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ORAL INTERVIEW

HODGES MASON

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Interviewer. Mr. Mason, I've come out to talk with you about your experiences when you were working for Bohn Aluminum in the early 40's. The date is February 6, 1968. You are to think back to the year 1942, I believe. This is Bohn Aluminum, which was then engaged in war production? And you had only men on the working force?

M. No, there were men and women, men of both races, but only white women.

Interviewer. I see. And who was it who first had the idea of getting Negro women into the working force?

M. The question was raised in the plant bargaining committee, and the committee went on record - that we fight for Negro women to be employed. That went on each time we had a committee meeting for approximately two years. Finally we met with management on the third Monday in October of 1942. We again raised the question of the hiring of Negro women and we were told it was like a broken phonograph record - that we consistently argued for it. In the meantime, the plant and the local meetings had gone on record to stop the hiring of any women whatsoever, until management agreed to hire Negro women. We met on Monday, and management turned us down flat. They told us they had no intentions of going along. It happened, however, on Tuesday that the manager of the plant who was a fellow by the name of Fred Eaton had an engagement (?) in the plant, and I was not in my office at the time. He requested that I come in to his office that he would like to have a talk with me. I went into his office, and he immediately told me that he had quite a lengthy discussion he would like to have. He told me that they were planning immediately to hire six white women, and I immediately objected, pointing out that the local had gone on record as opposed to the hiring of women until such time as they agreed to hire Negro women. He asked me if I would be kind enough not to interrupt, that it was quite unreasonable for me to do so, for I had a reputation for being kind enough to hear a person out. I apologized and told him to continue. He said they were going to start the ?? and they would be advanced according to seniority as nearly as possible. They

would have to have their places picked, meaning they would have jobs that were light enough to be worked upon by women. He further pointed out that it would be necessary to move men to heavier jobs, and that they would need the cooperation of the union. He asked me if he would get it, and the answer was definitely not, that we were not going along. He said I had not heard him out yet, please let him finish. He outlined his plans. I immediately said, "Now that you've told me, I think I'm in a position to give you an answer. And the answer is definitely no." But he said he hadn't finished. He said he anticipated hiring six white women, and integrating women into the labor forces, and then advancing them according to seniority. I said that I knew what his plans were as he had stated them, but that I still was not going to agree, and that I would go on to the meetings and object, and insist that we would not agree. To be absolutely frank about it, there would not be any women hired in the plant. We had gone on record to that effect, and of course he knew that if we had decided there would be no women hired, there would be none. We would handle them the same way we handled the non-union fellows management brought in - we would walk them right out of the plant. Naturally, I was quite bitter. He said I still had not heard him out. I told him to go ahead. He said that what he wanted to tell me, and I hadn't allowed him to, was that they were going to hire six Negro women also. And in order to kill off the opposition to hiring non-Negro women they were going to hire Negro women first. And then they would alternate, one Negro woman, one white woman, and that they wanted to hire that Negro woman right away. He asked me if I wished to call the Committee together to get approval. My answer was No, that I could give approval. The plant meeting, and the local's Bargaining Committee had given me authority to negotiate any effort to bring Negro women into the plant. "I will approve your plan, that is, give it tentative approval, and you start the ball rolling." I will call the Committee together, and tell them what has happened, and if there are objections, I will assume the responsibility. But you start to work on it." He asked me if I had any one in mind. I told him that I knew several people. He pointed out that it would have to be a person of high intelligence, as he put it, saying that she might be used as a human guinea pig, and that it would be a bit rough. I informed him that I was fully cognizant of that fact. I thought for a few minutes, then I said I had thought of a young lady who had not been in the city very long. She was from Miami, Florida, and she was a friend of a friend of mine and his wife. She had

expressed a desire to be put to work. She was highly intelligent, and I thought that she would be the ideal person. He asked me if I had her telephone number. I said I did, that she lived with a Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Young, on Leicester, that her name was Mrs. Cole Rough. (?) He asked me to call her, and I did, asking if she was still available, and interested. Her answer was yes. I told her how to get to 3516 Hart Avenue (the present site of the Arlan Department Store) by street car. She came over for a talk and a medical examination, which at that time was given at St. Aubin and the Boulevard. She was told that it would be unnecessary for her to return to the plant that afternoon. After the telephone call, I assured him she would be there, and he said that was very good. Then he outlined his plans. He said that instead of having her start at 7 as the men do, that the superintendent and the manager were not in until 8:30, and that they were desirous of being present at the time she was brought into the plant. They were fully aware of the fact that there was trouble brewing. When she came in to get the slip to go the doctor, word had spread through the plant that they were hiring a Negro woman worker. White women workers made a bee-line for the office, putting pressure and letting them know how dissatisfied they were. However, in the meantime, as soon as I was through with him, I called the plant bargaining committee together. And when I called them together I told them we were in a position - that I had made a decision which I would like to put to them. I said that I wanted to let them know exactly what had transpired. I kidded around about it. I told them that I had agreed that management could hire six white women. There were two committeemen at that time whom I considered as outstanding; one in particular, a man by the name of Nick Swetnick, who is the best union man I have ever seen. He immediately said, "You so-and-so - you know what the plant voted - what the local voted, and I'm surprised at you." I said, "Would you please let me finish?" After I have finished, you can accept it, you can reject it. You can reprimand me, or whatever you please." But give me the courtesy of hearing me out." He said ok, to go ahead. I outlined how they planned to do it. And then I said, "Now that you're all up in the air, let me tell you what else has happened. They have agreed also to hire six Negro women." And when I said that, Nick Swetnick jumped about a foot, patted me on the back, and said, "Marvelous, now we're getting some place." I then said that they had agreed that they would hire one Negro woman as of tomorrow morning. "In fact, she is on her way now, to be examined by the doctor; and she's planning to be here

at work tomorrow morning at 8:30. Now, I told them to go ahead with their plans, and I would assume responsibility for it. I have given approval already, and it's entirely up to you folks whether you want to approve my actions or not." The chairman of the Plant bargaining committee immediately approved my move; and then we discussed strategy. I pointed out that I had assured management that we would support them in their efforts to put a Negro woman in the plant, and that we fully realized there was the possibility of a strike. I said we would like the Committee to meet at 7:00 the next morning, and that we would be on a stand-by alert. There was a Belgian on the Committee by the name of Stanley Keris. He was wishy-washy - he would talk out of both sides of his mouth. He was 100% in accord with us to our faces, but then when he was approached by the opposition, he was 100% in their corner. We had a Negro by the name of John Arnolds who was an Uncle Tom, and who consistently operated in that capacity, throughout his career in the union. We had, however, a member by the name of Dempsey Dillon (?) who took an outstanding position in favor of the action. He spoke right up in favor of it, and said that it was his thinking this should be done. The meeting ended after fellows had discussed strategy, and the committee was highly elated, and the word was spread through the plant that a Negro woman was hired, and would appear the following day. The thing spread like wildfire. Now, we might as well admit - it is necessary to digress - that there had been built up a lot of tension in the plant; and we're not trying to claim any credit, but what we would like to point out is that the fellows in the plant, the Negroes and progressive whites, consistently plugged for management's action, and tension had grown so great that something had to give. Management realized that, and that was one of the contributing factors, along with the fact that there was a shortage of manpower, and we were in a pinch. I have to give credit to the militant fellows in the plant who were insisting on living up to the contract, and to CIO policy. On the morning on which she was supposed to report, which was Tuesday, I came past my friend's house at 6:00 in the morning, and I picked her up, and parked in the parking lot of the plant, with her in my car. And I said to her, "When they are ready for you, I will come for you." In the meantime I had gone to her house the preceding night, and I had gone over it, every phase of it, with her. I told her that she might be slapped, she might be spit on, that she might be insulted in every conceivable way "If you're not willing to be used as a human guinea

pig, please do not accept the job." because this is important, and we have everything to gain by your acting right, and by your playing the role of a guinea pig properly. We have everything to lose by your failing to do so. Now I would like to know if you feel you can control yourself to the extent that you can do it. The job pays good - there is no question about it. We're one of the best-paying plants around. And the opportunity is there for you." She said that for a good job she could do almost anything. When she walked into the plant they hired her. And when they had an attendant walk with her to the women's dressing room, everyone in the plant with the exception of two, went on strike. The two who failed to do so were a lady by the name of Winnie Winkler whose position was that she would not go on strike to keep them from hiring a Negro woman when Negro men were fighting and giving their lives to win this war. Certainly Negro women have a right to work in the plant. If Negro men are good enough to go to war, Negro women should be good enough to work in a war production plant. Another young lady by the name of Marie Pachecklis (?) - she is Polish - worked with her, and she took the same view. She absolutely refused to go on strike. There were only two who stayed on their jobs. We had a number of conservatives in the maintenance division, in the core-making and core-cleaning departments, both men and women, as well as a few in the trim department, who were led by a Frenchman, whose name was Manuel View. He was a member of the Association of Catholic Trade Unionists, and he was ultra conservative and was opposed to anything progressive. He later took part in the distribution of anti-Negro leaflets in the Sojourner Truth housing riots. It happened, however, that the die was cast: they went on strike, and the women immediately went to Kerris, who said to them, "I am not the chairman of the plant bargaining committee - he is." It was obvious that he was running and attempting to shift responsibility. I met him head on. I said, "You're damned right that I am the chairman of the bargaining committee, but you are a member of this committee. I have forty-four inches of shoulder, and I can stand every so-and-so thing that is put on. I'm not assuming responsibility for your actions, however. Now when you begin to tell them who the chairman of the plant bargaining committee is, then suppose that you tell them that the action of this committee was unanimous, that you voted in favor of it the same as anyone else. You're going to assume your responsibility and I'm going to assume mine. Every member of this committee voted in favor of it and you

know it as well as I do. Is that correct?" And his answer was. "Yes, I voted for it." I said, "Then, I'm not in it alone, we're in it. I'm not running, I'm standing on CIO policy. This plant, this local and the CIO have instructed us as to what to do, and by God, we're doing it." He turned then and said, "You're so-and-so right; I'm in favor of it too." And I looked at him and laughed and said, "You're a turn-coat and you're running. You'll never be an officer in this local again, as long as I can help it, because you are playing politics, and this is a question over which politics should not be played." When the women went on strike, management came immediately and said, "What's going on here." I said, "Just exactly what we anticipated - the women went on strike." He said, "Well, you fellows said you were going to stick with us." "We are." Well, what are you going to do?" "We're not going to do anything. This plant is not on strike. These women have struck as a wildcat strike. You run the plant. The plant union is not supporting any strike and will not tolerate it." "Well, what shall we do?" I said, "You run the plant, don't you know what to do? Don't you have guts enough to run your plant?" He said, "We're perfectly willing to do anything, but we don't know what to do." I said, "Well, you tell those women that you give them three minutes to get back on their jobs. And if they don't get back on their jobs within three minutes, that they have quit. And let them walk out and I'll bring some more Negro women in here to take their places. Now we're not playing on this thing. If you take a position, we're going to take one, but we're not going to run the plant for you." He immediately got up on a core rack - I don't suppose you know what a core rack is. It's a rack made of iron, angle-irons, that they pick up on an electric truck and put into the ovens, upon which they bake the cores to make them hard enough to hold when the castings are poured; see, that was a sand (?) foundry. He got up there, and said to them, "I'm giving you women three minutes in which to get back to work. If you don't go back to work in three minutes, you've quit your jobs. Your time stops as of the time that you walked out." They came up and wanted to know of Kerris, "You're our representative. What are you going to do?" He said, "Nothing. Nothing I can do." Then they came to me, and said to me, "What are you going to do?" "Nothing, nothing at all." "Well, we're not going to." "Fine." "Well, what are you going to do?" "Nothing." "But we're telling you, we're not going to

work with her." "Then don't work with her, that's all." "Well, what are you going to do about her." "Nothing." "Well, get her out of here." "Oh no." "Well, what do you mean?" "I mean 'no', that's all." "Well, we're not going to work with her." I said, "Then don't work with her." "What's going to happen to her?" "She's going to work, whether you like it or not." The wife of the foreman in the core cleaning department, by the name of Theresa Cardios (?), immediately said, "Naturally you're going to support her because she's another so-and-so nigger." And I wheeled - I almost hit her - and I happened to think, I had been telling Mrs. Rough about controlling herself - and I wheeled and said, "Theresa, I should knock you down, but I won't because I have everything to lose by doing so. But I'll tell you this, I suppose your husband's a so-and-so nigger." I said, "Management had an order here for nearly a year. And one of the reasons they had was because he was sympathetic to the union, he was a timekeeper in here. And I told him to bring his question before the plant meeting. I presented it to the plant meeting. The core room wanted to vote upon it alone - I didn't know why at that time - but I refused to let them do it, and I had the whole plant vote on it because I said, 'This is a plant question.' They voted to accept him into the local union, extend a membership card to him, which he accepted. I found out later that the opposition which the core room had was based upon the fact that he had more seniority than any man - any person - in the core cleaning department. And he's a foreman now as a result of the amount of seniority that he had. I suppose he's a so-and-so nigger." That shut her up immediately because of the fact that she knew that that was true. She turned and went away. There were some women who were supposed to have been quite progressive who were bitterly opposed, and they had rounded up as many of the conservatives as they possibly could to support them in the strike. When they were told that the plant nor the local would support them, they very reluctantly went back to work. The news spread like wild-fire, of course, and they campaigned for the remainder of that entire day and the following day. Fortunately, the plant meeting was held the following evening, which was Thursday, the third Thursday in the month. They were campaigning to get the fellows down to get Mason's scalp and I fully realized it. I met with the committee, expressed appreciation to them for this solidarity which they had displayed, and we met with management and expressed appreciation to them for having gone along. They said that they felt that the crisis was past. Because of the gravity of the situation, I hadn't had an opportunity to even eat a sandwich that morning, and I was exceedingly hungry. We had a habit of eating in the

dressing-room and I was sitting in the shower stall about to unwrap a sandwich and eat it, when a fellow by the name of Charles Henderson came to the door, pushed the door of the washroom open - there must have been forty of us in there eating. He said, "Mason, come here." I said, "Charles, let me eat my sandwich and drink a bottle of milk, will you." I said, "I haven't had time to even eat a sandwich this morning, it's been rough." And he swore and said, "I said, 'Come here.'" I knew something was wrong, so I gave my sandwich to the janitor there, whose name was Childress. I said to him, "Lay this away for me, something's wrong." He said, "Okay." I went out and Charles Henderson said, "Get that so-and-so door open upstairs or we'll break it down." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "They've locked the door on that girl and she's sitting on the stairway crying. She can't get in the washroom." I said, "Look, the union has handled this thing so far, now let us handle it." He said, "Well, you had better handle it, and you'd better handle it in a hurry." I repeat, the tension was exceedingly high. He said, "We'll wreck the so-and-so." I said, "Don't do that. You have everything to lose and nothing to gain by it. Now keep quiet and let the union handle it." He said, "Well, handle it, and handle it in a hurry. The fellows were really mad." I went and got the foreman, Gib Smalley (?). I went to the foremen's washroom and said, "Gib(?), I want to see you. Come here." He said, "I haven't had a chance to eat; I have to eat something first." I said, "Forget eating. Come here." He said, "Something's wrong." And he got up, left his lunch, came. I said, "They've locked this young lady out of the washroom, and she's sitting up the stairs crying." He swore, said, "Come on." We went, started up the stairs to the women's washroom, and there she sat, sure enough, on the stairway crying. And I said, "Come on, Mrs. Rough, we're going to take care of this." We went in, went up, knocked on the door, and he said, "This is Gib; open the door." They yelled, "No!" I knocked on the door and said, "Look, this is Mason; open the door." They yelled, "No." And I said, "You open this so-and-so door, or I'll break it down." And they yelled, "No." I broke it open. When we walked in I said, "There's a seat right there Mrs. Rough." The woman sitting there was a big woman by the name of Frances Buhl(?). She was very, very bitter. She said, "There's no room over here." I said, "Whether there's room over there or not, sit down, Mrs. Rough." She sat down and Frances started to spread out as much as she could to freeze her out. I said, "I have something I want to say. Gib, I want this door fixed, immediately following lunch. I'm stating the position of the union. We're carrying out the mandates of the union. And when we carry out the mandates of the union, nobody's going to stop us. Now, Gib, I want the door fixed, and if this door is locked again, I'm insisting, and I'm going to

report to the committee immediately, that every person in this place be fired unless they will say who did it. Now we're not taking any foolishness about it, and I'm not asking, I'm telling you. Now that is my position - the union is going to recommend the discharge of every person in this room if this door is locked again. Now I'm saying that without any if's, and's, or but's, no reservations, no equivocations, no argument of any kind. Now, we mean that." He said, "I'm stating the position of the company. The position of the company is exactly the position of the union; if this so-and-so door is locked again, every person in here will be fired unless we find out who did it. Now that's it. I'm going and have the door repaired now, I'm not going to wait until after lunch, I'm going to have the man start at the end of the lunch period." I said, "I want it fixed so it can be locked, and it had better not be." The door was not locked. The following day she came in, they were a bit casual, a little cool, but they were not quite so hostile. They campaigned for the entire day. I knew what was happening; the fellows came to me and told me, "Those women are really campaigning, boy, they are really raising hell." And I said, "It's alright. As far as I'm concerned, we've accomplished something. And I'm not running from them at all." He said, "You're in trouble." I said, "I don't care about being in trouble." He said, "Some of your best friends are campaigning like the dickens against you right now." I said, "I'll take care of myself. If I'm not chairman of the plant bargaining committee another day, we've accomplished something. And if I have to give up the chairmanship of the plant bargaining committee for that, I want you to know that I'd rather be right than President of the United States, and I know I'm right." At any rate, we had 2900 people in the plant at that time, and there may have been 50(?) who were not present. We had a capacity crowd with them standing all around the walls. I fully realized also that there were alot of fellows there that were supporting us. At one minute of eight I took my seat and at eight o'clock sharp I called the meeting to order. The steward of that department asked me if I would like for him to make the report in regard to the hiring of the lady. My answer was, "No, it's my responsibility." I told him that I would like for him to report everything with the exception of that, and I thought that that should come under the report of the plant bargaining committee. He said, "Very good." And as a result we had everything finished, all of the reports. I asked for chief stewards' reports, the blue-button stewards - we called them assistant stewards, they were stewards in reality, but we always

called them the assistant stewards because they worked under the jurisdiction of the chief steward - we called for all of the reports, and then we asked if there were remarks by any individuals. I said this, "We'd like to know if anyone would like to have anything to say. If you have it to say, we'd like to hear it at this time. Are there any further remarks on any item. The floor is open." Nobody said anything. I said, "I'd like to stress one thing and that is that I'm asking this because I have a report to make. I'm going to relinquish the chair and I don't intend to be interrupted by anybody for any reason whatsoever, no point of order, no point of anything. Now that is my reason for insisting if you have remarks, make them at this time. I'll ask again, (and I put my hand up) are there any further remarks." No one responded, so I said, "Very well, brothers and sisters, at this point I would like to turn the chair over to the vice-chairman, Brother John Reynolds, and I would like to inform him upon turning it over to him, that I am respectfully requesting that I be permitted to complete my report without any interruption whatsoever." And I handed the gavel to him. He said, "There will be no interruptions." I repeat that John is an Uncle Tom. He said, "Before the chairman of the plant bargaining committee makes his report, I would like to again ask if there are remarks of anyone; anybody have anything they'd like to say?" No one said anything so he said, "Very well, Brother Mason, go ahead." Tension was exceedingly great and I fully realized what we were in for. So I politely arose and said, "Thank you, Mr. Chairman." Then I opened my remarks with, "I presume that you would expect me to say, 'Gentlemen, we who are about to die, salute you.' However, I'm not going to make that salutation. I'm going to greet you in the usual manner, with, 'Mr. Chairman, brothers and sisters, I would like very much if someone else would have to make this report. This is the second time in which I have regreted that I am Negro. I'm very proud of the fact that I am one, but it happens that a report of this kind, in my thinking, would be far more pleasant if it were coming from a non-Negro. But it happens that I am the chairman of the plant bargaining committee and will be until this report is completed. And after this report shall have been completed, then you will have the privilege of deciding what you would like to do. It is my responsibility, and I have never shirked a responsibility in my life, and I shan't shirk this one. Before I begin, Mr. Chairman, I would like to digress here and give to you a letter. This letter is a letter of

resignation from the chairmanship of the plant bargaining committee and the bargaining committee itself, with instructions, Mr. Chairman, that this party will understand that legal removal procedures will not be necessary. After I shall have finished my deliberations I am insisting that you ask for a vote and that you ask for the pleasure of this body. If this body votes by a one vote majority that they would like for me to resign I am hereby instructing this secretary to read this letter of resignation. Now, Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that the report that I am going to make is one with which I am delighted. I have said that it would be better if a non-Negro would make the report, but I am delighted to be able to make the report because I think we have reached a real milestone in progress. My report is as follows." I pointed out the things that had happened, and such, and then after having done that, I started summing it up. I said, "This plant, this local, the international union, and the national CIO have stated their position and I'm not running from anybody. I know why a lot of you are here. You're here to get Hodges Mason. Suppose that I inform you that I have already stated my position. The letter of resignation is in the hands of the secretary. And if you're dissatisfied with the action that not only the chairman of the plant bargaining committee, but the bargaining committee, have taken, you have a right to ask for the resignation of the plant bargaining committee or me. I cannot speak for the entire bargaining committee, but I'll assure you that if you ask. I will resign and I'm sure that the other members of the committee will resign." Nick Swetke(?) yelled, "That's right!" I looked at him and Reynolds immediately said, "Please, nothing from the floor." I said, "Suppose I state my position. I'm standing on CIO policy, and I had rather be right than the President of the United States. I have never run from anybody and I never intend to. Now that we may understand each other, I will tell you what the circumstances are. Point one, Negro men are dying, they're giving their blood, their sweat, their tears in Europe in an effort to get your countries out from under the heels of Hitler. And here you folks are taking the position of little Hitlers yourselves." I said, "95% of you are of either foreigners or of foreign extraction. And to be frank about it, your countries are being over-run by Hitler and his hordes. Negroes are dying to save those countries and here you are thinking you're too good to work with a Negro woman. You should be ashamed. To be absolutely frank about it,

you owe them something. These men have been denied the rights to work on decent jobs until the union came in, and the union has consistently fought and improved your working conditions. And now we have Negroes going to war, dying, to be told that their women cannot have the opportunity to work in the plant. No, I'm not running. And I want to tell very quickly that I am the chairman of the plant bargaining committee, and I shall be the chairman of the plant bargaining committee until I shall have completed this report. After that time you can do what you please, but I would like to inform you of this fact, that, if I am removed from the chairmanship of the plant bargaining committee, and if this plant bargaining committee is removed as a whole, this agreement had been signed, sealed, and delivered, and regardless of what action you may take, there are going to be more, and more, and more Negro women working in this plant, whether you like it or not, whether I'm the chairman of the plant bargaining committee or not. We have made progress, and we are not going backward. Now, if you feel that you don't want a militant leadership, if you feel that you want someone around whom you can wrap around your fingers, and make do what you want done, then get somebody else for the chairman of the plant bargaining committee. The important thing is that I am the chairman of the plant bargaining committee and will be until this report is completed. You can do what you please, but it will not off-set what has been done. Now you make the choice." I spoke for an hour and ten minutes. I never raised my voice at all, not one time. I found that the southerners were staddling the fence. Of course, a person that knows how to handle crowds can feel the pulses of crowds and they know just about what their reactions were. As it was, I knew that they were there for one specific purpose and that was to vote against me. And since they wanted to play it, I decided that I would play it right down the middle. At the termination of my remarks I said, "Mr. Chairman, I have only one other remark to make - one other statement to make. I would like to digress enough to remind you, Mr. Chairman, that when I relinquish the floor, that you will please be kind enough to ask the pleasure of this body, and to get a vote on it. Now my closing remarks, Mr. Chairman. I'm puzzled, absolutely puzzled. And I don't know how to solve the puzzle. I'm going to tell you what that puzzle is. I'm confused to the extent that I am unable to understand how it is that some of these hypocritic women consider Negro women not good enough to work in the plant with, but they don't consider a Negro man as not good enough to go off and go to bed with - for a price. Thank you Mr. Chairman." And they talk

about the silence that followed Lincoln's Gettysburg address. For a full two minutes you could here a pin drop. Then I received a muffled ovation. This guy Reynolds didn't want people to know that he was laughing, and he laughed out of one side of his mouth, the side that they couldn't see. "Boy, you really troubled them so-and-so's." The last remark was the one that swung the southerners into my corner. A fellow from the state of Missouri by the name of Lawton Davis when the chairman said, "You've heard the report of the chairman of the plant bargaining committee for the plant bargaining committee. What is your pleasure?" This guy Davis from Missouri jumped to the floor and said, "Mr. Chairman?" Reynolds looked at him; knowing that he was a southerner he didn't know what to expect. "Brother Davis." "Mr. Chairman, I move that we approve the action of the plant bargaining committee and the chairman of the plant bargaining committee and we give them a standing vote of confidence." A fellow from lower Indiana by the name of Joey Tymes(?) said, "I support the action, Mr. Chairman." He called for the discussion on the motion and nobody said anything. He asked for a vote, and he said, "The motion is carried." "No. Mr. Chairman," I immediately said. He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I want these people to stand up and be counted. I want a division of the house. I want you to let these people that want to vote against it, stand up and let people see who they are. I insist that you ask for a division of the house." He said, "The motion is carried." "I have a right, Mr. Chairman, to demand a division of the house, and I am demanding it at this time." He didn't want to do it, but he said, "Very well. Those in favor of the motion will please stand." Even the women stood. He said, "Are you satisfied?" "No. I want you to ask for opposition." He said, "Oh, that's right. Those opposed?" Not a soul stood. He said, "Are you satisfied now?" "No. Mr. Chairman, I move that the secretary be authorized to record in the minutes that this motion is unanimously carried." He said, "You will record it as such." I'd like to say that there were those southerners, a number of them, who came to me after the meeting and said this, that that was the greatest speech that they had ever heard me make, and that they had been anti-Mason ever since they had been affiliated with the union. But that regardless of the office for which I would run, that they would always be voting for me. And I'd like to say that they kept that promise; I never had opposition from them again. The important thing was that we took a firm position. We had

communication from as far east as Connecticut, as far west as Washington. The thing that they were asking from all over the country was, "How do you do things like that?" The only answer that we could give was, "We just do it." We have no formula, we stand on CIO policy. We have no apologies, - no reservations, equivocations, or apologies. We stand on union policy, and we had rather be right than President of the United States."

Interviewer. Were there many Negro women who followed this Mrs. Rough?

M. Yes, there were. They hired six Negro women. One of them turned out to be no good, and before her probationary period was over, before she was there two weeks, she was discharged with the sanction of the union on a question of morality. Some of the whites, the same thing. But that broke the barrier and Negro women were brought in consistently from then on without any repercussions. The important thing was that they knew that they couldn't get away with it and that we were standing on principles. I'd like to say that we later had a strike in the metal room which was composed of all Negroes with the exception of about two and they insisted that we should support them. It was a wildcat strike. We took the same position on them, that if they wanted to work they could, if they didn't want to work they could quit. We had taken a no-strike pledge and we were living up to it. I'd like to say that for the duration of the war there was not a legal stoppage of work throughout that plant, and even in the race riot of 1943 the plant had no stoppage of work as a result of the friction. The fellows came to work, and that was the manner in which that plant was operated.

Interviewer. Now, Bohn Aluminum was the first, do you think, to employ Negro women?

M. It was.

Interviewer. And after that then Chrysler, Ford?

M. Right. I understand Ford was next in 1943, and then Chrysler.

Interviewer. Well then, that was really a landmark, wasn't it?

M. I think it was, but I repeat that I'm not trying to take any credit. I think the credit goes to the militant people in the local union and particularly in the plant. I'd like to say that our plant, Plant No. 2, at 3516 Hart Avenue, was the backbone of Local 208. I notice that you have one of the old Four Facts(?) stipulating that we had the strongest union in the country; and I think we did.

Interviewer. What were the years of your presidency there?

M. '43 to '48.

Interviewer. So taking this risk as far as popularity was concerned turned out to be just a great boost for you really and you quickly went into the presidency after that?

M. No. I could have been the president earlier, but I felt it wasn't necessary. It wasn't a matter of taking a risk, it was a matter of taking a position that I thought was correct. And frankly, at the time that it was taken I thoroughly understood that it was a matter of a fight to the finish, and the only thing we did was gird for it. I wasn't trying to be popular, because, to be frank about it, I didn't have to be the president of the local. I thought the important thing was to accomplish what we accomplished. And that was the aim. We wanted to have it said that we had a local union which stood on CIO principles, and that's what we did.

Interviewer. So if you had known that it would mean that you would not be president, you would still have done just exactly the same thing?

M. If it had meant that I wouldn't have had a job, or if I would have died, I would still have taken the same position. I don't sacrifice principles under any condition. I take a position for the right, and regardless of the consequences, I stick to that position. And I'm not indulging in braggadocio; that's my position, and I'm saying it very modestly.

Interviewer. Was the next big struggle for upgrading?

M. Yes, the next struggle was for upgrading. This fellow Frenchy View - Manuel View - that we talked about, when we started in upgrading Neg led the fight against it, and threatened to close the plant down. But we still upgraded them in the core room, in the foundry, and in the trim room. I'd like to say that the fighting that was done in the union, I think made a much bigger, a much better man out of me. I think I was compensated to some extent for having failed to complete my college education. I myself making up to my mother who struggled to see that I would have a chance...