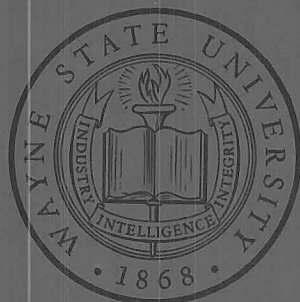


# Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs

ORAL INTERVIEW

George W. Crockett, Jr.

Herbert Hill and Roberta McBride, Interviewers  
March 2, 1968



Wayne State University  
Detroit, Michigan



CG-2

INTERVIEW  
OF  
GEORGE W. CROCKETT, JR.

BY  
Herbert Hill  
accompanied by  
Roberta McBride

ON  
MARCH 2, 1968

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Wayne State University  
1972

H - Herbert Hill  
C - George W. Crockett, Jr.

H: This is an interview with Mr. George W. Crockett, Jr., March 2, 1968. The interviewer is Herbert Hill.

Mr. Crockett, I should like to begin by asking you to tell us when and where you were born, some of your early personal experiences regarding schooling, when you came to Detroit, and, also perhaps, leading into your experiences with the wartime FEPC operating under President Roosevelt's Executive Order No. 8802, the first federal Fair Employment Practices Commission, some of your experiences at that time, the period before you became officially involved with the UAW.

C: Well, that's a pretty large order. Let's correct a date - this is February 2 instead of March 2.

H: I'm sorry, did I say March 2? Correction, this is February 2, 1968.

C: Well, I was born in Florida - Jacksonville, Florida - in 1909. My father, who was a native of Delaware, went to live in Philadelphia at a comparatively early age. I don't think Dad finished high school; he probably went to the equivalent of the tenth grade in high school. My mother was born and grew up in South Carolina - a rural section of South Carolina. She was fortunate that at a very early age - I don't know; I suspect it was around thirteen years of age - there was a bishop of the AME church, Bishop...his name escapes me now, but he was from Philadelphia, and I judge he was a bishop of South Carolina. And when he was going back to Philadelphia, he arranged with my grandfather to take my mother back to be sort of a girl about the house and at the same time to go to school. So she got a fairly good public school education in Philadelphia, and that's where she met my dad. Then, before they got married, she came back to South Carolina. And because she had what was considered a premium education for a Negro at that time, she received a license as a public school teacher and taught very briefly in South Carolina. My dad got lonesome and decided to leave Philadelphia, come to South Carolina, and marry her. They got married, and by that time my grandfather in South Carolina decided to leave that state and migrate to Florida. So Dad and Mother came along with him. Dad got a job working with a city contractor in Jacksonville, Florida. This was in the period when it was not unusual for a Negro to be a contractor with the city of Jacksonville, Florida. And this particular man, whose name I don't recall, he was a city carpenter and he took Dad on as an apprentice. Dad knew absolutely nothing about the carpenter trade; he had been a cap-maker in Philadelphia. But he picked it up and got along very well. And eventually, he discontinued working with the city and began working for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad as a car repairman. These were the days when all of your railway cars were built

of wood and they built the cars from the floorboards on up. And Dad became an expert at that and worked for the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad until he retired, roughly around...oh, I should think Dad retired around 1947, and he still lives in Jacksonville.

H: You were born in Jacksonville?

C: I was born in Jacksonville. I have a brother and a sister. My brother did not finish high school. He spent about a year at Tuskegee, and now he works in the shipbuilding industry in Jacksonville. My sister is a graduate of Fisk and the New York School of Music, and presently she is teaching music in the public school system in Pittsburgh. Prior to that, she was Dean of Women and head of the Music Department under Mrs. Bethune down in Daytona Beach. And then there is, I think, a celebrated children's chorus in Dayton, Ohio, which is sponsored by one of the big steel companies - Inland Steel - and they brought her up from Daytona Beach to direct that chorus, and for several years she directed the chorus. Her husband is Rev. C. LeRoy Hacker, who has a regular broadcast on a Pittsburgh radio station. He is, I think, a major in the Reserves, United States Army.

Now, shall we go back to Florida? Dad also went into the ministry. There's a joke in the family. Mother says he wanted to be a minister long before she gave her consent. But, having grown up in the home of a minister, she knew something about the standards that the community applied to children of ministers; so she insisted Dad not go into the ministry until each of her children had finished public school in Jacksonville. So, after I finished high school, Dad finally went into the ministry, pastored a church, and he only retired from that about four years ago because of failing eyesight.

Now, as I said, I attended Stanton High School of Jacksonville, Florida. One thing I like to point out about Stanton High School is that James Weldon Johnson was at one time principal of that high school. That, however, was before my time.

H: He discusses that in his autobiography, Along This Way.

C: Yes. Well, I think Stanton is probably the oldest Negro high school in the state of Florida. When I went, it was just a wooden building. They built the present structure while I was there. There's nothing so important, I think, about my high school days. In my senior year I learned one lesson. They had an oratorical contest and I waited until the last minute, then decided I wanted to be in the contest because the prize was a scholarship to go to college. I got busy and wrote a speech. My speech was on the thirteenth, fourteenth, and the fifteenth amendments to the United States Constitution. I went to school and told my principal and the head of the history department that I wanted to be in the contest. Then I told my teacher, and he told me it was too late.

I went home and complained to my mother. She said, "Look, you never stop with the first defeat. Is there somebody you can appeal to above the teacher?" I said there was the principal. "Well, you go directly to the principal, and you tell him." So I did. To make a long story short, I was permitted to participate. They had to have an elimination contest then. I won out in the elimination contest, and I won out in the final contest. That's how I got the scholarship to go to Morehouse. The scholarship was given by Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, and that is how I came to join Kappa Alpha Psi, too, I think. Let's say I was oriented in that direction when I got to college.

Do I just go on with my college days now?

H: Yes, please.

C: I can tell you a little about my family background. We were certainly not a wealthy family. There were no wealthy Negro families, as such, in Jacksonville. The two outstanding families in terms of wealth was A.L. Lewis, who had the Afro-American Insurance Company, and a fellow named Blodgett, who was a contractor in the city of Jacksonville.

H: A building contractor?

C: A building contractor. And yet, the fact that your father, a Negro, had regular employment with the railroad put you in the so-called middle class, as far as Negroes were concerned. It was a Negro class which was maybe a cut below the Negro postman or the Negro schoolteacher, but a class which was definitely above the general economic level of Negroes. I never knew what it was to go to bed hungry, for example; I never knew what it was to be pressed for a place to live because we were going to be dispossessed or put out on the streets or anything like that. And yet, I couldn't afford to dress like the children of some of my doctor friends, for example, or some of the children of the schoolteachers. But I got along well, in terms of life in the South.

I had practically no contact with white people. The only white people I knew was the guy who came to the house to collect rent, or I had to go downtown and pay the rent each week or each month, or the Metropolitan Insurance agent who came around to collect that ten or fifteen-cent premium. And then, when I was in high school, I worked at different stores as a porter, so I knew the white storekeepers. That was the limit of my white contacts. You lived in an entirely different world. If you rode the streetcar, the chances are it was a streetcar which served the Negro neighborhood, so just about everybody you met on the streetcar would be Negro also.

H: May I ask if the driver of the streetcar would be Negro?

C: No, the driver would be white in those days.

H: Were there any Negro streetcar drivers?

C: Not when I was in Jacksonville: no streetcar drivers, no streetcar motormen.

All right, comes 1927 and I finish high school and go to Morehouse to college. In those days, Morehouse prided itself in being the only Negro Christian college in the Far South devoted solely to the education of Christian young men...some sort of legend like that.

H: This is Morehouse College in Atlanta. Do you recall who was president then?

C: John Hope! You would never forget it. John Hope was president. Samuel Archer, who later became president, was at that time dean of the college. My days at Morehouse is a chapter all by itself, and I don't want to belabor you by telling you all of that. I came as a bright-eyed freshman who had had a little bit of experience as far as public speaking. Because, in addition to winning that contest, I was one of those little high school kids who memorized the addresses of famous men like Wendell Phillips, Touissant L'Ouverture, or something like that. On a given program on a Sunday afternoon in church, George Crockett would be invited to speak, and I would go and give this oration, and so forth. So, I had a little bit of a gift of gab when I came to Morehouse as a freshman. And at the first meeting of the Freshman Club, when we were voicing our gripes at how we were being treated by the sophomores and so forth, I got up and made an impassioned speech, and immediately I was elected president of the freshman class. I remained president, as I recall, until it became important: and that was about the senior year, because then your name would be published in the graduation slip who was president, and the Alphas and Omegas proceeded to defeat me. They didn't want a Kappa man as president of the graduating class.

I didn't participate in any of the athletics at Morehouse. I went out for football. Georgia football fields are unusually tough; they are made out of red clay, and if you get a really good tackle and you slide for a while you lose some skin. I got hit two or three times, and, frankly, I gave up football. I hadn't played football in high school, anyway.

H: What year was this, Mr. Crockett?

C: This would be 1927-28. Economically speaking, a very dark period, when you wondered whether or not the little stipend was going to come from home, and whether or not your tuition was going to be paid. Tuition, at that time, if I remember correctly, was \$75.00

per semester, \$150.00 for the entire year. Room and board and laundry was \$20.00 per month. It's much, much more than that now, I'm sure, at Morehouse.

Well, I was a fairly good student.

H: Excuse me, were you interested in the law...were you becoming interested in the law?

C: No, I was not interested in the law. I went to Morehouse with the intention of becoming a dentist. The only Negro in Jacksonville, Florida, who drove around in a brand new Buick was a dentist, and I decided that I wanted to be a dentist, and that's what I went to Morehouse for. I took the scientific course until I came face to face with two problems: one, what do you do about organic chemistry; and two, what do you do when you're interested in debating and spending a lot of time in the library reading up about whatever happens to be the national debate question for that year, and the professor for organic chemistry wants his experiments done, you see. So, finally, in my sophomore year, in the first semester, I had to make a choice. So I went over in the classroom one night, and I chased everybody else out, and put down on one side of the board the advantages of going into law and on the other side of the board the advantages of going into medicine, and then checked those advantages against what I knew about myself. And I ended up deciding to go into law. It was as simple as that. It solved several problems. I didn't have any more laboratory experiments to take care of. And that's how I got into law.

H: Another question about this period: Do you recall any campus involvement with organizations? Anything about the NAACP or some local groups? This was the period when a number of Negro betterment...a number of Negro self-improvement organizations were functioning around the Atlanta...do you recall any involvement at this period?

C: No, there was very little involvement in community activity, particularly of a labor nature, as far as Morehouse students were concerned in those days. In fact, the closest I came to learning anything about organized labor was through Professor Brazeal. Brazeal had worked through the summers as a sleeping car porter. He did his thesis on that, and he came back to Morehouse to teach economics. And by hobnobbing with him between classes, I got something of an introduction to the trade union movement. That's where I first heard of A. Philip Randolph - through Brazeal. The other local activity, studentwise...there was quite a ferment those days to have student organization on Negro campuses. Student government was just practically unknown, at that time, so we decided to set up a student government at Morehouse. It was bitterly opposed by President Hope. He delivered himself of a speech in chapel one morning about these radicals who want to change the



way of doing things. But we did organize student government. I was elected the first president of the student body - the first delegate to a meeting. At that time, I think, it was called the National Student Association, or something like that. I'll never forget. It was a meeting in Atlanta at the old Ansley Hotel, and this was to be our first time attending. Brazeal was our sponsor; he went with us. We got to the Ansley Hotel, and we were politely told we couldn't come in the front door, that we had to go around to the back door. Well, we went around to the back door and came in the meeting and took our seats in the back of the hall. And, immediately, the delegation from Tulane University got up and walked out. They would have no part of the session. The hosts for that national meeting was Georgia Tech. Georgia Tech came over and requested we leave until they got this whole issue resolved. We left. I don't know whether the affiliation continued after that or not. Otherwise, we didn't have on the campus, for instance, a chapter of the NAACP. We didn't have student memberships in the NAACP at that time. We had very little contact with the Urban League; we knew that it existed. And the Atlanta University School of Social Work eventually moved onto Morehouse's campus, and that gave us some contact there. But, otherwise, there was very little involvement between the students at Morehouse and the so-called community agencies.

H: Do you remember any significant figures in Negro life who visited the campus at this time? Did Dr. DuBois come? Did James Weldon Johnson come? Did Monroe Trotter? What other figures do you recall?

C: None of them came to Morehouse while I was there, so far as I can remember. The figures who were invited on Negro campuses were so-called liberal whites, particularly if they were in a position to give some money. They were the ones who were invited.

H: What year did you graduate from Morehouse?

C: 1931.

H: 1931 - a bad time to graduate from college. And then what did you do? You went on to graduate school?

C: Yes...not to graduate school, but law school at Ann Arbor.

During the summers I was at Morehouse I did what most young Negro college students did - I got jobs working in New York City on the boats. I used to work on the Fall River line.

H: These were excursion boats.

C: Excursion boats. Overnight from New York to Fall River or to New Bedford...that line. One summer, the summer after my freshman

year, I worked in Connecticut raising tobacco. John Hope had a classmate who owned a tobacco plantation in Connecticut, and he would always take fifty Morehouse students each summer. He would pay their transportation up from Morehouse to Hartford, Connecticut. If you didn't work the entire summer, you paid back your transportation, but if you stayed the entire summer, he would give you back that money to pay your way back to college. And you could be assured, if you worked and saved, of having enough money to take care of your tuition when you went back to Morehouse. So, I got that experience. Then the summer after my senior year, I signed up for a trip to South America on a freighter sailing out of Brooklyn, and that was my first time leaving the country. I saw a little bit of Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and so forth. When I returned from that, it was just about time to go to law school.

And my aunt - that's my father's sister - who was a domestic in New York, had undertaken the responsibility of seeing me through law school, on condition that I didn't get married. So, I bundled myself up and came out to Ann Arbor. I really wanted to go to Harvard Law, but I didn't have Harvard's money. Harvard at that time was charging something like...its tuition was something like \$500.00 per year, and the tuition at Ann Arbor for an out-of-state student was \$150.00 per year. And Ann Arbor rated with Harvard. Not only that, it just received this gift that resulted in their getting that beautiful quadrangle there that was featured in the New York Times. And that's when I first learned about it. Then I discussed with Howard Thurmond, who was one of my teachers down at Morehouse at the time. I know one day he was going downtown and asked me to go along with him, so I went along. He said, "Crockett, what is it you expect to be?" I told him one of these days I hoped to sit in the Congress of the United States. Oh, that was a very unusual ambition - not that you didn't have Negroes in Congress; I think Oscar DePriest from Chicago was in Congress at that time. He said, "That's good, that's why you are going to study law?" I told him that had something to do with it. Then he wanted to know where I intended to study law. I told him I wanted to go to Harvard, but I didn't see how I would be able to, and that I had been accepted at Michigan. He said that, as between the two, he would prefer I go to Michigan. I asked him why. He said, "Harvard is for us country boys who need polishing. But you are already pretty smooth. You don't need polishing. You need someplace where they're going to make you buckle down and work. And I think you will get that at Ann Arbor." I just mention that in passing, because on the campus I was considered a sort of man of affairs. I was in everything, president of everything. I even got a letter in athletics, not because I was in football or baseball, but because I organized the cheerleaders and insisted that cheerleaders be recognized and be given athletic letters. So we had a high-level conference with the dean of the college, and it finally ended with me designing a block letter for cheerleaders with a megaphone to use from that time on.

H: This was in 1931. You were admitted into the Law School of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in 1931?

C: Right, one of two Negroes admitted that year.

H: Do you recall who the other one was?

C: No, I don't. The last I recall, he was at Chicago. He was a graduate of Fisk. His name was...it escapes me. It was in the lower half of the alphabet, because the freshman class at Michigan that year was composed of 300 divided in two parts, 150 in each part. And that meant that we had one Negro in each section, so that I was one Negro surrounded by 149 white students. And remember, at this time I literally couldn't tell one white person from another.

H: All white folks looked alike?

C: All white folks looked alike to me. And I was scared stiff every time the professor called on me. I had the feeling that everyone in the class was looking at me to make a complete flop as far as Negroes were concerned. So I carried the weight of the entire race on my shoulders every time a question was put. Plus the fact that the year before, they had five Negroes in the Law School in the freshman class, and five Negroes flunked out. So that there was a feeling...not a feeling, it was rumored on campus that, while it was comparatively easy for a Negro to get into Michigan Law School, they only let you in to keep from being accused of excluding you because of race, and they would proceed to punch you out. Well, I don't think that was true; it certainly didn't turn out to be true in my case. And yet, today, Michigan is not exactly one of the leaders in integrated education in the Law School. I've had some correspondence with the faculty about that, and they have recently found some money in order to offer some scholarships to deserving Negro students in order to get some Negroes over in the Law School.

I was a pretty good student over at Michigan. At Morehouse, I graduated with honors. At Michigan, I graduated, I think, in the upper third of the class. I didn't make the Laureate View because my first semester on Michigan's campus was chaotic - that's the best way of putting it - in the matter of getting adjusted. As a result, I ended up with a couple of "C's" the first semester, and you can't make the honor roll if you have a "C" in any required course. And I did have a "C" in two courses in my freshman year. The rest of the time, my grades were "A's" and "B's." Later, I had the distinction of being, I think, the only Negro graduate at Michigan who has ever written for the Michigan Law Review.

H: Did you become interested in any particular branch of the law at this time? Labor law or constitutional law?

C: I became attracted to and very much interested in constitutional law, and since many of the constitutional issues in those days concerned labor, because you had the whole New Deal and you had this battle to change the Supreme Court, that sort of thing. So, I became interested in that. The constitutionality, for example, of the NIRA was one of the questions we had on our final examination. I proceeded to uphold the constitutionality of it, notwithstanding the dean of our law school and the professor of constitutional law was a rock-ribbed Republican; so, obviously, I didn't get an "A" for the course. I got a "B" for the course in constitutional law.

Now, in the senior year, the dean, normally, would give recommendations to students to help them get lined up in jobs all over the country. He announced one day that the students who thought their records justified his recommendation could come in to see him. He wouldn't prepare a list; he would leave it to their own judgement. I went in to see him, and he said that he had hoped I would come in, that he would be only too happy to recommend me, but that I had problems. "I can't think of a single law firm in the country which will take you. As a matter of fact, I would suggest things for you to do, Mr. Crockett. Either you should teach law at Howard University, or join the staff of the Justice Department in Washington." I said that either one would be acceptable to me for I had pennies zero. I wasn't saying that I was broke, but I had married in my senior year, at Christmas time, and I thought my aunt was going to disinherit me - that I wouldn't get that payment for my tuition. But fortunately, she forgave me and the tuition came through, and I could graduate. But, getting back to this interview with the Dean, he wrote a letter to Howard University, Charlie Houston, recommending me. It was an interesting letter he got back. Charlie wrote back, in effect, "I'm very happy you brought to my attention young Crockett, and we would like very much to have him here, but unfortunately, the last vacancy we had has just been filled by the appointment of a very bright young man from Harvard University, Mr. William Hastie." And that's how I missed getting on the faculty at Howard. Later on, when I was working for the Department of Labor in Washington, I was guest lecturer at Howard for a while.

H: While Walter Houston was dean of the law school?

C: No, Ransome was dean, and it was Bob Mins' course, really. Bob was going with the Office of Price Administration, so I filled in for him for just that one semester.

Well, that's about everything as far as Ann Arbor is concerned. Graduation Day came - I was still broke, didn't know what I wanted to do. I didn't want to stay in the North, but at the same time I was somewhat reluctant about going South. I knew that though we had Negro lawyers in the South, they were few and far between. The outstanding lawyer in Florida was S. D. McGill in Jacksonville, Florida, who handled many cases before the U. S. Supreme Court,

including the celebrated Chambers vs. U.S., the opinion by Mr. Justice Black. Then there was A. T. Waldon in Atlanta who had made a name for himself, not necessarily in the field of civil rights, but perhaps working with budding Negro businesses around that area - life insurance companies, the banks, etc. Nevertheless, I didn't see too much hope for the Negro practitioner in the south, so I decided I wanted to settle in a border state, so I picked West Virginia, mainly because Negroes were just beginning to be politically effective in West Virginia. We had T. G. Nadduck who was serving in the Legislature at the time - I think you had two or three Negroes in the Legislature. This would be back in 1934. I ultimately located in Fairmount in West Virginia - that is in the north end of the state - but I originally went to Charleston. I went there with the expectation of taking the bar examination, so the first thing I did was go down and register to become a citizen. I realized that West Virginia was Republican, had been for years, and was likely to continue being Republican, not with standing a Democratic administration, so, believe it or not, I registered as a Republican, and I remained a Republican until - I will tell you later when and why I changed. I went to West Virginia because I had borrowed some money from the University of Michigan, its scholarship fund. This was the first time they had ever loaned to anyone to go out and open up a law office, but they appreciated the problems, they told me, that a lawyer had in getting started in the community, so when I presented my budget, all of \$150 to take care of my wife and also of my law office, they gave me the \$150 to be repaid at the rate of \$5.00 per month, beginning one year from that date. And that's how I got started.

Well, when I got to West Virginia, and went in to talk with the clerk of the supreme court, he realized for the first time that I was not a member of the Michigan Bar. In West Virginia in those days if you graduated from the State University Law School you automatically became a member of the Bar, and under their rules if you came to the state as a practicing lawyer from another state you didn't have to establish residence requirements. You could just go on and take the bar examination. And that is why he had encouraged me to come direct to West Virginia. When he found that I did not automatically become a member of the Michigan Bar by having graduated that meant I had to put in one year's residence in West Virginia. Well, he was an old fellow - he took a liking to me, and I to him. He said, "I'm going to see if I can't find a job for you, so that you and your wife can stay here in West Virginia." So he picked up the telephone and called John W. Davis at West Virginia Collegiate Institute, and arranged for me to go out to talk with John W. John W. was a Morehouse graduate, too. Incidentally, I had won the John W. Davis prize for best man of affairs at Morehouse, so we had something in common. But he explained to me that while he would like very much to take me on to teach constitutional

history, at his school, he had some graduates from his own school who had their masters in history, that it didn't make sense for him to take a non-resident and have him teach, when he had a vacancy. So that meant that I had to leave West Virginia and find some employment, so I decided to go to Florida, my home state. My wife and I went back to Jacksonville, and, fortunately, the young fellow who was practicing with S. D. McGill, was leaving McGill to go into private practice, so I walked right in to S. D.'s office, stayed there about a year, took the Florida exams when they came up, and I was fortunate in passing them. I was the only Negro taking the exams, and since the exams were being held in the sacred chamber of the Senate of the state of Florida, no Negro could sit in a seat in the Senate chamber, so they put up a special table and chair in the corridor outside for me to write the exam. I was successful in passing it, and continued with McGill's office, taking on the Chambers' case and several other important civil rights cases and that's where I really got my apprenticeship in the law. He was a very thorough lawyer, and he would take me in for a conference like we're sitting here, and drill me like I don't know what, and then if he felt you were ready he would say, "I'm not going to argue this case. You go on down to the court and argue it" - that sort of thing. It does instill confidence in one, but I couldn't see too much future in Florida, so I decided to leave and come back to West Virginia; so I came back to West Virginia, took the West Virginia Bar, and then went up to Fairmount. This was in 1935. Fairmount is in the northern part of the State - the soft coal region. Even though the country, generally, was having hard times, times were not too hard in the coal industry then. The National Bituminous Coal Act had been passed as part of the New Deal. Senator Neely from West Virginia was a leader in the labor forces in the new deal conference, and just about every thing that West Virginia wanted, Neely was able to get it for the state. I was about the first Negro lawyer in the state who had even considered opening up an office there. I had two letters of recommendation - one was to an elderly fellow who had formerly been a member of the Supreme Court of West Virginia. The other was to a comparatively young lawyer whose name was Hayman. If you'll look today you'll find that he is a chief justice. He said "Well, I'm going to take you under my wing. You know what a Dutch uncle is?" I told him no. So he said he would explain to me what it was. "The first thing I want you to do is get you an office on the main street in Fairmount. No little corner - on the Main Street." So I went over to the Home Savings Bank Building which was next door to the Court House in Fairmount, and I found a vacant office. At the time the building was in receivership. I went over to the federal receiver and told him I wanted to rent a space. He said, "Well, Mr. Crockett, I'm from Indiana, and I'm just appointed conservator. Frankly, I have no racial prejudice. I admire your

school; Indiana and Michigan used to play together quite frequently. But the Federal government asked me to make the building pay. If I put you over in that building, as a result we'll lose tenants. Now, it's as simple as that." "Well," I said, "I'll tell you what to do. Let me pay you one month's rent. Let me move in. At the end of one month, if you still have complaints, I'll move out."

He said that was fair enough. So that's how I got to be the first Negro ever to be in a building like that in the whole state of West Virginia. Well, I moved in, and my offices were three floors below those of Senator Neely. So I got to know the Senator's son very well. He used to stop by and chat; these were the days when a young Negro lawyer who was starting had plenty of time. I think I read the Bible from cover to cover during the period - I didn't have anything else to do. You sit there waiting for a client. My first client was a West Virginia hill billy. He stumbled into my office. He was having a neighborhood fight with his neighbor, and the case was coming up for trial before a local justice of the peace, and he couldn't find anyone else to take it. That's why he came and got me. I went on and proceeded to represent him, everyone with their eyes wide open at the audacity of him having a Negro represent him since everything else was white. And I proceeded to lose the case on a technicality - but we needn't go into that. And then I made friends with a local undertaker in West Virginia. An undertaker in West Virginia is a very important individual, because when you had deaths occurring in the mines those bodies came to him. Under the Workermen's compensation Act, the widow was entitled to compensation. Under West Virginia law the undertaker as a creditor of the estate, was named administrator. So we would always arrange for him to be named administrator, and then he would employ me as the attorney for the estate. So that's how I lived, in large measure in those early days, based on my being administrator of those estates. And even today - this is what, about 30 years later - I still get a monthly check from the state of West Virginia, for my proportionate share of compensation that is paid to a widow and has been paid to a widow down there ever since that time.

I practiced in West Virginia till about 1938, in the off-year elections when Senator Neeley was up for election, and it was important for him to have Negro support in order to win.

H: Were Negroes voting in significant numbers?

C: Yes. His campaign manager came to me to find out what were the chances of my becoming a Democrat. I told him I thought they weren't doing right by the Negroes who were in the Democratic party. He said they could take care of that, but that they needed some Negro Democratic leadership here in the northern part of the state. Well, to make a long story short, I think that, at heart, I was a New Deal Democrat anyway, so I decided to go on over. One of the first things I decided to do was to write an article on why I was joining the Democratic Party. Senator Neeley controlled both the morning and afternoon papers and so I had a half page in both. I may have a copy of that somewhere, in a scrap book. That's how I became a Democrat

and I've been a Democrat ever since. The matter of patronage is usually associated with something like that. So the first appointment I had was as a Director of Personnel for the National Youth Administration in West Virginia. In those days Mrs. Bethune was the deputy director of NYA. I won't go into any of the problems we had except to point out that much of my time was devoted to interviewing deserving Negro students who otherwise couldn't go to college unless they got assistance. One of the young men whom I interviewed - I have forgotten his name, but anyway he subsequently commanded the 99th Air pursuit Squadron over in Italy, and we brought him back here and had a banquet for him when I was Director of Fair Practices for UAW. UAW would frequently bring in generals to boost the morale in the plants, and I wondered why we didn't bring in some Negroes so we brought in a fellow by the name of George S. Roberts - he was a major then and we toured all the war plants with him. It was a terrific boost to the Negro workers in the Rouge plant to walk out and here was this Negro major in full regalia. It almost shut down the line, everyone was so excited. Well, that was my work with NYA. Then, about this time, the Wage and Hour law had gone in to effect, and they were getting together a staff in Washington. I had a telegram from Senator Neeley telling me he had arranged an interview for me, so I went to Washington for that interview, and I was accepted. They hired three Negro lawyers then. One was Bill McKnight from Cleveland, the other was Jones in Chicago. You know Judge Jones? Well, we were the three: Bill McKnight was stationed in Cleveland, Jones in Chicago, and I was in the Washington office. This was in 1939. I was assistant attorney; this was the highest ranking position, as far as Negroes went, in the Department of Labor at that time. Well, I stayed with the Department of Labor for roughly three or four years; I progressed from assistant attorney, to attorney, to associate attorney, to senior attorney. As senior attorney I was assistant chief of the appellate briefing section. When it became time for me to be promoted to principal attorney, calendar-wise, I took up the matter with my superiors. They were very frank and told me in no uncertain language that the U.S. Department of Labor was not ready to have a Negro as Chief of a section, and that is what I would be if I were appointed principal attorney. That's when I began looking around for something else to do. Father Haas who was a bishop in Grand Rapids, had just been appointed as head of the FEPC, and George Johnson, who is now teaching up at State, I think, was the Executive Director of FEPC and Earl Dickerson from Chicago was on FEPC, and the vice president of the Transport Service Union - Milton Webster was on the FEPC at the time. I went over and made application - I was interviewed if I remember correctly, by Father Haas. I was offered the job of hearing commissioner but the rating would be equivalent to that of a senior attorney, and I told



them it wasn't worth changing for that. Father Haas asked me to take the position - he was going to see if he couldn't get the whole thing reevaluated - and to make a long story short, it was upgraded to principal attorney. This would be in 1943, maybe early in the year

- H: Now this was the first federal fair employment practices commission established by executive order 8802 and you were then located in Washington, D.C.?
- C: Right. By this time I had become pretty well labor oriented - you just don't work for the U.S. Department of Labor without becoming that way. I was the Department's authority on race under the Wage and Hours Act - I had written several articles, I had been quoted in the U.S. District Court down in New Orleans and by the Supreme Court of Georgia who obviously didn't know I was a Negro - just quoting articles from the University of Michigan Law Review, legal issues which grew out of the Wage and Hour Law.
- H: What were some of the cases?
- C: One of the big issues of FEPC at that time was - I suppose the most important case that I was connected with was the Philadelphia Transit Case. The Transit Company in Philadelphia refused to employ Negro operators on the Transportation system. A complaint of discrimination was filed with the FEPC and we set up hearings there, in Philadelphia on Broad Street that's where the City Hall is located? We brought in the entire commission sitting in at the time. The Commission consisted of Earl Dickerson, Milton Webster - Father Haas was no longer chairman; Malcolm Ross was chairman. Now, the role of the hearing commissioner was a dual role. We conducted hearings and made recommendations to the Commission, if it was not sitting. If the Commission was sitting, we served as the examining attorney for the Commission. I served as the examining attorney in Philadelphia. In other words, I examined the witnesses and built up the case - that sort of thing. Then it was the work of the examining attorney to prepare the draft opinion, for the Commission. The Commission then went over the opinion, examined it, and adopted it.
- H: Wasn't it also the practice to have an investigator, like Ted Poston and -
- C: Ted Poston was not with the Commission when I was there. Clarence Mitchell was with the Investigation Section and what's the name of the fellow with the American Jewish Committee - Will Maslow - Maslow was the head of the section.
- H: Do you recall who did the investigation in the Philadelphia Transit Strike?
- C: No, I don't. But I do recall it was done locally. It was Fleming - G. James Fleming was head of the Philadelphia office. I think it was the Philadelphia office that did the investigation. And knowing how methodical Fleming is, I suspect he still has the original notes from that investigation. Anyway,

I think it would be worth your time to get in touch with him. Well, I wrote the opinion for the Commission. The Commission read it and approved it. I don't have a copy of it. The Transit company did not comply with the order and it was referred to President Roosevelt, and they finally took over the operation of the system. The next case I took on was here in Detroit, where they had a similar situation, refusing to employ Negroes as motormen and conductors on the system. That assignment was two-fold. It was, one, to come here because Detroit was the headquarters in those days for the trade union which organized these employee - up on Brush Street and the Boulevard. I came over to meet with the International president, whose name I do not recall. He filled me in on the background. Ed Swan was head of FEPC here in Detroit at that time, and he did the local investigation on that. You had a local FEPC which had been set up as a community agency. I forget the name of the head, but my former law partner, Dean Robb, first came to Detroit as Executive secretary for this FEPC. My second reason for coming to Detroit was to contact leaders in the labor movement to line up political support to get Congress to pass a statute to make FEPC a permanent agency. So after discussing with the agency to see that something was going to be done, I went over to see Gus Scholle. Gus, then, was chairman of the Wayne County CIO, in early 1944. After talking with Gus Scholle, and getting his agreement to write to the Michigan delegation and affiliates of the CIO, he suggested that I go over and talk with R. J. Thomas, head of the Autoworkers. I waited a while to see him. Meantime my train, the Red Arrow, was to leave for Washington, and I couldn't wait longer, so I left to get my train. Well, I was sitting down on the train when a colored fellow came through. I could see that he belonged to the, shall I say, intelligentsia.

H: The talented tenth?

C: Yes. There were not too many of us, in those days, who could afford to ride in Pullmans, so if you were, you either had to be working for the government, or something else. So as soon as he saw me, we knew we had something in common- we knew we were both members of the upper tenth. We started talking. It turned out that he was alumni secretary of Howard University. We talked to the problems of the brother, and the prospects and I noticed just across from me a white fellow - not too tall, heavy set, who was intensely interested in what we were saying. When we would smile, he would smile; when we got very intense. he would get intense. Finally, my colored brother said he believed he would get a bite to eat. So he left. When he looked over at me and said, "I gather from your conversation you're with the FEPC in Washington. Yes? Then you probably know my good friend Frank Hook?" "Yes, I know Frank Hook," I said. Hook had been a former Congressman from Michigan, and he had been appointed regional director for FEPC. The region was composed of District of Columbia, Maryland, etc. "Well, tell Frank hello for me," he said. "I'll be glad to do so, but who is it who is saying hello?" I asked. "I'm R. J. Thomas of the Autoworkers," he replied. "Well, that's pretty good," I said. "I sat in your outer office for an hour and a

half - two hours," I said. "Well, what was it, what did you want to see me about?" he asked. So then I began talking with him, telling him about FEPC. One thing led to another. Then he began to tell me of problems of discrimination in the International Union, about the knock down, dragout fight they had had at the last convention, where the issue had been, I think, the election of a Negro to the Executive Board. He was for it, George Addes, who at that time was Secretary-Treasurer was for it, but Walter Reuther was opposed to it, based on that same old argument you hear these days about not wanting to put Negroes into a special category, about wanting to employ people based solely on merit, and so forth. Anyway, as a compromise, it was agreed they would get someone at a high level, and bring him in to work on discrimination in the International Union, and that's what R. J. and I were talking about. He told me he had interviewed Bob Weaver to see if they could get him to come in. Weaver, at that time, had left the federal service for the University of Chicago, I think, or at any rate he was stationed in Chicago. That had not, at any rate, panned out, and he was at loose ends.

- H: Do you recall any other Negroes he had interviewed?
- C: No, I don't. Well, when I go back to Washington, I delivered his message to Frank Hook, and I told Frank generally about our conversation. Frank said, "Well, he was talking to the man he should have had right then. Why didn't you sound him out about your going?" I said,
- H: May I interrupt? We shall return to this thread later. You were in Michigan to get support from organized labor, organized groups, and so forth for FEPC? You made contact with Gus Scholle, and, inadvertently with the head of the autoworkers. I'm curious, what was the response of the American Federation of Labor? Did you have any reaction from the AFL on this matter?
- C: I didn't even waste any time interviewing anyone from the AFL. AFL had not shown any inclination to do anything about discrimination in war-time industries, all during that wartime period. Not only did I feel it would have been futile, all Negroes felt that way, and so did FEPC leadership in Washington. I don't think even Webster, who was from A. Philip Randolph's union, the only such union in the AFL, felt he was going to get much support from AFL on this.
- H: Did anyone from AFL, except Randolph, who at each AFL convention made a motion for support of FEPC, a motion which was invariably voted down, did you get any support from AFL?
- C: Not that I know of. OK, getting back to my conversation with Frank Hook. He wanted to know if I would be interested in going with the UAW. I told him I thought I would. By this time, I was tired of the federal service. You see, the federal service gets to be a disease. If you get to the place where all you

want is a monthly check, you stay. But by the time you reach maximum efficiency at that job, unless there is another job, or another agency to transfer to, you might as well leave.

- H: Before we talk of your leaving the federal service, I wonder if there are other important cases before the FEPC in which you may have been involved. Did you handle any of the shipyard cases? or the aircraft cases?
- C: No. I actually handled a few other cases which did not involve organized labor--for instance, the Dow Chemical Company, which was discriminating against the, was it the Mornons? Jehovah's Witnesses in Midland, Michigan, and a similar case of religious discrimination in Pennsylvania.
- H: Did you get involved in the Sun Shipyard cases?
- C: No. I went out to California in the case involving street-car operators, the Los Angeles transportation company. I worked out there, held hearings on that . . . I handled none of the FEPC cases involving Boeing, etc. I left late 1944. I was out in California, and I got a wire asking me if I would stop by in Detroit, on my way back to Washington. I did, and it was at that time he agreed to pay me as much as I was getting with the federal government, if I would come to the union and set up a program to handle the problems of discrimination.
- H: I have to ask you a question, Mr. Crockett. Have you ever reflected upon the fact that they brought in a person who was not from the UAW? There were many Negroes active in the organization, particularly in the Ford organizing campaign. Why did they bring you in and not choose a person from the ranks, as was traditional, especially since there was not a Negro on the staff at that time?
- C: Well, I would hazard two reasons. One, the internal politics in UAW, was such that you would have to pick and choose very carefully in order to get someone acceptable to both side, and who would not jeopardize your position in the UAW as a balancing factor - and that was the role that R. J. Thomas played at that time. R. J. really wasn't the boss of UAW., but the compromise between the Addes forces and the Reuther forces, with just a small force which was tied to him, and because of that he exercised the balance of power between the two contending forces. The other reason was the importance the UAW has always attached to name individuals - you're going to bring in a Negro for something? Bring in someone who is somewhat known, who has a record. I'm sure that is why they considered Bob Weaver, and no doubt, others. In my own case, frankly, I think it was a selling job which was done by Frank Hook, who did a selling job on R. J. I hadn't had much contact with labor, and wasn't known to them. My contact with labor was based solely on the time I had spent in the Department of Labor and the short time I had spent with FEPC.
- H: I have here before me an issue of the Michigan Chronicle of 6/17/44 announcing your appointment to the UAW. It not only

- identifies you as having been with the FEPC, but it says you were a member of the War Policy Division of the UAW in Detroit.
- C: Well, the UAW, at that time had a War Policy Division under the leadership of Victor Reuther, which concerned itself with issues related to the war that concerned the international union, programs to increase production, to expedite production - that sort of thing.
- H: So your first appointment, your first assignment -
- C: The War Policy Division was under R. J. Thomas, so I was assigned to the War Policy Division, which put me under Victor Reuther. You have to understand some of the internal politics of the union to understand that, too. I don't know if it is true in UAW to day - I doubt very much that it is - but in those days different departments of the international union were assigned to various of the four top officers. And you balanced it off so that an equal number of departments was assigned to each officer. War Policies, for instance, had six international representatives. Well, to balance that off, because that would be assigning it to R. J., since R. J. was head of War Policy, you would have to pick out another department which had six to give to George Addes, and another department which had six to give to Walter Reuther. Education, for example, was under George Addes, General Motors was under Walter Reuther, Chrysler was under R. J. - that's the way it worked. So that when I was a new member of the staff, and was hired by R. J., I was assigned to a department belonging to R. J., which was War Policy.
- H: I understand. Now I have before me an announcement from the UAW dated 7/144, which states that you have been appointed as Consultant on Minorities Problems to the UAW. Did this mean a switch from War Policies?
- C: No, I was still in War Policy, and was given the title of Consultant on Minorities Problems. The truth is, I created the title. I was taken on the staff - and the only way you can go on the staff is as an International Representative. Well, if I'm just another international representative, then I'm just like Horace Sheffield, and all the others. I was classified as an international representative, a representative of the international union. But you need some distinguishing title if you're going to have standing, and do the job with the local unions which you are supposed to do. So I was given the grandiose title of Consultant on Minorities Affairs - that's what they brought me in for.
- H: So you were designated on the payroll as international representative, but you did not function as we commonly understand that term?
- C: No.
- H: You did not function as an international representative, but as a consultant. This was in the last half of 1944. Now, would you describe what your functions were? And your relationships with other Negroes in the UAW in both caucuses?

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- C: Well, that's a big order. And there's a little preliminary you have to understand. When I came into UAW, I had absolutely no-- I didn't know anything about this ideological conflict between Socialists and Communists - I was just a babe in the woods. I was only concerned with one thing - I'm ashamed to admit it, but all I asked was how it affects the brother.
- H: Why do you have hesitancy about admitting that?
- C: No matter what the political shading of the individual, as long as it was good for the brother, it was all right with me.
- H: You regarded as your primary responsibility the advancement of the Negro in the union and in the industry?
- C: Right, and in so doing to advance the cause of the union, see? All right. Being attached to R. J. was very good, because he was considered to be in the middle. And being attached to him, I was able to work with both groups, the pro-Reuther and the pro-Addes groups, even though my immediate superior was a Reuther, Victor Reuther, see? I remember the first time I met Walter. Victor decided (this was in the first week that I reported for duty) that he wanted me to meet his brother. I said, "All right," so we went over to the international union - the War Policies Division was then in the Maccabees Building, and the international union was on Cass and Milwaukee. So we went over and met him; we sat and talked a while, and he expressed himself about what he hoped for for the union, and what he hoped I would be able to accomplish. And in the process he used that expression which always infuriates me, "You people - you people - you people -" So when we came out I said to Victor, "I suppose a part of my job with the UAW is to let the top officers, at least, know what they should not say in terms of good race relations." And he said (that's Victor who said that) "I know what you mean - 'you people' - and I've spoken to him several times about that."
- Well, the first few weeks I was concerned what role I would play with the UAW. There were no blue-prints here. You were just brought in cold, put on the pay roll, and told what you were to do. It was up to you how you were going to do it. They were too busy, putting out this political fire, and that political fire, to do that.
- H: Ostensibly, there was a problem, that's why you were brought in.
- C: There was a problem. All you had to do was pick up the proceedings of the Buffalo convention, 1943, I think it was, and you would see they had a problem. All right. Now there had been a man, Walter Hardin, he is dead, now, I think, who had been R. J.'s right hand man on all matters relating to the Negro in the union.
- H: Now, I understand from our previous interviews that Walter Hardin was the first Negro placed on the international union staff.
- C: Probably, with designation of international representative. Now, I think Walter rather resented their bringing me in. There was now more reliance on me in regard to matters affecting the Negro rather than on him. So, additionally, I had the problem of cultivating good relationships with Walter. And very

frequently, even though I had almost made up my mind concerning a matter, I would ask Walter to stop by and talk with me about it, and the decision would then come out as our joint recommendation. I think Walter Hardin and R. J. had come up through the same local - Chrysler 7, I think. During the first few weeks I was deciding what was to be done. And finally came the convention in Grand Rapids in 1944. And that was the first convention of the UAW I had even attended. For the first time I had a chance to sit down with all the international representatives. I had a chance to get acquainted with fellows like Bates from Indiana, some fellows from down in Ohio. And that, if you want to call it such, was the beginning of the caucus which I'm credited with bringing into being, to a certain extent. We sat around and talked about the problems of discrimination and what was to be done about it. And the idea occurred to me, "Why didn't we do on the international level of the UAW, what the federal government was trying to do on the federal level?" This was suggested to me by my experience with the FEPC. Well, very good, but the catch is how do you enforce the decision which is made. That was the big problem with the federal agency. "Well," I said, "if we have a committee from the Executive Board which really represents the power of the Executive Board, then if that Committee makes a decision, the chances are the Board will approve that decision. If the Board approves that decision, the International constitution gives the Board authority to replace local officers who do not carry out Board mandates, and appoint an administrator. And that's the best way to enforce the thing; so when I came back to Detroit after the convention, I wrote up this plan for the creation of an FEPC.

H: At this convention, the '44 convention, did you meet Shelton Tappes?

C: I had already met Shelton Tappes. When I came on the staff there was a photograph - I'll give you that. R.J. called in all the Negro representatives in order to introduce me to them.

H: Mr. Crockett, we have here a photograph taken July 29, 1944, at Webster Hall, Detroit. I would like to ask you to identify some of the leading figures in the UAW at that time.

C: There is Shelton Tappes, Oliver LaGrone, Bill Oliver, Hodges Mason who, at that time was the only Negro president of a UAW Local, Leon Bates, John Conyers, Sr.; I don't see Walter Hardin here, or Oscar Noble, or Horace Sheffield. In all, I seem to recall we had about 11 Negroes on the staff, all as international representatives.

H: So in 1944 you began to think of setting up a FEP Commission or agency in the UAW.

C: Yes. So I wrote up the plan, and checked it with President Thomas, Vice-President Reuther, Vice-President Frankenstein, Vice-President Addes. I got tentative approval from them, and then I went before the International Executive Board and presented



the plan to them. There was quite a debate because everybody was not wedded to the idea of doing anything about discrimination in the UAW.

- H: Do you recall who supported the idea and who did not?
- C: Let me say that each of the top officers I have mentioned supported the idea. The opposition came primarily from regional directors who resented the idea of anyone from the international union being authorized to by-pass them, and go into a local union to take care of a problem, or even to investigate a problem. Nevertheless we did get unanimous approval, on a trial basis. R. J. Thomas appointed me the first director of the Committee, and George Addes as the chairman of the committee, so that automatically made Fair Practices a department under George Addes. There were very good reasons for doing that. George Addes represented the so-called liberal forces as regards race, discrimination and things like that. Reuther was lined up with the conservation forces. I don't know if that was because of his own personal orientation, or whether the bulk of his support was lined up in General Motors locals and those locals were the more reactionary ones among all the locals - it was the latter, I suspect. So we got off to a start, as I recall it, with a Committee of five, only one of which was a top officer. The others were for the most part regional directors. It was centered here in Detroit. I had one person on my staff, a secretary. I insisted on having a Japanese-American as my secretary, a displaced American, one who had migrated here after she got out of that detention center; now, in the main, we were concerned with doing an educational job, doing a policing job.
- H: Were you also authorized to accept grievances from rank and file members, complaints?
- C: It was a policing job. The complaints would come in, either in the form of a letter, or a local union member here in Detroit would stop in.
- H: There seems to be some confusion. Was the form of organization a committee or a department?
- C: A Committee. I'm coming later to the time it became department. It was a committee, however, which operated as a department, in the sense that I was responsible only to a single person, R. J. Thomas, and the Board. I attended each meeting of the international Executive Board, and I reported on behalf of the Committee. I prepared a Committee report, I submitted that to the Committee Chairman, Mr. Addes. He would approve it; then I would present it as a report to the Board, a report recounting what that Committee had done during the quarter. Now, to go back to the complaints. Besides, it wasn't politic for me, not a union member, an outsider, to be coming in and investigating. So what I would do was write to the Regional Director to designate someone to make an investigation and report to me his findings. Or, if I knew there was a Negro on the staff of that particular regional director, I might telephone the director to tell him why I thought that person should go in to make the investigation, and in that way we would get our investigations done. Now, if the regional director didn't move in and adjust the situation, then the

Committee would step in and hold hearings, just like the national FEPC was doing. For instance, our Fair Practices in the UAW was the first one to tackle Dick Gosser over in Toledo. And in those days Dick Gosser was the kingpin over in Toledo.

H: What were the problems over in Toledo?

C: The usual - upgrading.

H: In Auto-Lite?

C: I can't remember - this was twenty or so years ago. We took our Committee and went down to Toledo and held hearings there. What we normally would do was hold a meeting in one of the leading hotels, call in witnesses, take testimony, just like FEPC would do - maybe not verbatim, but certainly enough to prepare a recommended report for the Committee. That would be my job, what the committee's findings were, then send it around to the Committee for approval - the same way we did for FEPC. And then, if it wasn't adjusted, bring it up before whoever was in charge of that department. If it was a General Motors problem, to Reuther, if in Chrysler to R. J. Thomas - that sort of thing. We had a similar thing down in St. Louis, and you will find similar correspondence there, asking him to designate a member of his staff, a Negro and I went down and made that investigation, myself. The classic example though, was a case of discrimination we had down in Atlanta. There was a General Motors Local down there that refused to admit Negroes to membership. There were Negro workers in the plant, in a very menial capacity. This would be 1946, early 1946. I had been receiving these complaints ever since 1945. I finally went down to Atlanta to investigate the matter. I had some assistance from the Atlanta Urban League who knew the names of the Negroes out there, and got them together. I sat with them to tell them something about UAW, its policies on discrimination, and so forth, and that since they were employees they had a right to join the union, and any of them who wanted to could become members - "here's the application, you fill it out. It then becomes my responsibility to get the union to live up to its policy." And it was somewhat touching to see them going around to each other to borrow the money to become members right there. I gave them the receipt and took the membership cards back to the regional director - his name was Starling at that time. He shared offices with the Steelworkers. The Steelworkers, however, owned the building. The first thing I noticed when I walked in the building was that they had separate drinking fountains, and big signs, "Negroes" and "Whites"; and separate rest rooms. I took this up immediately with the regional director. But he said there was nothing he could do. His hands were tied. There weren't segregated elevators because the building didn't have elevators - it was a walk-up. I do recall writing a letter to George Weaver, complaining about the situation, and asking him to protest to Murray. I brought the applications back with me and turned them over to Reuther, saying, "it's your baby now," "I was going down to Florida to visit my parents in Jacksonville.

While there I got a telegram from the Atlanta Urban League, asking me to stop there on my way back. They said all hell had broken loose there. So I came back through Atlanta and stopped in to see the regional director. He gave me a blow-by-blow description of what had happened. He said he took the applications out to the meeting of the local union; I told them of UAW policy, and so forth. They jumped on me, "When did you become a nigger-lover? What's the big idea of me taking orders from a nigger sent down here by that red-head in Detroit?"

H: Do you recall the number of this local union?

C: No, I don't but it was a General Motors plant. He threw up his hands - he had done the best he could. It was his local union - he came out of it - and they refused to take the Negroes. I said the only thing we could do now was to take the next step - to get in touch with Walter Reuther who was head of General Motors. So I picked up the telephone and called Walter and told him what the problem was, and I would recommend he come down to Atlanta. Well, he did. He called a special meeting of the local, and he read the riot act to them. I'll always give him credit for that. He said, "You take them in, or there's going to be an administrator appointed." They said, "Let's take a vote." He said, "You can take a vote if you want to, but regardless of how the vote turns out, you're taking them in." Now I don't get this from Walter, I get this from the regional director who was there. That's how you get Negroes into the local union in Atlanta. I think I've told you all the details I know on how this was done. I was back in Detroit at the time and I got a report from Walter - not to me personally, but to the Fair Practices Committee. That's about the size of it.

H: Do you recall a situation with a Braniff local in Houston or Dallas?

C: No. We had other examples of discrimination in local unions. One I like to tell about happened at Dodge 3. In those days it was predominantly Polish. I think today it is predominately Negro. But even in those days you had this friction growing between Negroes and Poles. Each year that local would give an annual dance. In this year, in 1945, a Negro delegation came to see me about discrimination in that local at the dance. And when I tried to pin it down, "What is it you are complaining about?" "Well, we get taxed for that dance, Brother Crockett, but every year they end up with a band that plays nothing but polkas. We just can't enjoy that kind of a dance." So I called in the leadership of that local. Well, there was nothing they could do, they said--you know, majority rule, and so forth. "Well, I tell you what - let's do it this way this year, and we'll see how it works. You've got enough money. Get a larger hall, and hire two bands, one at one end playing polkas, and alternate the music, see how it works out." Well, they did, and had the best dance they had ever had. That's another example of how we tried to work out these problems. And then we had a very intense educational program going on. We wrote pamphlets as "Bill of Rights for all UAW Members." We put on a poster campaign. I wish I had a set of those posters. You see, coming out of the New Deal, we had an organization of artists in New York, National Committee of Arts, Sciences and the Professions.

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You had a fellow like Ben Shahn. What I did was work out a relationship with their executive secretary, so that each one of these well-known artists would commit himself to doing a poster-of-the-month for the UAW. They would do the posters. Then each month I would go to New York and make a selection. Then we would make thousands of copies of that poster. And every UAW local had to carry that poster of the month. In addition to that, at a cost of something like \$1000, which was quite an outlay, I convinced the International they should put up an illuminated poster right there at Cass and Milwaukee, which, at night would really show up - white hand and black hand clasped at the ballot box, or something like that. It was a terrific plan and it went over very big. Then came the plan of setting up local FEPC's in each local. This was recommended by the International FEPC, and was carried out. Then I hate to keep saying I, but there was a period I had to do the thinking. Well, I began thinking about the small number of Negro representatives who were employed, and how do you go about getting more employed? Well, the whole thing is political - each regional director is allocated a staff. And he has to think of his political fences in making these appointments, all of them anxious to get more appointments. So I proposed to the Executive Board one person attached to each regional staff who would represent the Fair Practices Committee. And either let the regional director designate or appoint that person. They went for it - this was early in 1945 -- after the convention. The 1945 convention was at Grand Rapids. That's where I got the brain-storm to create a Fair Practices Committee. I met with the Board and sold the Board on the idea. So the period I'm talking about was in late 1945 or in early 1946. The Board bought the idea of doing something about Fair Practices on a regional basis. Every regional director was authorized to get someone for that. And it was my job to work with the individual directors and sell them on the idea that it should be a Negro. In order to integrate your staff, for one thing. And that's how we got more Negroes on the staff. Now, not every appointee was a Negro; in several instances they were white.

- H: Now I recall - and this becomes important in terms of threads we're going to pick up later - that among the more active Negroes were Oscar Noble, Conyers, Horace Sheffield, Bates.
- C: You've missed some - but their names don't come to me now. There was Lattimore -
- H: We're in the 1945/46 period now. Now we have been told, in the course of other interviews, that the Negro representatives did not have office space, did not give desks and telephones, and secretaries, the usual amenities of an office assigned to them, but that the Negroes met every day at the Paradise Lounge, and hung around the bar, and received their assignments every day from a telephone in the Paradise Lounge. Is that true?
- C: I think it is a half-truth. First, of all, they wouldn't have

had office quarters at International headquarters. I didn't have that. I had office quarters in the Macabees Building, on Woodward near Warren. War Policies, Education etc. were located there. The international reps were, for the most part, attached to the regional offices. You had one attached to the International Ford Department, you had another appointed by Walter Reuther. He would be attached to the G. M. Department.

H: With the exception of Walter Hardin, who was attached to R. J. ?

C: Walter didn't have any desk space at the International. Walter didn't have any desk space, period. So that would be an example of what you're talking about.

H: You're suggesting that many of them would be attached to regional offices and departments and have space there?

C: Right.

H: Nevertheless, several of the people we talked to insisted that while the whites had desk space at the offices to which they were assigned, the practice was for the Negroes to go to the Paradise Lounge, and to receive their assignments, each day, by telephone at the Bar there.

C: Well, I think there might be some truth that they received there assignment by telephone, though not necessarily at the Paradise or any other fixed place. I think there might be a lot of truth in the statement that they did not have desk space in the regional office.

Have you ever been in an insurance agent's office in the district office? You have a large room and several desks? It's like that in some union offices. It might be that you had no desk space there for the Negro reps.

A lot would depend on the personal predelictions of the regional director. A lot of them would be in my office, just sitting around talking with me. We frequently would meet for lunch down at the Paradise, and the like, and they might call from there. But in terms of having fixed assignments, servicing local unions, and the like - Negroes just didn't do that, in contrast to the white reps who did. Frankly, sometimes I wondered what the Hell the Negro reps did do.

H: Would the white reps, if they didn't have desk space, operate out of a regional or a departmental office?

C: They would operate out of a departmental or regional office; they would have desk space. The Negroes did not.

H: Some of the Negro representatives have said that the only time they went to the International was to get their pay check, and that short of that, they spent most of their time hanging around, at places like the Paradise, and getting their assignments over the phone.

How do you evaluate that situation?

C: First of all, I think that was true. They didn't complain to me, I complained to them.

I pointed out that more and more they lost contact with the rank

and file in the plant. And the more they lost contact, the more they became dependent on the regional director. So they lost their independence. "Actually you are no good as far as the Negro is concerned," I said. "You're not concerned with his problems, you're only concerned with keeping your job. Your idea of keeping your job consists in staying on the good side of the Regional Director, and frequently that conflicts with the idea of helping the man in the plant."

- H: Now, I am going to pose a fundamental question which concerns Virtually all Negro staff members in all unions, not only the UAW. That is, does the Negro appointed official, is he the representative of the white leadership, to hold the Negro in line, to squash rebelliousness on the part of the Negroes, or to handle by ameliorative measures the just demands of the Negroes? In short, are the Negro reps the ambassadors of the white leadership to the Negroes, or are they spokesmen for the Negroes?
- C: Does the line run from the boss down, or from the rank and file up?
- H: Yes. What was the status of the Negro representative at this time?
- C: Well, in those days, with one or two exceptions, the Negro representative was the spokesman for his regional director who was white, or for his department head who was white. And he did not have a difference of opinion with them.
- H: Suppose he had a difference?
- C: He was let out - he went back on the line.
- H: Were there such differences? Would you tell me of instances when this occurred?
- C: I think Horace Sheffield was one such instance. I can't tell you the specifics - you would have to get that from Horace. In those days, the three most independent Negroes were Hodges Mason, Shelton Tappes and Horce Sheffield, Horace and Shelton were out of 600 - Local 600 had a large Negro contingent, out of the foundry. They could stand up on their hind legs and call a spade a spade. No one could touch them. They could always go back on the staff of the local union, if they wanted to. So they didn't have to take all the gaff a regional director could put on a Negro representative. Horace was an international rep on the Ford staff; Shelton was not on the staff, was a recording secretary for Local 600.
- H: Hodges Mason, as I recall it, told us, very proudly that he never went on the staff, but always maintained his mass base in the local union, though he periodically accepted organizing assignments. But he always rejected offers to go to work for the international because, "no white man was going to tell him what to do." Now are there some instances where Horace did not do what his bosses told him to do, and he went back in the shop?
- C: I think so, but it has been so long ago that I don't remember.
- H: Would you continue to reflect on this point? Has the situation changed today, either in the UAW or in other unions?
- C: Well, my contact has not been too close with other international unions and Negro representatives, and not even as close as I would like it to be with the UAW. But, getting back to

- and file in the plant. And the more they lost contact, the more they became dependent on the regional director. So they lost their independence. "Actually you are no good as far as the Negro is concerned," I said. "You're not concerned with his problems, you're only concerned with keeping your job. Your idea of keeping your job consists in staying on the good side of the Regional Director, and frequently that conflicts with the idea of helping the man in the plant."
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your question, my answer is "no." Negro reps in UAW are still taking orders from their white bosses - the regional directors and the department heads - whether they think those orders are in the best interests of the Negro masses or not. If they have to choose, and their choice determines whether they're going to stay on the international pay-roll, forget it! They're going to do whatever is necessary to stay on the pay-roll. I can tell you this from personal experience-- from my campaigns. I had Negroes from international headquarters come out to my campaign headquarters. I would go out-to have lunch with them in some out of the way place and they would let me know what the score is, but why they cannot be quoted and identified as such.

H: I wonder if I may sum up, the major role of the Negro appointed official in the UAW is that he is the representative of the white union official and is to control the Negro rank and files. rather than vica versa?

C: I would agree. Unfortunately, that is true today, maybe not to the extent that it was in 1945-46, because you have to recognize the white boss has undergone some changes too. He is inclined to listen a little bit more to the Negro representative than he was in 1945-46, There will be areas where his thinking and that of the Negro appointee coincide.

H: Are you suggesting that because of the increasing political strength and growth of the Negro in the rank and file in the auto industry, now the appointed Negro official has another function to perform, and that is to represent to the white leadership, the hopes, the aspirations of the Negro rank and file?

C: Right.

H: But fundamentally the role of the Negro pork chopper is to safeguard the interests of his white boss, and if he has a choice of sacrificing rank and file interest or to safeguard his position, he will do so?

C: A good example of that is my friend Horace, who has changed a great deal. I was sort of, taken in, let's put it that way, some time ago, when Horace was having his spat with his bosses over at the UAW. This was in the last two years. When they said he had to make a choice - when they were assigning him to Washington, and he was resisting an assignment to Washington, there was a feeling of many people here that Horace had been a little too independent in asserting aspirations of Negro people, not only as concerns civic affairs here, but as concerns UAW also, and they wanted to get rid of him by assigning him to Washington. I got the idea that Horace really wanted to make a fight of it, TULC was up in arms, etc., so I made a speech identifying myself with Horace, in opposition to the UAW, and suggesting TULC close ranks, and "let's create a permanent position of Executive Secretary for some community group which would combine all these Negro groups and give the job to Horace and let him do the political organizing job we need done around



here. And in order to do it we need some money, and I'm willing to contribute \$500, and I think I can persuade my wife to contribute \$500, so here's \$1000 to get the thing started - and let's get going." I think it was only about 10 days till Horace had completely changed and wasn't going to fight the issue any more. And I had that thrown back to me in my campaign later on, that I was opposed to Reuther and all that, because I took the position I did on Horace. So that is what I mean when I say you really haven't reached a position of independence in the trade union movement for the Negro appointee.

H: Now I would like to go back to the 1945-46 period. Would you discuss your relationship with George L.P. Weaver who, at that time was head of the National Committee to Abolish discrimination in the CIO? What were your relationships with the CIO?

C: George was to the CIO and Phil Murray about what the Negro reps were to the white leadership in the UAW. George Weaver wasn't going to do anything that would out him on the spot as far as Phil Murray or Jim Carey was concerned. Jim Carey was his boss, and headed the CIO Anti - Discrimination Committee. If I remember, it was created after the UAW Committee, and was sort of modeled on it. It was made up of international officers from the different unions. George Addes represented the UAW, but he normally didn't attend meetings. He designated me as his representative.

H: How frequently did they meet?

C: Not very frequently and not regularly - quarterly at the most. The chairman of that committee was Jim Carey.

They undertook to do essentially what we were doing. They put out literature, carried on an educational campaign, but I don't recall a single instance when they investigated a case of discrimination and ordered the international union to do anything about it.

H: Was there any hostility between yourself and Weaver?

C: None, personally. We disagreed on some major issues, however; you will find at the CIO convention, in 1946, I think, I took on George Weaver, and was supported by everyone from the UAW. We, frankly, accused him of wearing a handkerchief which was a little too wide, around his head on this whole question of discrimination. There was a letter, which I drafted, which was supported by every Negro representative from UAW to Phil Murray which pointed out just what was happening as regards the increase in discrimination in CIO, and how it conflicted with the basic objective of CIO, and how George Weaver wasn't doing anything about it. I don't know whether the letter is there or not.

H: It would be very important to have it.

C: You will find some mention in my column in the Chronicle. And it was touched on by a columnist for the Courier.

H: Would you tell us of the events leading up to the convention in into a department? What year was that?

C: 1946. But there were a few events before that. For, example, you had that nation-wide General Motors strike, right after the

the conclusion of the war and the whole question of discrimination against Negroes figured - well, I can't honestly say prominently in it - I had hopes it would figure rather prominently, and that the strike would not be settled until an anti-discrimination clause was in the contract. You will find quite an exchange of correspondence between me and Walter Reuther on that. Walter Reuther assured me every effort would be made to do that. In the course of the strike I traveled to every corner of the country, north, south, east, and west, meeting with groups and speaking on the issues and talking of the Negroes' interest in the strike. So I confess to a considerable amount of disappointment in the conclusion of the strike, without an anti-discrimination clause and when Walter Reuther sent word to me that he thought the people had been out long enough and he couldn't hold them out longer just to get a no-discrimination clause in the contract. Just after that Walter announced his candidacy for the presidency of the union, and that was to be an issue at the convention of 1946. At that convention he opposed R.J. Thomas. Up until that time or maybe a few months before, I was still trying to ride the fence between these two factions, and getting chopped at by both sides for the matter; but more and more I was finding that the people who were willing to do something about discrimination by and large were in the Addes faction, and they included all your so-called Reds, besides many of your old-line Socialists. Now the Reuther group represented, predominantly, the Socialists, but, how shall I put it -

- H: Rather than the Socialist point of view it was the Socialist party point of view.
- C: The Socialist Party. I'm glad to have that distinction made - Socialist Party. Mainly theory, but not action, see? So we get to the convention, and by that time, I am a Thomas man, no question about it, I am opposed to Reuther - well, we had had a Negro caucus meeting before the convention, that was at my home in Detroit, when every Negro international representative right down the line had said "No Reuther," including Bill Oliver.
- H: Including Horace?
- C: Including Horace.
- H: But Horace supported Reuther.
- C: Horace does now, but not at that stage.
- H: Now, I want to ask you a question which is very important. You were saying at this stage, the pre-1946 convention, that every Negro representative, every Negro activist from a union with a large Negro base, was in the Addes-Thomas caucus?
- C: Well, I can't say every Negro activist. I don't know. I can only speak about the Negro reps, especially in the Detroit area. They supported Addes - they did not support Reuther.
- H: Then it would be correct to say they were in the Addes-Thomas Caucus?
- C: Right.
- H: I want to get to a fundamental point. Why were the overwhelming majority of Negroes in the Addes-Thomas caucus, not the Reuther caucus?
- C: Well, first because of the attitudes of the leadership itself.

- They felt that the things which had been done to cope with discrimination in the plants had been done in the non-Reuther plants. You had more Negroes employed in General Motors plants and General Motors locals than in any other plants, and perhaps in all others put together. But employment was in menial capacities, only - janitors, etc., only, no upgrading.
- H: Did General Motors have more Negroes than Ford? I was under the impression the biggest concentration was at Fords.
- C: I think not. And the General Motors locals were under the complete domination of Walter Reuther. He was the complete leader. Neither Addes or Thomas could say one word about conditions there - it was Reuther's bailiwick. So, given that situation, Negroes gravitated toward the top leadership which was more sympathetic to their problems - and they found this type of leadership in Thomas and in Addes.
- H: So what you are saying is that Negroes became involved in the Addes-Thomas faction not because of any ideological reasons.
- C: That had nothing to do with it!
- H: But because Negroes found a better atmosphere, a more favorable and congenial environment in the development of the Negro, and that Negroes regarded the Addes-Thomas caucus as the more effective basis for operation than the Reuther caucus.
- C: That is correct!
- H: And this represented a friendlier and more congenial home for the Negro caucus, a better way to advance the interest of the Negro. Now, I want to ask you another question: Many people say that you, as the head of the Fair Practices Committee used your influence to develop a Negro Caucus, to secure a bloc vote for the Addes-Thomas Caucus, that you very adroitly used your position as head of the Committee to develop support in the Caucus.
- C: Yes. Down to the close of the General Motors strike in 1946 I had tried to maintain impartiality in the factional fights within the UAW without identifying myself politically with either of the caucuses. Following the complete failure of Reuther to get an anti-discrimination clause in the General Motors contract in 1946 I decided the best interest of the Negro in UAW was not being served by promoting Walter Reuther to more power, but rather by promoting the opposition to Walter Reuther, and from that time on I consciously was opposed to Walter Reuther for president of the UAW. Before the convention in Atlantic City in 1946 there was an informal meeting of the Negro reps. Now you have to distinguish between these informal meetings that we used to have down at Paradise Valley or occasionally we met in Chicago, for example, with R. J. Thomas. We actually would go to Chicago and would sit down in a hotel room.
- H: Was Willoughby Abner involved?
- C: I can't place him right now. I remember, for instance we were - we didn't have a single Negro Woman on the international staff. and yet you proclaimed to the world you had a woman's division and that is one of the issues we took up with R. J. Thomas in Chicago. That is the time he told me, "You canvas around the international union and you find a Negro woman. If you agree on one, I'll appoint her." So we did, and that is how Lillian Hatcher is on the staff now. Now that is a caucus, if you want

to put it that way. Aside from that, I consciously tried to create a fair practices caucus that was concerned only with Fair Practices - that was the only issue and there were no restrictions on attendance - Negro and white attended that. The notices would go out, "We are going to have a meeting to discuss ... All who are interested should attend." For we originated that. We had one each year. We would plan that. What should we consider? What are the practices which should be corrected in local unions? We used to plan in advance - that sort of thing. All right. We get to Atlantic City and Walter decided to call an all-Negro caucus meeting to support his candidacy. Now we had sort of taken a position in UAW that we didn't call an all-Negro meeting. The brothers got together, but they got together on an informal sort of basis. But here is Walter calling a meeting of all the Negro delegates. I wasn't invited. Bill Oliver was going around informing everybody, and getting everybody there.

H: Who was Bill Oliver, at this point?

C: Bill Oliver, at this time, was recording secretary, had been recording secretary for 400, but I think he was on Leonard's Ford staff at this time. To the surprise and to the consternation of everybody, at this Negro Caucus I think, I showed up at the caucus. I wasn't supposed to know anything about it. Walter was beating his breast and telling what all he had done for Negroes in UAW, and when he got through he asked if there were any questions. And I got up and said I didn't really have a question, but I wanted to say something. So I told them about Walter's role in Atlanta, and I thought he was really to be complimented about it. Of course, I said, he didn't really have any choice. Otherwise it would come before the Board that a General Motors local was adhering to a policy of discrimination. But then, I said, you balance that off with what he has done on the General Motors contract you now have. And I gave them a history of the correspondence we had as regards discrimination at General Motors, and pointed out with respect to the Bendix contract for example which had been negotiated by Addes we had a non-discrimination clause, in respect to contracts negotiated by R. J. Thomas we had a non-discrimination clause, in Chrysler contracts we had a non-discrimination clause, in the Ford contract that was one of the first ones in which we had a non-discrimination clause, but in the General Motors contract which covered more Negroes than any of these, we had no such clause. "Now, look, let's have Brother Reuther explain that." Well, it was rather embarrassing to Reuther. But you know how it resulted. Reuther was elected. Now, the other key issue which I had to consider at that convention was what was to be done about the Fair Practices Committee in case the Addes-Thomas faction was not elected. It was something which could be abolished over night since it was just something set up by the Board. So I prepared a proposed amendment to UAW's constitution to make Fair Practices Committee a department of the UAW, so I

began preparing a campaign of my own, visiting local unions sending out letters, and so forth, pointing what a vital part Fair Practices could play in the post-war period and that was an issue to be voted on at the convention. And you will find the correspondence to Victor Reuther, the chairman of the Resolutions Committee, indicating it was going to be a resolution to be voted on at the Convention. All right, I think the Reuther forces saw that was going to be an issue, so on the floor of the convention they proposed an amendment that the Executive Director must be a member of the International UAW. And that would leave me out, since I was not a member of the UAW.

- H: Did they support the issue of constitutional status?
- C: Yes. I had really done a job of campaigning. They could really hardly oppose that. So that's how you got the Fair Practices Department as a constitutional body which could only be abolished by convention action.
- H: And this was at the 1946 convention at Atlantic City. All, right, now we come to you. What happened to you at this convention?
- C: All, right, you come to the Board meeting which took place in Chicago. At the first Board meeting following the convention they parceled out the departments. Who was going to have what?
- H: Now at this point Reuther, though he was president, did not have a majority of the Board?
- C: He did not have a majority. So at this point I get a phone call from George Addes telling me that Walter wants Fair Practices put under him. Addes wants to put Fair Practices under Thomas, as a compromise. Thomas, on the other hand wants Skilled Trades put under him, because Skilled Trades has a much larger staff than Fair Practices. I try at the expense of a long-distance telephone call to explain to them that it's not the number of staff in your department, but the propaganda effect of the agency you control. And that with Fair Practices you get a greater political return through the educational work you do, than you do with a few more staff people in Skilled Trades. Well, they didn't buy it. They took Skilled Trades and gave Walter Fair Practices. And so, Walter took Fair Practices and immediately named himself and Bill Oliver as co-directors.
- H: Why Bill Oliver?
- C: Well, for one, Bill in effect had bought the appointment by his turn tail action at the 1946 convention in organizing this all-Negro caucus at which Walter was to speak.
- H: You told us earlier, Mr. Crockett, that Bill Oliver was in the Addes-Thomas caucus. Now you are suggesting that at the 1946 convention Oliver broke with the Addes-Thomas faction to support Reuther?
- C: Oliver was in the Addes-Thomas faction in that Oliver was attached to the Ford Department which was under Dick Leonard. And Dick Leonard, at that time, was in the Addes camp. Later, Dick Leonard broke with the Addes camp and joined the Reuther group

and was elected a vice-president.

- H: But earlier, in the pre-1946 convention period, at the Negro Caucus at your home in Detroit, Bill Oliver indicated opposition to Walter Reuther?
- C: Right,
- H: But you're suggesting that he switched sides and part of the arrangement was that he would become head of the Fair Practices Department?
- C: No, I don't know about that -
- H: But one may assume that as a reward for garnering support he became director. Now, did any other Negroes switch? Did Horace?
- C: None that I know of - nor did Horace at this time.
- H: So what happens to you now? You are displaced by Oliver?
- C: I was displaced by Oliver. Now each of the top officers had administrative assistants. So I was appointed administrative assistant to George Addes. I was doing essentially the same work as before - fair practices, but on a more limited scale. So what you had was, two fair practices operations in Reuther and Bill Oliver. And then you had the other operation which was being carried on by me. So, in terms of publicity, in terms of investigating complaints, and so forth, to the extent that it was under the jurisdiction of Addes or Thomas, that is, the local union or the locale of the problem.
- H: How much longer did you stay in the UAW?
- C: Oh, my office was moved. You see, the Fair Practices offices were located down town in what was then the Cadillac tower. My office was moved up to international headquarters, I was given office space there. I stayed until, I think, late 1947, or early 1948. Do you remember when they started portal to portal law suits? It was under the minimum wage law, whether you were allowed travel time, cleanup time, and that sort of thing. All right, because of my prior experience with the Wage and Hour law, the general counsel of the UAW, who was at that time Maurice Sugar, wanted me to come with him and work in the legal department of the union on the portal-to portal cases. So he asked George Addes to give me a leave of absence from his staff to come to join the legal staff. Now UAW at that time did not have a Legal Department as such. Instead, it retained Maurice Sugar as the general counsel and he had working for him on call a group of lawyers who were referred to as associate general counsel. They would do their work; submit their bill to the General Counsel, the General Counsel would approve the bill, send it to the International Union and the International Union would pay it. So, by taking a leave of absence I was no longer on the staff of the UAW but in private practice. This was in late 1947 or early 1948. Meanwhile, when I went back as administrative assistant to George Addes, I was determined to become a member of UAW. After all, there was a possibility the Addes forces would be successful in the next convention, in which event I would then be eligible for appointment as head of Fair Practices, if I were a member of the union. So it was arranged that I would work on weekends in a garage over here on Canfield.

I would go there every Saturday, work as a janitor, clean up grease on the floor, put in rear-view mirrors on new Fords, etc. until I had the requisite number of hours to become a member of UAW. And then I was elected into membership of the UAW Garage and Mechanics Local.

I'm still technically on leave of absence with UAW. They give you a leave of absence withdrawal card when you go so you don't have to pay any dues. Well, I went in the General Counsel and worked on portal-to-portal cases. Finally, you had the Supreme Court knocking out portal-to-portal cases. I elected to stay with the general counsel's office, and it became my duty to review all constitutions and by-laws of local unions, and to approve them initially, for recommendation to the Executive Board, for that was a function of the Secretary-Treasurer. So any time a local amended its by-laws I would have to approve it so the Secretary-Treasurer could present it to the Executive Board for approval. And it was in that capacity that I made the suggestion that is followed now, that the constitution be printed in loose-leaf, with all annotations and interpretations which had ever been made by the Executive Board. That is done now, and I think it has been copied by other unions. I now drew further away from the Union, primarily since at the 1947 convention, Reuther got complete control of the Union; when Reuther got complete control, he no longer had use for Maurice Sugar, who was notoriously identified with the Addes caucus, had been for years. Maurice had a contract with the UAW whereby he could be separated completely, and be given a lump-sum payment as severance pay. I don't know how much it was. And that's what Reuther elected to do. He decided to retire from practice of law, too.

So we continued to function together as just an association of lawyers, and then came the Smith Act cases. And that begins a new series of actions which may or may not be related to the trade union movement.

- H: Before we go into that, during the period you were functioning as administrative Assistant to Addes, and you said there were in essence two fair practices departments, yours, unofficially, Bill's officially, my assumption was that there was much conflict between you.
- C: No, we hardly ever saw each other.
- H: I see, that was one way to keep conflict at a minimum. During this time did the majority of Negro reps and activists continue to support the Addes caucus?
- C: I would say yes. Through the years you had some defections. They represented, for the most part, personal interest. You take for instance my friend Bill Beckham. I was shocked when I heard that he had made peace with Reuther--was going on the staff. He had been a power down in Ohio - get his start, I think at the Wright Aeronautical plant down in Cincinnati. He was chairman of the Bargaining committee there, and a great follower of regional director Paul Miley and Miley was one of the key supporters of the Addes

- caucus. And all of a sudden, Paul Miley makes peace with Walter, and Beckham is on his staff, and the first thing I know, he's being brought up here to become administrative assistant to Walter.
- H: What did Sheffield do during this period?
- C: He went back to the plant. I don't know when he made his peace. He went back to the plant and he was elected president, I think of the foundry. And didn't he go from the presidency of the foundry to the staff?
- H: Whom did you regard as the unofficial leader of the unofficial Negro caucus in the period from 1943 to 1947? Was Tappes the moving figure?
- C: I would say yes, with some opposition from Hodges Mason - not ideologically, of course.
- H: Yes. What role did Joe Billups play?
- C: I didn't know Billups.
- H: You didn't know Bill Abner? No? How about some people in outlying districts?
- C: I didn't know them. There was a big fellow who came in from the Buick plant in Flint. Bill Bowman I didn't know very well.
- H: Mr. Crockett, have you had opportunity to review the success of the current operation of the Fair Practices Department? How would you evaluate the work of your successor, Bill Oliver?
- C: I haven't followed it very closely. But I do regard myself as a well informed individual in this community, as to what was going on in this area. I have heard very little about it - It has made little impact on me, so I would judge it has had little impact on the Negro community. You know, the stock joke in the UAW, when Bill Oliver took over the Fair Practices Department, was that they were going to have Bill Oliver sing.
- H: He was known as Singing Sam -
- C: He was known as Singind Sam, and that's about all he did do. He did little investigating, held no conferences, prepared little literature. Certainly, the few months I remained with UAW I heard little of what the Fair Practices Department was doing. Now, since that time, I think they still hold a Fair Practices Conference. But what comes out of that conference I don't know. You seldom see any mention of their operations here in Detroit. I don't know whether Walter is co-director, or not.
- H: They still have this arrangement, but I believe it is largely ritualistic. It sounds good to say the President is the co-director.
- C: It wasn't ritualistic at the offset. Walter was the director, Bill Oliver was the singer. It was originally -
- H: Mr. Crockett, when you ran for the City Council in 1965, and then for the Records Court in 1966, you made a point that the UAW was not supporting you, but that the Negro community generally was. In a rather prominent ad which was placed in the Michigan Chronicle by the Committee to Elect George Crockett Records Court Judge, 11/5/66, the headline reads, "Solidarity House must not control the Negro Community." and the ad read, "The Negro community has been handed a challenge by the UAW. Through their stong arm attempts to dump Crockett-"[etc.]



Now this poses a very interesting question. In the late fifties, or early sixties a rather significant split occurred between the Negro community and the UAW on political matters. In the mayoralty contest between Cavanagh and Miriani, the UAW and the Wayne County AFL-CIO supported Miriani, the Negro community including TULC supported Cavanagh.

Again, in the Conyers campaign, in several primary campaigns, in your own campaigns, you were elected even though the UAW endorsed your opponent, and there was some significant indication there were defections of Negro union members who supported you. I would like your views on the significance of this defection. After all Detroit is the UAW's home base, it is where UAW's big membership is concentrated. What is the significance of this, that Negroes are taking an independent path, what of the old liberal-Labor-Negro coalition where the liberals, rather paternalistically, have told the Negro how to vote? How do you see the increasing defections of the Negro as reflected in your own campaign and, generally, in the political scene in Detroit?

C: You've done a very good job of summerizing this. You see, my election was the culmination of a series of events from 1960 to 1965. Cavanagh was elected in 1961, and then in 1965. You see, UAW first began to have some measure of political control in the Negro community, because when you go back to the beginnings of the UAW, the only community-wide organization which was effective among Negroes was the Negro contingent in the trade union movement. And the leadership which was developed through Negroes becoming active in trade union affairs, was translated to leadership in the community. To the extent it was oriented toward UAW - and in many instances these Negro leaders were officers in local unions and so forth, they caused UAW to exercise a dominant political influence in the Negro community in Detroit. That was true when I came here, for example, and it has continued on down the line. Because of that, plus UAW membership in the state, UAW began to exercise dominant control in the Democratic Party. The Negro community being more or less wedded to the Democratic Party, as opposed to the Republican party, went along with this UAW-Democratic coalition. And then you get the feeling (by you, I mean the Negro) that the UAW feels it more or less has the Negro community in its pocket. It is no longer concerned with how the Negro thinks - it feels it can tell the Negro what you support and what you shall not support. And they continued to do this, down through the Miriani campaign. Well, Miriani's record on the issue which was pretty close to stop and frisk now, was so bad, Negroes would not sit still for that. When the UAW said, "We endorse Miriani," the Negro said, "This is the parting of the way," It didn't mean they were falling out, for any future elections, with the UAW. It meant that, for this elections, this was it. And so they supported Cavanagh. And as a result of that support Cavanagh was elected. Now, the next break came in the election of Conyers to Congress.

H: Now the UAW did not support Conyers?

C: They did not. They supported another Negro, Dick Austin.

H: Why do you think they didn't support Conyers, considering that his father was an old-time UAWer?

C: I don't know. I wasn't here at the time. I was down in Mississippi heading up the Mississippi project during the campaign.

- I strongly suspect Sheffield had a lot to do with it. I don't know, because it sort of split TULC at that time. And isn't that when MDELCO came into existence? That was another strained relationship between UAW and the Negro community.
- H: Can you give me other examples? I believe there were other instances, in election of committeemen, etc. within the Democratic Party. I recall reading in the Free Press about Conyers speaking at some state meeting and denouncing the UAW for trying to control the Negro vote.
- C: That was at his first election?
- H: In the past year or so. The UAW did not support Conyers in the second election?
- C: No. That was somewhat incident to my own election. When Conyers came up for reelection they decided to support Yates, also a Negro. He had been a member of the Legislature, but by that time Conyers had made such a record that he didn't have to worry about reelection. His primary concern was to retain control of the leadership in his district. And the key to that was what the position would be in respect to my own election. We had a knock down and drag out fight on that.
- H: Which election was this?
- C: When I ran for judge. When I ran for Common Council I was endorsed in the first congressional district, which was Conyers!
- H: You were not endorsed by the UAW?
- C: No-no, I know I wasn't. This was in 1965. I'm trying to remember if UAW made any endorsements. No, I was never endorsed by UAW, or by COPE.
- H: It would have been the Wayne County COPE. And they didn't endorse you? But TULC did?
- C: Yes. And they did in 1966 when I ran for judge. In both cases UAW did not. You had quite a battle in the first district whether I would be endorsed or whether a white candidate would. The white candidate was endorsed, in count of votes, not by show of hands. I was there, and I think anybody else there would tell you I had the majority in show of hands, but UAW and UAW representatives, led by Horace Sheffield, were in control of the first district at that time. In fact, it was a UAW representative who was district chairman, Marc Stepp, and Horace was COPE coordinator for the district. Significantly, right after the election - my election as judge - came time to elect officers of the district organization, and every UAW person from the 1st district was unseated. A Conyers man was elected chairman of the district, and all Conyers forces on the district Committee. That's primarily a Negro district, and that's the first time that has happened, as far as that district is concerned. Now, the UAW opposed me, also, out in the seventeenth district. Now that is a predominantly white district out in the northwest section of Detroit, where Negroes are just beginning to move out. And the same time they were having the battle in the first Congressional District, they were battling in the 17th also. And the 17th ended up endorsing me, primarily because the Young Dems, who had no allegiance to the UAW, said, "To Hell with the UAW." They got out the vote, and I got the endorsement there. And in the 13th Congressional District, which is even more predominantly Negro than the first, Diggs' district, there was no problem. I received the endorsement - I was, so the speak,

their favorite son. Significantly the UAW Coordinator, John Burton, did not actively oppose me there.

- H: So, would you say that, beginning with the Miriani mayoral campaign in the early 60's there has been a growing breach between Negro political movement and UAW political power?
- C: That's true. Now this ad you were referring to, "Solidarity House Must Not Control the Negro Community," was not my doing. This was a voluntary effort sponsored, primarily, by Negro doctors, who put in the money for the ad. But this gives you an idea of the feeling in the Negro community about the UAW trying to control Negro destiny.
- H: I notice that this ad refers to the fact that several other unions did support you, the Hotel and Restaurant Workers, the Laundry workers, the Public Employees, the TULC, Teamsters Joint Council. Why do you think the UAW continues adamantly to oppose you?
- C: I think it is a matter of personality rather than basic differences on the issues which concern organized labor. I don't think it is ideological. I think it's simply a matter of Reuther and I having disagreed at the 1946 convention, which was carried down to the present time. It's not on my part. I remember in 1946 Reuther making one of the most beautiful speeches on tolerance and good will, you could ever imagine. I think you could wake him up at midnight in the middle of sleep and he will come up with the right phrases and the right words. But you try to get him to act on that basis and you have problems. Then the whole question is, "What is the political implication? If the political implication is good for Walter, he'll do it; if not, he is not going to do it. It's as simple as that.
- H: You are suggesting that civil rights is not the top consideration for the UAW. It is simply one of a whole constellation of issues and considerations, and it does not have the highest priority.
- C: Right.
- H: Are you also suggesting there is a paternalistic attitude - that the UAW knows what is best for the Negro community, and that the Negro community should accept the dictates of the UAW on political issues?
- C: That definitely is true. I know a fellow - Leach, who is now the Wayne County AFL-CIO president, who used to be in name the Michigan coordinator of UAW. I first went over to get the UAW endorsement for Common Council and met Russel Leach, and it was then I learned that when I first came to UAW Russ Leach was a no-body, a non-entity out in one of the plants, didn't even know what fair practices meant, but by the time this conference was over he was speaking as an authority - he knew what was best for Negroes in the Detroit community. Now, he has been one of the strongest opponents of Crockett and the man had never seen me to know me up to that time, as far as I know. So he gets up on the floor and makes speeches on the Council floor, and says that UAW cannot support me because of ideological differences. Now, there are no ideological differences between me and the UAW, unless UAW has different ideas from mine on Negro liberation and Negro equality - and then there's a big difference. No, I think it goes back to Walter not realizing

that the world still moves, and that people don't harbor grudges like, perhaps, he does.

- H: Now, of course, the situation which we have been discussing poses some rather sharp dilemmas for the Negro staff of the UAW to the extent that there are divergences between the UAW and the Negro community, on political leadership. And since one of the chief functions of the Negro staff is to get the Negro community to follow the UAW line, this poses some sharp contradictions for some of the Negro reps, and some of the others on the staff. How do you see the handling this situation? This dual allegiance?
- C: Well, knowing the UAW leadership like I do, I don't think they are ready for any Negro measurable degree of independence to rise to top echelons in UAW. I think as long as Walter Reuther is top man at the UAW he reserves the right to hand pick which black man he relies on, to say "We are an integrated union at the UAW." I think it's as simple as that. I don't think if Negroes had a choice as to whom to put on the Executive Board that it would be the present member of the Executive Board.
- H: Who would it be?
- C: If you had asked me that question two or three years ago, I would say it would have been Horace. If you ask me that question today I don't know. It might be Buddy Battle. I'm not sure. But it would not be the man who is there now.
- H: Let me ask you one final question. When you were active in the UAW in the middle and late 40's there was a very strong feeling that in the union movement there was great opportunity for the freedom of the Negro. And the UAW was a very special kind of union; while the rest of the unions were going their own conservative way, the UAW was different, because of the centrality of its concern with the Negro, because ideologically it was attuned to the needs of the Negro, because of the concentration of the Negro in the auto industry and in the UAW. Now, 1968, twenty years later, how do you in retrospect, reevaluate the hopes and aspirations the Negro had for the UAW as an important instrumentality in the Negro freedom movement? How do you evaluate it? Is it important in the Negro struggle?
- C: It could be important, but it is not important. For one thing, much of the militancy which characterized the union movement, has gone out of it. The trade union movement, in its desire to become respectable, to fraternize with big business, has cast aside many controversial issues - and the Negro is one of those controversial issues in the trade union movement so they soft-pedal it. The other thing is the merger of the AFL-CIO. In retrospect, I think it was a very bad thing because I think it is the AFL policies which prevail, and not CIO. I think the conflict between Walter Reuther and George Meany has nothing at all to do with trade union basic issues, nothing at all to do with the Negro. I think it's just a power struggle. Meany stands in the way of Reuther becoming top dog in the American labor movement. So if Meany is for it, Reuther is opposed. It's as simple as that.
- H: What do you see as the future for the Negro, in organized labor especially in the UAW? And what do you see as the future of the labor movement, as an instrument for social change?

- C: I don't see too much future for the labor movement until it develops more militancy and more independence. I think one effect of the McCarthy era was more or less to cow the labor movement. I don't think it has come back, as a result of that. I think it's still afraid of being called red, labled with the brush of red, of being called Communist. For that reason, in areas where it should speak out, it's afraid to speak out. As a result I think it leans over backward to identify with the administration. It leans over backwards to say, "I'm pure, just like you are."
- I don't think the Negro wants that. I think the Negro people are way more militant than labor is, and until the labor movement develops some militancy, you're not goin g to have much union between the two.
- H: Thank you, very much, Mr. George Crockett, Jr., for this interview. Ask your question, Roberta.
- R: What do you see as the future of the Negro and the UAW, as far as political alignments in the Detroit area are concerned?
- C: I think UAW has to be slapped down a few more times. I think that's unfortunate, because in the process the Democratic party and Democratic candidates are going to be slapped down. I think that gradually the word is getting around that is spite of UAW support, without Negro support, in the Detroit area, you're not even going to be elected dog-catcher. Now, UAW is going to try to capitalize on that by recapturing the Negro support if it can. Now, the key to that is, I think, whether the UAW can make peace with the Conyers forces. I think that's one. And as of right now, I don't see a ghost of a chance. I don't think UAW has learned its lesson yet and until it does, I don't think John is ready to sit down and discuss political peace. I see a very beautiful future for Negroes, politically, in Detroit, in terms of independent political action, in terms of telling UAW what the score is and whom you're going to support, and who you're not, and in the process, telling the Democratic party.
- H: Where does Diggs fit into all this?
- C: Well, first of all you have to understand Charley. Charley comes from the old school of politicians, with a big, wide streak of conservatism. His roots go very deep. I hear people talk that they want someone very young over in the 13th district, someone vibrant like Conyers. It's one thing to talk about it, another thing to get it. I don't see anyone now, who will displace Diggs from the 13th Congressional District. I could wish that Charley would speak out and take a more positive position on some of there issues, just like John does. After all, Diggs is my Congressman. But I can't see it happening. And the Diggs family tradition is so embedded, on the lower east side, that he can afford a little conservatism, and still be elected.
- H: Do you see any hope for development of a strong, independent Negro caucus in the UAW?
- C: I can't tell you. You see, I don't know the UAW well enough. When

I left the UAW I sort of divorced myself; of course I talk with individuals who come and cry on my shoulder and tell me their problems and such - I don't have the contacts I had when I was there.

- R: Back when Horace was having his troubles with the UAW, and you were hoping that he could be set up as Executive Secretary of the TULC or other power groups in the Negro community, if he had been willing, or someone else had come along who would have so functioned, do you think that even so now, such a group would have been branded as conservative by the Cleage groups - could it have saved Detroit at all?
- C: I think it would have been a very wonderful thing politically that would have happened. My guess is that if it had happened, there wouldn't have been any room for the Cleage group. There would have been a very healthy debate within that group itself and certainly with that kind of united action at registration and making Negroes politically conscious we would have been much farther ahead than we are now. I - about the only good thing I can see about the Cleage group is that it is taking on the UAW. An that needs to be done; and that's what the Cleage group is doing. Now, it's not the healthiest thing - you see its orientation is a little too radical. I don't go along with this separatism. You're not going to have much integration right now. I think my position is a little closer to what I understand is the CORE position - that we need to do considerable work among Negroes, building pride and building strength in the Negro group, in order that we can meet on a basis of equality in negotiating with the white community. But - how shall I put it - until we can negotiate from strength, then when you begin negotiating for integration, you end up with tokenism. Now, I think that, in essence, is what CORE is saying. And to me that makes a lot of sense. What doesn't make sense is what Cleage is saying - that we always want separatism. That doesn't make sense.
- H: What is your estimate of the role of the NAACP in Detroit? As concerns the UAW and the growing political consciousness of the Negro? Is there any role?
- C: The NAACP was captured by the UAW. Whether it still is, I don't know. It was captured when Gloucester Carrant was here. Gloucester was responsible for getting Walter on the Executive Board of the NAACP. Then Walter began advocating trade union representation at NAACP meetings. At the annual meetings you could be assured of large trade union delegations. Going was financed by UAW, and that was how UAW took over quite a few of the policies in NAACP. Here in Detroit Negroes will still take out membership in NAACP. And on paper you still have your largest chapter here in Detroit. But believe me, Negroes don't pay any attention worth talking about in Detroit, to NAACP. To some extent they feel it has been captured by whites, and particularly by the white power structure. So out of racial loyalty they take out \$1.00 and \$2.00 memberships or pay for \$100.00 annual dinner memberships. My wife told me just the other day, "Well, at long last, I've finished paying for life membership in NAACP. So now we're both life

- members. But do you think we'll go to the annual dinners?  
No. I have no interest in going, and she has no interest.
- H: What do you think of the urban coalition? Do you think it's going to improve life in the ghetto?
- C: Which urban coalition are you talking about?
- H: You know, the coming together of General Motors and Walter Reuther. the millionaires, the preachers and the doctors, and the labor movement. They're going to get jobs for Negroes in the ghetto, and they're going to save Detroit.
- C: I don't think it means a thing. They will probably waste a lot of good money. I think Hudson probably knew what he was doing when he tied strings on the money, and required that they match it, dollar for dollar. I doubt very much that it can be done. I see that Horace's group accepted and is going to try to raise \$100,000. I don't think they can do it. I don't think they have enough popular support to raise \$100,000. I think the Cleage group will come closer to raising \$100,000 than Horace's group.
- R: Are you discouraged about the state of race relations right now?
- C: Let's say I'm not discouraged, and I'm not particularly encouraged. I would like to see more attention given to registration drives. I'm committed to the notion that the political salvation of the Negro, and to that extent, of the nation, is the growing political strength of the Negro. I would like to see Negroes in Congress. I think our foreign policy would be altogether different. I would like to see more Negroes in judicial positions. I don't think we'd have a problem of police brutality. Give me more Negro judges. and we won't have to worry about police brutality. These policemen take their chances. If they think a case is coming before me there isn't any police brutality. If they feel they can by-pass me and go to some other judge, they can get away with it.
- H: Are you the only Negro judge?
- C: We have three Negro judges - Davenport and Ford.
- R: Have you been able to do some of the things you had hoped to accomplish on the Recorder's Bench?
- C: Yes, but it's been on an individual basis. I haven't been able to influence my bench to go along with me as I would have liked to do. But there is a new day - anybody can tell you that. It's entirely different than it was before. If anybody comes before me, and there is any indication of police brutality, my view is very simple. You have already undertaken to arrest the guy, to try him, to punish him. There's nothing left for me to do - I'm going to dismiss the case. So all your work is for nothing. I'm not going to try the guy, I'm not going to imprison him - nothing. Just order him dismissed, period. I don't know whether it's right or wrong. I can think of all sorts of justifications for it. As an officer of the state he's inflicting cruel and unusual punishment and the only way to prevent it is to dismiss the case. But, I don't know. That's what I was telling you upstairs, that Judge McCree has ruled that exception in the Michigan constitution is unconstitutional and need not be followed. I think his ruling will be binding on the Michigan Supreme Court, and will be followed.

So that will be the end of that kind of thing. If the Detroit police hope they can find a weapon or drugs, or something like that, and that justifies illegal search under the Michigan Constitution, but of course you're not talking about labor now, you're talking about something else.