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THE 20th CENTURY TRADE UNION WOMAN: VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Oral History Interview

with

FANNIE NEAL

American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations

Committee on Political Education

by

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Program on Women and Work

Institute of Labor and Industrial Relations

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VITAE

FANNIE ALLEN NEAL

Fannie Allen Neal, a great-grandaughter of slaves, was born in Montgomery County, Alabama in 1919,and raised on a plantation where her father was a sharecropper. In 1929,after her father's death and a major flood that devastated some of the rural areas, the family moved to Montgomery where all of the family members worked to survive the Depression. Much of Fannie's youth was spent trying to get an education. She walked eight to ten miles each way to the rural schools,and worked as a domestic during her teens to earn money for night school classes at Alabama State Normal School in Montgomery. There was no public high school for blacks in Montgomery County at that time.

In 1942, she went to work at Reliance Manufacturing Company, a shirt factory, earning 25 cents an hour to start. During her seventeen years in the factory, she held many jobs, including being the first black woman in the cutting room. Ms. Neal was one of the first to become active in organizing a union in her plant, an election that was overwhelmingly won by the Amalgamated Clothing Workers Union in August 1945. As a leader of the ACWA, Ms. Neal also became active in the Montgomery Central Labor Council and was an elected offical of her local union, the city council, and the Alabama State CIO Council. The labor movement was the most important part of her life.

During the fifties and sixties, Ms. Neal was very active in voter registration drives throughout the South, in the Montgomery Bus Boycott, and in other aspects of the civic rights movement. She worked on the campaign committees of a number of political candidates. Following years of political organizing in her region for the labor and civil rights movements, she was asked to join the staff of the AFL-CIO in 1962. Ms. Neal is currently on the staff of the AFL-CIO Committee on Political Education.

INTERVIEW WITH FANNIE ALLEN NEAL

Conducted by

Marlene Rikard

The following is an interview with Fannie Allen Neal which took place at Samford University on May 27, 1977, conducted by Marlene Rikard.

Rikard: Mrs. Neal, I'd like to start by getting some information on your family background, going back about as far as we can. I don't know how far that is, but, for instance, the names of your grandparents; where they were; what they did--or, further back, if you can.

Neal: I am the great-granddaughter of Washington McCloud, who was a slave. He was owned by the master whose name was Mr McCloud. I don't know his first name. My grandfather was the father of 17 children, and I'm sorry, but I don't know the breakdown now and the sex, but he was a very strong man and at the end of slavery, the master gave my grandfather 60 acres of land. This land was to be our property and we were told that it was never to be sold.

My grandmother was born two years after the surrender and her name was Mary McCloud. She grew up . . . She finished the second grade, but she was a school teacher because she went through the Blueback Speller and she was qualified to be a school teacher. I believe that she was a very excellent teacher because she really helped us in our lives and in our early childhood in learning to read and to spell and do things like that. My grandmother was a very strong woman, except that she <u>was</u> a woman, and regardless of how strong we are, sometime we are taken advantage of. She is now passed, of course, but she was a very good student because she knew the Bible from back to back. She read it--I don't remember how many times--several times. She was able to quote any part of the Bible and you could ask her who said such-and-such and she could tell you, "John. . ." and such-and-such verse. She was a smart woman, I think.

When she was about 17 or 18 years old, a very unfortunate thing happened to her. I guess you wouldn't really . . . Today, we can't conceive of something happening, but you can imagine a black daughter of an ex-slave. You can imagine the work that they still had to do and all. So, one of my grandmother's responsibilities--as she told us--was that she had to go into the woods after they had worked in the field all day, and just before night they'd have to go into the woods and round up the cows to bring them in so that they could milk them. Each one of them had certain areas that they covered, I suppose, and one afternoon this master's son, who rode his horse through the woods and everything, and he took advantage of my grandmother under a Chinaberry tree and this was where my mother was conceived.

I guess if we were people who had not been brought up by a very strong mother, we cculd be bitter because my grandmother taught us many things--not to trust people because they were no friends to you; that they would take advantage of you--and things like this. On the other hand, my mother was a very strong person who said that you got to have faith and you got to trust people because you can't go through the world with bitterness. I guess that was. . . .

Rikard: So your grandmother was . . .

Neal: My grandmother did play a great role in our lives. She made a marriage though, a man named Mr. Huffman--Amos Huffman--and they didn't ever have any children, but, oh, my grandmother had another child who was a son--Uncle George--and the same man did her the same way when my mother was two years old and another child was born whose name was George. I think my grandmother said that my grandfather went to the master and told him that if he bothered my grandmother again, he would really kill him--physically kill him. I don't think he bothered my grandmother after that anymore.

Rikard: But that second time was after she was married?

Neal: No, I think both the kids must have been born before she really married, but then she did marry this man named Mr. Huffman. We never really knew him because he was gone before I came along, but my older brothers knew him. I don't know what kind of person he was because my grandmother was the leader there. She did all the work in the fields. She plowed; she hoed; she planted, and she did everything. Grandpa Amos stayed home and he cooked and he washed and he ironed. (chuckles) It was just a reverse role of what my concept of what a woman's role is versus a man's role. This is kind of comical . . . I don't remember the year, but they said that sometime Uncle George had grown up and he had

moved to New York and he came home and Grandpa Amos said to Grandma, "You know Margh, there ain't no sugar here." And Uncle George just couldn't stand it. He ran Grandpa away 'cause he said, "The idea of a man telling his mother who had been working in the field, when she came home, that there was no sugar, and it should have been his responsibility to make the way." This was more comical, but. . . .

Then, in 1931 or '32, I never shall forget, he came back to Montgomery. He went to Kentucky, I believe. . .Lexington, Kentucky, or Lexington, North Carolina . . .I don't know which, but it was a Lexington. . . .and when he came back, my grandmother was so happy! They sat on the front porch in the swing and they laughed and they talked and they laughed and they talked. By this time, I was just a young lady, but I could realize what it meant to my grandmother to have her husband again, and I thought . . .I still think it was a little cruel, but I probably would have done the same thing. But I think it was cruel for Uncle George to run him away, knowing what he meant to my grandmother.

As I grew up, my grandmother lived near us on a plantation that was owned by a man named Bibb Folmer. This was in Montgomery County, but my grandmother played a great, great. . . She had great influence over her grandchildren. Maybe we liked her because she always said that we should never be sick because she liked "shinny", she called it. That's whiskey. Some people refer to it as "white lightning" or something, but in those days, my grandmother referred to it as "shinny".

Rikard: S-h-i-n-n-y?

Neal: I guess. (laughs) "Shinny's" all I know, but I know if we had a cold or we were feeling bad, she always made us a "hot toddy" and so we always liked to hang around her because she'd put sugar and all this in it and she'd give us a drink. I guess this may have been one reason, and also my mother had a lot of children and so grandmother loved us all very dearly and grandparents really let their grandchildren get away with murder. But I shall never forget when my daughter came along later in my life and I got terribly frustrated and I was all mixed up because I had been to church and I had heard ministers preach about Heaven and hell and all these kinds of things, and I shall never forget the Sunday I went home because I had envisioned hell. . .I had envisioned myself as dying and falling into a pit, sort of, and the devil was going to take a pitchfork and pitch me into a burning fire and all this kind of stuff, and I was quite emotional about it and I wanted to know more about it and I asked my grandmama if she really thought there was a Heaven and a hell and everything. So, grandma hadn't gone to church that day. She had had her a couple of drinks and she said. . .My kid was just about a year

old and she was sitting on the edge of the steps and my grandmama just looked at her and she thought for a minute, and then she said, "What do you mean?" Then I told her how I felt about how I had envisioned the devil in my thoughts and his pitching me into a fire, and so she said, "You see that youngun' sittin' on them steps?" And I said, "Yeah," and she said, "Would you take her and throw her into a fire?" And I said, "Grandma, you gotta' be crazy! You know I wouldn't burn her!" And she says, "Well, hell, you ought to know if you wouldn't burn yours up, God ain't gonna' burn his up!" So I thought that was. . .and it really changed my way of thinking because I am now able to want to be good and want to do good for people and my fellow man, but not to get so hung up on just dying and going to hell. So I give a great deal of my smart, I guess you could say, if I have any, to my grandmother on my mother's side.

Rikard: How long did she live?

Neal: (laughs heartily) Listen, as far back as I can remember, grandmama was 75 and when she died, she was still 75 (laughs again). We estimated that she must have been 89 or 90 years old when she died. She was about 18 years older than my mother and my mother was born in '83, so that would have made her. . .She was born about two years. . .she was born about '65. That's when she was born, so that would have made her, you know, live to be a ripe old age. She lived until 1948 or '49.

Rikard: And all this time you all were in Montgomery County?

Neal: Well, I'll have to tell you a little bit about. . .No! See, my grandmother and her family were from Pike County, Alabama, and lived at a little place. . .Oh, my goodness! I can't tell you where they lived because it was so far over in the woods, (chuckles) but the nearest postoffice was at Orion, Alabama.

Rikard: Orion?

Neal: O-r-i-o-n, Alabama, which is in Pike County.

Rikard: That's where the land was that was given to them?

Neal: Uh huh. That's where the land was that was given to him was recorded, in the Pike County Courthouse in Troy.

Rikard: How, then, did you get to Montgomery?

Neal: Well, my mother and my father were married in 1900, I think, and then to this union, these kids started coming. I understand that my mother's first child was a little girl who had crib death. This is what we call it now, but I can't think of the word mama used to tell how a child died in its sleep, you know, when it was

a healthy child. After that child passed away, then my mother had a son named George and she had five sons right, you know, just two years difference. . .two years and some months difference in all of our ages. And uh. . .they lived in Pike County and they also lived in Crenshaw County because, you see, my father's people sort of came from Crenshaw County. I'm going to get it together so I can tell you a little bit about my father and my father's people because it was a very interesting history. I know the immediate people of my father's family, but the grandparents were dead before we came along and I didn't know them.

Well, anyway, my mother had 11 children. I don't know how many miscarriages she had, but I know she had 11 children and 10 of us lived and they moved from Crenshaw County into Pike County and so some of the kids were born in Crenshaw County; some was born in Pike County. Then, I think after the fourth son, then mama and them moved to Montgomery County, but we were as close to the Pike County line as from here to the street and this is where my brother Joe, my brother Selma, my sister Dorothy, and I were born. We were born in a log cabin. I used to go back when I was a kid. My great aunt and my mother's cousin, who was like a sister to her, lived very near where we were living. Aunt Lujenia and Uncle Jim were really good to us. They owned a plantation. Uncle Jim bought the McCloud place later in life and I wish I could tell you all about that, but I played in the house that was the master's house at one time and lived there with my Aunt Lujenia and my Uncle Jim, who were my great aunt and uncle, and they could tell me so many stories about when the master was living there; what happened and things like that. I was the last child born in this log cabin and this was when my father migrated from that part of Montgomery County toward the City of Montgomery and we lived out the Washington Ferry Road, and we always referred to that as "down by the riverside" because we lived within a mile of the river and every year, when the high water would come, we'd have to. . . . We should have moved out, but papa wouldn't move us. He'd just stay in there 'til the water come all up around.

Some of the early things I can remember about high water was that we used to stand on the porch and fish! (chuckles) The water would come right up, you know, close. Mama wouldn't let the smaller children go in the yard because she could see the snakes and everything that had run from the water and she was afraid that we would get snakebitten. We always said we lived "down by the river" and uh. . . .

Rikard: Sometimes right <u>in</u> the river!

Neal: (laughs) Yeah, right <u>in</u> the river when it would overflow. My father and mother moved from down near Orion up to Montgomery in December of 1919. This was when I was a month old and we lived at this place--this was where Bibb Folmer owned the plantation.

I don't know if I told you or not that my father was a share-cropper. Nobody . . . nobody knows the life of a sharecropper except the sharecrcpper himself and his wife and his kids because they are worked to death. In the end, they are the ones who still have nothing . . . nothing. . .

Rikard: Who was he working for?

Neal: Bibb Folmer who was frcm Pike County. Now I don't know about the plantation where I was born . . .if this plantation belonged to Bibb Folmer or not. It probably did because they were. . . . It might have belonged to Fox Henderson, but these are big names that just come to my mind. And then it might have belonged to some of the McCloud family. I don't know whose place we lived on when we were there. But then when we moved up here I remember very distinctly because my father started us working as socn as we could walk good. (laughs) If you could walk, you had duties to do, just about.

I shall never forget, when I was about five years old, we were setting our sweet potatoes and because I couldn't get the stick right to push the potato . . .uh. . . what did we call it? . . . uh. . .well, the potato vine into. . . Do you know how you trans-plant a potato vine?

Rikard: Uh uh (negative).

Neal: (chuckles) Well, anyway, you bed potatoes and they grow up and everything and then you get them and they call them "slips", or something like this, and you take those and you just take a small piece and you just stick them in the ground. My father had a stick that he would. . . I mean he would plow the earth and everything and prepare the rows, and then when we would go to stick them out, we would have to have a stick to make the hole and it had a little fork in it and if you could put it on there right, it wouldn't cut the potato vine. But if you didn't put it on right, then you would cut the potato vine, and I remember this. My father was whipping me to death because I continued to cut the potato vines and he had shown me and shown me, and I still couldn't do it. Or, perhaps deep down inside, I really didn't want to do it.

Rikard: How old were you then?

Neal: (laughing) Five years old. Of course, he didn't really send us to the field, but we had to set out sweet potatoes. We had to work in the garden and plant the garden and things like this. So, by the time you were seven, you were going to the field and working in the field. Unfortunately, between my seventh and eighth birthdays, my father died. I was almost eight years old because he died in October. This was in 1927 and times were lean, but

they had been lean to us all of our lives! And I never knew that Santa Claus brought anything to a child or to anybody. . . I never knew they got anything except one apple, one orange, some nuts and raisins, so help me! And I didn't know any difference until 1928, and this was after my father had died. I don't remember this, but they said that my father had a light stroke sometimes before. . . maybe after my brother Mose was born and he's next to me. I think he was born in '22. . .'23. Then he got allright and everything, and then I don't know what happened during that span, but it was almost four years before another child came and that was my youngest sister whose name is Clara and whom I love very, very. . . . I love all of them, but I guess perhaps she's the closest to me I guess. And I shouldn't say that because, really, we are a very, very close-knit family. She was three months old. . . She was born in July and my father fell with a stroke on a Sunday morning. He had been out cutting some wood. . .sawing wood with my brother Selma who's just over me and he started in the house and he fell on the porch and he had the stroke. On Tuesday he died. It was very emotional because here mama was with ten children--nine of them still living in the house with her--and no father. I had one brother named Tyree and he was the most loyal, and I would say this anyplace. He was the most loyal brother that we had because until death he <u>really</u> looked out for his sisters! And not just the sisters but the brothers, too. He was loyal to us all. But he was away at school at a place called Calhoun Colored School. This was in Lowndes County, Alabama. It wasn't at Hayneville, but anyway, it was in Lowndes County. When they got word to him that my father had had a stroke, he started leaving the school running and this is at least 30 miles, I suppose, from where we lived because he would have to come to Montgomery and then come back down into the woods where we lived. A man named Mr. Brown who was at the school picked him up and carried him and helped him get on the train to come home.

But when my father died, my brother James, who was the oldest living at home and who is still alive, and my brother Tyree who passed in '63, and my brother Fred who lives just outside of Montgomery now and is retired. . .but they ran to mama and they just hugged her and she was just very emotional, and they said, "Mama, you don't have no companion, but <u>we</u> will be your husbands." It's very touching, even now to think about the sacrifices that my brothers made for mama and--as they refer to us--"the children".

So, my father died on Tuesday and we buried him on that Thursday, but we carried him back down to Pike County where his mother and father was buried. When we got back to Montgomery, we stayed in Montgomery with relatives--my older brother George and his family and with my aunt and very close friends--until Monday morning. And when we got back down on Monday morning, the barns had been nailed up where the corn. . . . You see, at the time when my father

died, he had just laid his crop by. He had dug the sweet potatoes. He had done everything and we had lots and lots of cows and hogs and chickens and all these kinds of things. And this man who owned this plantation--either he or his supervisor, or whatever it was--had been there. They counted the chickens out and they counted the hogs and they had branded the cows and done all these things. What hurt us, I think, more than anything. . . . hurt me when I grew up and found out all this had happened. . .was the idea of him nailing the barns up with the peanuts in it and with the corn in it and with all of these things because he didn't know if we had food to eat or not. And then when mama got back that Tuesday, he came and he said that he was sorry that papa died, but she was very fortunate because he made almost enough to clear his debt. You see, he had worked mama and every child that was big enough to go to the field. I was eight and mama had this little baby, so she would not leave this little baby at home with me because, at that time, I resented my younger sister and my youngest brother because I had a complex. I don't know why but I guess I was the baby for such a long time so that when they came along, I was just absolutely jealous of them and the greatest thing that God ever did for me was to help me overcome that because by the time that my father really died, I wasn't jealous anymore.

Anyway, my sister Dorothy and my brother Selma. . .Let's see, there was Dorothy, Selma, and me, and Mose and Clara. . .There were five of us still at home, which meant he had four kids in the field with him and my mother and himself. . .and for the man to have the audacity to say he made "almost enough" to clear his debt. Well, we had never known anything but vegetables that mama. . .that we raised ourselves and things like this. For flour, papa bought flour 25 pounds at a time, I think. . .meal maybe, and rice, but the rest of the things. . .and so we never knew what new shoes and all this. . .We caught what the other one had or somebody would give us something, you know.

After my father died and this man came to see mama and said that he made "almost enough" to clear the debt, he said, "But you can stay on and I will advance you money if you will sign this contract." But see, my mother went through the seventh grade, so she was really. . . . I would put her up with anybody that had finished college (chuckles) now because you may be teaching more at college now, but my mother was a very. . . . She used that that she had. But anyway, she said that she saw her boys' names on it and she refused to read any further because she decided that he was trying to say that she could stay on if she was gonna' keep them there to run the farm and she was not going to assign her children back into slavery. She said that, no, she wasn't going to sign it and he got very indignant and everything and said that he wanted his house and he wanted this, that, and the other. And when he was going, he said, "Now don't be trying to steal this, that, and the

other." My mother was an honest woman and she said to him, "Surely you wouldn't send me away from here with all my children when we have made this, without something." So he gave her, seems like, a hog and a pig and he gave us a cow, I believe. But that's all. And I'm sure he knew. . .I don't know, but I'm sure we had chickens. But if it was left up to him, there might have been a rooster and a couple of hens, but I just can't remember, really, that vividly, but the story went out of what had happened and how this man was treating mama with all these kids and so a man named Bob Carter, who was a black man (chuckles), and everybody said Mr. Carter was the meanest man in the world (laughs). . .but he sent word that he wanted to talk to mama and her boys. And so he said that he had some houses, but they weren't that good, but we could live there and his land was very poor. It wouldn't make anything, you know, but at least we had shelter over our heads.

My brothers also worked at a gravel pit and then after papa died they didn't farm. They didn't try to farm and they went to work at this gravel pit. I think it was Montgomery Gravel Pit. But anyway, they didn't make very much money and whatever they made they always brought it home and gave it to mama and then she was able to feed us. I really don't know if we had to pay rent to stay on Mr. Carter's place or. . . . I just don't know what happened during those years, but during that year I went back down to Pike County and my brother Selma and I lived with a cousin of my mother's whose name was Clara Allen. By the way, my father was Jonas Allen and my mother was Lilla Huffman Allen. Of course, Cousin Clara was also the granddaughter of Wash McCloud and she and my mother were very, very close. When papa died, she really tried to get mama to give her some of the children because God didn't bless her with any and mama wouldn't give her children away (chuckles). But she did let two of us stay with her. We went to school there. I went there for two years.

Then, in 1929--and I always thank God for the flood of '29 because this was when the water came up and everybody. . . . The Red Cross was giving people a lot and everything. Of course, my brothers had heard that the water was going to rise and so they had gotten mama and the children out when we could still, you know, ride out. I think my brother George--he worked for some very rich people in Montgomery named Gerson--borrowed their car and came down there and got mama and us and carried us up to the city where we stayed. Well, the water came so high--Mr. Carter's land was low land--that it came on up in the house. I can remember the house sat on real tall brick, you know. We'd have to go up tall steps to get in the house, but in spite of that, the water went up in the house. My brothers put the mattresses. . .just packed stuff all up and they took it and put it in the loft of the house in order that it wouldn't get ruined with water. Mama had a machine and that water came up to the very top of that machine and this shows

how high the water really came inside the house. And we never had to move back to the country. When they did salvage the little bit they could out of that, we never went back to the country. We moved to town!

Rikard: And you liked that?

Neal: Well, that was progress because at this time I was back down there and I was going to go to school down there. It would have meant that I was going to walk five miles to school and five miles back. That's a long ways to walk to school. But in my father's lifetime, in the first year I started to school, I walked ten miles. . .between eight and ten miles to school and eight to ten miles back home.

Rikard: This was when you were in the first grade?

Neal: Uh huh, my first. . .Well, we had the primer. (Telephone interrupts train of thought here.)

One of the fallacies about busing was that during this time--back in 1927 when we were walking to school--the bus was passing us with these white kids on the bus and they were throwing trash and everything out of the bus windows at us and calling us all kinds of names and everything. Sometimes they'd force us off the road into the ditch because at that time there was no paved roads--no way, down in those woods, you know. But this is one of the things that I have to just. . . . I laugh at 'em now when they raise all this about busing because busing is new to me! But it's not new to our system at all.

Rikard: That's right. . . Now you went to school first in Montgomery County and then you went to live with your aunt. . .or with a cousin?

Neal: Um hum, a cousin.

Rikard: And so you went to school in Pike County?

Neal: Um hum, at a place called Pine Grove. Oh, that was the name of the school--Pine Grove School. It was at Ansley, Alabama.

Rikard: And then you moved back into Montgomery?

Neal: Well, see, my mother and my other family, except for brother and me--my brother Selma and I--went to school down in Pike County a couple of years because we went immediately after papa died and we finished that year out down there. Then the next year. . . and then the next year, mama brought us home because we had, at last "arrived". We had gotten out of the country (laughs).

You know. . .in those conditions. But I must say the conditions in the city was almost as horrible, and I guess, more frustrating to my mother and my older brothers who understood and had to assume responsibility. We moved in a house that we were renting and, oh, times were hard! I can remember. . .This must be about 1929. I believe it was in like January or something when that flood came. There was no money hardly. . .no money, and so we were just barely eating and paying the little rent. We had no lights and no inside toilet or anything like that.

We lived there for a period and then I don't remember how it happened, but some way or another we started buying a house. I think the total cost of the house was $400 or $500 (chuckles) and we were gonna' pay maybe five dollars a month or four dollars a month, or something like this. . .I mean on the note. You know, we had to move because we lost the house. . .couldn't pay that!

My mother was a very proud woman and grandmother was living with us at this time. After that last flood, grandmama went back to the country down where she was living when papa died. She didn't move away when we moved away. He let grandmama stay. We would go back down there and spend summers and things with her, but then she really was getting kind of old and feeble and we didn't have any way to get down there and see about her and get back and all. Then she got sick or something and we brought her to town and then we moved her on to town with us. So here was all of us living in three rooms and the kitchen! And with no water, no bath, no lights.

Anyway, when the Depression was declared--the <u>national</u> Depression was declared. . . .You gotta' keep in mind that we had never known anything but a depression (chuckles) and then they were interviewing different people. You know, you could go and put in an application to get on "relief". I think that's what they called it. . .to get food. We were never even able to get on food because, number one, they had something called "old-age assistance" or something like this that my grandmother could have possibly been entitled to, but grandma said she didn't want no hand-outs. She had ten chillun'. (chuckles) But really she only had one child now because my uncle had passed away. She didn't have anybody but mama and all those other kids. And when she told about where he was working at the gravel pit, and so-and-so's working such-and-such a place. . .but when they put it all together, we'd have maybe a total of six dollars a week. . .or seven. . .maybe. The boys worked. . .the young men worked and they were entitled to have a little something for themselves.

And I remember back in this time when. . .I may be just wavering around. . .but my brother Fred. . . .and this really brings tears to my eyes when I think about it now. I remember they would get up

around 3:30 in the morning and they would have to walk back down in the country to work because they didn't have any money to pay anybody to ride. So, when they would get paid, they would bring the money home and they'd give it to mama and then mama would give 'em a quarter or thirty-five cents or something like this. But this particular payday when Fred brought his money home and gave it to mama, she said, "You take this money and go buy you some shoes, 'cause you need some shoes to wear to work." Well, in the meantime, I needed shoes to go to school, and he said, "No, mama, I'll put some pasteboard in the bottom of my shoes and you buy Fannie Mae some shoes." And when I think about it now, it almost tears me to pieces and I just couldn't stand. I would go hungry, rather than to know that he was hungry today. I would do without and let him eat. But I would do the same thing for any of my sisters or brothers. But I think all of us feel the same way about one another.

Rikard: Well, your brothers were able to find some work during those years?

Neal: Um hum. If both of them weren't working, then one of 'em would be working. At one time it was so bad that the man would let one brother work one week and the other brother work another week to divide it up. But in the meantime, we were never able to get any assistance. Even my mother was not able to get any assistance because we had somebody in the house that was working and they never looked back to see how many mama was trying to feed or anything like that. But our system has always been that often those that really need don't get, because if anybody needed, mama did.

Aw, she had a lot of pride. She tried to get work, but now this was enough and they would not give her work down there. And my brothers, having been told so much by my grandma about people, they swore and bedamned if they would not let their mama go out and be a domestic or anything like that; that <u>they</u> would work and they would do for mama and do the best that they could. She could not go out and seek work. We did have some--what they called at that time--"bundles" and used to wash for people and we would bring things home like that. We'd have to wash and iron and then carry the clothes back to the people.

Rikard: You don't remember how much she got paid for working like that, do you?

Neal: One lady paid her thirty-five cents a week to wash and to iron and she furnished her own soap. I really don't remember, but with all of 'em put together, we wouldn't have two dollars 'cause they were just small bundles.

Rikard: When you lost your house you were trying to buy, where did you move?

Neal: We moved right around the corner into a rental house. I don't know how we got the money for the rent but. . . I think what happened was that the house note had just gotten so far behind that there was no. . . . Plus, you see, by this time the family had grown. My brother Tyree had gotten married and he moved his wife into the house with us and to this union, two kids was born. In the meantime, there was some moving out and some coming back in, but that was the time when mama could say, every night before she went to bed, "I have seen every one of my children today." 'Cause they came, if they didn't do anything but say, "Hey mama, how you feeling?" And spend two or three minutes with her then. And they were very selfish men because they never wanted, even though mama was only about 45 when my father died, and he was only 46 or 47. . .They never wanted a man to look at mama and mama was a very pretty woman, I thought. Anytime any man would be looking at mama or talking to mama, they would always say, "Mama! I can't find. . ." such-and-such-a-thing. "Mama!" It was "Mama!" this, and "Mama!" that, and she would always say, "You'll have to excuse me 'cause my boy want me. . ." or ". . .my child wants me" or something.

She always had time for us. She was a good mother, really, but I often wonder now if they didn't deny her of a good life where she might have been happy with somebody else. But they didn't allow it. There was a man that lived around the corner from us and he would come sometimes and sit on the porch and one evening he came and mama and Mr. Cunningham were sitting on the porch in the swing--we had a swing on the front porch--and this must have been the second or third time that some of 'em had come home and seen Mr. Cunningham around there or some kind of guy. And they said, "What's old Mr. Cunningham doing sittin' around here with mama all the time?" And then in a minute: "Mama! I can't find. . . ." (laughs heartily) So she really never had a chance.

She really never wanted to go anyplace but to church and she drug us to church with her.

Rikard: "Drug" you to church?

Neal: Well, what I mean was she carried us. When she spoke, it was the law. She wasn't a mean woman or anything like that, but when she said, "You do such-and-such-a-thing," you did it.

Rikard: What church did you go to?

Neal: I'm a member of the First CME Church; that's the First Christian Methodist Church.

Rikard: Were you an active church member as you were growing up?

Neal: Oh yes! I still am.

Rikard: Were your brothers active in church?

Neal: All my brothers went to church and took part, really. Some of ~~them~~ have sort of strayed away. . .you know, but mama's philosophy was: You bring up a child in the way you'll have him grow, and when he grows old, he will not depart from it. She often said, "He may stray, but he'll come back."

(End of Tape 1, Side 1)

Rikard: Were there certain chores that <u>you</u> had to do?

Neal: In the morning when we got up, we had to wash the lamp chimneys and we had to take up the ashes, and we had to (chuckles) get coal in to run through the day. If mama was going to wash that day, we had to get that water and put it in the pot and make that fire around the pot. And we put water in those tubs for mama so that she could wash 'cause we didn't have no hose pipes or anything like that.

Rikard: Did she have to do that out in the backyard?

Neal: Oh yes. I remember we had wooden tubs part of the time, you know, a barrel. . .a piece or a half of a barrel. 'Course, that was the only tub we had as a bathtub when we lived in the country--was this barrel that was cut in two--and we used that to bathe in.

In the afternoon when we came in, we had to take up the ashes again and we had to wash the dishes and we had to clean up that house and mop and do! Mama kept us busy! There was plenty to do! And when we got through doing that, then we got our lessons. Oh, you had to put coal oil in the lamp to make it burn. Oh, it was. . . We did everything. And we had to clean the yard. If we had chickens at that time, we'd have to get the eggs. Then in the springtime and all summer, and in the fall, and even in the winter until it got too cold, we'd have a garden and first you was planting this and then you was gathering that, and you was doing this and you was doing that to prepare the vegetables to try to can something, and all this kind of stuff. So we had full duties! We never had a breathin' moment.

Rikard: What kind of social activities did you have? Any?

Neal: We went to church.

Rikard: And that was it? Did the church have things that were more social functions than they were . . . .

Neal: No.

Rikard: It was all pretty much Bible study and preaching?

Neal: Let's don't discuss that because I told you. . . . I believe in God. I sincerely believe and I believe He's great, but I believe some of our churches are going to send some people to hell. So let's don't discuss it.

Rikard: OK. When you finished grammar school, did you go on to high school?

Neal: Yes. See, we finished grammar school and then we went to junior high school. This was back in 1935 and in Montgomery County, when you finished the ninth grade as a black, you couldn't go to high school unless you could get $12.50 every three months to go to Alabama State, which was State Normal School at that time. There was no public high school for blacks in the whole county. So I finished junior high school in 1935 and then I went to Alabama State. During that year, before that year passed, I jumped up and I got married.

Sometimes people marry their husband, but sometimes they marry somebody else's husband, and I must have married somebody else's husband and we had a child. The marriage just wasn't working because the man I married was many years my senior.

Rikard: How old were you?

Neal: I was 16, going into my 17th year, and he was 28 or something like this. . .29. There was no. . . . Everything that he had done when he was 16 or 17 years old, I had not done. I don't know why in the world we got together, but after my child was born, I wanted to go back to school and there were some hang-ups about me going back to school with my classmates who had things in common with me and me being married to him. We weren't really mad with one another. He just felt like if I went back to school I wouldn't be his wife. My brother Tyree, he was really my friend and my companion and my counselor. . .and even in my mama's lifetime, I talked to him about things that I didn't even talk to mama about. He was just my friend--all the way. And anytime I wanted to do anything, I'd talk to him about it, except talk about getting married. I didn't tell him that. I wish I had, but I didn't. So then, I was telling him what my husband, Neal, had said. He didn't make any comment, but then I came right back to him and I was talking, and he said, "Do you want to go back to school?" And I said, "More than anything I know." And he said, "Well, I don't have very much, but

I'll help you." He said, "I'll help you." And he ran his hand in his pocket--We didn't have to pay the $12.50 all at one time. We could pay $6 and. . .you know. Just so we paid it before quarter was over. So he gave me that money and I went on and I registered in school. And then Neal said, "I meant what I said." And I just smiled (chuckles) because I had 'had it' with being married, you know, anyway. I really wasn't prepared to be a wife in any way. I knew nothing about taking care of a husband and all those kinds of things. Even though I had worked and worked and worked, I had never learned to iron, and we had those long old things--what they called a "furnace"--and those blackirons and we'd make that fire and put 'em on there and we'd have to clean that iron. The rest of 'em could iron, but I never could. I just couldn't ever learn to iron. I could iron flat things, but those other things weren't my bag.

So I went on back to school then. At first I went to night school the first year, and then I found out that I could go to both night and day school, and so to try to catch up with my class for that year and a half that I was out, I went to day and night school and I got credit for both. I finished behind my class but not as far behind as I would had I not done that.

In the meantime, we had a friend and she was white, but she was very, very kind to us and her name was Mrs. Elizabeth Baldwin Hill. Well, I don't really know how far back she went in our family, but she was very, very fond of mama and her children, and I guess she must have been very. . . . She was national president of PTA at one time and all this stuff, so I guess she. . . . I <u>know</u> she had compassion--great compassion, really--and I remember times when she would send her cook and chauffeur to get groceries for her, and she would say, "Here, you buy Lilla and them children something and you take it by there." So Mrs. Hill was really our benefactor, too, during those really, really lean days. And, of course, after I grew up and I needed a job to help myself because I couldn't just sit back and let my brothers do for me because I was their sister and because they would neglect anybody for their sisters. Mama never allowed us to take advantage of that, you know. She said, "You're grown. You make your own way. You get you a job." So I got a job and I worked for Mrs. Hill as a maid and I worked. Now this was the first year that I went back to school and I did the washing and the ironing and cleaning upstairs and she had a butler that cleaned downstairs. At this time, her two daughters was gone and it was just she and Dr. Hill, but Dr. Hill wore two white shirts a day (chuckles) and I thought I was going to lose my job 'cause I couldn't iron those shirt collars. The cook was a relative of ours and she used to come and she would help me, you know, and all this kind of stuff. But I made it anyway.

Rikard: So you were working and going to day and night school?

Neal: Well, that first year I didn't go to school in the day. I just went to night school the first year. Then the next year when I wanted to go to day school and I went to her and I told her. . . I hated to leave her 'cause she'd been so good to me. You know, she really had, 'cause plenty of times on Saturday when I should be cleaning and doing all this kind of stuff, I'd be sittin' on those stairsteps. . .There wouldn't be anybody there but the chauffeur and he would be outside doing chores outside. She gave everybody a day off, but I didn't get a day off except Sunday 'cause I only worked part-time anyway because I would leave around 2:30 so I could get to school and the rest of the people would have to stay until after supper, you know. So I'd have a lot of work to do--all my school work--and doctor had all these library books and had everything convenient, and I'd be sitting on stairsteps getting my lesson and I wouldn't hear her come in, I guess, or else I'd be so carried away or something, and she'd say, "Hello! You enjoying your lesson?" Or, "Are you finishing?" or, "About to finish?" or something like that. And I'd say, "Oh!" and she'd say, "That's all right. Finish your lesson first." So, she was really lovely.

Rikard: Where did your mother meet her?

Neal: I said I can't really tell how far back it went because all my life I had heard about her and had known about her.

Rikard: And yet your mother had never worked as a domestic?

Neal: I think one of my brothers at one time when he first. . .You see, George, my oldest brother, came to Montgomery seemingly before papa and them moved up here and he lived in the servants' house and worked as a chauffeur for Mrs. Hill. . .kind of flunkying around for them in some kind of a way and then later. . .I don't know if she helped him or how, but anyway, he got another job where he was working for somebody else, you know. It seems that Uncle George, when even he was a young man, might have worked around those people--some of them--so it went 'way back in the family where they knew us. I really can't tell you just how far back it went, but she was really our friend.

Rikard: When you worked for her, did you have to live there at her house?

Neal: No.

Rikard: You were still living at home?

Neal: Uh huh. I went to work every morning. I'd get there around 7:00 and then I would leave around 2:30 to go to school, and I walked from where we lived to her house which was about five miles, and then I would walk from her house over to school which

was about two and a half miles, and many nights I didn't have bus fare and I would walk home. Of course, there were plenty of people who were walking.

Rikard: Was your mother keeping your daughter?

Neal: Uh huh, my mama kept her.

Rikard: What was her name?

Neal: My daughter?

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: She's named Alonzetta. That's A-l-o-n-z-e-t-t-a. We've got her nicknamed. She doesn't allow me to tell it, but we call her "Sweetpea". (Both laugh heartily)

Rikard: Now the year and a half you were married, were you and your husband living there at your mother's?

Neal: At home, uh huh.

Rikard: Did your mother like him?

Neal: She did before we got married, but after she felt that he shouldn't have been messing around with me and uh. . . . Well, she was a kind woman. She never. . .She wouldn't say an unkind word to anybody.

Rikard: Did you get an official divorce or did you separate?

Neal: We just separated for many years. My child was 12 years old before we really got a. . .or maybe 13. . .before we really got a divorce, but he never bothered me and I never bothered him. In fact, we stayed friends, really. . .you know. I wasn't mad at him and he wasn't mad at me.

Rikard: The school you went to, was it a private school. . .state supported . . .or. . .

Neal: Alabama State. . .what is called Alabama State University now, but at that time it was Alabama State. Before then, it was State Normal School and Mr. Trenholm was president of that school and you had to pay. You had to pay to go; $12.50 if you were in high school, every three months, and I don't really know how much you had to pay for college, but it was much more.

Rikard: So it was a state-supported school, but you were having to pay tuition, in effect, to go to high school?

Neal: Yes, we did. . .um hum, and this went on until 1938 and in 1938 they. . .I don't remember what governor it was. I don't know how it came about really, but they did pass a law where you had to have public education for blacks in that county, and I guess it was the fall of '38 before this came about, but if you'd been married you couldn't go. You know, you were contaminated if you'd been married, so. . .(chuckles). . .and so I went back and finished Alabama State High School in 1940.

Rikard: When you started going to both day and night school, then you had to quit your job?

Neal: Yeah, and that's when. . .I didn't know how to tell the lady that I wanted to quit because she had been so good to me and everything, but she said, "I'm proud of you! I'm proud of you!" And then when I finished high school, she got me a job immediately with her friend as a maid and I worked for them almost two. . .Well, I worked for 'em two years really--the McPherson family. Mr. McPherson was the Vice President of the First National Bank down in Montgomery and they were very kind to me, but I just wanted something different. I wanted. . .My mother had always preached to us that she wanted her kids to have a better opportunity and have a better way of life than she had had. My father, even if he would have had us still down by that riverside had he been living, always said that he wanted his children to have a better life than he had had. You understand?

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: And when my brother Tyree went away to school, it almost caused a revolution in that family, but my mother was a very strong woman. She didn't argue with my daddy. None of us could say we ever heard them have a harsh word to say between the two of them. But when my mother really put her foot down on something, she said, "Jonas!", and just like that, my daddy would sit right down and he wouldn't say nothing else. If he was whipping one of the kids, and he whipped 'em what she felt was enough, I guess, all she had to do was just walk to the door and say, "Jonas. . ." and his hand would freeze in the air. (chuckles) But she ruled, not with meanness or anything like that, but when she used to be flailing on me, she'd say she was whipping me because she loved me. I thought it was a strange way to show love, but I appreciated it. (chuckles)

Rikard: Well, did you have any idea of what you wanted to do other than the domestic work that you were doing? Did you have any, or did you just want to. . . .

Neal: Oh, I wanted to do anything <u>but</u> that! I didn't want to do that at all! But I was. . .You know, we can become victims of something.

Mrs. Hill told me she would send me to school and I was talking about this to my brother and he said, "I want you to go to school, but you aren't going to take handouts." He said, "You get you a job and you save you some money and send yourself to school. You don't do that." I wish I could say I regret it, but I can't truly say I regret it because I went on, after two years I didn't get in school, and I went to this factory where I got employed and I bumped around for seventeen years in that factory, and I shall never forget this: We were working on. . .When I first started working at the factory, they paid 25 cents an hour.

Rikard: What year was that?

Neal: 1942. That was the beginning salary—25 cents an hour. Well, let me tell you this: the first two weeks I worked, I worked for 15 cents an hour and the minimum wage was raised to 25 cents an hour, and you had a week to learn the job and if you didn't learn within the week, the boss would send you home and hire somebody else, you know.

But, when I first went there, I went in the afternoon after I had gotten off my work at Mrs. McPherson's and could now apply, and this man looked at me and he said he just didn't have anything. And I said, "But I need a job very badly 'cause I got a little girl that I got to take care of and I need a job!" So he started letting me come in in the afternoon to learn to turn pockets, and you don't know anything about turning pockets, but that was an operation in the shop, and then I would turn the cuffs because it was basically the same machine, but it was different, but you went through the same process in putting them in together. So I did this for two or three days and then he shifted me around and I did something else and then a job came open where they needed a printer to print labels and I got that job.

Rikard: What was the name of the factory?

Neal: Reliance Manufacturing Company, commonly known as "the shirt factory". And so, working there and everything, I caught onto my job pretty good and when there was no work on printing labels, the foreman of the cutting department started me learning to assemble the different parts of the shirt together so it would. . .We called it "bundling" and then we sent it on over to the stitching room for them to start working on it. And so I learned to do that. You must bear in mind that this was the same time that the war was going on.

But, to tell you how I first wanted to join the union. . .I'm goin' to tell you. One day, we had a young lady who worked in the office and these were all whites, you know, and all the operators in the stitching room and in the shop was black, except the head woman who was in charge of the whole stitching room was white and the man in charge of the cutting department was white. The man in charge of

shipping was white. Anybody in charge was white, but under the stitching room supervisor, she had other supervisors who were black. So, anyway, this girl, if she decided she was gonna' pay you 40 cents an hour. . . I can't remember her name. Anyway, the minimum wage bill . . .uh, minimum wage law has increased and we are making 40 or 42½ cents an hour. If we were making 40 cents an hour, it must have been the minimum wage, but if you made "production" and everything, then you made 42½ cents an hour, and this payday, she had the gall to pay me 40 cents an hour and I wanted to run her away from there because it wasn't. . .you know, she just. . .and it wasn't a whole pay period. It must have been just one day that in her figuring she figured me at 40 cents an hour instead of 42½ cents. And Mr. Geising was Superintendent of the plant and, bless his heart (chuckles), he was good as gold, but he was superintendent of the plant. When I said he was "good as gold", he was good in one way and he was terrible in another way because he spoiled people who let him spoil them. They could make him just do almost anything, you know, like they'd owe him money or they'd sell him this sob story of all this and then they wouldn't pay him or pay him 50 cents at a time and all this. Why the man wouldn't get his money! I think we took advantage of him. . .I'll say "we", but not me. But, anyway, he was gonna' run his hand in his pocket and give me the two and a half cents, or whatever it was she took from me and I wouldn't accept it because I told him that all she had to do to make the company very rich was to take two and a half cents from everybody for every hour they worked. You know. . .

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: And I was real ugly with him about it and I refused to take it, but I shook my finger at her and I said, "You going pay for this!" You know, we's gettin' the steam off and everything. Well, from that time on, she and I had a little "thing" going, but she didn't bother me and I didn't bother her, but I pushed the other workers up to watch their checks closely and watch their time and all this kind of stuff.

Well, the war came along and they had a guy named Joe who was the head "marker" and they thought he was going to be drafted, but immediately after he didn't get drafted. . .He thought he was gonna' be drafted, but after he didn't get drafted, he had found him another job because jobs weren't that hard to find for anybody. So they needed a marker.

Rikard: What is a "marker"?

Neal: A marker is someone who takes the patterns and assembles them on the paper. At that time, we would staple the paper to the material. You see, we spread the cloth on a long table, like 32 or 34 yards long, and we would make just hundreds. . .oh, some. . .depending on

the weight of the materials. Now there were some things that we could spread 120-ply high and cut 120 shirts and if that machine went into it one time, it would cut 120 and that was just one, you know. So Joe was leaving and they were talking about getting somebody and they tried a lot of white women, but there was a lot of standing and the work wasn't that easy either. So they didn't work out, and then one day, Mr. Condon, who was the supervisor or the foreman in the cutting room, said that he wanted to try me out to see if I could learn how to mark. Then he talked to Mr. Geising about it and he said that Mr. Geising said I couldn't learn it because I was "colored".

Rikard: Was Joe white?

Neal: Yeah, Joe was white, but Joe was gone and there was Mr. Condon . . .all of this. . .

Rikard: Everybody they had tried up to this point was white?

Neal: Uh huh, and you see, one day they. . .Mr. Condon got to be the assistant superintendent and then Babee was over the cutting room and he come telling me one day, "You got a white man's job anyway." But, anyway, those kind of things, you know, kinda burn you. But anyway, when Mr. Condon told me that Mr. Geising said I couldn't learn this job 'cause I was "colored", I knew I <u>had</u> to learn it. I had to learn it. People are funny. Mr. Condon had faith in me that I could and he took time with me. In the evenings, I would work late for him to show me different things about the job. For about a week, I guess, I worked about two hours overtime every day 'cause I couldn't keep up, you know, so he was helping me out and showing me different pointers and things like that, and I learned this job. Now I was this marker from about late '42 until I left, really--until the plant closed--and the plant closed in '59.

But, during all those years, I had many things happening, you know . . .go to work. . .and this didn't happen to me, but whatever happened to somebody else always affected me, and people would come to work to be at work at seven o'clock in the morning, which meant that some of them had to leave home at six. They had to get up at 5:00 or 4:30 A.M. in order to get to work and they would get there at seven and they couldn't check in--couldn't hit the clock--until they could find some work. They wouldn't have work prepared for them and they'd have to stand around--sometime it would be 9:00 or 9:30--and they would be sitting around waiting. Then, the supervisor would come out and say, "I'm sorry. We just don't have anything for you to do." And it wouldn't be just <u>one</u> person; there would be a <u>lot</u> of people, you know. And this would just burn me up so bad! And when I get to thinking about it now, I just get furious! If the union didn't do anything else but give us reporting

time, it was worth it! The first contract we got said, "If you report to work, and the company has no work for you to do, they must pay you four hours anyway; whether they let you check in or not, they owe you for four hours, unless they tell you the day before not to come in." That was one of the things that really burned us, but there were so many.

There were just little things like, "If you don't like the way things are going, just hit the clock!" You understand? That attitude. We needed the jobs. That was the only job we had and the best job that you could get at that time with the type of education that we had and all of these things. We were machine operators in a factory--factory workers--that's all. So, things rocked on until 1944. . .really 1945, and somebody. . . . Different things was just happening and was happening to so many people and we resented it. All people aren't as fortunate as others. Some of us could "talk back" and get away with it; others could just be so humble and just one time defend themselves and be talking back and they'd be fired. You know. Well, this galled me 'cause I took the attitude that I got this job 'cause I was looking for one; if you fired me, I'd get another job. You understand? And this was just exactly what I'd tell him if he mess with me as an individual. "I was looking for a job when I got this one. . .ain't no big thing!" But one thing I knew was true, too: They couldn't find nobody who could walk right in there and do what I was doing. (Chuckles)

Rikard: So your leverage was that you had mastered a difficult job?

Neal: I had mastered my job and I didn't teach anybody else my job.

Rikard: Right.

Neal: That was part of my bargaining, you know. If I made mistakes on my job, I didn't wait for him to come and tell me he was gon' fire me and all this. When I would hit the clock , I would just go up there and knock on his door and I would say, "I want to talk to you for a minute" and he would just. . .He knew me by now. And he would say, "I don't have anything to say to you." I coulda' gone home 'cause I knew he wasn't going to raise too much sand. I didn't make that many bad mistakes, but like I said, sometimes one mistake and you'd ruin a whole bunch of stuff.

Rikard: Do you think that it was the upbringing of your mother and your grandmother that gave you the "nerve"--the courage--whatever you want to call it, to stand up and talk back at a time when a lot of people wouldn't have done that?

Neal: Well, as a child, I was a problem child. I was the only child that my mother had, out of all the children that she had. . . and she said I was "talking back" to her, but I thought I was defending myself. I had to stand up for my rights! I thought! You know?

Rikard: Um hum. . .

Neal: Oftentimes it got me crucified, but I still would. . .I would still have that same attitude, you know. I thought they was giving me a hard time, but I appreciated it. My brother. . . my oldest living brother, James, used to whip me every evening when he come home from work. Oh, it just upset him no end to know that I had provoked mama and mama had already almost killed me, but when he'd come home from work, he'd go in there and mama would say, "I don't know what I'm going to do with her. . ." and on and on, and he'd just come right on and just flail me and tell me, "I'm gone kill you one of these days if you don't stop worrying my mama!" (Chuckles) You know. . .He wasn't gon' kill me. I wasn't even worried about that, but he used to put some terrible whippings on me, really.

Rikard: Had the war situation created a scarcity where you knew that you could find other work?

Neal: Not really, but I just. . . . . .Today, I've got that attitude, that I could get another job. It may not be this good, but I'd get another job. And I can! I can get another job. I don't know what I'd be doing, but I could get another job.

Rikard: So, even that early, you were just a very self-reliant, confident individual?

Neal: All my life I've had confidence in myself, and I believe if anybody else can do it, I can do it. I might not be able to do it as good . . .(chuckles). . .but I'll try it. This grew up with me. I think my grandmama. . .I think my grandmama told me this when I was. . . as far back as I can remember. . .not just me, but the rest of 'em, too. But I think it might have gone deeper with me because I had more of her in me, I suppose, because she said, "You are as good as anybody. Don't you ever let nobody make you think you're not as good or better than they are." So that's part of my grandmama's philosophy and she also told me, "You can do anything, if you want to. Anything you really want to do, you can."

The following is a transcript of the second interview session with Fannie Allen Neal which took place on June 13, 1977, at the Samford University Library. Interviewer: Marlene Rikard.

Rikard: Mrs. Neal, you mentioned in our previous session that you were an outspoken person; that you did stand up for your rights at work. You protested being cheated out of two-and-a-half cents an hour which you said you felt was yours, and the problem of people coming to work and the work not being ready, and they might be sent home. Did this outspokeness on your part begin to lead you into union activity, or how did the unions come to the shirt factory?

Neal: The workers had been so abused, in our opinion, by management, and I still say that this reporting time was more important to all of us than anything else--that we'd come to work and then they had no work for us and we'd stand around and all this, that, and the other. I'll have to tell the truth. This never happened to me because by this time, I was on this job where I was the only person to do the "marking".

As a person, I got along all right without the union, but I wasn't happy with my pay because, number one, I was doing a job for 56 cents an hour that they had paid a white man a dollar, maybe a dollar-and-a-quarter an hour, and I was aware of this. And then, my supervisor, Babee, used to say all the time. . . you know, just made little sly remarks about, "You got a white person's job." And we used to "get into it" kinda' sometimes 'cause I was, you know, terribly hot because we just had fans and everything, and a worker with paper couldn't hardly use the fans 'cause the fans would just blow the paper and all this kind of stuff, and so I wasn't privileged with having this kind of comfort. Late in the afternoon when they would come messing with you about having "a white man's job" that you got, you know, you're ready to almost blow up on them, and so I just got tired of him always referring to this as being "a white man's job that you're holding" because it was anybody's job who had the job. And so, one day he said this to me, and I said, "This ain't no white man's job. This is <u>my</u> job." And we had words about this and if it had been in his power to fire me, he would have, but he was in no position to fire me, and the company was not really in a position to fire me because, as I said, there was nobody else who (chuckles) really knew how to do the job except the assistant superintendent, and nobody could learn the job just overnight.

All of us were frustrated. You see, we were unhappy because the cost of living was going up and times were hard. Poor people have always been in a depression. It's a "recession" when you are out of work, but it's a "depression" when we are out of work. Well, we might as well have been out of work because the salary was so low that we could still just have a good, decent meal perhaps just every two weeks--where we'd have steak and all the trimmings. Other times, we were eating vegetables and not having a proper diet, really, because we couldn't afford it. So our plight was a plight that all the people in the shop shared.

So, anyway, if you can remember, in the early forties and in the mid-forties, the CIO was really organizing in the South, and we had been reading about the AFL and the CIO and we immediately got offensive toward the AFL because they said that was the union that represented the crafts and we were considered industrial workers, so the CIO offered us, in our way of thinking--and I still think so—more than the AFL was offering. So an organizer by the name of Carey Haigler came to Montgomery. He was an organizer in the state of Alabama for the CIO and he talked to just five of us the first time. He told us about all the things that the union could do for us. He really was an inspiring man, and he asked if we thought we could get a few cards signed up and he left us some cards. He came back the next week and he said we could bring one or two other people with us to these meetings, and we did.

Rikard: Where were these meetings being held?

Neal: We really met in the Lutheran school, but the first meeting that we had, we met at Frank Gregory's home--met in a private home. Then, I shall never forget these days, we got those cards signed up and when we came back he picked those up and he didn't want to leave us but three or four cards, but we insisted. I don't remember now how many cards, but we had to sign 'em all up, which was a handful. So then he said that at the next meeting we should bring even more people whom we could trust, and we did. The group continued to grow. About the third week, the boss knew that we were signing up union cards and his name was Mr. Geising. He was a decent guy. He really was. I will tell you a little about him. But he would ask if the workers. . .you know, if they were tied up in the union, and they'd say, "No," and all this. And yet, they had signed cards and I could never understand how they could look in his face and tell that lie. You know. . .but on the other hand, I could understand because they were afraid. And of course, the fellow, Charles Hoyle, who became secretary-treasurer of our local, denied having taken any part or participating in any way. And Mr. Geising never forgave him for that because he said he lied to him, and if he lied to him, he could never trust him again. But there were some of us that when he asked about it, we just said "Yes."

And this was quite an experience for me that I'm gonna tell you about now: I didn't even know how to thread up a power machine. I didn't know if a seam was sewed straight or if it was crooked. I knew nothing about putting the garment together after it was, you know. . .assembling it. And he, in his anxiety to get those who showed leadership ability, I guess, out of the union or divert our interest, he told me he would make me the supervisor of the stitching room. You know, it was so comical that he was going to make me the supervisor of the stitching room and he knew that I didn't even know how to thread up a machine! I didn't know anything about the stitching room at all. He quoted a real decent salary like $200 a month and all of this, and here I am making . . .about this time. . .at 56 cents an hour. . .I don't know how much I was making, but not very much, and $200 was almost a million over what I was making. But, the first thing I asked him was if I would still be in the union, you know. And he said, "No! You'll have to get out of that mess." And I just laughed and I said, "No way. . .no way." (chuckles) And he said, "What has the union done for you?" And I said, "Nothing yet. It hasn't done anything yet, but it's what it's going to do." And he sat there and he really talked to me as a friend, and he said, "What have I done to you people for you to want to organize and get a union against me?" And it was at this point that I told him that we loved him very dearly and we weren't organizing "against him". Reliance Manufacturing Company owned that shop; he was just an employee and we would always feel the same toward him. But we were trying to get better working conditions and trying to get a "piece of that pie." I told him this, I said: "I have a daughter that is so precious and we call her 'Sweetpea'. Her name is Alonzetta." But I said, "You know, Mr. Geising, 'Sweetpea' likes steak." And I said, "I'd like for her to have steak more than once every two weeks. And I like steak and I want to eat steak more than once every two weeks. And we like pork chops and we can't have these things. Not on the salary we are making and we aren't trying to organized against you, we're only trying to get a union because we feel that Reliance Manufacturing Company is mistreating us." And then I almost said to him: ". . .and you are a part of it because you let these people come and stand out here all this time and then send them home." You see, he had many things that he could have straightened up, but it's just like the J. P. Stevens people right now. As long as the top bosses tell a superintendent or plant manager what to do, he's gonna' do it. It might break his heart, but he'll do it anyway. Well, this was the position that Mr. Geising was in.

We organized it and in a short time--I think about three weeks' time--we could have held an election, once he found out that we were really organized. These were the days when we met like twice a week. At first we were meeting. . .I told you we were in a

Lutheran school, but it was a long time before we went to the Lutheran school because at first we met in private homes. Then we branched out and there was a man who ran a club named B. T. Thompson and he opened up his place to let us have a meeting in there. And we would sing! Oh, we would sing the union songs! And one of the songs that is still very dear to me, "We Gonna' Roll. . .We Gonna' Roll the Union On". And it says, "If the boss gets in the way, we gonna' roll right over him. . ." and "whoever gets in the way, we gonna' roll it over him, 'cause we gonna' roll the union on." That was one song that still sticks in my mind because "rolling the union on" is having full participation and cooperation from the members. You can't "roll" a dead union 'cause it'll die if you don't have participation. So I still think of this.

And then another song that we used to sing all the time was "Solidarity Forever". It says, "When the union's inspiration through a worker's blood shall run, there shall be no power greater anywhere beneath the sun; yet what force on earth is weaker than the feeble strength of one, but the union makes us strong." And this <u>really</u> sticks in my mind, and it will.

So, after we had worked for some time. . .We had had all the cards filled out that we needed and everything and then they had to file for an election. They sent a person. . .I guess he was from the National Labor Relations Board. . .to conduct the election. At this time, naturally, the campaign was on and Mr. Geising was trying to get his loyal people to vote against the union. And we were working on them; telling them, "Don't back up! We've come this far together. Let's go on!" and all these things. And we sang another song that was a spiritual--"We Shall Not Be Moved"--and this was very good.

I think one of the reasons that we don't have stronger unions today is that we stopped singing and getting the spirit within our organizational campaigns and into the members, because if they believe in it, then they can be more active. But anyway, we were waiting then for the Board to have this election, and it was on August the 14th, I think, in 1945. This was a great day because I believe this was the same day that it was peace. . .the "VJ Day", or something like this because people. . .We were going home from work that afternoon and people were beating their tubs and just. . . 'cause the war was over and we had won the union that day, too! We had won the right to bargain 'cause we had had the election. And I remember this: We had 298 people who voted for the union and we only had 28 to vote against the union. Some of those were turncoats, but then some of those really shouldn't have had the right to vote anyway, but we didn't care because we <u>knew</u> we had it sewed up.

After we got the union, then, we had trying times because we were real arrogant. We had a contract and had the best organizers--Lucille and Ed Witt--and they were really. . .They have both passed on now, I think, but they were really great organizers. They told us so many things that the union could do for us and so. . . . I, for one, believed that the union could do everything that they told me it could do! But, as you move into it, you find that there are certain things that just can't be done. The contract didn't say it, and you must know your contract--what is written in your book--and not how the company interprets it, but how it is written, and neither how you interpret it, but how it is written, you have to go by. So many times we got. . .

(End of Tape 1, Side 2)

. . .and it meant something else altogether. But, sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't.

But, anyway, we had this contract and this was in '45 and by 1948, we went to negotiate our contract in Chicago, and it was a man named Mr. Gerther who represented the company and Mr. Geising went, representing the company, and Frank Gregory and Charles Hoyle and I were the three members from the shop to go. So when we got to Chicago, we had reservations confirmed to stay at the LaSalle Hotel and we walked up there with these reservations and the three of us being black, and they said, "We have no reservations. . ." and all of that and so we had to go 'way out someplace. . .I do know where it is. It was 'way out where we went and a black woman. . . . I take that back. Frank didn't go to Chicago with us that time. Mary Garrett went with us and she had a sister who lived there and her sister was able to get us a place in this hotel out at 4800, or somewhere, Drexel Boulevard, and the cab, at that time, charged us five dollars to take us out there. And so that was the first slap in the face because we had always been told that when you cross the Mason-Dixon Line, things was better for you if you were black. But we had a good laugh about that when we got back.

The funny part about it though was when we were sitting in negotiating, and you can imagine that this was the first negotiations that we had been involved in. . .the first one I had been involved in because the first contract was really written by the professionals and everything, and we didn't even know what to ask for. But by this time, we were supposed to be presenting our side of it. We had been schooled by a business agent and representives about what we were going to ask for. So when we were asking to increase. . . I can't remember if we really got a "break time" in our first

contract, or if it was in our second contract, that we got a 15-minute break, and we might have gotten one in the morning and didn't get one in the afternoon and we were probably negotiating for break in the afternoon--a 10-minute break. We were putting up a pretty good argument and Mr. Geising got on our side, you know, and finally, Mr. Gerther looked around and said, "Who do you represent here, Geising?! Do you represent the Reliance Manufacturing Company or do you represent these people here!?!" (chuckling) And so Mr. Geising just turned his head and he wouldn't say anything, and when we got outside, he just patted all of us and he said, "You are my people." You know. . .and it really made us feel good. We told him that this was the first time that we had ever been to Chicago. The negotiations was like two days . . .two and a half days maybe. . .and then that afternoon we were out, and so we said we had never been to Chicago and we'd like to see it. And he said, "Aw, just be at work Monday morning." You know, he was really a dear old guy. He had his faults, but he could have been much worse. And we were grieved when the company did him in. That was a time when if we had been able to rebel against that company, we really would have, 'cause they did him bad! In our mind, anyway.

But, anyway, after we got in the union, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers always see that when the shop is organized, we join the state organization, and if you have a Central Labor Council, they see that you join up with these immediately. Central Labor Council is where this is the group of labor unions that come together in a central body like Montgomery, Alabama, would have all the unions there to come together and form a Central Labor Council. At this time we didn't have one, but the state did have an organization. An old man named Mr. Cherry was the president of the organization the first time. I came to convention and he was an <u>old</u> man and. . . . I'm sure all of us are filled with prejudices, but that was an experience that I will never forget, because when we came in our office was down on 19th Street, upstairs, down just on the other side of First Street, South, and we had the meeting upstairs. . .I don't remember whether it was on the other side of First Street or on this side of First Street. . .but anyway, it was on 19th Street and it was upstairs. And when we went upstairs, there was a <u>rope</u> coming down one side of the auditorium. . .you know. . .the meeting room. And all the white people were sitting over on the left and all the black people were sitting over on the right and uh. . . . The Witts had told us the union would make us free men and women and when I got up there and saw this, it really astounded me. But this was the year that I met Mr. Asbury Howard and Perry Thompson and many other guys in the labor movement who were strong trade unionists. They were with the steelworkers union. And Emory Jackson used to have a newspaper here. . .Mr. Jackson passed away a few years ago, but Emory was a fighter, too. He had a sister and I can't remember exactly why his sister was at that meeting that day, because I'm sure she wasn't a member, 'cause

there was no such thing as the AFT in Birmingham at that time. I don't know who she was representing, but she was there, and she took the floor about that rope and there were some of these white. . .There were my brothers in the labor movement and some of my sisters in the labor movement, and she said, "Throw 'em out!!" You know (laughs). . .and, naturally, this created a lot of dissension, but we argued it out. I say "we", but I didn't have a word to say 'cause I was frightened to death.

Our organization within the state was not without problems. We had great problems because our white brothers and sisters wanted to get the benefits of the union, but they weren't willing for us to have part of it, too, I don't think. Some of them weren't, I know. But anyway, I never came to another convention where there was a rope in the building but there seemed to have been a "gentlemen's agreement" that you sit over on this side and then we sit over on this side. Nobody ever said anything, but I guess it was just an unspoken understanding.

Rikard: Well, in your shop it was all black members of the union?

Neal: Yes, except we had one man named Mr. Brown, and he was so poor! I can't think of his first name. He was poorer than dirt! He was <u>so</u> poor, and his wife had a baby every year. . .<u>every</u> year. . . and he never had money to pay the hospital nor the doctor. He was doing production work, but they wouldn't put him in because he was white. Isn't that awful!? And we didn't care about him getting in because he was a fool. He should have insisted on getting in because, you see, we had insurance coverage. The union got it for us. We had vacation days; we were getting holidays with pay. If you worked the day before and the day after, you got paid for the holiday. If you were actually sick and could prove that you were sick and you couldn't get to work, you were still entitled to your holiday pay. Mr. Brown was getting none of this. I call him "Mr." Brown, but it was because I'm sitting here, 'cause we called him "Brown" in the shop, you know. I think one time Mr. Bowie--that's another story--this was the boss that followed Mr. Geeson--said to one of our guys, "Call him <u>Mr.</u> Brown", and, boy, we really. . .(laughs). . .This was the funniest joke of all. But the way that we got him to get into the union was that we pointed out to him that his wife have all these babies, you know, and he have to scuffle up on the money and we had this insurance on us. And the union dues. . . They were continually telling him he'd have to pay the union dues. Well, we started out paying 35 cents a month and if you couldn't afford 35 cents a month. . . .Now this was for a short period and then we went to 35 cents a week, but for the things that we were getting, 35 cents a week was nothing! And we had life insurance. It wasn't very much, but back in '45 a $500-dollar life insurance policy was pretty good. So, we finally talked

to him about it and he say he want to get in it, but we wouldn't fight for him to get in it. We made him go to management and ask to get in it. Then management tried to tell him about being in there with them and he said he didn't care what color they was. (laughs) But we had convinced him of what he was losing. You understand?

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: He needed it! He was so. . .He was pitiful!

Rikard: The organizers that were sent there when you were first trying to get the union started, they were primarily white?

Neal: Oh yes! In the South? In 1945? You know they were white! But they were great people, really.

Rikard: You obviously were one of the first people that was approached about the union. . .

Neal: Frank Gregory. . . .

Rikard: Tell me about Frank Gregory.

Neal: Well, he was the president of our local. He was really the first one that talked to anybody. When he talked the first time, there was nobody involved but just Frank and Carey Haigler, and a man named Ed Nixon who was from the AFL side and who really wanted us to talk to the AFL, but we wouldn't. And then, of course, he always said that he was responsible for us having the union, but I give Frank Gregory the credit because it was Frank who came back. He talked to four of us girls and from that, we moved out.

Rikard: Why did he pick you as one of the four?

Neal: Oh, we had been friends all the time. We grew up together. We grew up in the community and I had known him all the time. We had been buddies, you know--friends--ever since we came to town, really. We're still friends. But Frank is the one that I give the credit to for it. Nobody else. . .because nobody else could have come and talked to me about it and to the other people about it and gotten us involved like Frank did.

Rikard: What was his position in the shop?

Neal: Frank was a cutter. I was a marker and Frank was a cutter and the cutter was the one who ran that big machine that went into the material.

Rikard: So he had one of the better jobs and was also a natural leader?

Neal: He had a better job and he was the one whom they approached and he came back and he talked to us about it. He told us when the man was coming back and he wanted us to keep it a big secret and we did. We went to hear ourselves and the second meeting was a big secret, too. We just brought some other people in, but there was a girl named Mary Garrett and uh. . .Mary. . .well. . .She was one of our charter members. Then there was Ida Caldwell Baker and Beauty Mae Johnson. Beauty Mae came in later, but in the beginning it was Mary and Frank. . .Ida Mae and Charles Hoyle and me. And there was one other lady we called "Sis". I can't remember her name now, but we always called her "Sis" and she was there at the second meeting.

And then, of course, as we got us a little committee together, we formed a "clan", you know. Whatever happened to one, we had to swear that we weren't gonna' forsake the other one, you know, because this was stepping on dangerous grounds. But after awhile, we got real ornery. . .after people started listening to us and everything. Some of them would listen to us and run right on and tell the boss, but you know, it has its great advantage because, you know, the boss really needs to know some things. We would have been sick if he hadn't found out we were organizing. (chuckles) We would be meeting. . .up on Jeff Davis or wherever. . .we would meet at churches sometime. Some churches would let us come in. But we would be meeting and we could see Mr. Geeson riding by and peeping and then the next day we would come to work and he would ask some of us, "Did you go to that meeting last night?" "No, Mr. Geising." And he'd say, "Aw, you're lying! I saw you!" (laughs heartily) But there were many of us who said, "Yes, I was there."

Rikard: Were most of the workers in the shirt factory female?

Neal: Yes. Most of the males worked just in the cutting department and in the shipping department. Now we had what we called "bundle boys". You see, after awhile, the garment became a great big bundle and it was too heavy, we thought, for a woman to carry so we had men in the stitching room who got the thread and gave it to the girls and who carried the bundles and put the bundles down by the machines and things like this, so it would be convenient for them. Have you ever been in a factory?

Rikard: Not that kind, no.

Neal: You should go in one because it's an experience because everybody would be pushing those machines and they'd just have a song, almost, going. . .hummmmmm. . .hummmmmm. . .and it's just a continuous things; all the machines just. . .and there were some operators whose machines never stopped. They just could feed that material right on in and before they'd get where they could hold it with one hand pick up the garment with the other, and before it could get through the machine, they'd have another garment going. It's really fascinating to see them operate.

Rikard: Did you have a certain level of output that you had to achieve?

Neal: Yes, in. . .in. . .in every place. As a marker, they can't time you on that, so I was on what they called "straight time". I was on a straight salary. But there were many people in the plant who got more money than I did, even though they made less per hour than I did because they were on "production." I had a sister--my sister Clara--I have a sister who worked in the shop with me and by 12 o'clock, she could have eight hours. . .easy . . .on the operation that she did. And they used to study it all the time. But there were other people on the job where she was working who could barely make eight hours in eight hours, but some people are just gifted in operating or doing something, more than other people are. So we would never agree for them to use her as an example of where they should set the rate on the operation that she was on.

Rikard: When the election was held and the union was officially accepted in the shop, what was your role, then, with the union?

Neal: Well, I got elected as the recording secretary and Henry Stoudemire, who was a teacher, but worked at the factory with us for a long time, was in charge of piece goods. This was one of the operations. He took stock and, you know, kept up with the piece goods, and he was elected as our first financial secretary. Frank was elected, as I said, as the president.

Rikard: Did you receive any kind of training for what you were supposed to do?

Neal: Oh yes. . .oh yes. . .They sent people from the educational department from New York and we had shop steward training and what the chairlady--this was the chief shop steward--what his or her responsibilities were. And I got elected as the shop steward.

Rikard: When was this? In addition to being recording secretary?

Neal: Oh, I was just recording secretary of the local, but. . .yeah, I got elected as the shop steward.

Rikard: Tell me what your duties were as shop steward.

Neal: Oh, you have to listen to all the grievances and when they take a worker to the office and they want to give them a pink slip or a white slip, or whatever the slip. . .a blue slip, or whatever the slip was. Then you would have to go in. It was a terrible position to place a worker in because sometimes people are entitled to some kind of a slip, but you have to put up a good argument and try to prevail with them. I always tried to be fair. Some of the

workers didn't think I was fair, and a lot of times the company didn't think I was fair, but if a worker was really just guilty, I would plead for mercy and ask for them to be given another chance. If they just continued to do bad. . .And then we would ask them to work with them because, you see, we had other shop stewards. Each department was supposed to have a shop steward. This, of course. . . .but today, it is much better because, you see, when you have to stop off of your operation to take care of something like that, or if the worker wanted to tell you something while they're working, you can just hit the clock and charge it to the union. Back in those days, we had just gotten the union and I guess there was still a certain amount of fear in our hearts and we didn't. . . .A lot of times workers. . .The shop steward didn't have time, really, to hear a worker's problems, so we would wait until our break time and try to get it together, and at lunch break, we would try to get it together. Throughout the time, if management called us into the office, we didn't have to take off on the clock because our contract said that if management. . . if there was a meeting and they called it, then management paid for it. But if we called a meeting, well then the union would have to pay for it. But most of the time we would call our meetings after work, unless it was something very serious, and then we would have to take it up on, you know, the company's time, and then we would check out and come back on the clock when we finished the grievance.

But the chief shop steward got all the grievances from the departmental shop stewards and read them, and then we'd have to separate the gripes from the grievances. You know, it's quite a problem to separate gripes from grievances. And, of course, in anything, you're gonna' have a lot of people who want to "get by"--nobody's right but them and they're always right--but there's two sides to everything and we tried very hard to look at it from a broad spectrum. Then, when a worker was just having so many problems, I would just go get the manager and say, "Let's go see what's wrong." As an illustration, if a girl has a machine and it's just constantly breaking thread and the mechanics come and do something to it and they go away, and they say, "Oh, she's doing that." Well, now if a girl is sitting there and she's trying to make production, she's not going to just maliciously have her machine breaking thread. And many times we would just get the boss to go and look at the machine and watch her operate. He would put a supervisor down on the machine and let her sew to see what was the matter with it. And they would sew real slow and come out and it wouldn't pop the thread. Then, when this girl would get back on the machine and she's got it brrrrrrrr, you know, and it would pop the thread. So I learned many things about it. I said, "Now you sit her down there and you let her sew it just as fast as this operator has to sew it." And then the thread would pop. But, in Mr. Geising's

lifetime we got a lot of things straightened out because I would just go in. . .some afternoons I would say, "We need to sit down and talk about some things. Frank and I want to talk to you." And Frank and I would go in and we would talk about different operators and what we knew about the operator and her personality. If she had personal problems, he was the kind of man who had compassion. And if we actually knew that that operator had a personal problem and she was in bad with her supervisor and she wasn't up to production, well we would ask him to kinda' go along with her for a few days, and we would also work with the operator and try to get them to come up, you know.

Rikard: Were the women as active in union work as the men in the plant?

Neal: More active. Women have led in any shop where you have predominantly women working. . .the women taking the lead.

Rikard: They attended after-work meetings actively?

Neal: Yes, we had shop steward meetings and we had training programs. We had to have extensive training because we thought that everything that the union had promised that it could do for us, that it could do it, and a lot of those things weren't written in the book. . .wasn't in the contract, and we tried to enforce some of those things. (Chuckles) So they had to come in.

Then there were other things. One thing was that the contract said that the business agent or service person could never come into the shop and go into the office and talk to management unless they had somebody with them. And we had some business agents who would come in and talk to them and go out and have dinner with them and then we'd hear about, you know? And so we'd run them off. And we ran so many business agents off because they were never Lucille and Ed Witt again. You see, the organizer was one person and then the person who would service you was another. So we were still looking for somebody like the Witts to come back to us, always hoping in the back of our minds that they would send them back. But we had some organizers who weren't concerned. They would, you know, stand off from us like we were nasty or something and want to talk from 'way off to us, and things like this. We'd smoke them out real quick and then we'd send them right on back to the Amalgamated. Then they got. . .Our vice president, Gladys Dickerson, got mad at us and she wouldn't send us no business agent, and so we were mad at her. We wrote, you know, smart letters. . .she said they were "smart letters," but we were just stating facts. And she said that she wouldn't send us anybody. By this time we were paying a service charge of $80 or $85 a month. Now this was in excess of what we were paying as per capita time. So we stopped sending the service charge, and

and this was a violation of the union. Well, she didn't take us up on that, so we withheld our per capita tax. Then they decided that I was a communist.

Rikard: The union decided this?

Neal: Oh, Gladys Dickerson decided this, I think, and they sent a black woman who was on their staff in New York down to see who was influencing me and any of the rest of them . .what communist group we were tied up with. And when Dolly came (chuckles), she sat about 30 minutes with us, talking and asking us different questions and everything, and we were collectively telling her what our problems were and things that were happening that we didn't think should be happening and everything, and she laughed and she said, "Bless you little commies' cotton-picking souls!" (Laughs) But then she told us that perhaps we were right in taking the attitude that we took, but we went about it in a bad way, and she showed us how to write up things that we wanted the union to know. That we should not stop paying, but that we should document them and send them in, and we would get action. But we never got any action as fast as when we would withhold our per capita tax and things like that. Gladys Dickerson was the southern director for organizing and in charge of the South. She wasn't interested in us. We were the first shop with Reliance Manufacturing chain to get a contract anywhere in the country. We broke it open by winning our contract. They had tried several times down in Mississippi and each time, they had lost. But then, after we got the contract, then she. . . I think she always stayed mad about that because they had spent so much money trying to organize other places and never got it. I never really quite understood her because she always wanted to talk down to us, and we were the kind that you didn't talk down to, you know, because we had decided that since we were paying into this union, we were, therefore, paying your salary. So, you don't talk down to us. We're not your servants! You are <u>our</u> servant, 'cause we pay your salary, you know. That was the attitude that we took. We might not have said this to her, but this was what we said to one another.

Rikard: But your relationship with. . . . .

Neal: . . .with our person was not good. . .with the vice president of Amalgamated Clothing Workers. She's dead now, but. . . .

Rikard: Did it ever really get straightened out? The relationship there?

Neal: No, not really. . .not really. Uh. . .We were hard on business agents. We really were. But, they would just come in and just casually look at something and then. . .You know, they weren't concerned because they, too, were white. And I shouldn't look at

it like that because we did get some good white business agents. We really did. There's a man now who's secretary-treasurer of the Mississippi AFL-CIO who used to be our business agent and he was really a great guy--Tom Knight. He was a good business agent. He had time. But he was from in the plant down in Hattisburg, Mississippi, and he understood what we were talking about. These other people were just hired people, you know. They sent us a little old girl one time, named Barbara somebody. She didn't make but two trips there 'cause we just told her not to come back.

Rikard: When a business agent came, they were supposed to contact Frank and. . . . .?

Neal: They were supposed to contact Frank and me, because I was the shop steward, and they were supposed to contact us and see what was going on. Well, it was all right if they just came on into the shop and just waved and just looked around in the shop. They had the privilege of going through the shop and looking and things like that. Mainly, I think, because Mr. Geising was such a decent guy. But we resented them going in and sitting down and having coffee with him--laughing and talking--'cause we didn't know what they were talking about. And this wasn't right and the contract said that they couldn't do that.

Rikard: According to the contract, one of you was supposed to be with them, right?

Neal: They were supposed to have somebody with them who belonged to that union anytime they talked to management. They didn't want to do this, for some reason. And then, we had friends who were white and this person saw this Barbara out having dinner with Mr. Geising one night. Then she whispered and told me, you know. And I said, "Now she can't have dinner with Mr. Geising and then talk about how she's our business agent. That'll never do!" So we invited her not to come back, and she didn't.

But we sent so many of them away. I don't even remember the young man's name, but he came and he was gonna' straighten us out. We were gonna' straighten him out, and he said, "I don't have to take this from you! I can go call New York!" And I said, "I know the same number in New York that you know." You know. . .We were tough! Really! We had a good, strong unit.

Rikard: It sounds like you did!

Neal: We really did.

Rikard: How did your family feel about your union participation?

Neal: Well, see, my sister had started working at the plant and she was in the union, too, and we used to take the kids to union meetings. . .the older kids, and my daughter. . .My daughter's a member of the AFGE now, in California. She's always. . . As soon as she could, she joined the union. I don't know how active she is. She's more-or-less a bench member. But you know, the AFGE is sort of "white-collar" and don't have the participation from them. . .never did. . .that we had from the industrial unions.

Rikard: When they came to these meetings, did most of these women have to bring their children?

Neal: Many of them, yes, because they had no one to leave them with. This was why we carried our kids, because my sister and I lived together and we were kind of a team. And then we had separate apartments one time, but we were always at each other's apartment and so we lived together. Even today we live. . .all three of my sisters. . .all three of these sisters. . .There's three of us and we all live together. My oldest sister stopped work many years ago and stayed home for when the kids might. . .As I said, the youngest had two other kids and when they were born, we hated so bad to take them out in the weather, and also, Robert and Peggy, who were the older kids, had started to school and for them to come home to an empty house with a key, and come in an empty house, wasn't what we liked, but it was all we could do. But then my sister stopped work and she came and lived with us and we paid her a small salary and gave her a home and everything. But she overly earned it because she cooked, and she washed, and she ironed, and she kept house, and she's an excellent housekeeper. She enjoyed it and she loved the children very dearly, so. . . .

Rikard: Did the union kind of take the place of other social activities?

Neal: Um hum, yes! The union took precedence over everything in my life.

Rikard: And you find yourself more involved with union activities and fellow union members than perhaps church, or something that had dominated your life before?

Neal: Oh, it took precedence over everything in my life. If fellows ask me out on a date, I'd say, "I'm sorry. I have to go to a union meeting." Nothing! Honestly. Nothing was more important than my union. Unfortunately, all the members weren't like that, but there were a few of us who were. . .to the end. We didn't put anything ahead of our union. In 1948, this was the time when the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers were sent. Well, our organization said that they were communists-dominated, and Asbury Howard, at that time, was working for the Mine, Mill, and Smelter Workers.

He was also a board member for the Alabama CIO Council, and they were expelled in 1948 from the national CIO and also from the state body. And so we were sticking with Mr. Howard because he was black(!). I didn't even know at that time what a commie was! (Chuckles) You know, I knew that they were supposed to be red and that they were supposed to advocate the overthrow of the government, but I wasn't trying to overthrow the government. I wasn't concerned about it. But anyway, Mr. Howard had to. . . They had put him off the board when they expelled him and then I ran for his seat on the executive board and this was the year that I won. I stayed on until 1960 and then I had to give it up because I was really going on the staff of the AFL-CIO. I didn't get on as a full-fledged member until 1962, but it was in the making, and because I was spread so thin, I was advised that I should resign from the board.

Rikard: Did you continue to have a relationship with Asbury Howard, even after he was expelled?

Neal: He was our inspiration and our leader and the things that they did to him. . . .He put out a leaflet in Bessemer, Alabama, and do you know, they put him on the chain gang for that leaflet. Our hearts went out to him and I still love him very dearly, but they were making an example. When I say "they", the Bull Connors and this element was trying to make an example out of Mr. Howard to show you what we'll do to you if you try to raise up and try to lead blacks into demanding or pushing for their rights. And so they made an owl out of him in my eyes. You understand?

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: I never thought he was a communist. Even today, I don't think he was affiliated in any sort of a way. The man had a job and there might have been. . . I'm sure there was communists, but I don't think <u>he</u> was ever one. He was just a natural-born leader, but they had. . . . He was also the president, I think, of the NAACP at Bessemer, and you see, all of this was considered as communism or communistically influenced and controlled, or whatever they called it. (Chuckles) Whatever they decided that we were.

Rikard: How did you decide to run for his seat?

Neal: I think he might have pushed me up to it. I really can't remember. It happened so fast and everything until, you know, it really. . . and I never thought about it too much. And I got out there and campaigned for myself. I said, "<u>I'm</u> a candidate to run for this seat at-large.

Rikard: Were you still working at Reliance?

Neal: Yes! I worked there from '42 until 1959 when the plant closed. And I campaigned for myself! I went around and I asked those white delegates. I said, "I'm Fannie, and I would like for you to cast your vote for me." And they said, "All right," and they did.

Rikard: You think you got a lot of white votes?

Neal: I know I did! It was just a handful of us blacks there.

Rikard: Who were you running against?

Neal: You know, I really can't remember. I <u>really</u> can't remember.

Rikard: Do you remember whether it was a white?

Neal: No. . .Well, let me. . . .You see, in the CIO, they had us fixed where we were called "vice presidents at-large" and there were four seats--one from the Mobile area and one from the Montgomery area, and then Birmingham, and North Alabama. So you would have at least four blacks on because we were "at-large"--what you call "at-large" members. But I think that if I had still been working in the state, I could have run for an executive. . . . Now, it's no longer at-large because they finally decided that it was discriminatory to set aside places for blacks; that you ought to run for any place. But I think it may still be a "gentlemen's agreement" that you don't run against them, but. . .

Rikard: But those four were reserved for blacks?

Neal: Those four were reserved for blacks, um hum.

Rikard: So that put you on the board in '48. How old were you then?

Neal: Hmmm. . .I was born in 1919 and that's 20. . .I think I was almost 30 years old or about that.

Rikard: Still relatively young for that kind of position.

Neal: Yes.

Rikard: When you got that position, did you give up your other local position with the union?

Neal Oh, no!! You. . .Nothing! Nothing was more important to me than Local 490! Really.

Rikard: Were you still shop steward?

Neal: Still shop steward and still recording secretary.

Rikard: Well, what were your duties now in this new position on the board?

Neal: Well, you see, if you had any kind of a problem, if somebody came in to organize another shop within the area, you were to assist them and help them make contact. And if there was something going on in the community and if there was a shop that needed organizing, then you would write it up and send it in to the state organization. You looked out after the welfare of the union in your district. Then get in time to run the president and the financial secretary and all these big people who would be getting in contact with you and letting you know. And then you have your meetings on your local level and, you know, choose what side you go on. (Chuckles)

Rikard: Did you get a salary for this job?

Neal: Oh no. . .no. . .all this was free.

Rikard: So every position you had with the union at this point, you were doing it for free?

Neal: Um hum. Eventually, I believe they started giving me three dollars a month to be recording secretary, but I think this was probably for cab fare or bus fare or something, you know, to get places and to do more things, but. . .no pay. . .no.

In 1950, we organized the CIO Council in Montgomery. That was the Central Labor Council and I ran in that (chuckles) to be the financial secretary. And we were just organized and we chose the president and the vice president and. . .But I remember I ran for the financial secretary, and there was a white man--whose name I don't remember--from Prattville was running and there weren't but about seven or eight of us blacks who attended. Why I beat him by 30-something votes! But I had friends. . .I made friends with my co-workers and the other labor people, and they supported me. See,CWA at that time in Montgomery was very active and they had real staunch, real staunch, members who came out to help organize it, and Harry Tully, who is now president of the Glass Bottle Blowers, was a part of this. I think, but I'm not sure, that he was our first president. And we had board meetings and everything. We had a real good organization going until the bus protest began (laughs) and then I, being black and being treated like we were treated and everything, I sorta' turned on my friends who happened to have been white. . .but they were my friends, and some of them really called my hand on it because I have a friend. . .had a friend who was with the telephone company at that time who later became the executive vice president of the Alabama Labor Council--

that's the legislative director. His name is Earl Pippen and today, he's my friend. But Earl really called me on the carpet about my attitude about the people who were with me and who meant me well. But he was able to talk to me and to point out to me how I was not trying to help knit things together in the city, but that I was joining over to forces and it was gonna become a pure black and white issue. I knew we had white people who were good-willed with us, but I guess in the madness and the anger, you just get totally frustrated. I'll always be grateful to Pippen for the things that he said to me to make me come to my senses.

I'll tell you how bad it was: I went to council meeting one night over on the Mt. Meigs Road. . .We met at the Carpenter's home and there was a man named Brock and. . .What's that other guy's name? Jack Brock and. . .golleee. . .I thought I'd never forget his name. I can't think of it right now. But when I walked by them. . .They were standing downstairs at the Coke machine and I started up the steps and ohhhh, look like a cold chill came on my back, and I was so scared! And I went on up and I sat right next to Earl Pippen because I believe I was. . . I might have been. . . . No, Oscar Junkins was there and he was with the union in Montgomery and he was black and he was there. I don't remember there being another black person, but I sat next to Pippen and Harry Tully and Barney Weeks. Barney Weeks was still at that time in Montgomery 'cause he was out of the typographical union in Montgomery and he was a part of the Council at this time because we had merged by this time. And, a woman who works at the Glass Bottle Blowers told Pip that Jack Brock and Welch. . .His name was Homer Welch. . .said that they were gonna' "do me in" that night. And so, I didn't know anything about it and after the meeting was over, I started out and Pip said, "Wait a minute, Fannie. I want to talk to you." And then he went over and he said something to Barney and to Harry and they came on over and we started a conversation and I noticed that Barney was in front of me and then Pip and Harry was walking sort of behind me, but almost with me, and I came out between them. And when we got downstairs, there was Jack Brock and Homer Welch, and they was talking about, "nigger lovers!" (laughs) Talking about, "We'll get her!" and all this, and it was at this time that I knew. I was afraid anyway because I had felt it when I was going up the steps.

(End of Side 1, Tape 2)

Barney drove his car maybe in front or behind, and Harry drove his car, but anyway, the car that I was in and that Pip was in was between the other two cars and they carried me home. And then, after that night, I didn't try to go to council meeting anymore for a long time because I was actually afraid for my own safety, you know.

Rikard: Let's talk a little bit about Montgomery in the 1950s and the bus boycott. How did you get involved in this?

Neal: I think I told you earlier that I was just a person who would get involved in whatever was going on. I was soooo tired of going, many evenings. . . . We lived a long ways from work and we had no transportation and so we'd get a ride sometimes, and sometimes we couldn't get a ride, and we'd be too tired to walk and so we'd ride the bus and the bus driver would want you to hand him the money in the front door and then you go around in the back door and you get in. And oftentimes, he'd pull off and leave you! You know? And so this was something. . .It's nothing in this world that has happened to black folks that was worse than the intimidation that we took from the city buses in Montgomery. Nothing! And the way the drivers would treat us--like we were animals. . .worse than that—and they were stealing, because if they took my money in the front door and then drive off and leave me before I could get around there and get in the back door. . .have us packed back in there, and then it was insulting that we would be on the bus and sitting down and all the seats were taken in the front, and then you're white and you get on and I've got to get up and give you my seat and I paid my money? You see, this was something that was deep in every black person in that city, whether they participated or whether they didn't. They couldn't help but resent it! And so when they did Mrs. Parks in that afternoon, and all day at work that next day we heard about it, and we were mad at work.

Anyway, they had this meeting down at the Dexter Avenue Church that night and I really went down there, but I was a little bit late getting there. There wasn't but nine people there, and this was the night that Martin Luther King was nominated as the temporary chairman of the Montgomery. . .well, temporary chairman. We didn't even have a name and afterward we said, "Well, we need to name ourselves something," and somebody came up with the name "Montgomery Improvement Association." But it was only a temporary thing because they agreed. . .they agreed, because I still wasn't inside the meeting, but I was down there. They agreed that they would stay off the buses on Monday because Mrs. Parks' trial was going to be on Monday and that they were going to get somebody to run some notices off and we were going to put them in everybody's door throughout the community. So I helped get these

leaflets out to the black community for the meeting, and it said we would stay off the buses on Monday and then we would have a meeting Monday night at Holt Street Baptist Church. That was the night that Rev. King spoke to the group and he said all those magic things. He was a great speaker anyway, but when he was telling us how we had been treated and all those things, you know, it. . .and he. . . . .That morning nobody rode those buses. Some people will have ridden those buses. I won't say "nobody", but two or three got on, you know. Some people might have caught that bus, but they had the nerve to send the motocycle cops out behind the bus, you know, as if. . . . .and so this intimidated people who might have caught the bus, and they decided to walk.

So we walked that day and then that night we went on to the Holt Street Baptist Church to see what was going to happen, and we decided that we were going to walk until she was turned out. . . until the trial was ended. And then it just went on. We were going to meet again on Thursday night, and then Thursday night we had the meeting and things still hadn't been solved. So we started meeting, and the first thing we knew, we were nationwide. We opened up an office and everything. I worked at the factory everyday, but when I would get off work everyday, I would go over to the office because I had a girlfriend, Hazel Gregory, who was Frank's wife and one of the secretaries, and she and I grew up together too, so I would go and hang around over there and do whatever I could do just as a volunteer.

Rikard: Was this your first civil rights involvement?

Neal: I was in the NAACP, and you see, no, 'cause they wouldn't let us vote. You know how they gave us that long. . .and then if you didn't cross a "t" or dot an "i" or something. . .anything. If you do everything, you still didn't get to cast a vote. In 1945, I also registered to vote, and that was my first. . .I guess. . . through the NAACP and things like this was my uh. . . .

Rikard: What had been your NAACP participation?

Neal: Oh, in 1931 I got my first recognition for writing the most memberships in the NAACP--youth memberships--and I worked with the "Y". I used to be very active in membership drives in the "Y".

Rikard: So your role in the Montgomery Improvement Association was not necessarily one of leadership, but one of participation.

Neal: Oh no. . .a follower. . .participation and a follower. . .yes.

Rikard: You say the plant closed down in '59?

Neal: Um hum.

Rikard: What was the reasoning behind it closing down?

Neal: During the war, Reliance had something like 28 plants across the country and they had government contracts, and so there was no more war. We had some that made parachutes; some who made shirts; some who maybe made dungarees, you know, made different things. If you'll remember, there was a recession after the war and. . . Anyway, we got laid off between seasons when we would be changing from spring to summer goods and from summer to fall and from fall to winter. We were always laid off and things like this, so in 1952 I got laid off and I took a job with R. L. Polk. This is the people that get the city directories together.

Rikard: R. L. Pope?

Neal: Polk, P-O-L-K. You're familiar with the city directory?

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: That's the company that makes them. And so one day, it was the hottest summer I've ever seen besides this one, I guess, and I was just reading the paper 'cause I was drawing my unemployment and was getting 28 dollars a week and so I was doing all right. Well, I said, "Shoot! I'm gon' get me a job. I want me a job." So I was reading in the want ads and I saw this ad that day and I went down and applied for this job. (Chuckles) So the man said, "Well, you're the first colored person that ever applied." But he said, "I'll tell you what. You find a friend, so there'll be two of you--a partner--and bring them back down here 'cause I like the way you talk. I think you could be a help to me." So my neighbor, who was a school teacher, was out of school that summer and everything and, you know, you need money. So I went home and I first told my sister. And she said. . .my sister Clara said, "Shoot! You're crazy! I can get 28 dollars a week and don't have to do anything but go get it? And I'm gon' out and work for 35 in this weather?" And I said, "Yeah, that's what I'm gon' do." So she said she didn't want it, and she said, "Louise say she want a job," so I got Louise Young to go down there with me and we both took instructions that afternoon. And the man said to be back the next morning at 8 o'clock, or something like that, you know. And we went back down there and then all the other people that were writing. . .getting the census for this directory were there, and those poor white folks was poorer than dirt! I'll never forget this lady. . .I shouldn't say it, but she was the nastiest thing I had ever seen! She hadn't had a bath for ages, I'm sure, because all that rust around her heels and things. And she was the worse one. And she said, "I'm not working with those niggers!" (Laughs) And here we are, clean and. . .you know. . .looking like somebody, and she's down there half raggedy.

She really raised sand about it, but the man who was in charge of it was from Detroit and what he wanted was his work done, you know. So this lady was able to influence quite a few people to quit, but as fast as one of 'em would quit, we was sending some black folks down there and they was getting those jobs, and they was glad to get them 'cause, you see, you had a certain amount of production to do per day, but they gave you a list to go by--the streets and all of this--and they assigned me to my own community. So many times, when I would go down there at 8 o'clock in the morning, I would have done two hours of work in the morning already. And then, late in the afternoon. . . We probably would work until 10:00 or 10:30, and then we would come home and stay home until 4:00 or 4:30 in the afternoon, and then we would go back out and work 'til 7:30 or 8:00 o'clock. Well, we had done that eight hours' work because we knew the area and we could move fast and had it down.

So then the union. . .We had a business agent. Hazel Bankston was in charge of the union labor, but I think Gladys Dollar was our business agent at that time and she told them that I had taken a job and the man told me that if I was interested, that I could travel with the company. So she told Gladys Dickerson and them in New York and they decided that they didn't want me to get away from the shop. They thought that I might be a little use to them in the shop, so they sent me to Birmingham and I worked with Hazel Bankston on the union label drive--pushing the union label. We would have tables set up in different union halls showing union-made goods and tell them who made union goods and the things that were not union-made and things like this. So I worked about two weeks and then I got called back to my job and I went back. I enjoyed every day of it.

But in 1955, my daughter finished high school and she wanted to go to Dillard University and I was barely making enough money . . .my sister and me together was barely making enough to buy food and to pay the note and the utilities and all these kind of things. But my child always believed that whatever she wanted, mother will do it. And so I couldn't see how I could let her down and I didn't have any money to send her. But there's a man at home named Rufus Lewis. In fact, he's a state representative now, and he ran a club called the Citizens' Club and you weren't supposed to be able to get in the club unless you had a membership card and your membership card would be that you had registered to vote. And that was the idea that he opened the club up with. That was one way that you were able to keep the riff-raff out, because if they came in and were going to kinda' turn the club out or raise so much sand, well we'd just tell him and he would go and ask them for their membership card and then if they weren't registered, he'd say, "Well, I'm sorry. It's just for registered

voters." You know. . .but that was just a front, really, 'cause other people came who were not registered because it wasn't their fault because they were trying, but it was just hard to do. But anyway, when I went in, I talked to Coach. . .we called him "Coach". . .and I said I needed a job and I wanted to work in the club. And he said, "Miss Fannie, you know you don't want to wait no tables!" And I said, "Yes, I do, because Sweetpea wants to go to Dillard and I don't have enough money." And he said, "I'll see what I can work out. Maybe I can let you tend bar." He said, "But you could make tips if you were waiting tables." He said, "I don't know. . . ." But he went home and he talked to Mrs. Lewis about it and she said, "Rufus, you give her a job if she wants to work! How many young women would do that?" You know. . ."would want to do it?" So it was through Mrs. Lewis. She got killed, but she was a very fine woman.

So I started working at the club and I worked at the club on Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays at night and I made real good tips. I would leave work some Fridays and I would go home, (chuckles) take me a bath, and I'd run and get in the bed and sleep fast because at 7:00 o'clock I would have to be at work, and I would work until, sometimes. . .if I didn't have to work at the plant on Saturdays, sometimes we'd stay up there until 6:00 o'clock in the morning 'cause of all the late owls and everything. Sometimes we'd be ready to close and then here would come some more stragglers. They were nice people, but they'd say, "Let's go to the Citizens'. . ." You know. And Coach would say, "Oh, we're all closed." And then he'd say, "Let's have a party!" And we would stay there and play the Rockola and serve them liquor and stuff and dance with 'em (chuckles) and stay there, sometimes, all night. But if I had to go to work at the plant the next day, I would never work later than 1:00 o'clock. And on Sunday. . .I would work all night on Saturday if. . .you know. I'd let the other girls go and I would just stay if it was necessary for somebody to stay all night 'cause I'd have all day Sunday to sleep. But I would sleep until about 10:30 and then I would get up and get dressed and I would go to church and then I would run back home. Then, I would sleep until 3:00 because I was supposed to go in early on Sundays because we opened early and I was the only one who would be there in the afternoon, but that was because I was going to leave earlier that night because I had to work the next day.

And then in the summer. . .It was a beautiful place at one time. He had these pecan trees all out in there and we had a patio and in the summertime, we would have good business on Wednesday nights as well as Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. So he'd have a little band or something--some kind of entertainment--and I would be up there and would wait tables in the summertime on that night.

Most times 'cause I needed the money. And I wouldn't touch my money. Whatever I made in tips, I would. . .I had me a shoebox for my paper money and I had me some jars that I put my change in. And then, at the end of the month, my nephew and my little niece and my daughter. . .Well, my daughter was gone to school then, but we would sit down in the floor and we would count the money and we'd roll it up and then I'd take it to the bank. Oftentimes, I had enough to pay her tuition, you know, or her room and board or. . . .

Rikard: Did you do that for four years?

Neal: I worked there for three-and-a-half years and I never got tired. Well, occasionally, you know, I'd just be so tired that I just couldn't make it, and I would call them up and say I was gonna' take a night off. And if it was kinda' slow, he would say, "All right, you deserve it." But I was a good waitress because one time he and I had a little misunderstanding and I don't know if he fired me or if I quit 'cause we said hard things to each other. And then. . .Everybody knew me, just about, you know, and so I called some of my friends up and told them that he had done me bad. And they didn't like it at all and so they fixed it up so that they would go down there (chuckles) and they'd say, "Where's Fannie?" And he'd say, "Oh, Miss Fannie's not with us anymore." And they'd say, "OK. We're going over to the Africlub." (Laughs) After a couple of days, Coach called me and said, "Miss Fannie, come on back to work." You know. I was so glad to get my job back I didn't know what to do! (Laughs heartily) I really don't know if he fired me or if I quit or if in it all he might have said, "I'll fire you," and I said, "You can't. I quit!" I don't know how it was, but, anyway, I went back and I worked on.

Then later, my sister started working up there, too. You know? Times were very. . .The depression didn't leave me until I got this job and it didn't leave me immediately then, but I was, you know, in a little better position. Course, by the time I got this job, my daughter finished college that year and I worked up at the club for three-and-a-half years. Then, when I counted out my money the last of January, my legs got so tired I couldn't go, and I called Coach and I told him I was going to have to take off some time because my legs were bad. But I don't think they would have ever hurt if I hadn't had enough money to pay her tuition out for the year, her room and board, and her graduation fees. But, during Thanksgiving and Christmas, we were off work. Our shop was closed down for that week for inventory and all that, except I guess I was a little bit greedy, and I knew how to help take inventory, so I went in and would always help with the inventory. But I would still go to my job every night. So during that

period I made very good and people were very kind to me. People were very kind to me because people would say to me that they admired me because so many people wouldn't make that sacrifice for their child, you know. The women were good to me and the men were good to me, and they would say, "When you go to the Citizens' Club, ask for Fannie." And then sometime they would come in and order something, and the wife or the girlfriend, or whoever would say, "You ought to be ashamed of yourself! You give Fannie more than that!" You know. . .and I would save my money. I thought it was jinky to spend it as you got it, you know.

But there are so many people that I will forever be grateful to because they were kind to me when I needed them so badly.

Rikard: What year did your daughter finish college?

Neal: She finished Dillard in '59.

Rikard: Then she finished in the same year that the plant closed?

Neal: The plant closed. . . .I got off work the last of March, but the plant didn't really close. . . .They cleaned it completely out, I think, by August, or something like that. Everybody was off by then. But by being the marker, I was the first one to. . . . My job was the first operation and that was the first one that was over. But then, I still went in for a few days and would help check up on supplies and things like this, but I had already been promised this job as a special project worker and so I didn't mind getting off. I had started drawing my unemployment. I don't remember now exactly what we were getting at that period. I think they had raised the unemployment up to 30-something dollars a week and I collected that on through the summer, because I could have gone on this job earlier, but because it was just a special project for one year, the people who had helped me get the job decided that we ought to stretch the unemployment and draw that and then go on the job so that the year would. . .you know. And then I would be eligible to draw unemployment again if this didn't work. But it seemed that everything that I touched just turned out in my favor.

Rikard: Who helped you get the job?

Neal: Barney Weeks, who's the president of the AFL-CIO Alabama Labor Council; Earl Pippen, who was the Legislative Director, COPE Director; Phil Weightman, who worked for the CIO as the PAC Director, and then when they merged and COPE was formed. . . .He's a black man, but he is truly. . .He's 75 years old today! Huh! I forgot! He's 75 years old today and he's still gainfully employed and he's

alert and (snaps fingers) quick on the. . . .But he was truly a labor leader and a man. There are some people who are. . . . . There's a difference in a real man. He stands up for what he believes in.

Rikard: Was he local? From Alabama?

Neal: No, he really came from Mississippi, I think, as a young man, but he grew up in St. Louis and he was out of Chicago, but he worked for the national AFL-CIO and he worked all over the country. I met him back in 1953 in Atlanta, Georgia, at a conference. I had ridden over there with Barney and Pippen. They were still local then in Montgomery, but we rode over together. I took notes and he got impressed with the way I was writing everything down and everything, and then later that evening a group of the black. . . We couldn't stay in the hotel with the whites and we stayed at the Wallahaja Hotel. This was a hotel and apartment house that was run by a black man. And that night we were recapping things and I was able to tell them about many things and he got me to give him some of my notes and things.

He was very popular with Mr. Reuther--Walter Reuther--and at that time he talked to Walter about me and Walter said, yeah, he would put me on. But my roots was in Montgomery and I wasn't thinking about going no place for nothing! You know, I was. . .I still love my family and my home and I had this job at the factory, and by now, I think I was making about $1.50 an hour! (Chuckles) So I had become. . .You know how that is. But anyway, I wasn't interested in going. Then, when I found out the plant was going to close, Mr. Weightman was down in Birmingham with Mr. Patton. . . We had an organization here known as the Alabama Coordinating Association for Registration and Voting and Mr. Weightman was instrumental in helping Mr. Patton--W. C. Patton--and a group of other men--Mr. Clarence Lee from Montgomery and W. P. Mitchell out of Tuskegee and Dr. Gomillion and Mr. Montgomery from Mobile. It was any number of black men--Dr. Rogers from up at Anderson and Mr. Swopes from Sheffield--but it was any number of people who thought we had the right--ought to have the right--to vote. And so we organized this Alabama Coordinating Association.

Mr. Weightman had been very kind to get funds from the organization to help us put on registration and to get printed matter, and he would send us literature free and stuff like this, and so when I saw him. . . .I attended a meeting at. . .I don't know whether it was at the Gaston Motel or at the building next door to the hotel, but anyway, we had a meeting here in Birmingham and I was at the meeting and I told Mr. Weightman that I was going to need a job. And he said, "At the very time when I don't know anybody who needs anybody!" And he said, "But let me work on it." And so he first

talked to Barney and Pip about me, to see what their thinking was, and they said, "Oh sure, we'll do anything we can." Well, I was from the Amalgamated and he had friends in the Amalgamated, being Mr. Roseblum, Secretary-Treasurer, and he talked to Mr. Roseblum about it, and he said, "Sure, I'll help you," and he talked to Mr. Reuther and to Mr. Hathaway, who was Secretary-Treasurer of his union--the United Packing House Workers, at that time—and the Steel Workers. I think Mr. McDonald was still there at that time. And he set out to raise the kitty of $6,000, but the first year he had $10,000 so he still stuck it out. He said he wanted to work it out so I could make at least 75 dollars a week, which was equivalent to what I was making in the shop, and we would stretch it out while he was seeing if something else could be worked out in my interest, you know.

So I worked like that for this organization. I was supposed to work in Alabama, and I worked in Alabama for six months. But I had such successes with the little projects that I would put on and had, that they decided that it "can be done", if you have somebody just working at it and can get the attention of people and get people involved. And that's what I was able to do. So, in the spring, Senator Kefauver was running for reelection in Tennessee and they pulled me out of Alabama and sent me to Tennessee to work in his campaign. He was running against a man named Tip Taylor and we just socked it to 'em! We beat Tip Taylor to death!

Then, after that. . .Well, the Alabama Coordinating Association was making a contribution into. . .you know. . .they were making a small. . .I think they were giving 35 dollars a week for expenses, and so the whole bill was like coming to $105, I think, or $110, but I had to pay my whole traveling out of that, eats and everything. But I don't regret it any because it really turned out to be real good. After we worked in Tennessee, they sent me to South Carolina to get involved in registration in South Carolina. Well, by this time, John Kennedy was getting ready to run for President and I was working some in Alabama and in South Carolina and in Tennessee, and then the Alabama Coordinating Association, which really didn't have any money anyway, stopped making a contribution and the AFL-CIO, then, refunded. . .He raised a little money from the other groups, but it was such a good project that the AFL-CIO then decided to underwrite the project for a year.

Rikard: Well, who was your direct boss in all of this?

Neal: Well, by this time, Mr. Weightman was really the boss. He was giving me then. . .then. . .When I first started. . .

Rikard: He was with COPE?

Neal: Yes. When I first started as a special project worker, Mr. W. C. Patton, who is the NAACP voter registration man in the state. . . Well, he's really throughout the South and. . .well, throughout the country, I think, now. But at that time, all of us loved Alabama so he was telling me where to go in Alabama. But when I moved out, then Mr. Weightman started directing my activities, through Earl Davis, who acted as the paymaster.

Rikard: Were you actually working for the AFL-CIO, or were you working for the Alabama Coordinating Association?

Neal: At this period, I was being paid through the Association, but I was being instructed by Mr. Weightman, who worked for the AFL-CIO.

Rikard: Well, there was a very close coordination then?

Neal: It was a coordination between the two groups, um hum.

Rikard: And the Alabama Coordinating Association was working primarily for black voter registration?

Neal: Um hum. Well. . .I was working strictly in the black community when I went to Tennessee and when I went to South Carolina. Until this spring, I have been able to work with the white community and with my white trade unionists and all of this, but it's just because I have branched out and made friends and we have helped each other in projects and things. But my main job all the time as a field director was to work with the minority--that's the black community. And so this is going to be my first thing to go outside of the black community.

Rikard: But in this period—'59, '60--the union, in effect, was using another organization--the Alabama Coordinating Association--to get the black community registered. . .

Neal: It helped. You see, the AFL-CIO has done more for blacks than any other organization in the country. . .in the world, I would say. I'm sure I'm telling the truth because they have always fought for social legislation, which the black community was able to reap the benefits. They realize that if they help get black people to register, they will be helping themselves, too, but they've always had compassion for the underdog, and we <u>were</u> the underdogs. So, they were willing to put funds, if they could get results and get blacks registered. The first money that came into Montgomery for the bus protest was from the Packing House Workers, and the unions really rallied to this Montgomery bus protest.

Rikard: What was the position of the Central Council that you were a member of, as far as the bus protest was concerned?

Neal: I told you that Pip really got me straight on that because I uh. . . after that experience that night. . .Well, I had been acting a little funny and had missed several meetings with the Council because they were in conflict with the meetings that we were having with the Montgomery Improvement Association, and then I was getting mad at all the uh. . . .You know how we are. We get "hung up", and I was turning on all of the whites, and it was Pippen who got me on the right track again. But after that experience that night--and he was aware of it--well, he didn't bother me about coming to the Council meetings anymore until things got a little bit better--you know, when that period had kinda' went on and. . . Finally, I started going back, but I resigned in early '56 as being the financial secretary of the Council.

Rikard: Well, did you feel that, overall, the union leadership in Montgomery gave support to the boycott; or was there such division--black/white--that they were unable to do that?

Neal: That has been. . . . .The people who were really the leaders in that Council stayed loyal. They never changed. But the membership as a whole. . .and we have not really gotten back together yet. The Communication Workers still. . . . . You see, the bus protest did more harm to many groups than it did help. But, on the other hand, it. . . .Nothing can replace it, where blacks are concerned because it's the greatest thing that ever happened to us. But the Communication Workers, their new leaders. . .new president. . .all new leaders, and many of the members who were really loyal to their union really dropped out--really dropped out of that organization. When John Patterson ran in 1958 against Wallace. . . .This is funny, in a way, but I'm ashamed to tell it, really, but the unions supported Wallace and I got arrested. . . the only time I've ever been locked up in my life was when I was working at the polls in the interest of George Wallace. But he stood for more than John Patterson, because the only thing that John Patterson had told the people of Alabama was that he wanted to be their Governor. He wanted to carry on "cleaning up Alabama." And he said, "As your Attorney General, I ran the NAACP out of business," and he, you know, waved the "red flag" to get the white element all stirred up about the NAACP. This did a lot of harm for us, but you see, for a long time. . . .I don't tell many people this now, but I was actually locked up and I was pushing George Wallace for the Governor of the State.

Rikard: How do you mean you were "locked up"?

Neal: Oh, I got picked up at the polls and they said I was violating some state law and some article so-and-so. I don't know what it was. But they picked me up and carried me to jail! They took my picture

and gave me a number and identifying marks and everything else. I stayed in a cell, I guess, maybe 25 minutes or so. It seemed like forever! But a man named Rich Harris. . .You see, they wouldn't take property bonds or anything. You had to put up a cash bond when we got in jail during those times. Even though the bus protest was over, if you got locked up, you had to have cash. So, Rich Harris, who ran a drug store there, (he passed last year) came down to get us out of jail and when he got down there, he had this big roll of money--great big roll! He showed it to me. He had several 100-dollar bills wrapped around a lot of other bills, and he went down and he pulled his roll out and he charmed the jailer, when the jailer saw this roll of money. And he said he had come to go the bail for Miss Fannie Neal and the Reverend Hoffman and another young man--I don't remember his name--but when we were coming out of jail, they were bringing some more into jail. But I think this stopped it because they must have arrested six of us. And again, of course, Coach Lewis was active in this because he was coming into jail when they was taking me out of jail. He thinks that the psychology of having this big roll of money was that the jailer says, "There's no point in us locking them up 'cause this guy's got enough money to get them all out all the week," you know.

So when we went to court, Fred Gray was our lawyer and they found us guilty. The first court we went into--Recorder's Court, I guess--they bound us over to the next court. And we didn't even know when we were supposed to go to court, and I picked the paper up one morning, reading it before I went to work, and it said: "Blacks Forfeit the Bond". I almost died! I called Coach and he called Gray and he said he had talked to the judge and they had decided they were going to just throw it out. They weren't going to pursue it any from one court to the other because they weren't able to prove what law we were breaking because Gray asked them if they were talking about the <u>building</u>, then everybody who came into City Hall to pay a bill had violated the law; but if they were talking about the actual voting <u>booth</u>, then none of us were guilty, you see, because we were standing more than thirty feet away from the voting booth. But if they were talking about the building, then everybody who entered into the building for whatever reason had violated the law. So they really didn't have too much ground to stand on, and so the judge had promised to throw it out, but the paper had picked it up that we had forfeited our bond. But that's another thing.

The Communication Workers were real active and they called down there and was giving them [complaints] about "arresting our members" and <u>I</u> was down there. I didn't have any identification on me except my union card and they said, "Union Official Arrested!" (Laughs) But, anyway, it was very exciting. Three or four days afterwards.

Rikard: That was before you were doing political projects officially for the union. This is why you were still. . . .

Neal: Oh, I was involved in doing political projects for the union since '45 'cause we set out to try to get all the members in our plant registered, and all my family and all my friends.

Rikard: How did you go about doing that?

Neal: What?

Rikard: How did you prepare people to go and register?

Neal: Did you register when they had that long form with 24 or 25 questions?

Rikard: [No verbal answer audible]

Neal: OK. We got ahold of some of them and then we ran them off in masses and we'd have clinics. . .We called 'em "clinics" at that time, and I got eight or ten people in different areas and some afternoons I'd have two or three clinics in one afternoon with people filling out these forms--practicing how to register, how to fillthem out, and what to. . .you know. . .all of this. So uh. . .And at the shop, we used to have clinics at our lunch hour and at union meetings, when it come a union meeting, and people had been down to register and they still hadn't heard from it and they were filling the form out right, and they were mad, and all of this. So it was motivating. We could get people to register then easier, almost. . .to <u>try</u> to register easier then than we can now, almost.

Rikard: When you felt that someone had filled the form out properly and they were still not able to get registered, what did you do then?

Neal: Well, we had different tactics. Uh. . .we'd send them back down. I got registered when they were talking about the Boswell Amendment. You know, you would have to quote any part of the <u>Constitution</u> to the satisfaction of the Registrar. I don't remember which it is, but there's one part of the <u>Constitution</u> that has less than one whole line in it, and I had learned it at that time. But anyway, a white guy was signing that Saturday morning. Seventeen of us went at one time, and then when I finished filling out my form, I went up to him and I said, "Is there any portion of any part of the <u>Constitution</u> that you would like for me to quote for you?" And he looked up at me, and he said, "No." And he wrote something on my form, but then the middle of the next week, I got my registration form. I don't think anybody else got their certificate that way. Well, this infuriated the other people who went with me

that day because we knew we knew how to fill them out! So this just made them more determined and many of them would just call Mrs. Willis. She was the one who was over the board and they would just call her and bless her out and talk to her and tell her that they want to know. Like my sister, Clara, had been down there about five times and she couldn't get registered. So I came home one afternoon and I just picked up the phone, 'cause she was giving me hard times 'cause I was telling her she needed to go back. She said she wasn't going back no more. She said she'd been there as many times as she felt was right. So I just picked up the phone and called down there and told Mrs. Willis that I was Clara and that I had been down there. I told her the day and all this, and that I wanted to know what happened. I hadn't heard from my application. And she said, "Oh, it's in the mail. You'll get it tomorrow, Clara." And for true! The next day we got it! (Laughs) But it wasn't in the mail. She didn't even look. She didn't do anything. She just answered me right off, just like that, and she had no idea. She couldn't remember all those folks, just like that.

Rikard: Then you think if anybody questioned them, they would go ahead and register them?

Neal: Sometimes, but one man--old man Nash from down at Fleeta--told her that he wasn't gonna' die 'til he got registered, and he was 80-something years old. He just told her that and she registered him that time. But, you see, as the time went on, those people who were working in the plant with me, that we could motivate to go down, we really got a lot of 'em. We got a great majority of them to register. But you must realize that we had all kinds of people. Some of them knew how to push those machines, but they just never had the confidence in themselves that they could fill out the form, and they didn't try. But there were others who did. We would go to churches and we would go to the schools. We would go anyplace--PTA meeting--where there was going to be a group of people and we would always have a clinic because it only took a little while. Nobody was sure that they could pass, so nobody was ashamed.

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: And my neighbors used to hate to see me coming, I guess. One lady told me, said, "I just went on and got registered. I got tired of you worrying me." But, now, she never missed voting. She never. . . Miss Crenshaw. She never missed voting! And I'm proud to say that everybody on my street is a registered voter.

Rikard: You say, "We ran these clinics." Was it the union, or was it just you heading up an informal group?

Neal: Informal group. . .because at this time Coach had become our leader sort of, you know. You have to have a leader and then you have to have good followers to carry it on.

Rikard: Did you feel it was essential to have a man as a leader?

Neal: Not necessarily. . .no. But at that time. . .that time. . .he was the leader for. . . . And then there were other groups, you know. There was, you know, this vying for power: Who is the leader? But it depends on which ones you have following which one and I was one of Coach's followers and, naturally, we would try to get all the people we could and others would get mad and be pouting, but we would just keep going. I traveled all down around Luverne, Alabama, Crenshaw County, Pike County, Bullock County, Butler County, Barber County. . .We've been all over everywhere, where we was having a clinic.

Rikard: Did you pay your own expenses?

Neal: Well, Coach was able. He's the owner of a funeral home now.

Rikard: Oh.

Neal And he had a car. He wore out more cars trying to help black folks get registered! By the way, he has been appointed as the U.S. Deputy Marshal for the Middle District of Alabama. Not the Deputy, the U.S. Marshal for the Middle District of Alabama, and people are saying that he's too old. I really don't know how old he is. I know he's close to 70. I'm sure he's close to 70, but it's a matter of opinion whether he's too old. He's paid his dues. You know, when they talk about him, he's this, that, and the other. He used to take a bunch of us--as many as wanted to go--anywhere we wanted to go if we could hold a clinic. And you see, holding a clinic, you'd have to give each person. . .you'd have to grade the paper, and you couldn't embarrass them. You have to look at it and tell them to check this right here and whisper to them and ask them, you know, what should they put there? And if they don't know, then you whisper and tell them and then you let them fill out another one and see when they get to that question whether they can fill it out or not.

Rikard: How did he get his name?

Neal: He used to be a football coach, but he was in a wreck. . .I don't know if he ever coached any after he was in that terrible wreck or not, but he married Mrs. Lewis. His wife was a Clayton and one of the leading black undertakers at home was Ross and Clayton, so he married the Clayton daughter. So he had time.

(End of Side 2, Tape 2)

Rikard: You were talking about your voluntary political activity, even before you were officially politically active. . . . .

Neal: I guess that's what led to me getting the job.

Rikard: Well, this was what I was going to ask: Did your informal work in political activities perhaps lead to your special projects job?

Neal: Yes, it did. It definitely did.

Rikard: Now this special projects started in '60?

Neal: '59. . .September of '59.

Rikard: And at first you were getting funding from several sources and you were working with the Alabama. . . .

Neal: Well, what they did was they pooled this and they made a pot.

Rikard: And that pot was for Fannie Neal?

Neal: Yes, it was for the special project and I was the special project to do voter registration.

Rikard: Now what project, in Alabama, did you do?

Neal: Well, my first trip outside of Montgomery was to Mobile. Well, let me say that after I took this job as a special projects worker, my first trip was to Mobile, and we uh. . . .This was a funny thing, because my friends from Mobile had always told me how easy it was and that they didn't have all the problems we had in Montgomery County and all the other counties throughout the state. In Mobile, they didn't have. . . .and I got down there and to my amazement, they had to have a voucher. If you were to get registered, you had to carry someone with you to swear that they know that you are who you said you were, and all that stuff. It was so ridiculous and I was so disgusted! But Earl Davis, who is also on our staff and who was my immediate supervisor before the reorganization, came to Alabama and worked in '58 and then he came back and worked in '59. But when he came back in the summer of '59, it must have been a city election or something like this, but it gave him an opportunity to train me because I worked, and he would do things, and show me how to do different things, and then he would be working one area and I'd be working in another. Then I would always report back to him. But this was all as a volunteer, but it was to train me some. Then, when I went to Mobile, I had to show him that his training was not in vain.

I tried the things that he did, with the ministers, as an illustration: We had had the ministers to go from door to door and knock on doors and we got their pictures made and got 'em to the black press and all this kind of stuff. And when I got to Mobile, I tried it on the ministers down there. People said, "Aw, they won't do it." But I smiled at them and "conned" some of them in, and they came on out and we did it in the housing project and they were just fascinated. They didn't realize. They found members of their churches that they hadn't seen in a loooong time, they said they didn't even know they were still alive, you know. It was quite an experience.

I worked with the NAACP leadership there and a man named Joe Lowery. By this time, Rev. King and them had organized the SCLC, Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and Joe Lowery was involved in that. He's a minister. . .was a minister from Mobile, and so he was very active in the community. I got around and I spoke at different churches about the importance of registering. Mr. Montgomery was a barber down there. He used to be a very. . .a <u>real</u> leader, but, for some reason, we like to kill off people who try to help us, or else when people got registered and everything, the . . .it got to be popular, then they tried to cast aside all those who had really gone through the hard times of it. He's not doing too well with his group now, but he really made a contribution. He got all these clubs. . .federated clubwomen. . .because, you see, they didn't care what color. . .I mean they didn't care what kind of education or what group you belonged to, they didn't register you in Alabama. And so, it was a problem that all black folks had. So it wasn't hard to move into this club and that club. . .any kind. We used to be very, very strong with savings clubs. You know, just a group of people get together and set up them a savings club. I'd go to those meetings and plead with those people and ask them to let us conduct clinics. And by this time, we had gotten groups of people down there involved and if we had a clinic at this place, we'd have Miss So-and-so going and Mr. So-and-so going to this place, and we had clinics going all over. Then we had transportation. People volunteered to take people if we could give them the list and the time and all that. They'd take them down and vouch for them. There was a postman in Mobile and he knew lots and lots of people, and they wanted to charge him with fraud or something because he identified a lady that he knew her face, but he didn't know her name. He knew about where she lived, but since he was there, he talked her into going in and registering and he said, "I'll vouch for you," and some way or another, they found out that he didn't know her, and they wanted to have him put in jail or something, and he said, "Well, I <u>do</u> know her. I don't know anything about her life, or anything like that, but I know her." He remembered her name and he remembered the address. . .you know. So, after then, that kinda' scared him away because he was gainfully employed as a postman and he didn't want to be involved in all that.

His wife was not too active in civic affairs and things, so he never went down to be a voucher for us again. (Chuckles) But we'd get people to just stay down there and then after that they found out that they were going to intimidate a voucher who stayed a long time. And it's time consuming to send ten people and ten vouchers down there. You know? That's just. . . .But this was just one of the ways to keep people from registering.

But we had a very good program that fall. We really got people registered during the fall of '59 in Mobile—one of the best registration drives that we had before the civil rights bill was passed, the Voter Rights Act.

Rikard: So one of your projects, then, was voter registration in Mobile. Did you have other projects within Alabama that first year?

Neal: Um hum. I left Mobile and I went to Sheffield, Alabama, in Colbert County, and I worked the whole county. I met a very fine lady up there who's a beautician. She lives at Cherokee, Alabama. Her name is Rebecca Rutland and Becky knew everybody down that road! And we registered all those people. She drove and we brought them in. We had clinics down there and we taught them how to fill out the forms and all that.

Then Bernice Owes. . .She's married now and I don't remember her name right now, but she was secretary for the Laborers' Union. You know, the laborers had a black union—a black local and a white local—but she was secretary and bookkeeper at the black local. We used the Laborers' hall as our headquarters to get our work together and everything. So we had a good thing going there and in Sheffield and in Tuscumbia.

Paul Johnson, who later went with management, but he was at that time with the. . .uh. . .what is it. . .TWA. . .with one of the unions at TWA. I can't remember which one. But Leon Nichols, who's passed away, was the business agent for the Laborers out at TWA. So all of us just. . .and Paul also served on the Alabama Labor Council Executive Board. So all this, by this time, was just blending together, so I knew people everywhere. And a man named Mr. Swopes from up at Sheffield had been active in the NAACP and in the Coordinating Association, so it wasn't really just trade unions—it was black people. [Correction: Operating Engineers]

Then, I went from there to Anniston, Alabama, where Dr. Rogers was and we had a real good drive going on up there. The ministers were very cooperative and we could put our notices in the churches and pass out the registration forms for those who wanted to study them. Many of the ministers set up the clinics themselves. And there was a school where Mr. . .Whisenhunt. . . I think that's his

name. He's at Alabama State in Montgomery now. It was Cobb High School. He gave me permission to meet with the teachers and talk to them about registering and voting. Dr. Rogers almost turned his office into. . .Every patient that came into his office --he's a dentist--he talked to 'em about getting registered. And sometimes people would have the toothache sooo bad, but he never passed the chance. And they would be sitting out there and sometimes he would call them in and say, "Can you come down because I'm so busy today and my receptionist is busy and I have a full day." And we'd go down and the courthouse wasn't too far from his office, and we'd get them to just go down. And sometimes, if the office was just so full and they weren't too painful, we'd let them go register while they waited and keep their place. So it was a real experience.

And, of course, I worked here in Birmingham in 1960 when the freedom riders came. I was on assignment here in Birmingham, and we had Miles College involved. Miles College is my church's school. Dr. Pitts was just coming here good and he was a real leader--Lucius Pitts. Did you ever know him?

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: And by that being my church's school, and I was a CME and this was a CME school, well he just opened the doors wide and we used the school. We got a band that was here to volunteer to play for a "ballot hop" one night and we had it at the Masonic. . . .

Rikard: A "ballot hop"?

Neal: A "ballot hop" and we had this at the Masonic Temple. They donated the place for us and the ladies that were working with me really knew how to put things together 'cause they had. . .The MC would be just talking and he said, "Oh! Congratulations to Miss Richards! She just got registered to vote today! Let's give her a big hand!!" And then, all at once, the band would be playing and he do something, and he'd say, "Hold it!" And the drum would just beat, and then he would say, "Congratulations, such-and-such a person!" And then, the students who had gotten the most people registered. . . .and it was just an exciting night! Really.

Before the Voter Rights Act was passed, this was, again, one of the biggest registrations that we had had here in Jefferson County. As we moved out, a man named Mr. Johnson and his wife Bernice Johnson. . .They live out in one of the suburb areas--one of the outer areas of Birmingham; not Fairfield, but out in one of the areas like that--and she really had a good organization and she worked with us. But, you see, we all had been active in the NAACP

together, and so it wasn't hard to get us to come together for a common cause. And, of course, in Montgomery, I still. . . .

Rikard: Kept right on working?

Neal: Yeah, I still do that. Many days I work for. . .just. . .

Rikard: When your paycheck came during during this time, who was it signed by?

Neal: Mr. Lee. He was the treasurer of the Alabama Coordinating Association. Clarence Lee, who was also an undertaker there. He passed away. His wife still carries the business on.

Rikard: In these cities you went into, were you actually the leader of the registration drive? Were you the coordinator of the activities?

Neal: Oh yes, I would be the coordinator--kinda' put it together--but whoever the leader was, I would work with them. You know, it would be the ideas I had used some place else that I would work with them in such a way that they really thought they were putting it together.

Rikard: So you would take a local leader, and then you were actually doing the real business of getting it coordinated, but you were using a local leader and pulling it together.

Neal: Yes, and wrapping it around that local group or leader. Um hum. My successes have been, not to project myself, but the idea or whatever was trying to be done. I've always said that it's irrelevant who I am or anything about me; it's the idea of the job that we're trying to get done.

Rikard: Um hum. When you moved on into Tennessee the next year, were you then officially with COPE?

Neal: No. I didn't go with COPE officially until January of 1962.

Rikard: Oh. So you were still on this kind of special. . . . .

Neal: I was still on this special project, but now the project was refunded every year, but it was refunded by friends of the black community. It was actually funded by the COPE Department of the AFL-CIO.

Rikard: But it was not officially a part of COPE?

Neal: No, it was not officially a part of it until January of 1962.

Rikard: Who did you get your paycheck signed by that second year?

Neal: Mr. Lee signed it.

Rikard: Still?

Neal: Until January of 1962.

Rikard: OK. So you were working in Tennessee, but you were still getting paid officially by the Alabama Coordinating Association?

Neal: Um hum, because this gave that organization prestige and, you know. . .and all of this.

Rikard: Um hum. How then did it get transferred so that your position was officially with COPE?

Neal: Ask that question again. . .

Rikard: All right. How did you officially get put on the staff of COPE?

Neal: By this time I had worked in Atlanta, Georgia, and we had been successful in defeating Davis, and I had worked in New Jersey, where we had been successful in electing Hughes as the Governor of New Jersey, and when I was on my way back to the South, I came through Washington, and Mr. McDevitt was Director of COPE at that time, and he said, "Oh, Fannie, congratulations! We're so proud of you!" And I just said, you know, "I'd like to talk to you a minute." I said, "I'd like to know when I'm going to become a part of the official staff. They say I don't have any benefits." And I guess it sort of caught him off guard or something, and he said, "Just give me 'til January." And so, come January, he did work it out and he put me on officially. . . . I guess I asked for it! (Chuckles)

Rikard: That's a good way to get it! Tell me about this campaign in Atlanta.

Neal: Oh. . .That was when we came down to Atlanta. We were there. . . I guess it was in '61, in the fall, and this was before they had all this modern voting apparatus and everything. They were going into. . . .In Atlanta, at that time, if you did not want a candidate, then you scratched through his name, and Charles Weltner was running against Jim Davis. I think his name was Jim Davis. And Jim Davis was the Mayor of Washington by his. . .uh. . .I guess by his seniority in Congress or something. . .however the Mayor of Washington was before they let us have a Mayor, one of the Congressmen would serve. You really had the job of seeing that the city was run. And so, he was so unkind to blacks in Washington--Davis--and he was not labor's candidate by any means. He was anti-minimum wage. He was anti-everything that the labor movement stands for--anti-union, too. So we wanted to get rid of him.

So a team of us came from--that same team that had worked in New Jersey came right down to Atlanta--and we worked and we were only

there ten days, but we tied in. We had friends there and we tied in with them and we had little funds to help with the campaign--volunteer dollars--and we got it together. The black people in Atlanta had been trying to get rid of him, but, you see, they had at that time. . . .gee whiz, I can't think. . .They had a. . . . system by. . . .You, uh. . . .You know, they had the county unit system in Georgia at that time, and this was the first year that they had eliminated the county unit system. So we had a record, and we worked on his record. He was unkind to blacks in Washington 'cause he was the Mayor. He was unkind to the labor movement and to blacks in Atlanta, and Charles Weltner was a well-known young lawyer whose family background was liberal and right, and so he was endorsed by the labor movement and he was endorsed by the black community and we teamed up together. We coordinated ourselves.

Dr. Mays was at Morehouse at that time. He's probably dead now. [still living] And he opened the doors at Morehouse [College] for us to get students to help us in the election. They volunteered. And then the president of Clark College was cooperative. Spellman College girls helped out--everybody. And plus, Atlanta at this time was a progressive city and it was moving on. Many of the doctors' wives came out as volunteers and we got people from all walks of life--the labor movement--people showed up and it was just a coordinated effort that was headed up by those of us who were in the labor movement and by the black organizations in Atlanta--the ministers . . . .The Urban League could not be really involved, but we had people who were working at the Urban League who were sympathetic to us and we were able, through this contact, to find people to participate as volunteers and things. Grace Hamilton, who is State Representative now in Georgia, was very active. Lottie Watkins, who was just elected to the State Legislature in a special election back in April, was very active and she was really the key to us getting in touch with all these little groups in the housing projects and things like this. We were anxious to "scratch Davis" and we had steps. It was very interesting. Weltner had somebody in every step and it would say, "Weltner, Weltner" when you walk on the sidewalk, you'd just walk "Weltner, Weltner". It was really together! Honestly, it was one of the most exciting campaigns because that morning, when we got up to go to work at 5:00 o'clock, it had started raining, and as the hours were later, it rained harder and harder. We had a telephone bank set up and it was almost. . .It was as near to perfection as anything that we have ever had because we knew who had to be picked up and we would call, and people would say, "We're waiting." And we rented cars from National Car Rental, and I say we "rented" them, but that man really. . . .I don't remember his name now, but the manager was for Weltner and so he rented us cars at a reduced rate--just as cheap as he could possibly rent them, he rented us those cars. And then,

[painted footprints on sidewalks]

nobody under 25 was supposed to drive these cars, so that meant that we had to get somebody to drive. And the students would ride in and they would open the doors for the old people and for whoever they could pick up, and we really voted the people in that election! And we beat Davis!

Rikard: In those kinds of elections, when there were still great tensions in the South between black and white, particularly white lower class, and there would be a lot of white, lower-economic class who would be in the labor movement; and you say "labor supports a candidate"--"the black community supports a candidate."

Neal: We come together, though, you know. I don't care how bad they dislike us. That element. . . .There comes a time when. . . . You see, money talks big, and we suffer with people like Davis. And when I say "we", it's "we" of the labor movement. They have a great impact on our lives--how they vote. And so, when it's a common cause, they forget what color you are. They may just forget it for that election or for that vote, and may not speak to you again--may not be speaking to you then--but we want the same things that they want. Now in Georgia, it is as bad as it is in Alabama. In Alabama, they have waved the red flag of "black versus white" and they've gotten away with murder. I hope that day never comes again!

Rikard: I do, too.

Neal: We almost got away from it. To use an illustration, when Lurleen [Wallace] ran, she had nine white men she was running against and she won without a runoff in 1966. But it was because a few blacks said that they were going to elect the next Governor of Alabama and they named Richmond Flowers. And fear. . .fear made those white folks go vote for Lurleen because Lurleen was George's wife and they came out of the hollows and the holes everywhere and voted for her, not knowing that there were many blacks who were not supporting Richmond Flowers--weren't even thinking about it--because we thought we knew what he was. In fact, we thought he'd "cut a deal" to pull us all over there so he could. . .and they were sitting up drinking coffee and laughing at us while we tried to elect him. But that year, the labor movement was for Carl Elliott and many of the black people were for Carl Elliott. Unfortunately. . . .Now Lurleen beat all nine of them, without a runoff. Now that's where white folks get together and they use, you know, black versus white, but John Cashim and Ozell Billingly, who are right here from Birmingham, were supposed to be our leaders, was the ones who got hung up on Richmond Flowers--"We gon' elect the next Governor!" Well, you can't elect nothin'. . .You can't elect a fly, if you don't have the votes! Including the graveyard, they said we had 234,000 blacks registered in Alabama, and there

was a million and 700-something thousand registered in the state, so, you know, this is silly for anybody to make a statement about what they're going to do. You can't do it unless you have the votes, and you can't do it even if we register every black in the state, we couldn't have elected anybody unless we had some white support. And then, what made me so unhappy with Richmond Flowers was that he went other places and was talking about what a liberal he was. But in Alabama, he didn't go to any white meetings, but he made every coffee and every. . . .If he thought I was having lunch and having company, he would try to get there to have. . . you know. . .sticking under the blacks. But, I always will think that, perhaps, he "cut a deal." (Chuckles)

Rikard: How do you mean that?

Neal: "Cut a deal"?

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: That's putting it very blank, and maybe I shouldn't say it, but I think it was an understanding between. . . .Politicians are funny things. Now he knew he couldn't win with just the black vote, but I'll bet you can't find five white organizations that Richmond appeared before while he was trying to become Governor of the state. And if he's not trying to get anything but black votes, there must be a reason. Either some of those people knew that he was a crook and was gonna' expose him. . . .I don't know what the reason was, but I think that it was something that they had gotten together and put together.

Rikard: When you say "they", who do you mean?

Neal: I'm talking about the professional politicians of the state--those he was running against. You know, they even got poor Jim Folsom to get in the race.

Rikard: And you think they were just using him to draw off the votes?

Neal: To draw off the votes, um hum. You see, the white element that you just mentioned, flocked to the polls in great numbers and hostility was very high that day by whites toward blacks, but they can't count either. If they ever looked themselves, there weren't but 234,000 supposedly registered blacks in the state, and I know. . .I looked. Listen, I had a brother who had been dead three years and his name was still listed, and I just went down the list looking in my hometown, and I could have scratched out I-don't-know-how-many people that was long dead that they were still counted. But, anything to inflate a mind and get

them to turn out in large numbers. . .any kind of way. . .wave the flag! You know, a lot of flag waving was done.

Rikard: But this wasn't as important in Georgia?

Neal: Oh, I have never worked in a campaign. . .now, I take that back. When Maddox ran against Arnold, that was a hot one.

Rikard: Yeah.

Neal: Yeah, but that was a time when in the black community. . .I remember one. . .I don't remember the exact number right now, but we voted 2,800-and-some blacks for Arnold and two votes for Maddox.

Rikard: Who were these other people on your team in that Atlanta campaign? What was their connection? What organizations?

Neal: Phil Weitman was the one who was really calling the shots in Atlanta. That was my ex-boss. Earl Davis was down. A young man named George Booker, who worked for the Democratic National Committee at that time, was there, and I was there. I guess we were the "outsiders".

Rikard: In the New Jersey campaign, was it about the same group working?

Neal: Yes, but we had a Dr. Spraggins who was from the Democratic Committee, and a Margaret Wilson from the Democratic Committee that was also in there with that staff, and George Booker, who was with the staff that I had mentioned before. We worked as a team to head up registration and then follow through with "get out the vote".

Rikard: So your primary activities in that year, after you left the special projects in Alabama, was New Jersey and Atlanta. Anyplace else? . . . .and Tenessee. . .

Neal: Well, I've said Tennessee. . .and South Carolina. . . .and Alabama (quiet chuckle)... .never forget Alabama.

Rikard: All right. And then you requested from COPE that you be put on officially. . . .

Neal: From Mr. McDevitt, who was the director at that time.

Rikard: And you were done so in '62. . .

Neal: Um hum. He said, "Just give me a few more days. Just give me until January." Well, I knew the Executive Council meets. . .the Board meets and he couldn't do anything until the Council met, but

I just wanted him to be alert and request it from the Executive Council.

Rikard: And what position were you given?

Neal: I was called a Field Director for COPE.

Rikard: What does that mean?

Neal: (Chuckles) Everybody always wants to know what that means. Everybody had to have a title, but I continued to do the same things that I had been doing all the time--bringing together groups, getting them interested in voter registration, getting them out to vote on issues and for a candidate endorsed by the labor movement. We've gotten involved in mayors' races--Philadelphia. . .Pennsylvania--these are just different places I have worked. I worked in Oklahoma. . .Oh, I don't want to start telling all that, though.

(End of Interview Session)
Tape 3, Side 1

This is a continuation of the Oral History Interview with Fannie Neal, being conducted at Samford University by Marlene Rikard on February 16, 1978.

Rikard: Fannie, the last time when we stopped, we mentioned that we wanted to discuss some specific campaigns that you worked in and were involved in. Perhaps a good place to start would be the general election of 1960. What were your activities in regard to that?

Neal: Oh, I worked in Tennessee, and Alabama, and South Carolina. In South Carolina I had one of the most intriguing experiences. (Chuckles) First of all, the president of the central body in South Carolina, in Columbia, was the person who, in 1948, had led the walkout of the Southerners from the Democratic Convention when Hubert Humphrey gave his civil rights speech, and the person who led the walkout was the president of the central body. So this was a terrible feeling for me to have to have to go in and work with a person whom I did not think was really on my side, but we got to know each other fairly well, and I was told about him before I went in, so I didn't expect anything of him and I really didn't get anything. . . But at least he carried me to the union meeting--the council meetings--and things like this. And then I moved out into the black community.

You know, at that time, the only place you could live was to get a room in a black home someplace because the hotels were not open to us. We had black hotels, but they were very undesirable and I couldn't live in them.

Rikard: What was the outcome of your work? How did the vote in South Carolina go?

Neal: Oh, well there's a story before how it goes.

Rikard: OK.

Neal: I was living with this lady whose name was Mrs. Wakefield and she was a beautiful old lady in spirit and in courage; of course, at that time she must have been near 80, and she had an extra room whom a friend introduced me to her and whom I lived with. And Mrs. Wakefield was carrying me around to her garden club meetings and to the civic club meetings. She really was beautiful to me because she helped me meet so many people, and I never shall forget a Mrs. Nance, who was of a very prominant family there who was Republican. But this was not unusual for

for some blacks--a large number of blacks--in South Carolina because they felt that they were Republicans. They were still Abraham Lincoln Republicans. He freed the slaves and they still felt that the Republican Party should have them, regardless of what happened, because Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves. So Mrs. Nance was one of these kinds of people and she was very nice to invite me through Mrs. Wakefield to invite me to her garden club meeting at her home. And when she introduced me, she said, "The young lady is there with Mrs. Wakefield and she wants to talk to us a little about getting our people registered to vote and whatever else she feels free to talk about." So naturally, me being a Democrat (chuckles). . .and I didn't know, really, that she was Republican or anything, and I started talking about the Democratic Party and what it had done for us --for the blacks--and how we were able to move forward, not only blacks, but working people. I reminded them that Roosevelt was the one who started us eating well again and having a little better housing and things like that. Then, when I started talking about how we needed to register so we could elect John Kennedy, well!!! Oh!! Mrs. Nance said, "Wait just a minute!" And I looked at her, and she said, "I didn't know that's what you wanted to talk about!" And so the other ladies said, "Let her finish, Mrs. Nance", and so she reluctantly . . .you know, was a little reluctant, but she let me finish. And I said that in my opinion, John Kennedy offered hope. He had had the debate already with Nixon, and I said, "All of you who watched the debate know when that man looked into your eyes and said that he felt that every child born should have an equal opportunity," I said, "How could we be for Richard Nixon?" I said, "Did you see his expression?" And so, it went on and I finished my speech.

But, anyway, when I had finished, Mrs. Nance got up and she said to them that she could not be unkind to anyone who was a guest in her home, but she wanted me to know that she was a Republican and her father was, and her grandfather was, and all of that. But when I left her home, I apologized to her for having different opinions, but I explained to her that that was one of the things. . .one of the most important things that we had in America, that we did have freedom of choice. That we could believe in different things and yet remain friends, and I didn't want to be mad at her.

So it was shortly thereafter when Rev. King--Dr. King--was in Atlanta. For some little something--parking ticket or something--they put him in jail. They had locked him up and sentenced him, and Bobby Kennedy got on the phone as the Attorney General and called and said to turn him loose <u>now</u>. It made the news right off and then, maybe an hour or so later, they said that Nixon said that he was "going to call the King family" and he was "going to call the officials to tell them not to harm him and to turn him

loose." So Mrs. Nance called me later that night at Mrs. Wakefield's house, and she said, "Darling, I am going to have to vote for your man," who was John Kennedy. Oh, that also changed a lot of other black people who thought they were Republicans--that very thing was the thing that changed them--because we only carried South Carolina by between 6,000 and 7,000 votes for John Kennedy, and more than 10,000 blacks voted for him, just in Columbia itself. Ten thousand is not a lot now, but at that time, 10,000 votes out of a black community was an awful lot of votes. That was one of the successes that I had in South Carolina. Registration was not too successful, but in the end, in the general election, we did carry the state.

Rikard: In 1961, you went to New Jersey. . . .

Neal: Oh yes, in 1961, we went to New Jersey and, naturally, Newark is the place where there are more blacks than any other place in the world, other than Chicago and New York and Detroit. But anyway, this was really the base of the larger block of blacks and Puerto Rican people. The strange thing about it was that the president of the New Jersey State AFL/CIO was Mr. Murphy. Mr. Murphy was a Republican and he didn't care who was running, (chuckles) he was for the Republican. Our office and Mr. McDevitt and all of them knew this and so a deal was worked out where we worked through the National Democratic Committee. . . Democratic National Committee. . .and when we went into the state, we went in unannounced to the labor movement. We were able to work with those people who were in the labor movement from the CIO and who were not really a part of the Murphy crowd within the AFL/CIO.

First of all, I hate to tell you these things, but the AFL and the CIO have not yet merged in New Jersey. They are in together (laughs), but the CIO has a side and the AFL has a side. I guess we'll never be able to get them to truly merge. (laughs) But anyway, Joel Jacobson was from the CIO and we were able to work very closely with him. He knew we were there, but we hid from Mr. Murphy and in the community. . . .Yeah, we just kind of didn't let him know we were there. . . .and in the community, we just worked as workers and when they would ask us about it, we would say we were with the DNC--that's the national party--and let it go at that, and nobody really did us bad.

We worked with Dennis Carey, who was the Chairman of the Essex County Democratic Party. . .uh, Democratic Committee, and he opened doors for us because he was interested in the candidate we were for--Hughes. Hughes was running against Mitchell. Mitchell was a Republican and, I think, he was the Secretary of Labor under Eisenhower, and there was a black man named J. Earnest Wilkins who worked in his Cabinet, and it was under Mitchell that

Mr. Wilkins was fired. And we got out leaflets that said: "Who killed J. Earnest Wilkins?" (Laughs) Sort of like, "Who killed Cock Robin?" It reallyworked though! And we registered large numbers of blacks and Puerto Ricans. . .larger than they said had been done, because we did it in a systematic way. We'd know where they were going to be registering. We'd set up registration spots and then we would work the community the day before--knocking on doors and begging people to come out so we could elect a Democrat to the governorship of New Jersey. We really had a good registration.

In anything you're doing, there's a little bit of fun and a little bit of anger. Black people are no different from white people when they get in power, and I remember Rev. Benson. . .that wasn't his name. . .anyway, this minister was chairman of the district in New Jersey, in the south ward, and we went into the district to do registration. We had cleared it with the Registration Commissioner. The chairman of the Essex County Democratic Committee knew we were going in there because we didn't do anything--he was a vicious politician, and as long as you cleared it with him, he would protect you. So Rev. Benson. . .that was his name I believe. . . . . And we didn't really have to clear it with district committee people or the district chairman, but this person had as many people as he wanted registered in his district. He didn't want any further because he could get defeated. We knew the ones who were cooperative and we knew the ones who were not cooperative, and we had been told that he was not cooperative. So we just went on in to do it, and when the workers went out at this designated place that we had set to meet, George Booker, whom I mentioned earlier, was from the Democratic Committee out of Washington, and he went up to start those workers in the registration that afternoon and I went to Montclair to start some people. But as soon as I got those people assigned in Montclair, I went back to the South Ward because we expected to have trouble. Rev. Benton. . .that's his name. . . . And so when I got out there, all the people were just standing up and locking crazy, and I drove up and I saw them and I stopped the car and I went out and I said, "What's wrong?!!" And they said, "Rev. Benton won't let us work in this ward." They said, "He said he doesn't need any help and he's got as many. . . ." And so we just. . . . George was saying, "Control your temper. . .control your temper. . ." (Chuckles) Rev. Benton was a great, big, fat guy, you know, sort of like Santa Claus, and was shaking. . . But anyway, he came waddling to me and he said, "Don't nobody come into my district unless they can. . . ." And so I just said, "Listen, preacher man, I'm not afraid of those white folks down in Alabama and you know good and well I'm not afraid of you preachers up here in New Jersey!" (laughs) And I said, "Come here!" and I got the map and we just started and just walked all over him, you know.

I just wouldn't let him. . . .you know. . .and the people gathered around because they were upset and all this. So we registered over 600 people in "his" district that afternoon and he tried to talk to me, but I wouldn't ever talk to him. I said a lot of ugly things to him, and then I was afraid someone had called Mr. Weightman down at the hotel. We were staying at the Essex House and I was afraid someone had called him and told him the things that I had said to the minister, and I was a little afraid to go in that night, you know.

(End of Tape 3, Side 1)

So when I went to the hotel that night, I was at the newsstand and I went to check my box, and the lady at the elevator said, "Girl, why don't you come on here. That old man will walk himself to death!" But if I wasn't in by 9:30, he got real upset because it was really terrible in Newark. It really was because a guy had just told me a few days ago that: "People who get smart and come in here, we throw one part of them in the Hudson River and we throw the other part away." I had told Mr. Weightman what this guy had said and he said, "If he puts his hand on you, he's going to regret the day he was born because we're going to really have him picked up!" And he said, "You tell him that!" And he said, "You call him up and tell him! And you tell him I said it!" So I did, and he said, "Oh, I was just playing with you!" But after that Mr. Weightman was very concerned about all of us that was working in there because Earl Davis was working in Jersey City and the chairman over there didn't want any more registration because he was in complete control.

All across the state, there was about five or six of us who were working in there, but at night all of us came back into the Essex House. I had to be in by 9:30 and Earl was expected in by 10:00, and the others were supposed to be in not later than 10:45, and if they hadn't come in by that time and didn't call in, well then Mr. Weightman was real upset about it.

So when I got off the elevator, I started to knock on the door and the door opened. We had an office there . . .and he said, "Fannie!", and I said, "Oh, Phil, that old preacher did so and so. . ." and I said, "I told him so and so. . . .", and he said, "You told him just damn right!" and he said, "Come on in here! What's his name?" And he called him up and really just put something on him! (Laughs) For not wanting us to register people. . . but that was. . . .I know the point was what they say that when a person gets in power--be he black or white--he doesn't want to change. They don't want to rock the boat if it's going to endanger their position in any way, so that was the reason for that.

But anyway, come the election time, the polls were saying that we were going to lose and that Hughes was going to be defeated, and Mitchell was running ahead in the polls. The papers, you must remember, were Republican papers, but Mr. Weightman was saying, "Don't worry about it. Don't worry about it. Just do your work and we're going to carry this state by between 36,000 and 40,000 votes." And really, when election day came, we won by 38,000 votes.

Rikard: He was pretty good at predicting!

Neal: But he was great. He was really a great guy! That's the story of the New Jersey election. . .Hughes vs. Mitchell. . . . We got out a lot of leaflets informing the people, but I guess the most entertaining one, I guess, was the one like "Who killed Cock Robin?" and the leaflet told what was done to Mr. Wilkins.

Rikard: In 1962, you were involved in a registration campaign in Miami that was very successful. Would you tell me about that one?

Neal: Well, this was shortly after I was put on full-time with the COPE-AFL/CIO and I was still working very closely with Earl Davis because I was still going through the training program, I guess, more or less getting out of Alabama, and we did a registration program there. But we had a reason for getting registration done in Miami that year. Claude Pepper, who was at one time the senator from Florida and was defeated in 1950, decided that he would stage a comeback and run for the congressman from a district in Dade County, so we went down. Claude Pepper had been our friend through the years—the labor movement's friend and the black people's friend—and so we put on a registration drive in Miami. They said it was one of the greatest ones that we ever did.

I met people and I knew some people who had moved from Montgomery to Miami. . . Ronald Young and his wife, Louise. . .and Ronald was working at a high school and in Montgomery he had been very active in trying to help us get registered and talking about voting. But you can imagine, back in those days, how difficult it was for us. But anyway, when I got there and. . .I stayed with them because, again, it was a problem staying in hotels. . .and he introduced me to the principal of the high school out at Opa Locka, Florida, which is in Dade County. . .in the county. . .out from Miami proper. Through meeting the principal, I told him we were interested in registration and things, and so he arranged for me to talk to the civics and social studies groups within the school and recruit from these students people to go out and knock on doors in that vicinity in order that we could get our people registered.

We had a lot of motivating literature during that time. One said, "I'm too young to vote. What's your excuse?" That was one that we used all over. We called ourselves "crusaders for registration". They had a printing shop at the school where they were teaching printing as a vocation, and the guys and the gals who worked down in the print shop printed up signs. They volunteered immediately to help us. We had maps and we drew out the area and we had it marked down. We knew just about how much time it would take them to cover it and what radius we wanted to cover. So we had arranged to have the registrars come to Opa Locka School on a Saturday. So the kids used their imaginations, and there was one kid there. . .I don't remember her name. . .but she was a delightful girl and she had a great, big dog--something like a St. Bernard--and she printed a sign and put it on her dog and it said: "I'm a dog. I can't register, but why don't you?" And she would walk up and down the streets with the sign on her dog and people thought it was the funniest thing! And it really made people ashamed that they were not registered.

So, that Saturday, about 12 o'clock, registration was going so slow, and I borrowed Louise's station wagon and we cleaned up the bars. . .this little girl and I. . .She was about 16 or 17. We cleaned out every bar, every washerteria. . .everything up in the little shopping area, but the funny thing was that some guy . . . . We didn't start it, but some guy said that somebody told him the week before that he had gotten picked up for being drunk and said that if he had had his registration card, they wouldn't have locked him up. So everybody was getting registered, (laughs) so they would have their registration card. And this kid and I picked up 57 people between 12:30 and 5:15 that afternoon. . . just the two of us. Now that didn't include the other 14 or 16 people who were out working and constantly bringing them in. And we would have gotten more than that, but the registrars told us they had "had it!"

Rikard: So there wasn't any difficulty once you got these people there? They weren't hassled by the registrars?

Neal: Oh the registrars were delighted to have them, except that they were supposed to get off at 4:00 and we worked them until 5:15. (both laugh) But they didn't turn anybody away. They just said, "Now ya'll just can't go get anymore people because we've gone beyond the call of duty now. It's Saturday, you know." So that was one of the experiences.

Another Saturday we worked downtown where we had to carry the people into the main office downtown--registrar's office. It wasn't that easy to get deputized registrars in certain areas of the city. The registrars were not as liberal as they are now, even in Miami. But anyway, we worked Second Street (chuckles)

and Second Street downtown is where a large number of the blacks live and we really couldn't get the people who promised to come only wanted to drive their cars, they didn't want to walk the streets because this Dr. Ward, who was 70 or 80 years old at that time, but still a member of the Young Democrats. . . (laughs) But, anyway, they said he always talked that talk, and they swore he wouldn't do anything, but he gave me his word that he would drive that day. So we met downtown at an insurance office there--Afro-American Insurance Company--and that was where we would dispatch ourselves from. We had about two other people who were going to pick selected areas and they had just planned to work for an hour or so and quit. You know, just showing. . . And I went down to Second Street and I was standing on the corner and I was just asking people if they had been registered to vote. And so, finally, a young man passed me and I asked him if he was registered and he said, "Oh, yes ma'am. I'm registered." And I said, "Don't you have some friends that aren't registered?" And I was standing not too far from a bar. I said, "Don't you have friends that aren't registered, and you could help me get them to register today?" And he said, "Oh, yes ma'am. I'd be glad to help you." And then he stood there on the corner a little while with me and was asking people and they were saying, "No" they weren't. Well, we had three cars right there and so we got one car filled up and then we got another car. You know, people were coming on. And then he said, "Let me go in the bar." And he said, "Come on and go in here with me." Well, it was ooooh! I was afraid to go in the bar so then I said to him. . . You know, I just told him a lie. I said, "I'm just down here on vacation and my family will never understand if something happened to me in a bar!" But I said, "In Alabama, we don't have an opportunity to do this, and since I was here, I'm just volunteering my services because you do have the opportunity." So, when I told him that, he fell for it and he went in there and he cleaned that bar out, and then we walked on down a little farther to another bar. The cars would just, when they would come back, wherever they would see me standing. . . and most of the time we kept them rolling until 12:30. . . fast as they could come back. Finally, they pulled another car and we had four cars that were just working with us and we just kept them rolling, fast as they come!

So when Dr. Ward came back about 12:15, he said, "Now, Mrs. Neal, I'm going to wait until the other cars come and then we're going to stop for the day. You all have worked hard and we're going to quit." And I said, "OK," and he said, "If you want to come back after lunch, then we'll have some lunch and then come back." And this young man who had been helping me all this time said, "You quitting?" And we said, "Well, we may come back this afternoon." And he said, "Well, let me go!" And I said, "You don't want to take up the space. Let somebody. . ." And he said, "I ain't registered! I just told you I was!" (Both laugh heartily)

But if you could have seen the people and the joy that was on their faces when they came back! They'd say, "Look what I got! Got my registration card!" Even though they were, you know, in the bar that early in the morning and drinking and going on, they were proud. They'd say, "We're first-class citizens!" I had been saying, "You can consider yourself a citizen, but you really aren't a first-class citizen if you can't vote!" And they'd stand there and they'd look at you; but then when they came back, they were so proud. This young man gave me his address and everything, and he said, "When you get ready to get the vote out, you come and let me know because I'm going to vote all of them! I'm going to make them go and vote that day!" And I promised him I would and although I couldn't spare myself all over Miami on election day, but certainly, when we were dividing the areas up, I gave his name to the person who was handling the downtown part of the campaign, and they said he really delivered! They said those people really voted down there in the primary for Claude Pepper down there. And the primary really was the big thing, you know, like it is in Alabama. . . the primary is it and the general election is almost. . . out, you know. . . so that was the experience in Miami and Claude Pepper was elected back to Congress in 1962 after being out of Washington for 12 years. He's still a congressman.

Rikard: That's unusual! In 1964. . . Well, before we get to that, let me ask you something. By now, you are officially on the staff of COPE?

Neal: Yes.

Rikard: What was your title?

Neal: My title then was Field Director for AFL/CIO--COPE, and COPE is the Committee on Political Education.

Rikard: How about giving me a rundown on who were the other people who were involved in COPE. . . the important positions on a national level. . . who were the ones that you were working with directly?

Neal: Well, Mr. McDevitt was the Director of COPE. You know, in the AFL/CIO, we have all these different departments--education and legislative, you name it--but we were COPE. We were the political arm of the AFL/CIO and Mr. McDevitt was the Director. And Mr. Barkan, who is now the Director, was the Deputy Director to Mr. McDevitt. I was working directly under the leadership of Mr. Weightman, who was the Minority Field Coordinator for the AFL/CIO, and we had this minority staff, which consisted of three: Earl Davis, Mr. Weightman, and me, and we worked all over the country with black people, getting them to register because, you know, black people look to the labor movement large and by far for

leadership. There were few times that the black community didn't follow labor endorsement and this is all over the country. There are very few times that black people leave the labor movement's endorsements because, long time ago, black people realized that what's good for laboring people is also good for black people. Really, they looked to George Meany for leadership when it comes to endorsing candidates and speaking out on issues and things. They follow him very closely.

Rikard: Who made the decisions as to what campaigns you would be involved in?

Neal: Mr. McDevitt, the Director, and the COPE Operating Committee, and the Executive Council meets on it. You see, COPE doesn't endorse candidates, per se. We are non-partisan, but the Executive Council and the COPE Operating Committee do recommend to Mr. Meany what needs to be done and, as a result, it trickles on down to the department heads as to what area we go into and work and for what candidate or what issue, whatever the issue is.

Rikard: How is the COPE Operating Committee selected?

Neal: From international presidents and designees of them.

Rikard: You had an experience in 1964 that we had talked about earlier in meeting in Atlanta.

Neal: (Chuckles) Well, we had an Atlanta COPE conference and this was in January of 1964. I'll never forget this because Millie Simpson, who was one of the secretaries, was traveling with the conference and it was the first time that she had ever seen a real Klansman dressed up in his Klan clothes and everything, and she was running all around saying, "You see him, Fannie?!", and when I saw her, I said, "Millie, you want me?", and she said, "Oh, dear, come! I want you to see a real, live Klansman!" (laughs) I thought it was so funny because I've seen them walk around the streets of Montgomery many times, you know. But she didn't really believe that they went around dressed with their white hoods and sheets and things.

But anyway, we were staying in the Dinkler Plaza and it was a "dinkley" plaza and if you were a guest in the hotel. . . You know, this was right after the Civil Rights Public Accommodations Act . It was immediately after Johnson got to be President. When Kennedy was killed, Johnson got to be President and, you know, early they started. Johnson hit real fast and passed a whole lot of legislation, and I believe this was just before the Public Accommodations law was passed, but in Atlanta, which was supposed

to be a progressive city, was letting blacks stay in some of the hotels and the Dinkler Plaza was one where we could get in. But where we ran into the problem was when we went down one night to eat in the restaurant and the hostess wanted to see our keys and Mr. Weightman said, "What do you need with my key? I'm a guest in the hotel." And she said, "You can't eat in here unless you show me the key." Well, Mr. Weightman was a man who believed in principle, and he said that if he said he stayed in the hotel, he stayed in there and he wasn't going to show her his key and wouldn't allow any of us to show ours to her. By this time, Mr. Barkan is the National Director because Mr. McDevitt had died the year before, and Mr. Barkan (chuckles) had to leave the bar where he was talking to some guys and come over and tell that woman: "These people are on my staff," because Mr. Weightman had said to Mr. Barkan: "You are going to tell her we are going to eat in this restaurant and we aren't going to show any keys, or else every one of us are going to move out and there won't be any further conference going on!", except he used some real choice words in telling Mr. Barkan this, and so they had to let us in to eat and that was the. . . you know, when I passed through there last week, I saw they had torn it down and I said, "Good riddance!" (laughs heartily)

Rikard: Tell me a little about your feelings about Johnson and these acts.

Neal: In my opinion, and I'm sure that if the historians are truthful about Presidents of these United States, I have an argument right now with many blacks that Kennedy was the greatest thing that we ever had happen to us. But if you look at the record, Kennedy talked good to us, said what we wanted to hear, but we were not making progress under Kennedy. He couldn't get any legislation passed, and when Johnson got to be President--if we are truthful to ourselves--he will go down in history as the greatest President black people ever had because he made it real. There were laws on the books, but they were never made real until the Johnson days.

Rikard: I can imagine that you, particularly, could appreciate the value of the Public Accommodations Act. Did you have bad experiences traveling with the labor movement--trying to find accommodations and trying to find places to eat and to stay?

Neal: The biggest problem was restrooms. Here, I carried credit cards with any number of oil companies where I'm supposed to buy gas with a credit card that's a company card and I could buy the gas, but I couldn't use the ladies' room. I never shall forget. . . Oh, there's so many experiences there's no use in me telling you, but I can tell you one pleasant thing was a man who ran a station

in Tuscaloosa [Ala.] right where Highway 11 and 82 separate and he ran a station over on the right-hand corner and I could always go in the restroom, but it was always closed. . . .I mean it was always open. It was never locked. And then I was coming from Arkansas one day and I stopped--after the Public Accommodations law was passed--and it was locked. And I said, "Oh, you locked your restroom." And he said, "Yes, I'm able to keep it cleaner now because everybody from the streets can't just come in. I don't let everybody from the streets just come in and use it. Before, I left it open because I didn't want to have to tell my customers that they couldn't use the restroom."

Rikard: Oh. . .

Neal: And he said, "In this area, with all these rednecks, if you had come in and asked for the key and I had given it to you," he said, "they might have run me out of town on a rail." He said, "I'm so glad the Public Accommodations law has been passed!" And this was an old white gentleman. And, always now, if I'm going to buy gas, if I can make it to Tuscaloosa, I take him my business.

But in 1962 in Americus, Georgia, we were coming from Savannah and I had taken the route to come through Americus. At that time, we had Shell [Oil Company] cards, but we don't have Shell cards anymore because we had a strike with them and we boycotted their products, and so we never got cards from them anymore. But this guy. . . . I needed gas very badly, but I needed to go to the restroom worse and I drove up and I said, "Would you fill it up, please, and check my tires and check my oil?" And I said, "I'd like to use the key to the ladies' room." And he said, "The colored one is around back of. . . ." I said, "Mister, I didn't ask you about no 'colored' restroom, I asked you for the key to use the 'ladies' room." I said, "Look at me. What do I look like? I want a key to the ladies' room." He said, "Well, I'm telling you now, the colored one is. . . ." And I said, "Mister, you take all your damn gas out of my car and take it out fast 'cause I don't see no 'colored' pump here and I don't see no 'colored' price here! So you take your gas out!" So he said, "Aw, take the key!" and he threw the key to me and I went on into into the ladies' room and I came out and paid him and they were giving S & H Green Stamps. I had driven way up the highway and had forgotten to get my S & H Green Stamps, and I thought about them and I turned around and came back. I was so mad and he was mad at me and he said, "What do you want!?" I said, "I want my S & H Green Stamps!" So he just tore a whole page out and threw them into the car and I said, "Thank you" and I drove on off. (Laughs)

But there were any number of times that I would drive up to where they have car-hop service, you know? I knew not to get out and not to try to go in, but I would go up in the car and the car-hop person would come to get my order, only to come back and drop their head and say, "I'm sorry, but we can't serve you." And sometimes they would say, "I can't bring it to the car, but you can get out and go around there to that window. . . ." Well, I've always had so much pride that if I couldn't get it out of the front door, I didn't have to pay you and get it out of the back door. So I'd just go on and almost ruin my kidneys drinking Coca Colas trying to squash my hunger, you know.

And then, you'd run into restaurants which were run by blacks and in certain areas, I couldn't eat in them. . . .I mean I didn't want to eat in them because of the conditions around them and I oftentimes neglected myself physically because of eating problems and not eating properly because I didn't have a place to go.

Rikard: Oh. . . . . In 1964, you were involved in a campaign in Oklahoma concerning the right-to-work law. Was this a successful campaign?

Neal: Yes. . .In January. . .By the way, we went straight from Atlanta to Oklahoma, Earl Davis and I, and we met with union people out there. It left a lot to be desired because there were no black people in the meeting originally that we met--the leadership of of Oklahoma--but we had sort of gotten used to this, especially after we left Alabama. Alabama had been progressive and had black participation in the labor movement all along. I know since 1945.

But anyway, Earl was in charge and we met and we talked about the different areas of Oklahoma and we did research and broke down the state where black people were in large numbers and we finally came up with the idea that Tulsa and Oklahoma City were really the main areas. The other little places were just "if we got a chance to go around to," but we really always carried on registration drives where there were masses of blacks. So Earl took Oklahoma City and I took Tulsa. In meeting with the black leadership, through the NAACP, I met a man named Jake Simmons who was a millionaire--an oil tycoon and black--and a devout worker for the NAACP and he introduced us to many people. We had a meeting in Oklahoma of black leadership from across the state of Oklahoma. We had it in Oklahoma City and I got a chance to meet some people from Tulsa, and then they had a meeting in Tulsa to talk about our registration drive. The NAACP and the union ran a coordinated drive. They shared the expense and were in it together. So a Rev. Ben Hill, who was an A.M.E. minister, got to be my very dear friend and adviser. Mr. Simmons had told me, when I got ready to go to Tulsa, that I would have to go by Rev. Kooksey, who was a

a Baptist minister. And he said, "I'll tell you right now, you won't get off the ground unless you pad his hand." Well, I have always objected to, and I still detest, people depending on the black minister delivering for them and especially one that you've got to put something in his hand before he does anything, and I resented it. So I decided then, come hell or high water, we're going to have some registration because I've got to prove to Jake Simmons that, without Kooksey, we'll do it, you know?

Rikard: Um hum. . .

Neal: So Rev. Hill advised me and he introduced me to different people and we got an old lady named Mrs. Clardy--C-L-A-R-D-Y, spells kind of funny, but that's the way she spelled it--and she was office. . . . . We opened up a headquarters and she was really sort of the receptionist and to welcome people in, and then we recruited, through the youth group of the NAACP, people to go out and knock on doors and talk about the importance of registering. I was not two-faced about it. I explained to them that the union had an issue--so-called the "right-to-work law"--that was going to be on the ballot and it was going to be on as Issue 409 and that we wanted to register our people so that we could vote against it.

Our headquarters was at 1001 East Pine Street and we got to be known as "check with 1001 East Pine Street." (laughs)
But we registered. . . .Well, it was real funny. They had tried to get the deputy registrars in Tulsa and they wouldn't let them have it, so Rev. Roberts, who was the Youth Group Director for the NAACP, had been down with some other people to talk to the Election Commission about some registration and he said, "No", he couldn't do it, and so we decided that we would try him again after I got there and we talked to Rev. Roberts and to some guys who were Masons and to the Federated Women's Clubs, and we were getting all these people involved in the registration--interested in it--and we had several meetings. And so we decided that we ought to go back and try this old guy one more time. (chuckles) He was <u>so</u> old and stupid! Rev. Roberts told him that we had come down to talk to him about some registrars. He didn't even remember that Rev. Roberts had been there before. He didn't remember the person. He said, "I told them out yonder that I wasn't going to be bothered with North Tulsa with no registration. Nobody out there wants to be registered! Everybody out there is registered who wants to be registered!" So Rev. Roberts said, "Oh no, we've got over 400 names here of people who want to be registered in North Tulsa. We've already got their names and addresses and everything. All we need is. . . ." And he said, "Well, who's behind it?" So Rev. Roberts said, "The churches. . .", and I said, "The National Association for the Advancement of Colored

People", and I said, "the Masons, the Federated Women's Club, the Congress of Industrial Organization, and the American Federation of . . . ." and I didn't say "labor". I caught myself. But if I had said "AFL/CIO" or if I had said "NAACP", he would have known what we were talking about, and the reason that we carried this was because he immediately said, "Well, if you've got 400 names there, I'll let you have it, but I'm not going to let none of them folks from the NN. . .NAAP, or from that union! They have nothing to do with it!" And so Rev. Roberts said, "Well, that's fine because we've gone ahead enough that churches and masonic lodges and the other people she's just told you about. . .". And I had said to him, "The Congress of Industrial Organization" and the "American Federation" and I said "The National Association of the Advancement for. . ." and I never said the "Colored People", I left that off, but he didn't know what I was talking about anyway. And he said he would let us have the registrars for one day, and he said, "If you don't register at least 20 people, I'm not going to let you have them anymore." We registered 199 the first night we had it, and then everyday thereafter, we just went up and up and up.

So then, they had them investigate to see who was masterminding the registration drive. I will never forget the day that guy came out there to find out because, you see, we were working like beavers. We had . . .by now we had two full-time deputy registrars and we had people who were assisting them to get the information and when they would carry them up to them, they had most of the information like the names and addresses so that they could type it up faster. But that day I was back in the back trying to do something--I don't know what it was--but this guy came in who happened to be white and he was asking Mrs. Clardy about it. She got up immediately and wanted to know if she could help him. He said, "I want to know who's in charge." She said, "Well, I am." Then he walked on over and he stood by the registrars and we've got lines of people sitting waiting to be registered. And he wanted to know who everybody was and when he got to me, he said, "And who's the one with the green dress on?" And she said, "That's my daughter's friend." She never told him. But I was so nervous, and when he left, it was cold and snow was on the ground about two or three inches, and I looked at me and I was just sweating! I knew that would be the end of our registrars if he found out that I was from out of town. And so we never let him know that it was anybody from out of town. We always hid behind Mrs. Clardy, you know, and that there was that much interest, really, in North Tulsa. They still say that was the greatest registration drive that has ever been held. We registered over 5,000 people in a short period of time.

Rikard: That's impressive!

Neal: Now we didn't do all of that in North Tulsa, but you see, when the papers started writing little nasty things--and we had a black paper that really played it up good--but the white papers, you know, the Tulsa paper, would either try to make fun, you know, or try to get white people to come in and register to, you know, kill off what we were doing. But it motivated black people who lived in the other areas in the black community to get registered, too. So it was really an enriching experience for me.

Rikard: You had mentioned . . . .

Neal: Oh! By the way, we did defeat the right-to-work issue 409.

Rikard: You did?

Neal: You know, another. . . .(chuckles) There's always so many things that happen to make you laugh when you feel you're at the bottom of the line and you can't go any further. (chuckles) I'll never forget. This person came into the place to register and she had been drinking. And you have to declare your party in Oklahoma, whether you're Democratic or Republican. So the registrars. . . We had one person who was a Democrat and one who was a Republican, but we got the girl to go downtown and register as a Republican so we could use her in our office. She was all right. But anyway, this person came in and they asked her, "What party do you want to register?" And she said, "What party?" And they said, "Yeah, what party do you want to be affiliated with?" And she said, "Party on Friday night or Saturday night! I don't care." (laughs heartily) Then they kept saying, "No, we don't mean that kind of party. What political party?" And she said, "I don't really care. All I want to do is register so I can vote against that 409." So we had really done an educational job on putting out literature on what the so-called right-to-work did. We didn't have any rights and we used Birmingham--1963 Birmingham: the water hoses and the dogs on people. Alabama was a right-to-work state and we didn't have any work, and we certainly didn't have any rights. And this went over big. Really, it helped the community. Now, we've got black Representatives from Tulsa and from Oklahoma City. Blacks have been running for different things and blacks have been included in city government and all this. So it proves that the vote does make a difference.

Rikard: We had talked earlier, just very briefly, about an interesting campaign that came just a couple of years later. In 1966, Lurleen Wallace, the wife of George, ran for Governor of Alabama against a whole host of male candidates. Can you tell me who was labor's candidate at this time and if there was any difference in who the black community was supporting?

Neal: You know, Carl Elliott, who was a former Congressman from Alabama from up at Jasper, was labor's candidate that year, and Richmond Flowers (chuckles), who had endeared himself to many black people, because he was saying what many black people wanted to hear, was saying that he could win. And so, to my knowledge that was the break in. . .the only time. . . .the first time, let me say, the first time that the black community in Alabama broke with the labor movement, and I was really raked over the coals because I was loyal to the labor movement and not to the black community, but I was always very proud and could defend myself because, number one, I could count, and if there was more than 1,700,000 people registered in the state, and we had only 284,000 blacks who were supposed to be registered, then I could count and know that even if Richmond Flowers voted every black person who was registered--and part of them was in the graveyard, sweetie, because I had brothers who were dead whose names were still listed. I knew people who were still listed, but they had gone on. So, not counting those who had moved out of the state who were still being carried, I could very well defend myself by saying that I was working for somebody who had a chance to win.

The interesting thing was that there were many other black people who felt the same way that I did, but people who were in positions where if the black community got out and blackballed them, they would. . .business people, who really wanted to get involved in the Elliott campaign, but who were afraid of their own black brothers and sisters because of what they could do to them as business people--saying that they were not with the black community. So, I still say that sometimes when blacks get in certain positions, they are as vicious as white people. Black people were going around saying that they were going to elect the next Governor of Alabama, and Lurleen put them all in their place. She beat nine white men (chuckles) without a runoff.

Rikard: Right.

Neal: And it shows that when you split the working people and the black community--organized labor and the black community--then you have a chance. It's divide and conquer and I think that was the whole idea of whoever got Flowers to run. So I don't feel sorry for them when they put him in jail. I don't care a bit.

But that was a very interesting campaign. I worked down in Mobile full-time because in Birmingham people who had promised me that they were going to help us and everything called me and said, "Fannie, come. I've got to talk to you." And when I came, they said, "We can't do it. We just cannot do it. When I vote, I will vote my convictions, but I cannot get out here and work against what the black people's leaders have endorsed, and don't hold it against me." And I didn't.

But when I went to Mobile, I had some few friends down there, but the people who were heading up the Flowers campaign had never been too active in getting people registered, so I didn't have any. . . . You know, I didn't care. I'd just walk over them. And I rented a place from a man who wanted to give me the place. His name was Mr. Montgomery, a barber there, and he had this place and he wanted to give it to us to use. And I said, "No, I'll have to pay you . . . have to pay you some rent." And I'm so glad I did because they put the pressure on him to put us out. Black people put pressure on him, and he said, "Well, the place was vacant. She came to me to rent it and I rented it to her and I can't put her out." And they blackballed him. They did everything they could to crucify him and he has not yet bounced back and gotten himself back on his feet. So, we are real vicious to one another.

I came out without being hurt because I was working for the labor movement and I was doing my job. Whatever they said about me to the labor movement, the labor movement knew that I was down there trying to carry out my responsibilities. And so, they could not hurt me as far as my job was concerned, but economically, they did hurt other people who were kind to us and who went along with us.

Rikard: In the general election in 1968, Humphrey was running and you came to know Humphrey personally. What kind of participation did you have in this '68 general election?

Neal: You know, I have to say this before I can say that. He was absolutely the greatest person that I have ever had a chance to know because. . . .My admiration for him went back to 1968 when he made the civil rights speech at the Democratic Convention and I always wanted to meet him. So when he got to be Vice President, we used to go to the White House and to the Executive Office Building also. I had a friend, who is now the Treasurer of the United States. . .

Rikard: And what is her name?

Neal: Azie Taylor Morton, and she worked in the Executive Office Building with ex-Governor Lawrence from Pennsylvania and she was working on equal housing. So I got a chance to. . . .Anytime I was in Washington, I could go over and have lunch with her and get in the Executive Office Building. And so, one day we were walking down the hall, and the Vice President came bouncing down and he knew her real well and he said, "Azie, how is everything?" And she introduced me to him. And then the next time I saw him, he said, "Fannie! How are you?" He remembered me just like that!

Then, in 1968. . . . 1967, I was in Philadelphia. I had worked in a campaign up there. I guess it was the Governor's race or something, and Humphrey came to Philadelphia to speak for the candidate and afterward, Mr. Tooley(?), who's president of the central body there, had a room down at the Ben Franklin Hotel where the Vice President stayed. He had a Presidential Suite down there. So we went down there--eight or ten of us--and the Vice President started talking to me and he said, "Fannie, have you been in Pennsylvania?" And I said, "I've been across the country, almost. I've been in Texas and Louisiana and I've been to any number of states." And he said, "What do you find?" He'd been to Florida, and I said, "Mr. Vice President, I'm sorry, but I don't know how to tell you this, but my people just aren't with you." I said, "I don't know what's wrong with them. They're saying that it ain't no use in all of this." And so he looked at me and he said, "I believe you. . .I believe you. But it's so hard for me to understand."

And the next day, I came down to Washington to a meeting where black people had come from all across the country to meet and talk about conditions over the country and the Vice President had us over to the Executive Office Building that afternoon and he spoke to us. He said, "Last night I was in Philadelphia and I talked to a young lady who told me. . ." thus and so, and he said, "But I don't understand it. I just cannot accept it!" He said, "I believe she knows what she is talking about, but I can't understand it." And Lewis Martin was with the DNC at that time and he said that all the time he knew the Vice President wasn't talking about anybody but me and nobody else! (laughs) And then when we went through the line, you know, protocol, where you go down the line and shake his hand and he gave us all the Vice President's seal, and Henry Arrington, a lawyer from Miami,

(End of Tape 3, Side 2)

said, "Mr. Vice President, I'm Henry Arrington from Miami and I surely . . .". By that time, the Vice President had kind of looked over his shoulder and he saw me and he shook his hand and he said, "Oh, Fannie!" And then Mr. Weightman came up and he said, "Young lady, will you tell me when you got on a first-name basis with the Vice President of the United States!?" (laughs) But that was a little bit. . .I was embarrassed and I didn't know who I was. I can't explain how I really felt, you know, when he was such an outgoing person and everybody in the room could hear him when he hollered "Oh, Fannie!", you know. (chuckles)

But anyway, after then, we immediately started trying to build registration groups up a little bit and inspiring them, in '67 even, pointing toward the election. . . Well, we were in '67 but we tried to push up our registration campaign because, really, the campaign was in '67. . . wasn't it? It was in '68, but we pushed our registration in '67 hoping to motivate people so they would really go forward and register in large numbers to try to keep the Democrats in the White House. But we had black people at that time who were saying that black people ought to "go fishing" because we were not getting our fair share and we had some black groups that were talking down registration. We're no different from anybody else. People will take the negative side before they will take the positive side. Of course, you know what happened. In '68 Richard Nixon got to be President and we figured it out that if just a few more people. . . just one more person had voted in every precinct in the United States for the Vice President, we would have had it. So that's the sad story of losing one of the greatest heroes, I think, that this country has ever known. . . for people. . . a person who was really for people. . . having an opportunity, and particularly underprivileged and my people--black folks.

Rikard: Um hum. . . I suppose we ought to try to bring this thing up to the present day and maybe ask you about your actions in the 1976 general election.

Neal: Well, I was involved in the Carter campaign and I was assigned specific states to work. Believe it or not, I was assigned Florida, Arkansas, Missouri, and Pennsylvania, mainly because I had built good working relationships with not only the labor movement, but with organizations within those states that I could spend a little time with and really get going. But I really spent most of my time in Pennsylvania. We worked very hard in the campaign. Carter had people wrapped around him whom we found it most difficult to work with because they wanted to shut out all of the people. They wanted their appointments, and I couldn't understand it because I continued to assure them that he couldn't offer me anything. The rest of us who were working down low in the campaign, we weren't looking for anything because we wouldn't give up our union seniority and positions we had with the union to go for a Federal appointment or anything like that. We were interested, really, in trying to help him win. Near the end of the campaign, it was really just falling to pieces and had it not been that Mr. Barkan and the president of the UAW and other labor leaders got together and decided they had to put more money in the campaign, had to put more staff in the campaign, and everything else to really. . . And we almost had to divorce ourselves from the regular Carter campaign and just go out and work for ourselves. As a result, we did a lot of duplication that would

not have been necessary if we had been able to really coordinate it. They wanted us to give them names and addresses and the money and everything and just be dead. Well, when that day comes, the AFL/CIO won't have any use for COPE workers, and so, you know, we couldn't surrender that, and plus, they couldn't have moved into some areas. People that will work with some people won't work with other people.

So we squished through it, but I'm going to tell you: Black people are becoming more and more frustrated with the Carter administration because, as I told Ben Brown, who is the deputy over at the DNC now. . .Ben is out of Atlanta and was a black state legislator. . .But I told him that black America voted their hopes in Carter and our hopes are all fading away because he has made some big appointments. He's appointed a few blacks to great, big positions. . .as I mentioned to you a few minutes ago. . .My friend is now the Treasurer--the first black Treasurer in these United States and she's a woman--<u>but</u> that has done nothing for the mass of unemployed blacks, and the blacks' plight is getting greater and greater because unemployment breeds crime. But I'm not going to tell you that I'd be hungry and let my family be hungry and you had plenty. . .I'd steal me something to eat I know. My family would have to eat. I'm not in favor of crime but I do think that would be one way of eliminating crime. . .if you put people to work.

Rikard: Right.

Neal: There are people going around here saying there are jobs for people if they want them, but you know, I don't see anybody going out there digging a ditch for five dollars a day if they could stay home and pay taxes. . .and social security and all the things they take out of it before you get it . . . and you can stay home and you'll get 12 dollars a day. That's hustling backwards! That's hustling backwards, so help me. So until you can create a climate of working conditions where a person <u>can</u> make a decent salary, well then. . . . There's so many people opposed to the minimum wage bill, but that's one thing that we are grateful to Carter for, and too, to the Congressmen and the Senators for the minimum wage increase. But, you know, $2.65 an hour is great if you can make it, I guess, but if you can't get a job where you can make $2.65, well then you're still bad off. So Carter has been a terrible disappointment to me about pushing programs that are meaningful where people are concerned.

Rikard: Do you think the labor movement, overall, feels the same way that the black community feels about Carter's actions?

Neal: Uh. . . .Yes, the labor movement itself is terribly frustrated because he has not pushed to get through labor legislation.

We've had any number of bills which have been presented and he has not pushed for them. He'd tell us "lip service" I'm told. I'm told he'd say, "I'm with you in everything," but then he'd send his group out. You know how politics works, don't you?

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: I might say, "Marlene, I'm all for you and I hope you're going to win!" And then I send all my troops out there and say, "Don't help her. . .don't help her." You know, this is what we're told Carter has done with many of the bills that have been bills the union was interested in. We're watching him now on the labor law reform. Are you familiar with labor law reform?

Rikard: No.

Neal: Well, labor law reform is really kind of hard for me to explain quickly, but we are saying that the National Labor Relations Act, which was the Wagner Act and gave us the right to organize and blah, blah, blah, and we have an NLRB--National Labor Relations Board--of four people and we want them to enlarge it to seven so they can get around to taking up complaints when we file charges, unfair labor practices against a company, such as J. P. Stevens; that they would have to sit down and bargain collectively with us within a said period of time and the workers would be treated. . . . If a majority of the people said that they wanted a union, then you should sit down and bargain with them. You understand?

Rikard: Um hum.

Neal: So, we are pushing for the enlargement of this Board, hoping that they will be able to take up more of these cases and then we can have elections much earlier than we presently have them. We don't have to wait all this long time for them to get around to holding an election. It would really give the labor unions an opportunity to represent the members better because a majority of the people believe in labor unions in this country. And yet, the right-to-work committee and Congressmen. . .Bill Dixon, of the Second District of Alabama is one of the leaders of it . . . . The members of the John Birch Society and they fight. We just got a letter from them. . .a lady, who is the mother of a union member up in Gadsden, Alabama, and the letter just came into our office yesterday and they're thanking her for her "generous contribution of ten dollars," and they sent her her card and a receipt for the ten dollars from the National Right-to-Work Committee, and she was baffled. She doesn't know who used her name and address. She knows nothing about the right-to-work committee. She says she certainly did not send them ten

dollars and knows nothing of them. So they have some way. . . You know, you have to account for money now and so somebody just sent in people's names and everything. I guess they didn't realize they would send them thank you notes. I don't know who did it, but the John Birch Society and the right wing element in this country. . . .Jesse Helms out of North Carolina; Strom Thurmond out of South Carolina and Curtis. . .and many others in the country who are members of the Right-To-Work Committee, are all out to try to defeat labor law reform, but this we need in order to save. . . .They say the big labor bosses wanted to save themselves, but I think we needed to save American working people.

Rikard: COPE itself recently reorganized. What year was that and could you describe a little bit about what happened and why and what kind of new position that you have gotten?

Neal: Well, when the Executive Council met in 1977, in February, I think, down in Miami, they decided that COPE should be reorganized. We had a minority staff. I think I told you that before. You know, now... uh...it's a law, and it may have been on the books all the time, but it says that union funds can be used only for union members and their families. Well, the minority staff worked with union people but we also worked with the black community, and it was necessary to take us out of working with the black community--which was by far working people, but not organized. . .not dues-paying members--so one staff person retired because Earl had enough years and he had the age and everything and he retired. He told the organization that he was going to retire at the end of January of 1978 so he was just sort of floating and he called himself a "lame duck" but he would go on special assignments wherever he was needed.

W. C. Young, who was another black staff person, was made a Regional Director for an area and he was to head up Region One, which is Michigan, Missouri, Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin. . Illinois and Indiana, and I was named the Southeastern Director for Volunteers in Politics--VIP. Now this was one time known as the Women's Activities Department of the AFL/CIO COPE, but we had two women who headed up this department--one east of the Mississippi and one west of the Mississippi--and it was just not possible for them to get into the areas, every state, every year, so when they had to have something to do with me (chuckles), they divided the country into three parts and had the Eastern, the Southeastern, and the Western, and I have two states west of the Mississippi--Arkansas and Texas--and then I have North Carolina through Texas and Tennessee through Florida, which gives me ten states.

So far it's been a very challenging job, but I've enjoyed every minute of it because, in some areas, I can see where we're making

progress. In some, regretfully, we have not done anything, but . . . . I've been on the job now. . . . I was told that I was going on this job in April last year--the 30th of April, 1977--and it took me two or three months to decide (chuckles) that it was really true, but during that time I was being given assignments to study and being trained a little bit more about the program because, working on the other job, I knew a little bit about the Volunteers in Politics program, but I didn't know a whole lot about it, plus we had gone into the computer now and we are trying to put all of our members on computer, with names, addresses, social security numbers, and all that, and so it makes a difference in knowing what information to gather for the computer and where it is supposed to be recorded and all that kind of stuff. So there's been a good bit of training that I have been going through and I must say that I'm still learning every day.

Rikard: Now in this program, are you working primarily with women?

Neal: No. . .another reason that they changed the name from "Women's Activities Department" to the "Volunteers in Politics" was because so many of our men had been volunteering in the program and it was a little bit, you know, unfair to call them "women's activities" workers, so there were a lot of reasons why they changed the name. They never used the whole name--"Women's Activities Department"--they'd call them "WADS" (laughs) and Virginia Sleet(?) up in Maryland said she was glad they changed the name. She didn't know if she liked "VIP", but she liked it better than she did "WADS" because she was tired of people asking if WADS was "Women After Dark". (laughs heartily)

There were many reasons why WADS did not fit because we had children. When I say "children", I mean children of union members who came in who were both men and women or boys and girls who volunteered to work in the program. So this was a reason.

Rikard: So you a r e working with people who a r e going to volunteer to work in the type of campaigns that you have been involved in in the past?

Neal: In the campaigns, but mostly in bringing our computer sheets up to date. You see, the AFL/CIO is now in the computer program. I guess the whole country is one computer, but in order to get our membership current and everything, we need people to process cards and work. We have workrooms set up in different areas. There's an organization in Alabama. Bill Mintz is the COPE Director here and he and I were talking today and he said he had at least seven workrooms set up in this state. Our most active ones are in Birmingham and Bessemer. Of course, we have the

Birmingham COPE program--Birmingham COPE--and Jane Loveless is the chairman of the VIP's for Jefferson County COPE, so we are really moving forward here, and in the tri-city areas we have very active COPE programs and we're building all the time.

Rikard: I'd also like to ask you just some general questions--sort of getting into the philosophy of the labor movement and women in the labor movement, and so forth. Do you think that organized labor has generally been responsive to the needs of women--women workers?

Neal: Well, first of all, let me tell you this: Organized labor has been very good to me and I would first like to talk about the opportunities and advantages that I have had. If I had been one to take a back seat, even in the labor movement in some cases, there was a time when I was told that because I was "new on the job" and didn't have as much experience that I should not expect to be paid what the others were paid. But I didn't accept that and I spoke up for myself, saying that although I was the newest person to them, I had been on two years longer than somebody else and I was fighting to have the same rights that they had. It was a compromise that I refused to accept.

On the other hand, the labor movement has given me the opportunity that I would have never had had it not been for the labor movement. It has been an education where I did not learn reading, writing, and arithmetic and the proper English and all this kind of stuff, but it's been an education that nobody could buy. I've had the opportunity to travel from coast to coast and work with people. Now that's how I look at the labor movement as an individual and as a woman.

(sighs) I wish I could tell you that I felt that all the opportunities that were due women had been offered or that doors had been opened for them so that they could come in, but I can't, and I just cannot lie about it, because as I look at our department of some 17 or 18 people, there are three women. In our building--and when I say "in our building," I'm talking about women being up in real positions--I don't think there's one. In fact, there's not a woman who's head of a department, and I don't know if women have not made applications or they were not asked. The only thing I can say is that they are not there. And then I look at some of the international unions, and I'm particularly concerned about some of the needlecrafts where men head up the joint boards and the district offices and things. Then, selfishly, I think, if it's going to be somebody, it ought to be a woman because I'll bet if you ask some of those guys, they wouldn't know how to thread a machine, and I think that women understand the frustration and

the "shop talk". There's nothing about it that a person from within the ranks could not work themselves up and become that person. So I can say, no, they have not gotten a fair share.

On the other hand, the union has insisted, in bargaining for contracts, that women be paid the same thing that men are paid for the same work. Unfortunately, more of our women don't know that they need to get involved in the union, because when I talk about the union and what they have not done, when we look at management, we don't know of any presidents of colleges who are women, do we?

Rikard: There are a few, but very few, and primarily of women's colleges.

Neal: Well, I was going to say if it was, it was not of a co-educational college. And they've been there all the time because it would look funny for a man to be president of Sweetbriar College or Spellman. . .you know.

And then when we look at the telephone company, the power companies, and General Electric, and all the rest of them, I'll bet you we wouldn't find five presidents of any kind of corporations in the country. Very few of them have them on the board. So I think the union has done more, really, because the union did fight for equal pay for equal work. . .and also, seniority. You see, the union gives us a whole lot of security and this is what some of the companies want to take away from unions--benefits that we have gained, and one of them being seniority. I never realized how much I <u>really</u> believed in seniority until a few years ago when the NAACP was attacking unions for the seniority clause and I started looking back (chuckles). . .and me getting old and everything and gotten a little seniority. . .and then what's wrong with some young buck coming along and saying, "I don't believe in seniority" and acting like they may be able to move a little faster than we can, and all these kind of things, and the company could move <u>me</u> out and give <u>my</u> job to somebody else because they were young and a little bit faster. So it made me think. And when the black people started to say the seniority clause was wrong, I started to bring it out to them or tell them that it was just getting to the place where black people within the unions were getting seniority because those who were white were retiring and we're building up seniority and now we have it over some of the younger whites. And so it was a very dangerous thing. To me, seniority is one of the most sacred things that we have in our contract.

Rikard: Interesting point. . .

Neal: It really is.

Rikard: What is the official labor position concerning the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA)?

Neal: Well, originally . . . . . labor was opposed to ERA, but some two years later they made an about-face and then Mr. Meany and the Executive Council came out and endorsed the ERA and we are working for the ERA across the country within the labor movement, trying to get it passed, and we are mandated to do this. It was a little bit hard for some of our presidents and leaders in the labor movement to come out two years ago opposed to it and then turn around and go back and sell it, but this is one of the things that happens so often. It's almost like working in a primary against one candidate and that candidate loses, and you turn around and you take the opponent and work for him because he's better than some other candidate who would be running. So it's the same thing--trying to unsell something that you have sold. But basically, we have all the states who are really pro. . .I mean the state leadership that's really pro-ERA and we'd like very much to see it passed, but it's something that we have to get passed in other areas because Alabama's still asleep.

Rikard: No. . .it's not going to pass in Alabama.

Neal: . . .because it's still asleep.

Rikard: Fannie, you've now been in the labor movement something like 33 years. You've done a lot and you've worked with an awful lot of people. We've talked about a lot of them, but are there any ones in particular that you'd like to mention or give credit to; is there someone whom you have not mentioned that you would like to incorporate into this?

Neal: Uh. . .There are any number of people who have played a great part in my life and there are some people who I feel have helped me be as successful as I have been in the labor movement and in my civil rights activities.

One person, I don't know if I have mentioned, is Dr. Gomillion, who used to be at Tuskegee, but who has retired now, but he played a great part in my life because I sort of used him as one of my idols and I looked up to him. I could always ask him for guidance and he would sit down and philosophize with me and tell me the good sides and the bad sides and then he would tell me what direction <u>he</u> would take, and I think I should let you know that he is my friend.

One person here in Birmingham that I have not mentioned, and that's Deannie Drew, who, in 1961, when I came to Birmingham to work in registration, opened many doors to people and introduced me to many people whom I did not know. She worked untiredly with me in

the registration and she was one who helped to put together the Miles College groups who worked with us in registration, and I'll always be grateful to Deannie for the help that she gave me.

I would be derelict in my appreciation to people—if that's the word to use—if I did not say that I would ever be grateful for the interest and friendship that was shown where my livelihood was concerned, and that was the late Earl C. Pippen, whom I mentioned earlier, but who was killed in a plane crash last fall; and Barney Weeks, who is still President of the Alabama Labor Council; and my long-time friend, Phil Weightman, who still lives and who retired in 1967, but who still works every day for government. Had it not been for these people, the AFL/CIO and COPE would have never known that there was a Fannie Neal and I would not have been given the opportunities to move into the area that I have and my life would not have been the same as it would have been had I not been given these opportunities.

I would also like to tell you, Marlene, that we talked about the things and the civil rights acts and the voting rights acts and all of these things that were brought about during the Johnson days, but out of all of these, I think that the law that was the most important to me was that of the Public Accommodations Act. To know that you could stop somewhere and sleep when you were tired. I can tell you there were some nights we were afraid to sleep (chuckles), but, however, I did feel secure in having a place to sleep. And then to be able to go into a dining room and eat and to have a clean restroom to go into and relax my body. To me, the civil rights movement and all the things that were brought about during that era, the greatest was the public accommodations law. And I still think that Johnson. . .(laughs) and I'll <u>always</u> think that Johnson. . . . In <u>my</u> world, Johnson was the greatest President. . . .Well, he was the greatest President that black people will ever have in this country because he made it real.

Rikard: We were talking, informally, a minute ago about the fact that we've just seen on television a supposed documentation of the life of Martin Luther King, and I don't want to get into a discussion of the TV program, but it did remind me that we in Alabama have witnessed some very important events, and you were a part of it, starting in Montgomery. You then came to Birmingham and worked here and eyewitnessed a lot of what happened in Birmingham personally in the early 1960s. Looking back on all of this and on your involvement in voter registration and in these campaigns and so forth, where do you see us—in Alabama particularly, because that's home for both of us. Where are we now? Have we come a long way? Do we have a long way to go yet?

Neal: We've come a long way, Marlene, but, oh my, what a long way we have to go! Uh. . .I'm totally frustrated with our State Legislature. You know, they meet and they are there and supposed to be representing the people and seeing about laws that affect the lives of people and to move the state forward, and we're still on the bottom of the totem pole as far as having a Legislature of action where they really produce things. It's a swapping off here and a swapping off there and, you know, which one can be influenced over another one and it's just totally frustrating. They aren't getting anything done, really! And it's a waste of the taxpayers' money. I think you can remember a couple of years ago when the Legislature met all the year and left without passing the budget for the schools and they had to call them back into a special session. You cannot tell me that the majority of those people who were elected didn't know that they had to pass a budget for the schools. If we had a strong leader heading up our state, he would not put up with such foolishness. They would make a calendar and make them work by that calendar and keep them. And when one of those things was passed, then they would take up. . . .And all that trash they get up there arguing about and carrying on about, they they wouldn't even let them bring it up. Not one thing productive has been done this year! Nothing! You name one thing that they've done. . . nothing but argue from one to the other, and it's a disgrace! It really makes me, as an Alabamian, ashamed.

I was in North Carolina last week and the president of the state organization was so mad. He said, "Fannie, I'll tell you, your Legislature really takes the cake!" And I said, "What happened, Wilber?" And he said, "Well, they just repealed the income tax law." And I said, "Oh, good! I didn't even know they were thinking about it!" And he just laughed and he said, "They didn't intend to. They didn't know what the hell they were doing, so they repealed it. Now they've got to meet and put it back in force." And I said, "You see, that's the way they waste our. . ." They don't. They are not taking those jobs seriously and we, as voters, vote a popularity contest and not a person who will go down there and take care of business. And I think, until we can elect a person who is a leader--who has leadership ability--and who will really put the clamps down on our Legislature, we still will be last in Legislative action. I don't remember how long ago, but it was written in the national paper--I think the New York Times--that Alabama had the worst. . . the poorest Legislature. . .Legislators in the nation, and, regretfully, I can't say that it has improved any.

Rikard: In 33 years in the labor movement, you've been observing the labor scene. Are there things that you would like to see changed? What do you see as the most positive aspects of the labor movement now and, perhaps, what do you see as the weaknesses of the labor movement?

Neal: Marlene, some of the things that I would like to see . . . . You know, I'm from the old school. You said 33 years, but they organized us with song. We sang our way into a labor movement. We sang spirituals that we turned into union songs: "I Shall Not Be Moved" and "The CIO is Behind Me, I Shall Not be Moved. . .", you know, and so all of these songs. . . . even "We Shall Overcome" was a union song. "Solidarity Forever" was a union song. Somewhere along the way, our international unions, in organizing workers, got away from singing. Some organizers have told me that the Taft-Hartley Law forbids this, that, and the other. They may forbid us getting members to sign cards in the way they did 33 years ago, but they cannot forbid us from meeting and singing and inspiring people through songs. I think that if we could get our unions, our international unions, to get workers more involved in spiritually. . .not religiously "spiritual", but the union spirit built up in them again like we had in us when we were young trade unionists that it would be much better.

You must realize that union members today, by and large. . . . and the reason you don't have more participation and more appreciation of the union and what the union has done is because these members came in with seniority, reporting time, decent wages, working conditions, and all of this; so they don't know what people have gone through to get them. And right now is a time, more than any I know, when all these things need to be brought to their attention because a little while ago I talked about the so-called right-to-work committee, and if they are able to beat them down, they'll have to go all the way back over what we went through in the late '30s and the early '40s, and it will be very difficult. But we can see it coming when they want to take away--not give anymore--and when we go to the bargaining table now, they aren't talking about what they're going to give workers, they're talking about what they can take away--holidays that we had; some companies want to take them away.

The miners are an illustration. They want to take away their health plan. Do you see how the miners can go back to work without a health plan? No way! No way! So, if there's anything I'd like to see changed, it is that I would like to see more of the true union spirit brought out to our workers.

One of the weaknesses is. . .(chuckles) I don't know if you will agree with this or not and I don't know if anybody else would agree with this, but as I see it: Whose son or whose daughter who is already in the union, or whose son or whose daughter is put in a position whether or not they have had training <u>in</u> the union or whether they. . . . . No longer. . .so seldom now do you find a person coming into the union with a good job who has worked his way up through the ranks. They get them out of college. . .who is somebody's son or somebody's daughter or somebody's niece or somebody's nephew, or shall I say, somebody who has a sponsor.

There was a time when you really got a job with the union because you worked your way up and you deserved it. And I think there would be a lot more dedication to the labor movement if some of those people were rewarded who have made it possible, instead of a lot of friendship and a lot of. . .whatever it is.

And then another thing I would like to see changed is that I would like to see the business agents who service local unions really service them and do something about their problems. All of them may not be grievances, but they certainly are problems, and a good business agent would sit down and reason with people and where there was a problem, they would try to work it out for them. And if there was a grievance, they would show them how to write it up and how to process it. And if it was a gripe, they ought to be able to sit down and explain to workers the difference between a grievance and a gripe. But now. . .and I don't want to get personal with this, and if I talk too much about it, I will expose what unions it is, but there are some unions that do such a poor job of servicing people that I hate to be around their members; because when they start telling me about their problems and things, and I say, "What union do you belong to?" and they say, "The AFL/CIO." Then I've got to even explain to that union member that, "You belong to some international union that is affiliated with the AFL/CIO." The AFL/CIO is the umbrella under which all these other unions work. "Now, which individual union do you belong to?" And they don't even know! And they'll say, "Local 104. . ." or Local one-oh-so-and-so. And you'll say, "Well, what's your international, sweetheart?" And they'll still don't know. And you ask what kind of services they're in, and they'll finally get around to saying, "Oh, I do so-and-so," and then you know what union they're with. Then, you say, "Are you a member of so-and-so?", and they'll say, "Oh yeah! That's it!"

But a good business agent would have meetings and it would be so much of "If I were a member of it" or "I'm a member of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers" and so on. And everybody would know what ACWA stood for. They would know what the Amalgamated Clothing Workers were, even if they didn't know what the AFL/CIO was. You see? So getting good service people. . .and when I say "service people". . .this is a business agent, to go in and work with workers. This is what they are for. If they were not going to go in and help the workers and try to straighten out problems and gripes and grievances, then there would be no use in having them. And some of them, so help me, aren't doing a thing. (chuckles) They don't even need them for what they are doing for the workers. I can't name any particular union because I wouldn't want them to hold it against me, but there are some that really leave a lot to be desired. I'd like to see it changed. If I could do anything about it, I'd change it.

Marlene, I don't think that I could close without telling you that had it not been for the United Packing House Workers, which is now the Amalgamated Meat Cutters of America, UAW, the United Auto Workers, and the United States Steel unions, the Amalgamated Clothing Workers, and COPE, for their financial contribution that was made up through the solicitation of Mr. Weightman for a special project that he had in Alabama, which happened to have been Fannie Neal...and I might say that he was raising this because it was said, as I probably earlier told you, that it was said that I was going to have a difficult problem getting a job in Montgomery or Alabama because I would be a threat to any company of trying to organize the union and they were afraid that I would not be able to get a job. Also, all my roots were buried in Montgomery and I just didn't see how I could leave anyway. Regardless of the hardships I might have had, I would have had a desire to stay, and I just wanted to say that there were people who had a concern about what was going to happen to me and it was these organizations that put up money for a project, for a special project for one year, that was going to be funded through the Alabama State Coordinating Association for Registration and Voting, and the Association was going to put up something like 35 dollars a week, or month; I can't remember really which, but it was a very small amount that they were going to put in toward the project since I was going to be working in Alabama.

But I will be forever grateful to these unions and to the person who went out to sell the idea that I was a special project and I hope that I will always be able to accomplish things that these unions will be proud of. The Reuther brothers were especially my friends, Walter and Roy.

Rikard: Well, Fannie, I think that it was very fortunate for the labor movement that they went out and raised that money and got Fannie Neal working for them in Alabama, and then Fannie Neal working for them all over the country. I thank you for taking the time to share with us some terribly intriguing experiences that you have had in these years in the labor movement.

Neal: Thank you.

(End of Tape 4, Side 1)

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