be --

**TAPPERT:** Subjected?

**MC CREE:** Subjected to it, and I don't allow -- it's a dangerous -- it's a deadly poison and I just keep it out of my system. It just has no place in my system at all.

**TAPPERT:** Well, you've been able to live above that.



**MC CREE:** Well, maybe above it but to live apart from it. I don't know whether it's above it or not. Because I'm interested in trying to eradicate it and I don't run away from a confrontation with it and I have no real illusions about how thin the veneer of civilization is anyway. Civilization has a very thin veneer. I have seen, in other communities, where people are pretty much mono-racial, the separation of the community along, say religious lines, or along class lines almost as draconian, as is the racial separation in some parts of the United States where people have been kept out of employment, where people have been subjugated, where people have been exploited and it just seems to be a human trait to create divisions and categories and pecking orders and to keep people into pecking orders and I think we have to fight against it no matter how the pecking orders are constructed. And I try to keep my -- that virulent poison out of my children, too. My children are fortunate. They were born in a family where both parents have a college education; where both parents have professional school training; where grandparents have been to college; where they've never experienced any privation -- yet, my children all know how to work. I don't want my children ever to feel that, because they're more fortunate than some other children, certainly not all other children, that they're any better. Because fortune has nothing to do with virtue. My son who is now nineteen, one of my twins, had a paper route from the time he was about thirteen 'till he was about sixteen. Then he wanted to be on the swim team in high school and he couldn't

keep his papers and stay out for training. But he retired, sold his route and had a thousand dollars in the bank. And he still has it there. He says, "I'll always have my nest egg". He works at school. He has a job as an orientation leader this summer and he has no pretensions of any kind of inherent superiority. My wife and I wish we could dress him up a little better, but he's not enamored with fancy clothes. I don't have a fancy car. I give away, oh, about \$200.00 a month to certain projects I believe in, most of which are educational. I drive a 1973 Valiant automobile, and that's all I have and I feel very comfortable in it. I don't feel demeaned because I have it. My children don't and they'll ride the bus. My daughter is coming in from Ann Arbor where she's working as a salesperson in a shopping mall there this summer. That's my other twin. She's coming in to go to the opera with her mother to hear Meistersinger, I think it's Die Meistersinger. She'll come in on a greyhound bus. They don't have cars of their own. I don't believe in 19-year old children having cars - unless they need one. And my children don't need them if they're just going to school and if they're serviced by the greyhound bus or the train. I think there's a kind of economic or social conceit that's as dangerous as racial conceit. And I just don't like it and I don't want my kids to do it. My older daughter has none of that either. So, I'm grateful.

**TAPPERT:** Well -

**MC CREE:** Well, I'll let boil vigorously.

**TAPPERT:** O.K.

**MC CREE:** One of the greatest conceits about race concerns the notion that almost everyone has a- other people have racial and he hasn't any himself. This was brought home to me many years ago when I was a child in Hawaii and my mother first began teaching at Liameah Junior High School. This was a school attended predominantly by Oriental children. And I remember my mother coming home and saying at the dinner table, "I don't know how in the world I'll ever be able to tell these children apart. They all look the same with their straight, shiny, black hair and their slanty black eyes, and their little round ochred-colored faces and they all look like peas in a pod, and I think it will be terrible. And, I remember about two weeks later, she said, I don't know how I ever could of made such a horrible misjudgment about them. These children are just as different as each one of my children, and I know everyone of them by sight, from the rear row. What she was really describing was a very common phenomenon that most persons had never really bothered to take the time to become acquainted with people from whom they differ in race, and in some instances, in social position or religion or other circumstances. When they do take the time, they find that they're just the same -- some good, some bad -- and most of them, a mixture of the two. That's why I think it would be worthwhile to take some time talking with Mother who has a wealth of extraordinary experiences she could share with you.

**TAPPERT:** That would be great.

**MC CREE:** I remember her telling me about the time the soldiers came marching home from the Spanish-American War and how she and some schoolmates went down to see them march through the streets of Springfield and so forth.

**TAPPERT:** Great. I want to cover two more areas and then we'll end with that. I want you to tell me something about your experiences in the army. Those seem to be the most - some years that weren't always the most pleasant years.

**MC CREE:** Well, the army wasn't altogether unpleasant for me. I resented it because it represented the interruption of my studies. But it was a much easier thing to accept then, then apparently it is, or has been for young people in the Southeast Asian War. Everyone went -- when I went, and I think we all felt a little sorry for the person who stayed behind and I even know persons who had perfectly good reasons for not going -- serious physical limitations, who tried to conceal them so they could go because it was almost a matter of honor and I suppose there was a consequence of the unanimous view or overwhelming view that this was the right war at the right time and in the right place instead of the contrary view about the Southeast Asian adventure. My first experience was, as I said, being drafted out of law school. That wasn't pleasant because I left a stimulating, intellectual, open society and we ran into a narrow, closed, autocratic society where the army said, because of your color, you stay here and because of your color, you're stayin' here. And, of course, I didn't care for

**that. The reception area for the first army was Fort Devons,  
Massachusetts. So, I stayed in New England which I liked  
very much, initially, and I was selected to go --**

**END OF SIDE 1**

**TAPE 2**

Tappert - Mc Cree

Side 2 - Tape 2.

**MC CREE: This was a unit of high quality -- exceptionally high quality, because most of its draftees were from the first army area and since they went through Fort Devons, Massachusetts, it means that they were educated in the New England community where everyone in those days went to high school and the high schools were quite good. And at one time, perhaps its IQ score might have been as high as the 442nd Japanese-American regiment. It was distinctly an elite group. It was in a beautiful place and I enjoyed the several months I was there in training. This unit was ultimately destroyed by army policies. A great tragedy. I left this unit after about eight months because of an opportunity to go to officer candidate school in Fort Benning, Georgia. There were only two opportunities for Negroes in the whole first army area that year, and I was lucky enough to get one of them. I went to Fort Benning. Of course, I was back in the South that I had left when I attended Fisk, except this was a different South. Fort Benning is in the rural South. And it was a hostile environment except that the post at Fort Benning was an old military post and the soldiers were from all over the country. As long as one stayed on the post, he was safe from any injury if not insult. I went through the 90-day program and became an officer and gentleman by an Act of Congress after three months, and really enjoyed the officer school experience.**

It was a hot summer; I lost ten pounds. I put it all back on in muscle. I did very well in the classes and when I graduated, I had ideas of perhaps becoming an important troop leader. There were some days when I found they didn't know where to assign me because there was an army policy of not assigning Negro officers to serve -- to lead white troops and so they were limited to a black organization and there were only four black infantry organizations at that time: the 92nd Division, the 93rd Division, the 366th Infantry that I had just left, and the 372nd Infantry, an equivalent of a regi-separate regiment in New Jersey at Fort Dix. There was a policy against sending one back to his own unit where he had been an enlisted man and the 372nd Infantry didn't require any officers; the 93rd was in desert training for overseas service at Guadalcanal and they didn't want to send any brand new officers into that outfit. And so I went to Fort Watchuka, Arizona, where the 92nd Division was in training. This was an interesting outfit. There were three infantry regiments and three or four artillery battalions and the ordinary complement of engineers and other special troops to form a division. All of the enlisted men were colored; all of the officers above company grade were white. There were the lieutenants and captains and a very few captains were Negroes. The policy was such that before a Negro could get a promotion, the regimental or division adjutant made certain that he would not rank any white officers and I know this because I was one of the early ones to get a

promotion there. This was during Louisiana maneuvers when my battalion commander lost our battalion in the swamp and I led them out -- and it came to the attention of the umpires from Army headquarters who were overseeing the exercise. Still, Arizona was nice. I loved Arizona. Fort Watchuka is on a plateau near the Mexican border. Its desert and mountains; it's just beautiful. And I just used to walk around in my spare time and soak in the sheer beauty of the place. I know a number of the soldiers didn't like it. Particularly those who were more interested in the big city with a great deal going on, but I was fond of reading then as I am now, and I did a great deal of reading. Also did a great deal of walking and a great deal of thinking and thoroughly enjoyed the place. We left there and went overseas to Italy where we went to combat in the North Apennines campaign, and we fought in the North Apennines campaign of Po Valley. We didn't do anything to distinguish ourselves. Our officers were pretty cowardly as far as having any initiative and the men didn't have any confidence in them either. And so we pretty much blocked a place in the line but there were very few heroics except on an individual basis. Certainly no group heroics. We lost a lot of people unnecessarily, but we were never in any serious engagements like the 366 that was thrown into a situation where they were overrun during a German attack under circumstances when they shouldn't have been placed there on the basis of their equipment and immediate previous training. What was left of them was pretty much destroyed in an



abortive attack on the Ligerian sea coast and it was just a shame that a fine outfit like that came to such a tragic end. My Division, as I said, escaped any calamity of that sort, but also made no substantial contribution to the ending of the war or outstanding, I'll say, because we did perform a significant role. We at least immobilized some substantial parts of the German army in Italy. I enjoyed Italy. I enjoyed almost every experience. I learned to speak Italian when I was there. And twenty years ago--twenty-five years ago, I could speak almost fluent Italian. I've lost the facility for want of use, now, but I can still read it. I can read the newspapers and books and I've returned to Italy on three occasions since. After I've been there a few days, and my ear gets attuned, I can converse to satisfy the needs I ever have as a tourist anyway. The only thing that troubles me is my vocabulary is still largely a military vocabulary and it's pretty short on ideas and abstractions. But for everyday things that a person uses in a restaurant or a hotel or shopping or the opera or a concert or looking at the ruins or something, I'm adequate. I made some very good friends in Italy among the civilian population. I have retained some of them and in the last several -- three months I was stationed in Rome -- as sort of a liaison officer, I suppose. That was pleasant. I could go to the opera, I could go to concerts and art galleries. However, I wanted to get back to Law School, and I did. So my military service wasn't especially distinctive. Went in as a private and I received a terminal promotion as a captain. I received a bronze star for

not doing as much as some other people I know did, to get one.

**TAPPERT:** O. K. I wanted to ask about the military officers training. What do they do? What do they train you as? What kind of classes do they --

**MC CREE:** Well, an officer is essentially a teacher. He has to take a group of people in his command, however large it is, and train them to achieve a certain level of military proficiency, and then he has to do what very few teachers have to do. He has to prove how good a teacher he is, by leading them into the actual performance of their task. And, if he's a combat officer, that means trying them out against the enemy when you're really playing for keeps, because if they haven't learned well, or you don't lead well, you don't survive. This meant going through every phase of infantry work. We were trained to be troop leaders -- infantry lieutenants. We had to learn to fire every weapon, to qualify as at least a marksman with it and we would hope a sharp shooter or an expert. We had to be able to dismantle every weapon and put it back together again. Do this blindfolded, because frequently, we'd have to do it in the dark. Or we'd make repairs, field repairs on it and we had to learn map reading and we had to be so proficient that we could be dropped in the middle of a thicket and we could find our way out without a compass, using stars or other methods of orientation to find our way out. We had to learn techniques of troop hygiene because that's usually the greatest killer of troops anyway. In fact, the Civil War was the first war in

history where technology was so sophisticated and more people were killed by weaponry than died by pestilence, just by virtue of having been in close proximity of it. So we had to learn hygiene, which was connected also with food acquisition, preparation and service. We had to learn first aid; we had to learn logistics, the technique of moving troops, of providing supplies. We had to learn tactics, the techniques of making the most efficient utilization of your forces to overcome enemy opposition -- frustrate the enemy -- and other activities. We learned military intelligence; the evaluation of information to let you know what the enemy can do and will do or is doing and then we had to be prepared to train troops who came to us straight out of civilian life to teach them to use the weapons, to teach them to do all of these things, and then we had to learn the, as I said, the tactics of employing men to achieve military objectives. And, if you move further up the ladder you had to acquire further skills. I was a platoon leader, of course, and later I became a battalion intelligence officer which meant finding out what the enemy was up to and ultimately battalion operations officer which meant planning how the battalion was to carry out the missions that it was told to discharge by people further up at command.

**TAPPERT:** Well -

**MC CREE:** I also used to sit on court martials because they knew that I had some legal training.

**TAPPERT:** Oh, yeah. After you got out of the army, you must have met your wife before you went in the army.

**MC CREE:** Yes. I met her just - well, no - about the same time. I met her in the summer of 1942. I had completed a year of law school and she had gone to Boston to attend Simmons College as a graduate student in Library Science. She had received a baccalaureate degree at Wayne University in June of 1942 and had come to Boston. I met her at a little party. I think it might have been in my own house. I was in on a furlough from Fort Devons and we became acquainted and corresponded all during the time I was in the service, and married when I returned.

**TAPPERT:** So you only knew her a short time before -- know anything through the correspondence between you and --

**MC CREE:** Well, that is exactly so, because I met her -- I guess it was September -- possibly October of '42 when I was at Fort Devons which is -oh- 100 miles from Detroit -- maybe not that far. About the same distance as Ann Arbor is from Detroit and I could get a pass and come in almost every weekend -- and I would -- so, I saw her about every weekend for --

**TAPPERT:** Isn't Fort Devons in Massachusetts?

**MC CREE:** Massachusetts, yes. But I said, the same distance Ann Arbor is from Detroit.

**TAPPERT:** Oh, Ok. That -- o.k. It was Boston.

**MC CREE:** Or did I -- maybe I misspoke myself. If I said Boston, I Detroit. It's that kind of distance, that relative distance. So, I guess I saw her every weekend for five or six months, which is seeing a great deal of someone.

**TAPPERT:** Yeah. O.K. So, you were married at -- in '46?

**MC CREE: 1946.**

**TAPPERT: And then you had three children.**

**MC CREE: I have three children. We have a daughter who is married.**

**We were married, July -- gee, I should know -- 29th, I think 1946 -- here in Detroit. And our first child was born in September '47. September 27, 1947 in Boston, because I had gone back to finish this law school business that had been interrupted. She was born six months before I finished my studies -- or less than that -- because it was September of '47 and I took my last exam in December of '47. And we brought her back out here, where I decided to practice in law and my other two children, are twins, were born on July 13, 1956 when I was a Wayne County Circuit judge.**

**TAPPERT: That's a big difference in age.**

**MC CREE: Yeah. It was a nine year gap between -- and it was fortunate that the last two were twins because with the gap, they were able to afford one another the companionship.**

**TAPPERT: Well, thank you Judge. This has been enjoyable.**

**MC CREE: You asked me if I had some pictures and I said -- I told you I'd look for it --**

**END OF SIDE 2- TAPE 2.**