# Archives of Labor History and Urban Affairs

ORAL INTERVIEW

Jack Raskin

Norman McRae, Interviewer
c.1970

Wayne State University
Detroit, Michigan

R: Jack Raskin, Interviewee

M: Norman McRae, Interviewer

Date: 1970(c.)

M: Mr. Raskin, would you tell me something about yourself?

R: I assume that you are referring to the period that you're interested in, right?

M: During the years preceding that period.

R: Well, I grew up in Detroit; I was born in Detroit. I went to high school in Detroit and finished high school at the time of the Depression. I worked at a place called Allen Industries for about three or four years, before it was unionized, before there was anything like an NRA or a labor union or anything of that kind. My sister and I were the only two in the family who were employed. And I worked there for sometimes 80 hours a week, at 20 to 25 cents an hour.

M: 80 hours a week?

R. Yes. And I was just a young kid at the time and didn't see my friends from week to week. I worked there for several years, and then I got a job working in a gas station after that. Tried selling cars, which I found very distasteful, and then I took a trip with a couple of friends to Florida. And spent six weeks there and came back and was quite disillusioned with many things. And I happened to be visiting my brother, who was a doctor, and was associated with the UAW, at their Medical Research Department.

M: Excuse me just a moment. I want to make sure of something.

R: The UAW Medical Research Institute was in the Hoffman Building, and right next to it was the Civil Rights Federation Office. At that time I met Milton Kemnitz, who was the Executive Secretary of the Civil Rights Federation at that time. I spent a little time - different times at the UAW Medical Research Office, and one day there was a strike taking place - I think it was Federal Mogul, I'm not sure - there was a lot of police brutality on the picket line, and they kept bringing people battered up into the Medical Research Institute for care, and the Civil Rights Federation was taking statements of what took place

on the picket line, police brutality. I can't remember which Police Commissioner was Commissioner, I think it was Pickard, Heinrich Pickard. And I became, well, sort of emotionally involved, and became interested in the Civil Rights Federation at that time. So I started spending time with Milt Kemnitz and other people around the Civil Rights Federation, attended their meetings and became more and more involved, until...There was a new organization formed on a national basis, called the National Federation of Constitutional Liberties. At this time, Bowens was already out of the Civil Rights Federation and Nocks was in. They formed this new organization nationally, and Nocks became president of that, as well as the Michigan organization. And Milt Kemnitz became Executive Secretary for the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties. And they were in search for somebody to take his place, and they offered me the chance. It really terrified me at first, because I had a lot of respect for Milt and the job he was doing and the type of work they were doing, and it seemed like a tremendous responsibility for me to be taking on, but it was Reverend Nocks that persuaded me. He thought I could do the job, and other people thought I could too. That wasn't my opinion at the time, but I decided to go along with their confidence in me and accepted. And that's how I got into the Civil Rights Federation.

M: Would you tell me something about Bowens and Nocks?

R; Well, Bowens was in the Civil Rights Federation before Nocks. The Civil Rights Federation sort of formed around a bill...well, two reasons, one around the Dunkel-Baldwin Bill, which was a Michigan sedition bill, I think around 1935. And they formed this federation of all kinds of organizations, principally labor unions and churches and civil organizations of various kinds. And Bowens, at that time, was the first chairman of the Civil Rights Federation. He was a minister who had a church on the east side of Detroit. I think it was an Evangelical Lutheran Church - I wouldn't be certain about whether that's true or not. It was on August Avenue, I remember that. And he was a very intelligent man, and one who received and merited a lot of respect. But when Nocks came in, he sort of separated himself except for special things like special consultations and conferences and things of that kind. At one time, we had the Federation represented, both the AF of L and CIO,

they had Frank Martel and George Addes and R.J. Thomas and people of that type were on the Executive Board. We really operated mostly through a Steering Committee, which met once a week, which was composed of representatives of different organizations, principally, again, from trade unions. The original Federation was an affiliate of the American Civil Liberties Union.

M: It was the Civil Rights-

R: Conference for the Protection of Civil Rights.

M: Right. That was part of the ACLU?

R: That's right.

M: I see.

R: But problems came up - this was before I came in - around the purist concept of civil rights. Where the American Civil Liberties Union had a purist concept that guaranteed civil rights for everybody, even if they were anti-labor. We felt that the capitalists had enough ways of protecting their own rights, that they didn't need us to protect their rights for them. For example, I remember a case where the Ford Motor Company was circulating in their pay envelopes anti-union statements which were not only anti-union, but by innuendo threatening people who joined the union with possible separation from the company if they joined the union, and we felt that this was an infringement upon the rights of the workers, because of the fact that they were being threatened with a possible loss of income. The Civil Liberties Union felt that they had the right to put whatever they wanted to in the pay envelope, even though it may have been threatening, that this was their right, that they had the right to be anti-union. But we felt that we weren't going to be in a position to protect an organization of that kind against the trade union or the workers who were, at that time, being organized in the trade union movement. So that there was a separation between the Conference for the Protection of Civil Rights and the ACLU at that time. But - Roger Baldwin would frequently come by, and we would be in touch

with him on different issues, but we weren't affiliated or in any way connected with him.

M: Could you tell me something about the Steering Committee and how it operated?

R: Well, it was sort of a loose committee. It met, as I remember, on Monday nights, and usually had about 20, 25 people who represented both organizations and individuals who were active, like Ernie Goodman, and Eleanor Macki, and there was one fellow who was always in attendance, a guy by the name of Newt Shorts, who was an electrical worker, Local 58, I think, and there was a guy by the name of Blair, E.C. Blair, who attended frequently. There was a guy by the name of Herman from the Plumbers Union who was there, and sometimes we'd have guys like Sam Sage from the CIO Council, and Hodges Mason who was UAW 208, and it changed and varied, but it was always people who were either from the organizations that were affiliated to us, or people who were interested in what we were doing, like some of the Legion people.

M: In some of the letters that I've read they start out "Civil Rights Federation, representing over half a million people"...how big was your budget?

R: Well, that's a good question, It wasn't very big. What we did was, when we had the AF of L and CIO affiliated to us, we counted their people into the people we represented. It fluctuated with different times and different issues. For example, we had a number of unions, like Packard Local 190, who sent us $25 every month, Local 208, I believe it was $10. Then we had the Capmakers Union send us only $2.

M: What -

R: Capmakers - it was an AF of L union. And these are just examples of people who sent us a regular monthly contribution. So that it was a constant struggle for finances, because if we had a big issue that the UAW was interested in, for example, they would give us extra money for this issue, or maybe finance the whole issue. Because they were especially

interested in it. Then we had a monthly conference, this was on Sprout Street, 51 Sprout Street?

M: Sproat.

R: Sproat. Which was a block from the Hoffman Building. It used to be the headquarters of Local 157, which is now on 14th Street, I think. We would once a month have a larger meeting there, and-

M: What would happen at these monthly conferences? That's something I'd like to know.

R: We would make a report of the activities to the people who had assembled. We'd invite everybody to come to that meeting. And we'd maybe get a hundred, two hundred, and, again, depending upon the issue, as to the number of people who'd show up. And we'd use these meetings as starting off points for certain campaigns, or, pass out material, or anything we were doing at the time. We would use this as an organizational vehicle. And move from there to the other organizations, and people would take our material and go back to their organizations, if we wanted a resolution passed on a certain issue, or if we were putting on a program of some kind, we would raise it at these meetings and people would take it back to their organizations. We weren't a mass organization as such. We had one mass affiliate, which was a professional league for civil rights, which organized basically among middle class people, and did pretty much the same thing as we did, but their major emphasis was among the professionals.

M: The social workers of that time?

R: Doctors, social workers, lawyers, people in the different professions, and they would carry on their own program; they had their own organization, but were directly related to us.

M: When did your organization begin to get interested in the plight of the Negroes in Detroit? Was it during that Federal Mogul strike, where one man, I think by the name of Perry, was bludgeoned and taken to Women's Hospital and he wasn't admitted? Was that the-

R: I think that we were always interested. I think right from the inception, that one of the things that the organization was interested in was the rights of black people. I don't remember the Perry case. Many things will have slipped my mind and-

M: I think that was one of the ones that you were telling me about that got you kind of emotional. There was one man, who was a Negro, and he was beaten about two blocks away by the police, and some of your members - or it might have been the league for the professional people - some were doctors, and one who was a doctor for the CIO took him to the hospital there, to Women's, and he wasn't admitted, and there was quite a running controversy between the Civil Rights Federation and the administration at the Women's hospital. And, that's one of the first - although I did read in the paper that there were a number of incidences where you complained about restaurants in the area.

R: Yes. I was just going to say that one of our interests was always the question of enforcing the Diggs Act, which was the law introduced by the Congressman's father in the State Legislature, that prohibited discrimination against blacks in places that were public. And we had always been interested in pushing that and had many campaigns and every time we had a situation that came to our attention, we would try to follow it through. Part of the big campaign against Pickard, who was Police Commissioner, was on the basis of the treatment of blacks, in addition to his treatment of labor unions. So I think that right from the beginning, we had three, four major interests. One was labor, foreign born, blacks and political freedom. I think that these were the four major things that we were always concerned with. And, because we were small and with a limited budget, we would take cases and try to dramatize them. We knew we weren't able to take on all the cases, so that we would take on a case that exemplified a certain problem and push it, as far as we could. I think we were successful in getting rid of three or four Police Commissioners, in our campaigns, which was good, because they were really, as today, I guess all Police Commissioners or police departments, at least, operate on the basis of brutality, and it was more so then even than today.

M: Another question I'd like to ask. What did your organization think of

NAACP and the Urban League? If you could synthesize your own feeling of how the rank and file of your organization felt about those two organizations.

R: Well, the NAACP was, at that time the President was Doctor McClendon, and the Secretary was Gloster Current. Actually, they were not oriented to the needs of the people. I think that's probably true today too. They discouraged any kind of mass activities. They had a once-a-year meeting, which was the beginning of a membership drive, and the rest of the time they set up a board which basically was a group of black professionals with a token of a few white people, and they handled certain court cases. But basically they tried to keep the black community from being an active community fighting for its rights. And the Urban League got a new Chrysler once a year from the Chrysler Corporation as a present. I used to really like John Dancy as a person, but the Urban League was set up and financed by big business for the purpose, again, of containing the black people, and he was able to get a certain amount of token employment through his relationship with big business. One of the guys who was there, a guy by the name of Scruggs who became big in the telephone company-

M: He's very big, now, he's vice president for AT&T in New York.

R: Really? Boy! I remember Scruggs when he'd come to meetings and his whole purpose was to keep the black community from any kind of action program. And then he was able to get a couple of light skinned blacks jobs in the telephone company, but they had to have a certain kind of complexion before they would hire them.

M: What was Reverend Hill's role in your organization?

R: Reverend Hill was a member of our Steering Committee. Reverend Hill really became active around the Sojourner Truth situation. I don't remember the year when-

M: '43.

R: '43, when the government built-

M: That was '42. The riot was in '43.

R: The government built this housing project for blacks, and they built it in a neighborhood that was on the edge of a nice neighborhood that had black people living in it, sort of like a...

M: Herman Gardens.

R: Herman Gardens. It was a like a better neighborhood, compared with the rest of the neighborhoods that the black people lived in. But it went into the edge of a white community, and, when this project was being built, and as it was being completed, there was a tremendous campaign in the surrounding white community to keep blacks from moving in. And these blacks that were moving in were war workers. And it was built for war workers. At the same time, there were a number of hate strikes that were taking place around Detroit - Packard's and a number of plants, where blacks were being introduced for the first time into industry, to any kind of degree at all. But there was a Congressman, who was the Congressman in the 13th District? Same as Diggs now. And he was organizing in Washington to get this changed into a white housing project, with a Catholic priest, and a lot of the people living in that area were Catholics, Polish Catholics, so that a citizens committee was developed to fight to keep this project for blacks. And it was really an interesting development, because the Negro, or black community was in splinters, because Horace White was on the Housing Commission, and everybody was attacking him because he didn't fight hard enough to keep it for blacks, and Diggs, who was a Senator at the time, was fighting Horace White. And they all came together at the Lucy Thurman Branch of the YWCA, and formed a citizens committee for fighting for the Sojourner Truth Homes for black people. Hill was sort of a neutral kind of a person, because he wasn't in the factionalism that was taking place within the community. He was somehow separate from it. So they chose him to be the chairman of this committee, and decided to all work in unity for this one purpose, to make sure that these homes went to black war workers. And that was sort of his beginning into the real activity and the struggle around Detroit. A lot of the work for this committee was handled by us. I was the Secretary-

M: Did you do the Sojourner Truth Newsletter?

R: Yes. Everyday. From our office. We met every single day at the Lucy Therman Branch of the Y, and every day we would get something like fifty people who would come down there for lunch. That's probably the best lunch business they've ever had. And we would mimeograph a bulletin every single day, and have it there, and people would take it back into their neighborhoods. And that was all done from our office. At that time we were at the Insurance Exchange Building, which is now the Red Cross Headquarters. I believe. On Elizabeth. That used to be called the Insurance Exchange Building.

M: The Hoffman Building?

R: The Hoffman Building is on Woodward. Is there still a Colonial Theater?

M: Yes.

R: Well, it's right across from the Colonial Theater. I think it's the Yellow Pages Building. Do the Yellow Pages in the phone company have a building?

M: No.

R: There used to be a building that was called the Detroit Hotel, but now it's-

M: Carmel Hall, I think.

R: Carmel Hall. Well, it's right across from there. That's where the Hoffman Building was. And that used to be a hotel called the Detroiter. I'll never forget the first meeting of the Citizens Committee for Sojourner Truth. It had its real comical aspects. It took place at some church, I don't remember which. And everybody agreed that they would forget all the past bickering differences in the community, and try to unite on this one issue. So the meeting took place, and Diggs was one of the first speakers, and Horace White hadn't come yet, and he was going to be a speaker. And Reverend Hill was chairing the meeting. And Diggs was - although there was an agreement to forget about all the bickering - Diggs was launching into Horace White, into a real attack against Horace White. And while he

was doing this, Horace White came in, and he got the platform after Diggs finished, and he attacked Diggs, and this was the big unity meeting. Then, do you know a guy by the name of Snow Grigsby?

M: Yes.

R: Well, he worked for the Post Office, and he was in a Postal Alliance, which was the black organization of Postal Workers. And they had a newspaper, and he wanted a chance to speak at this meeting. He got up on the platform and he said that when Sojourner Truth was fighting for the abolition of the slaves, that she went from town to town, and she was so active and so aggressive that some people in the audience got up and challenged her, and said, "You can't be a woman, you must be a man to be carrying on like you're carrying on." And Sojourner Truth opened her blouse and pulled out her breast to show that she was a woman, "just like the Postal Alliance newspaper, for 10¢ a copy, we tell all." And then he went up and down the aisle selling the newspaper. And that was the end of this first meeting on the unity around the Sojourner Truth thing. But that was an interesting fight, because we met, for months, I guess, everyday at the Y and carried on this campaign. We went back and forth to Washington four or five times. Louis Martin was very active in it; he was at that time the owner and editor of the Michigan Chronicle. I guess he's moved on to the Chicago Defender, and he's also a big shot in the Democratic Party now.

M: Question: Who financed the trips to Washington?

R: The people. They would be raising money, contributions, and churches, and there was all gathered. Now: you take one point, one morning there was a meeting at the City Hall before the Detroit City Council, and the City Council, had, at this meeting, throughthe help of William Rogell, (who's still a counsel in there), voted to change the character of this housing project form black to white. And there was a big hearing, a public hearing, and the place was just filled with people. Most of them were people who were in favor of it being for black occupancy. But the Council changed it at that time, and decided to send a message to Washington, asking that it be for white occupancy. Everybody went from that meeting back to the

Lucy Therman Branch of the Y, by that night, we had, I believe, two carloads of people, or trains, two trainloads of people, two cars, on our way to Washington. Well, that was really a lot of money to be raised real quickly. I remember that I didn't have time to go home to get a shirt, so Louis Martin had his wife bring down a shirt for him, an extra shirt, and I wore his shirt. But that night, we left for Washington, and we were up all night, because we took coaches, the cheapest way we could go. And we arrived there in the morning, and the first thing we did was we went to the AF of L headquarters and they assigned somebody to represent them. It was a guy by the name of Boris Shishkin, I think. Anyway, he was their legislative representative. Then we went to the CIO, and I think that they assigned Phil Murray, at that time he was the President of the CIO nationally. And I think that we got Brophy there, who was, I think, legislative representative of the CIO. And we kept picking up people all over Washington, as we went on, like the people from the black community and their organizations joined us, and pretty soon we had a regular march going through Washington towards the Housing Department. There was a guy there by the name of Bairdsnare III, who was head of Housing at the time, and he wasn't anxious to meet with us. And we went into the auditorium, I think that it was in the Office of the Interior, or someplace, that we went to the office, and he walked in to this meeting, and said to us that he had no time to meet with us, that he was a busy man, and at this time, the project was for whites and that was it, and, bang, he walked out. Well, we had our own meeting there then. Horace White was there, I remember, and Louis Martin, and one after another people got up in this meeting, and they just read the riot act, to the government and Bairdsnare III and we must have been having our own meeting for about an hour or two hours, when, all of a sudden, Bairdsnare III came back into the meeting. And he said that he would like a chance to talk. And we said, "You can talk...when we're ready, we'll let you talk." And we kept our meeting going, and he kept pleading for a few minutes to have some time to talk. Finally, we let him have the floor, and he asked us to set up a committee of five people who would come to meet with him in the morning and discuss it again. And we agreed that we would do that - go into his office in the morning and discuss it. And he apologized

for his behavior earlier. Well, we found out later that the White House had some people in there too, they were listening. And they were real disturbed. It was Roosevelt, and he was real disturbed about the way the meeting was going, and the support we were picking up, and the fact the AFL and the CIO were represented. And they called up Bairdsnare III and says, "Get back in there as fast as you can and apologize to those people and arrange to meet with them." The next day we met with him. I was on the delegation, and Horace White, Reverend Hill, and I think Louis Martin, and I don't know who else, and at that point, the decision was reversed again, where it went to black occupancy, and that's how it stayed. But that was sort of an interesting mass campaign which led to that victory.

M: This is the kind of thing that doesn't come across in documents and things of that nature, and this is why the oral interview is very, very good. In fact, there aren't too many people that I can think of who might have been at that meeting except yourself.

R: Well, there's one fellow in Los Angeles, a fellow by the name of Harper Paulson, who was at that meeting. Both Harper and I were attacked by Tenerowicz on the floor of Congress as being radical instigators or something like that.

M: I'm going to stop right now and change tape, and maybe you'd like to get a drink or something.

R: Yes.

M: STATIC....to the meetings to gather reports, like for instance, the meetings...the Home Improvement Associations or the neighborhood improvement associations, a black person couldn't go, and I know members of your organization would go and take notes because I've seen them. Who's job was that? Was it your job, or did you usually find someone else to do that?

R: We had a group of seven or eight, nine young people, like the Nader's Raiders, who went to different things for us. We were constantly gathering

material to see where the opposition came from. We kept track on the Ku Klux Klan, we kept track on the National Workers League. The National Workers League was sort of a pro-Nazi organization. There was a neighborhood organization around Sojourner Truth. A guy by the name of Joe Buffer was the head of it. Incidentally, when the Sojourner Truth project was finally finished and blacks started into it, there was a riot that took place, and this was, I think, the beginning of the big Detroit riot, in actuality. It was building up because of blacks going into industry, and the Sojourner Truth project. And several people were indicted for sedition, on the basis of information that we provided. One was a guy, who was connected with the National Workers League. All over the country, there were a number of people cited, and these were among several of the people in Detroit who tried to prevent blacks from going into Sojourner Truth. The trial never came to fruition because of the fact that the judge died before they were tried, and the government dropped it.

M: Another thing that I'd like to ask you, if you can remember: in the Civil Rights manuscript collection there's about a hundred and fifty page document of information gathered by investigators from that organization. Now, was it one person, or a number of people who did this? Do you know any of the names of them?

R: I don't know the document you're talking about.

M: It's....well, for instance, interviews of people involved in the riot and things of that nature.

R: Oh, I think that was sort of a collective effort. We really didn't have the finances to maintain good files. However, our files are probably a better history of a lot of things that went on in the community at that time than anybody elses'. But they were hit and miss. Part of the time, we were clipping newspapers, and we'd file them and mount them, and part of the time we weren't because we didn't have anybody to do them. Most of the activity was on a volunteer basis. We'd get women to come down a couple of hours a day and sit around clipping newspapers, and gathering stuff. The organization itself had, at the most, three full-time people, and sometimes it was two, and sometimes one, because of finances. So that the files and

materials that we accumulated were largely done by just volunteers, people who were interested.

M: Tell me something about the KKK in Detroit during that time.

R: Well, the KKK had a headquarters I think at 89 West Forest. And a guy by the name of Charlie Spvear(?) was head of it, and they used to meet there. And they operated somewhat within the factories. I remember there was a newspaper in New York called PM, and there was a guy by the name of Albert Deutsch, who was one of their staff writers, who came to Detroit during the Packard strike, and I don't know if you found this in the file or not, but someplace I have a copy of a clipping of a conversation that took place between me and a member of the KKK with Albert Deutsch copying it down verbatim. As reference to the Packard strike. And at that time, there was a national convention of the NAACP taking place and they had a mass meeting at the Olympia. And we gave this conversation to R.J. Thomas, who read it at this meeting,...which, where, the KKK took credit for being responsible for organizing the hate strike at Packard. I don't know of all the activities. Again, it was sort of like a hit and miss proposition, because we didn't have the manpower, or the money of the FBI or anything of that kind to do that kind of an investigation job.

M: I remember seeing a copy of a report where someone set out and took the license plates of the cars that went to this building, and then they were able to identify certain members like that.

R: Yes.

M: Tell me something about the Detroit chapter of the National Negro Congress. Can you connect him(?) with that organization?

R: Well, we were closer with _____, but the National Negro Congress was a more militant organization than the NAACP. They were more of the Paul Robeson type of representation in the black community. I know that they had a national convention in Detroit, at the Rackham Building, which I attended. We worked more closely with the National Negro

Congress than we did the NAACP. Offhand, I can't think of any special activities of the National Congress. Coleman Young was active in the National Negro Congress before he went into the Army...

M: Is that so?

R:...and, I really can't tell you too much about specific activities, but I know that they were an active organization. They were more interested moving masses, and were, I believe, more closely identified with the mass of the black people.

M: I notice that some of the things that your organization did - long before it was called black studies, you had a program on Negro history and such in Detroit, and I've seen letters: "the mayor's Human Relations Committee thanks you for the help you've given them in establishing their organization." Could you tell me about the Smash Bilbo campaign and the Smash the Fifth Column campaign where you equated the denial of rights to blacks as being in league with the Nazis and Japanese and hurting the war effort. Could you tell me about some of the thinking that was going on at this time? And some of the incidents. As you recollect them, of course.

R: Well, we related the whole problem of the black people at that time of the winning of the war - in order to put the message across, we raised the issue in such a way so as to make the fight to discriminate against blacks as an anti-war kind of activity. Just as the hate strikes - we felt, and I think it was so, that the reason why organizations like the National Workers League and the Ku Klux Klan and other organizations of this kind were causing the hate strikes was as much to hurt World War II as it was to fight the blacks. So we tried to relate it that way, because we felt that this was a way in which we could strike home to the people what they were doing when they had hate strikes and fought against war housing for blacks and things of that kind. I don't know if that's what you're getting at.

M: That's how I saw it too, as you related it to the war effort.

R: Also at this time, Roosevelt recognized the fact that in order to win World War II that you had to have a total effort on the part of the whole citizenry, and he set up the Fair Employment Practices Committee, and one of its first workers was George Crockett. Before George Crockett came to Detroit, he worked for the Fair Employment Practices Committee in Washington. You know George?

M: Well, I don't know him personally, but a very interesting thing, my wife's cousin has a TV program in Detroit called Profiles in Black. And he interviewed Crockett and his wife at his home and he asked Crockett a question about...well, his wife told about how he has been a radical all his life, he felt that everybody should have, there should be, justice for everybody, and so forth. Like the time in West Virginia, when he went downtown and demanded that they give him an office in this office building where no blacks had ever had offices before. But the shoot-out in Detroit, where he interpreted the law the way he saw it, he-

R. I was in Detroit last year, and I went to this courtroom, and talked to _____ a while. He is, without any question one of the outstanding Civil Rights leaders of the country. And he fought for everybody's civil rights. He's like Reverend Hill. Reverend Hill, for example, was a great guy because he was ready to put his career and everything on the line at any time, it didn't make any difference who it was, he would do it for Jewish people, foreign born, anybody who had a cause that they needed somebody to lend support to. That he was always there. And that's the same with Crockett. I think Crockett certainly a great guy, and a good lawyer. In fact, his law practice, when he first went into it, he was the only black man in there in the office of all white lawyers, and in that law office, which I know very well, he was certainly considered the top prosecution lawyer in the whole office.

M: Tell me something about your activities during the Balck Legion at this time.

R: That was before me.

M: That was before you?

R: Yes.

M: What about the Dies Committee?

R: Well, the Dies Committee - that was sort of most of it before me too. We, of course, were against the Dies Committee, and we fought it every way we could, but actually, most of the Dies Committee episode was before me.

M: Mr. Raskin, would you tell me something about the role of the Civil Rights Federation in the Detroit riot of 1943?

R: Well, the riot, as I indicated before, was an outgrowth of a buildup of anti-black activity around the Sojourner Truth Housing Project, and also the hate strikes in the plants. My first recollection of the riot taking place - we didn't know too much about - but we knew that there was a big problem developing, and we all got down to the office as fast as we could. The first thing we did was we assembled a group of people at the Lucy Thurman Branch of the Y including the mayor, who was Mayor Jeffries at the time, and Frank Martel of the AF of L and R.J. Thomas of the UAW, and the various church leaders to see what we could do. Because what was happening, basically, was along the sharp lines of division, between blacks and whites, principally Woodward Avenue at the time, that there was this tremendous battle going on, principally, between the police and the blacks. I think that most of the blacks that were killed at that time were killed by the police. Well, we were confused ourselves that morning. We wanted some sort of a citizen's group of deputies, who were given authority to go out and try to establish some kind of order. And the mayor was upset. Mayor Jeffries wasn't the worst mayor we've had, but he was trying to find some way out, and he was accusing us of fomenting the riot, because of our activities on behalf of the blacks. In fact, following this meeting, there was a meeting at the mayor's office, in which the mayor pointed his finger at me and said I was responsible for causing the riots. I don't know if you found that in the files anyplace or not. And I called the mayor a damn contemptible liar and that made the headlines in the paper that day. But what happened was

that in spite of the fact that you're involved in this kind of activity, you're not really in tune with the people. The people in the black community wanted the guards in to stop the riot. And we were against it, because we feared the Guards. But I think the people saw in Roosevelt a friend, and figured that if Roosevelt sent the Guards in, that the riots would be stopped, whereas they didn't trust the police who were really the rioters, in the sense that they were attacking the black people. When the troops came in, that the riots stopped in actuality, that Detroit looked like an armed camp. And then the big problem was that for a while there was no vender, or anybody who would go into the black community. At that time all the venders were white, all the people that brought the food in and everything else in the community, wouldn't go in. There was actual starvation. And the head of the Welfare Department at that time was a guy who later became Police Commissioner....

M: Witherspoon?

R: No, not Witherspoon. He was a sort of a fairly decent guy, however, his name will come back to me in a minute. But Beulah Whitby, you know Beulah Whitby? She and I went to meet with him, to see what we could do about establishing some way of getting food into the community, so that the people would have something to eat, and that program was worked out, the details of which I don't remember, in order to make sure that people were able to get stuff to eat. Ballanger was the Police Commissioner. Yes. He was head of the Welfare before he became Police Commissioner.

M: Yes. I remember, he came to some of your meetings.

R: Yes. He was a relatively decent guy, and so that was a big concern then, and of course, there was the whole debate that went on for a long time as to who was responsible, and the whole question of police brutality came up. Reverend Hill, who was light complected, drove through the black

community and he was hit in the head with a rock. I remember that. Again, Lucy Thurman branch was the headquarters for our meetings, and it was convenient. There's a lot more detail, but, basically, I think that was our role. We tried to stop the action of the police, and we tried to place the responsibility at the hands of the police, and we wanted some kind of activity on the part of the citizens, both black and white to try to stop. Though it was the people in the black community who wanted the National Guard in. One of the interesting things about that riot, though, is that no place where there was a mixed community, or in the plants, where blacks and whites worked together, did you have any kind of incident of trouble. It was only where the segregation was sharp, where on one side of the road there were blacks, and on the other side there were whites. There was a number of interesting - I remember one little incident that took place, which indicates , too, how people are mixed up in what is white supremacy and what isn't. There was a number of whites beating up one black man, and some guy, a white truck driver, was driving by and saw that this was taking place, and he stopped his truck and jumped out and went to the aid of the black man to help him and free him from the attack he was under. And later on, he was interviewed, and they asked him, "How come you went to the aid of this black man?", he says, "Well, I saw this coon being beaten up and I just went to help him." So I just went to help him. So here you get a mixture of a term which is derogatory, but the action was....

M: Tell me something about Kemnitz, and the organization he went to - the National...

R: The National Federation of Constitutional Liberites. Well, Kemnitz was naval(?) guy, he was very personable. I think that our particular civil rights organization, for that period of history, was the only one in the country that was sustained for a long period of time and had that kind of a continual existence. And it was felt that a National organization, something of that kind, was needed. And they had a meeting in New York where they had an assemblage of the same type of people on a national scale, who formed this National Federation of Constitutional Liberties, which was to start organizations all over the country, with one in New York being the head. And they had some success. They started

one in New York, and Chicago, and Los Angeles, and different parts of the country. And Kemnitz was the head of that. He had the similar job in New York as he had in Detroit. Reverend Nocks was the head of it and they had a number of lawyers, mainly.DuBois was part of that, W.E., and Paul Robeson. The Chairman was a guy by the name of George Marshall, who came from a very well known, nationally well known Jewish family, very wealthy. Carlos LeMant was part of that, from the LeMant family of the House of Morgan. His father was the head of the House of Morgan. And you had some people with money like that, who were interested in backing it. And they had a falling out with Nocks over the issue of whether to support World War II or not.

M: Nocks didn't want to support World War II?

R: Nock's whole interest was on a basis of pacifism, and he felt that you shouldn't support any war, and he felt that World War II was no exception. So that he fought against any programs like, for instance, our position, where we were trying to point out that if you didn't fight for the rights of blacks, and if you didn't utilize blacks and make the industries open to blacks,you were actually hurting the war effort, and he became against even that kind of a position. I remember at one point, he made the statement that what the America First Committee and the Gerald L.K. Smiths, who was also one of the operators in Detroit during this period, were saying about Jews trying to get us involved in World War II was true. In an indirect way he justified the anti-Semitism of that period, not really feeling anti-Semitic himself, but he felt the Jews had a good reason, for what they were saying about the Jews wanting us to get into World War II was true.

M: Tell me, did you have any _____?

R: Yes. In fact, it's sort of a sad thing to say at that time in history. I think that we had a better contact with the black community than some of the black organizations. It wasn't true later on, and it shouldn't have been true then, but there was a real void in the black community on the basis of anyplace where blacks could really go and participate. Like the various organizations that discouraged participation, and the

blacks were all strictly in churches. Some of the churches were good and some of them weren't. For example, the Second Avenue Baptist Church in Detroit, I think it was a Banks, a Reverend Banks, who was-

M: Or was it Bradby?

R: There were two Bradbys, the father-

M: and the son...

R: Well, it was Bradby, then, who had a connection with the Ford Motor Car Company, and sort of built his church on getting jobs in the Foundry at Fords for blacks. He would support nothing in the community in the way of any real activity at that time, while we were against police brutality or anything of that kind. The younger Bradby was different, he would take a stand and participate in different things.

M: What percentage of Jewish people were in your organization? The reason why I'm asking this is that Kemnitz was writing to a Mr. Pearlstein of a Jewish organization in Chicago, and he was telling him about Bollins. I think that an inquirer had asked about what were they doing in the organization, and he told that Bollins was a Gentile, Nocks was a Gentile, and then he went on and told him what they were doing, and then as a P.S. he said Mr. Lederwitz told me to tell you that although my name is Kemnitz, it isn't Jewish.

R: We have sort of the same situation with the Jewish community as we have with the black community. We have a lot of Jewish people participating in our organization, but the top organized part of the community were always concerned about us, because they didn't want to stir up any kind of fight against anti-Semitism. They felt that it's better to let it quiet. This was true of a lot of the experience of Jewish people in Europe who were slaughtered by the Nazis. And they sort of had this philosophy, that you shouldn't really fight in any way, and especially you shouldn't really involve Jewish people in a fight; what fight you have, you should conduct through their committees like the Anti-Defamation League and things of that kind, but don't involve the mass of people. But for certain things, though, they would come out and support us,

because they wanted it done, and didn't want to do it themselves. Do you remember Dorothy Thompson?

M: Right.

R: She was this columnist who was at a meeting of the German Bund of New York, and she was married to Sinclair Lewis, she was Sinclair Lewis' wife. She was in a press box, and someone made some statement against the Jewish people, and I don't remember what the statement was, but she was slapped or something, I forget the exact thing. Well, at that point, we brought her to Detroit and had a meeting at the Olympia with it being financed largely by people in the Jewish community, who were glad to have us do that, but they wouldn't have done it themselves. And we filled the Olympia with this big rally, on the basis of bringing her as a person who was subjected to an attack, and who was an outspoken anti-Nazi, and so that they were willing to participate with us on functions like this.

M: Do you feel that your organization was used to do the dirty work where other people wouldn't - like, for instance, the NAACP and the Urban League. And that sometimes they might feel, well, let them do it, we don't want to get our hands soiled. Did you ever feel that?

R: No. We did what we did because we wanted to do it, and because this was our understanding of what we had to do, and we were more oriented towards the people who were victims and felt that in order to accomplish any kind of an end with the establishment - just as it is today - that you had to fight, you had to put up some kind of a fight. That way the establishment could feel the pressure coming from the people. This was true in the early days of the organization of the CIO, but has become less and less true as the CIO has become established and entrenched within the system that their workers are a part of. At that particular time, too, I think that all the people, having come through a depression not too long ado, and most of them remembering it at that time, were a little bit class conscious, which I don't think is true today. They felt that they belonged to a working group of people and didn't belong to the industry that runs the country, and they felt more separated from

industry - an identity of their own. I remember for example, we had a meeting where we filled Cadillac Square to free Tom Mooney. Well, today, if you have a person who is that kind of a victim of a court frame-up, you'd never be able to do anything like that with the trade union support, because the trade unions wouldn't participate. Where, during that period, they did. We didn't feel that we were put upon to do the dirty work; we chose what we wanted to do and did it.

M: Is there anything you'd like to add, postscript, to this.

R: Well, I don't know what you want. I spent a lot of time there, and there are many things that we did; we just touched on a few of them. One of the interesting things, for me, when I was active in the Civil Rights Federation, the Civil Rights Congress is that we were able to accomplish what we did accomplish, because we were really very small, and just an office and a mineograph machine and with contacts all over, and that we utilized these contacts to stimulate interest, and that we did it with a small functioning group. And some of the things, were even sort of miraculous. I don't know if you saw anything about, for instance, the Limas Woods case in the file. I don't know what year that happened, but Limas Woods was a black soldier who wrote his father a letter saying that, "Dad, this is your son. I've been sentenced to die by a court martial, and you probably won't hear from me any more." He was in the Phillippines, and what happened was that he had accidentally shot somebody and the Army just court-martialled him, I would guess because he was black and didn't take into consideration that it was accidental, and was making an example out of him and sentenced him to die. His father brought the letter to us, and we were able to haul away to Manila and dig up the information that proved that it was accidental, and won a reversal on a court martial, first one - through Roosevelt again, by applying pressure to Roosevelt and telling the story and creating enough pressure to Roosevelt and telling the story and creating enough pressure so that Roosevelt ordered the court martial opened up again, and we had a new court martial hearing, in which Ernie Goodman represented us, in the Presidio in California - they brought Limas Woods from the Phillippines to California, and we were able to win the reversal. Well, that's pretty good, when you can take the Army on and get them to reverse their position

and, you know, it's really miraculous, because here we are, just a couple of people, working in an office in Detroit and the whole thing takes place in the Phillippines, and it was interesting the way we could work up interest in issues that were just and to the point where we could move the President of the United States to interfere with the Army. The Army resisted to the end. You know, we're opening this up and letting us present the evidence which proved that their court martial proceedings, if anything, were faulty, and inadequate and unjust, and we were able to reverse the case. I think that what happened to Limas Woods was that he got three years for doing this accidentally, and he served most of the time. And so that was really a good experience for me in the Civil Rights Congress. I enjoyed it and probably feel that part of my life was the most worthwhile.

(Woman): How about the _____ at Oakland, who's _____ and the Civil Rights....

R: There's an Ann Ginger, in Oakland...She was married to Ray and she has a library called Michael John Library. Michael John was a well known civil rights lawyer, and I guess she got his old library and she's been adding on to it, and it's supposed to be a Civil Rights legal library. She's in Berkeley...

M: Berkeley, California?

R: Yes, but I don't know that she'd have too much about Detroit per se. There might be a lot of things in Goodman's file, because he had a lot of cases, and his office had a lot of cases. And his predecessor, who was there before him, Maurice Sugar...

M: Oh, yes. He had a lot of cases. So that, he may have a lot of information in his files. Different specific cases. And they keep pretty good files there. I was going to ask you about this book, Scottsboro Boy, by Haywood Patterson and Earl Conrad-

R: Well, what happened was that Haywood Patterson was the last of the

Scottsboro Boys still in jail, and one day we had contact with his sister, who was Mayzel Patterson, and she lived in Detroit, and he was sort of a defiant kind of guy, he didn't accept what the prison was dishing out to him, and because of that, I guess, he was kept in longer than anybody else. So one day, she came to our office, and she says that Haywood's at her house, and that he'd just escaped from prison, and he came to her house. So we said, well, that's the worst place for him to be, because that's the first place they'll look. So we arranged to get him out of there real quick, and we placed him in the home of some other people for a day or two, until we could figure out what to do. So, what happened was, I went to New York, and met with some people I knew in New York, basically people in the National Federation for Constitutional Liberty, and told them what the problem was. He was in Detroit, and by this time, they'd already been to Detroit looking for him, and we had to find some way of taking care of him. And not let the authorities get a hold of him. So we took him to New York, we arranged for a whole carload of people to drive to New York, all of them black people, so nobody'd be suspicious, and we got new clothes, and all that, and sent him on to New York and we got a job for him there. And meanwhile, this book was written. We then brought him back to Detroit, this was when Williams was Governor, and we fought extradition and won it. But when the book was published, he wrote that inscription in the book for his sister, because he wouldn't give anybody a free copy, except his sister, and his sister says, "Look, I'd like you to have this book,"and she gave it to me. The inscription basically says, "Read this book, but don't give it to anybody else, because if you don't give it to anybody else, they'll go and buy one." And he wanted people to buy one so he could make some money on it. He was a pretty sick guy from this whole experience. He went through this siege in prison with all kinds of mistreatment and for something that he wasn't guilty of in the first place. And he came out and was, I think, sort of paranoid at that time, felt that everybody owed him a living, and he got into a fight in a bar and killed a guy, actually, this time in Detroit. This was after he was already saved on extradition, and went to jail and died a short time after it. And I sort of thought the inscription on the book was sort of interesting and how we got it. We had, during the time I was in the Civil Rights Congress, fought a number of cases where people had come to Detroit who

were leaving a lynch mob in the South and wanted some kind of protection. We'd fight their extradition, sometimes successfully and sometimes not successfully. It's a whole bunch of daily experiences that you just can't sum up too quickly, and that every day we were doing something or other, either picketing a restaurant because they discriminated against blacks, or fighting a legal case, or getting somebody out of jail on bail. It was a good organization, and as I think back on some of the things we accomplished, I really don't know how we did it. Unless you have any specific questions to ask, I really don't know that there's anything more to say.

M: Well, you've answered pretty much the questions that I've wanted to ask. There were some spaces there that weren't filled in, and you and a few other people were the only ones who could shed some light upon them. I have run across some statements where you fought extraditions. I can't remember the names of the men, but...

R: There was a Fletcher Mills case that I remember. He was a young kid from Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He was something like 18 years old, and he'd been a sharecropper, hadn't had any schooling, and he got into a fight over a cow with the guy who's land he was working on. He was already married. The first thing they do, I guess, you get married early there, because that keeps you on the land. And because he got into a fight, the mob came after him. I don't remember quite what it was, I think that he was allowed to have a cow, and the cow got out someplace where it wasn't supposed to get on a part of the land, and the landlord came there and was going to beat him up, and he hit him to defend himself, or something of that kind. And he came to Detroit, and he was followed here. He had relatives here in Detroit, and an extradition warrant was gotten out to bring him back to Alabama. The way the extradition warrants work is that they have a limited amount of time. They run for something like a month at a time, and then if you want it to continue beyond that you have to ask for another warrant. Meanwhile, the only thing that the governor's supposed to decide on extradition warrants is whether or not the papers are valid. The issue is technically not supposed to be what's up before a governor when he orders a person extradited.

The only thing that's involved is if the papers are correct. So we found out that the seal on the papers was in the wrong place, And, it's all supposed to be bound by a seal, and some of the papers didn't come within the binding of the seal, and so the judge ordered them to get a new, correct paper, where the seal would be in there right. So they went back to Alabama, and in the meanwhile, before they got returned, the period of time was up. The authorities weren't here to ask for a new warrant, so we went in there on a writ to get him released, and there was really nothing to hold him at that point, because we just caught him in a travelling period. And we got him released and we got him out of Detroit again, and got him a job someplace else, in Pennsylvania, and we were able to hide him again. It was a maneuver, but it worked. But we had all kinds of things of this type happening to us all the time.

M: What do you see as the most important issues to you and your friends in the 1944 election? That was the election between Dewey and Roosevelt during the war.

R: To us, at that point, it was really the issues of us particularly: the issues of the civil rights involving black people. One of the interesting things - if you get a chance to see Libran Simmons, he'll be able to remember - that we had decided between the National Negro Congress and us, to hold a big rally supporting Roosevelt, on the basis of Negro, or black rights. So we went to the Olympia, got the only available day that anybody could rent Olympia during the whole Roosevelt election campaign. And we invited Mary McCloud Bethune, and Paul Robeson, and I can't remember who else in the black community. But we rented the Olympia, and then it turned out that this was the only place that you could have this kind of a rally in the city of Detroit for Roosevelt at the time, and we wanted Roosevelt elected. We were approached by all kinds of people to broaden this meeting out, to make it a city-wide meeting for Roosevelt. And after a lot of consideration, we decided to do that, and we had Henry Wallace, Paul Robeson, Mary McCloud Bethune, and several other people of national prominence who were there, and we filled the Olympia, had this great big Roosevelt meeting. We were trying to make the issue

of black people a prominent issue, and bring it to the forefront in the whole campaign.

M: Second question: What was the relationship between CIO Political Action Committee and the Michigan Citizens Committee for Roosevelt in terms of finance and organization?

R: The Michigan Citizens Committee for Roosevelt was a result of this Olympia meeting. That's what happened out of the Olympia meeting. When we had the only facility for any kind of a mass rally, we formed the Michigan Citizens Committee for Roosevelt. And it was a committee which encompassed all the people who were for Roosevelt, and not all of us were in harmony on a lot of things. Hare, who was Secretary of State-

M: He is now.

R: -he was the Chairman of the Michigan Citizens Committee for Roosevelt, and he was chosen because he was sort of like between two factions. We on the so-called left and the other people who were for Roosevelt, who formed the ADA of the Michigan Citizens Committee, the ADA chapter, Americans for Democratic Action, was eventually formed out of the Michigan Citizens Committee. But everybody participated. The CIO Political Action Committee also participated in this big rally, and I don't know what the financial arrangements were, I really don't know. This rally itself, people paid to go. It raised a lot of money and gave the Michigan Citizens Committee for Roosevelt a big boost. We, at that time, also formed a committee for the soldiers, both for Roosevelt, which was affiliated with the Michigan Citizens Committee.

M: Number three. Do you recall in what manner the local PAC forces financed their huge registration drive in Wayne County?

R. No.

M: Okay, number four: What issues did the Republicans attempt to use in Michigan against the Roosevelt-Truman ticket?

R: I'm really too vague about that. I don't remember it well enough.

M: Okay. Number five. Any general observations on the campaign personalities, events, etc. You've already mentioned Hare. Any general observations on campaign personalities, events. etc.?

R: How did the Progressive party fit into this period?

M: I don't think...it didn't come up...'48, I remember that one. That was at Wayne. That's when the Progressives came on, when Truman was running for his second term against Dewey.

R: And Wallace ran...

M: Wallace ran...and I remember Robeson, that was the first time...He was my hero, incidentally...

R: Mine, too. Yes-I have a son that's named Paul. That's sort of an interesting story. Remember the Peakskill riots?

M: Yes.

R: After that brought Robeson to Detroit for a concert.

M: At the Art Institute?

R: No. We were trying to get anyplace, but everyplace was closed to us. We couldn't rent a place. So finally we were able to get Sonny Wilson. Well, Sonny Wilson had a roller skating ring on Forest and Hastings. And the only place that we could get to have any kind of a meeting with Robeson was his roller skating ring. That was the only thing available to us. And then, after we got that, they put all kinds of pressure on Sonny Wilson to take it away from us. They really worked hard to keep Robeson from appearing at this - well, it was really not only a concert, it was also a political meeting, because it was our reaction to what was done to him in his concert at Peaksville. So, for example, we set up

the chairs, and the fire department came in there and made us tie all the chairs together with rope. And there was all kinds of pressure on, and finally we were counteracting with pressure too, you know. We were applying our own pressure to keep it. At one point, Sonny Wilson took the hall away from us, and we were having a meeting with the Police Commissioner and Sonny Wilson and everybody else, trying to get the hall back. And the morning of this meeting, my wife went to the hospital, because my son was ready to arrive. I took her to the hospital, and then I went back to the meeting, and, well, during the meeting I was called from the hospital that he had arrived. So the meeting was postponed for a while, while I went back to the hospital, then I went back to the meeting. We finished the meeting and we won the hall back that night. So we had the meeting, and there was such a big turnout, that we just couldn't handle the people on the streets, the streets were just overflowing. You know, and every time they fight you, they give you publicity. They build it up for you. If we tried to publicize the meeting ourselves this well, we couldn't have done it. So what we did was, we got one of the big churches, I think it was Bethel AME to open their doors and the overflow crowd went there. We had two meetings. Robeson went from one meeting to the other meeting, and people just waited for him to finish one meeting, and he went to the other meeting, attended that. And so we had the both meetings at that time. So that's one of the reasons why I named my son Paul.

M: Do you have any other observations about the 1944 campaign. The personalities and the events?

R: One of the things that we felt about the campaign was that Dewey couldn't win. In spite of a whole number of things about Roosevelt, we people made a good deal of progress under him. We felt that it was essential for him to win. And Dewey represented the conservative reactionary forces. He was the law and order man of that period. Remember, he got his reputation by being the Attorney General of the State of New York. And he was a law and order man, like Nixon is today. That's basically the observations I make.

M: Have you got anything you'd like to say in closing?

R: No. But I'd like to have a copy of your paper when you finish it.

M: Fine, and thank you very much.