

Interviewee: Judge William C. Randall
Interviewers: Alex White and Seven Woods
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Alex White: Are there any striking memories you have from the movement here in Macon?

Judge Randall: Yes, there are. There are a few things that I remember especially.

AW: Could you tell us about them?

JR: Well, I think the first thing that I remember especially was the very first organized demonstration that Macon had during this era, which was a ... conducted by myself and fourteen other teenaged students back in—I guess that was around 1963. We boarded—there were 15 of us, so, we divided into five groups, three each—and we went to various bus stops, and we boarded the bus, and when we were asked to move from the front to the back, by the driver, we refused and of course... they pulled to one side and called the police. The police came, and they asked us to move to the back, and we refused again. We were all arrested. I think all us were above the juvenile except for three, I think, and they were taken into custody, and I think they were carried to the juvenile center. The rest of us were locked up right here in the Bibb County jail. The jail at the time was upstairs on the fifth floor, and we were all, those who were above 16, were brought down here. So that was one of the most striking events that I remember. It was the first event, first organized demonstration, here in the city of Macon, in Bibb County.

Seven Woods: When setting off to do this, did you know that y'all were going to be starting—well that it would be the first event—organized event in Macon?

JR: We knew it was the first organized event, but we hoped that it would trigger others, and it did.

AW: What kind of impact did you hope to make and then did you see that impact fully develop?

JR: My hope was to basically desegregate the buses and to get black drivers with the bus company. At the time, the bus company was privately owned. It was owned by the Bibb transit company, and it was our hope that they would hire drivers and integrate the seating arrangements. That did not result from that first demonstration. It took some other efforts, but it finally happened.

AW: Did you hope to see that—if that did occur—did you hope to see that applied to schools and other public areas?

JR: Oh yeah, that was just the first step and that was done by teenagers. Like I said, when—all memories of the youth chapter, the youth division of the Macon NAACP—we hoped that it would spark a series of demonstrations aimed at the entire spectrum because at the time nothing was integrated. No schools, no parks, nothing. Theaters were still segregated, everything. So we were hoping that that would be the catalyst to start a sustained movement here in Macon.

SW: How did your parents feel about your participation in this event?

JR: Well, my father [Billy Randall] and myself planned this thing in our living room. At the time, he was a political activist. He was the, I think, the political action committee chair of the NAACP. He also was the adult advisor to the youth council, and I kinda egged him on. The Montgomery movement started in 1955 and here it was 1961 or 62, and we had done no organized demonstration in Macon, and there were problems. I kept pestering him because he would have to be one to improve and to set it in motion, so we did that in our living room. I gathered the participants up from members of the youth council of the NAACP with very much disappointing because we had maybe 300 to 400 different kids that were members, and we could only get 15. I'd say 5 or 6 of those were relatives. Even the main president of the NAACP did not let his children participate.

SW: Did you see this type of lack of involvement throughout your whole process in the movement?

JR: No, as things went along people became more involved. The second event took place maybe a year or two after we initially boarded those buses. Five African-American preachers got on the bus and did the same thing we did. They got on the bus and refused to move to the rear. They were five prominent black pastors and so that really triggered things. By this time I think my father was—he might not have been president of the NAACP—they had another organization called the Bibb County Coordinating Committee, and they involved upon some of the negotiations with the transit company to voluntarily desegregate the buses. And of course they, simultaneous with the negotiations, they filed to the federal court to get that done. But in the mean time, the next big—after the event with the preachers—the next big event was to call another bus boycott.

That took place when father called for that boycott on Sunday. Then Monday, the bus boycott was initially 99% effective, with only one person of color getting on the bus, and she rode from one stop to the next and someone got on the bus to explain things to her and then she got out. From that point on, the boycott was 100% effective, and it went on for a period of time because it was well organized, there were carpools. When we

ran into opposition, police officers gave tickets for nonexistent offenses, even had one girl who was actually the daughter of one of the two black policemen at the time, made an allegation that one of the drivers who was driving in the pool had raped her and that's the kind of opposition we encountered.

The boycott lasted I think maybe two or three weeks, and they had to give in because the population of the buses were probably 80% to 90% black. So they were hurting. Some of our white citizens had black domestic workers and laid them off with the statement that, you know, we can't help the bus company financially and still pay you too. So a lot of domestics were let go, whether they were participating or not. Most of them got rides from the motor pools to their jobs, but they were let go. We received a lot of help from the Jewish committees in the city of Macon. They supplied a lot of the money for the gas, the oil, and they also provided bond money in instances where people were arrested. They were members of the Jewish community, very active.

AW: Did you see such types of support from other minority groups?

JR: At that time, there were very few other minorities in Bibb count. This is prior to the influx of Mexicans into the state and to answer the question, there were none. There were no minorities other than the African Americans who were doing it.

AW: How was the movement in Macon similar or different to the national movement?

JR: It was similar. Now you got to understand there were two groups even on the national level. There was a group that followed tactical violence, which we didn't follow. We followed the nonviolent prong of the attack, following after Dr. Martin Luther King. My father said, "We would not resort to violence." We would only engage in peaceful, non-violent protests in order to address the problems that we were facing.

SW: Were there many episodes of violence on black against white in Macon?

JR: No, the violence that took place was basically the other way around. For instance, we lived in the Pleasant Hill area off Grant Avenue, and we lived in the last house on the right hand side. The first house on the corner was a rental house that my father had. We lived on the same side of the street, but we were the last house on the right hand side. Somebody poured over 300 rounds of ammunition into that house on the corner. We surmised that it was a mistake that somebody got the wrong house. So after the shooting, my father went on television and said "Well, you shot at the wrong house. I'm at the end of the street." So then he said come on back. At that time, things could have gotten out of hand because black people got really upset and there were volunteers to protect my father and our house. They were stationed around the house with guns. Some of them were automatic that they got from somewhere. That went on for a period of time until there was an accidental shooting in the house that struck one of my nephews in the leg. At that time, daddy called off the guards and said "I don't want any more armed guards. I'll just take my chances."

AW: How would you describe the retaliation from whites? Was the majority of it violence? Or was there also a great deal of economic pressure?

JR: There was not a whole lot of violence, but there was some. But was there some economic pressure. A lot of blacks lost their jobs because—whether they were participating or not—they would have to participate if they were bus riders. And if they couldn't get on the bus, they just wouldn't get on it. So I think there was some economic impact, but I think the most violent thing was the shooting thing I just previously alluded to.

Then the other took place in Tattnell Square Park right there by your school. At the time, the new apartments on campus used to be a public housing project that was totally white. Remember nothing was integrated at the time. And so it was decided that we would try to integrate Tattnell Square Park. That group was led by, I think, two elderly ladies and one elderly gentleman who accompanied the children into the park. When word got out that these people were in the park, it seemed like the entire housing project was emptied and came to the park. They came to run those kids, those old people out of the park. Word got to my father, and he got into the car with Tom Jackson. He was an attorney. Tom had an old thunderbird, and he and my daddy got in there, and they went over to Tattnell to see what was going on.

When they got there, this huge crowd was there with bricks, sticks, and baseball bats. They were menacing these children and these elderly people. So my daddy decided he had to go in there and get them out. Tom said, "Don't go. They'll kill you if you go." He still got out of the car and started heading through the crowd, and he said that the crowd started parting like the Red Sea did. He went in and—I don't know if they were stunned that he would do that—but he got the kids out. And there were other cars there. They got the kids out and put them in the cars, they got the elderly people as well. Then he went back to Tom Jackson's car, and he kept trying to get through, but they were beating on the car with the sticks and the baseball bat. But he finally got through, and they pulled off. That was probably the worst instance of violence that I can remember. There were other instances, but this was a huge act of violence by a huge number of people.

SW: So on a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate the white opposition to the black civil rights movement in Macon?

JR: I would say maybe a 7.

SW: So you would say that white opposition was what was highest obstacle to the movement?

JR: We were fortunate, at that time, to have a mayor [Ed Wilson] who was rather fair. We had a city attorney, at the time, that was advising him and later became the mayor, but he was very instrumental in helping us. As a result, we never had to demonstrate again to have public facilities open. Of the public facilities, the tough nut that had to be cracked was the schools. It took a lawsuit to bring that about. A lot of the facilities that were owned by the city and county were integrated by negotiating rather any violence. Then, of course, came the Civil Rights bill of 1964, and I would say the resistance then was minimal. There were some restaurants that turned themselves into private clubs and that was not covered under the Civil Rights bill. But I think most businesses abided by the law. The hotels, the lunch counters integrated, although we had sit-ins at those lunch counters prior to the Civil Rights bill. At the time, downtown had several different department stores that had lunch counters. These department stores had previously prevented us from ever setting foot inside, but after the bill it was rare to be prevented from entering a business.

There were some conflicts, however. I remember once an elderly white gentleman spat on me. I was sitting at the counter and from behind he spit on me. At the same time, we boycotted several other stores downtown. I stood in picket line in front of a clothing store on Third Street, and as I walked in the picket line, a white gentleman tried to sneak and cut me, and he had a knife. I fought him off with the sign that I was carrying until other some people came to help. He tried to cut me. We had no organized violence, but individual acts and they were few, far, and between. I think the process of integration in Macon probably was easier than it was in most places in Georgia and perhaps throughout the South.

AW: You mentioned that most of the violence was individuals acting out. What you see with a lot of other states, mostly Mississippi and some cases Alabama, the community would organize events against the black protests. So would you say that Macon a lot more accepting of change?

JR: Yes, I think Macon was different, and we didn't have a white citizen's council that I knew of. The Ku Klux Klan effectively disbanded, and there's a story behind that. My father was a contractor. He would get a lot building, from blacks and whites, and he told me that one of the guys that he built a whole lot for was a member of the Klan. My daddy didn't know it. He never demonstrated any inclination that showed it. Apparently at a Klan meeting there was a discussion to kill my father, but apparently this guy, Sebastian, said "I'll be damned if you kill Randall!" and that effectively broke up the Klan. So we didn't really have the Klan to contend with during the 60's, and we didn't have a white citizen's council. Of the opposition that came, it was on an individual basis by the businesses that we were trying to integrate. There might have been some resistance, or individuals themselves who were trying to do things on their own. But I don't recall any opposition like they had in Alabama and Mississippi.

SW: But you were aware of these oppositions and during your time in the movement. Was there any point where you came to fear you for your life while you were participating?

JR: Well, yes. There was always the possibility. Like I said about the guy with the knife while we were on the picket line, because there were individuals who felt so strongly against it, they just struck out. I remember an incident at the J. J. Newberry's department store where this guy tried to attack a young black lady. She took off her high-heeled shoe, and she just hit him on the head with it. But there was always that fear. My father made sure all of us stayed in the back of the house. The children's bedrooms were already at the back of the house. My mother and father's bedroom was in the front of the house. He wanted her to move back because of the shooting, but she refused. She said, if he was going to stay in the front of the house, then she would stay in the front of the house and that's what she did. But, yeah, there were times of fear. I remember after the '64 Civil Rights bill was signed, we decided we were gonna test it. We went down to the bowling alley and when we came out, everyone kind of gave us this funny look. It was those types of moments where we felt the fear.

AW: You mentioned the bus boycott, the picket lines, and the sit-ins, and these were all common practices of protest throughout the whole era of the civil rights. Was there some sort of communication that you see between other areas that effectively use that technique? You said you read about the Montgomery boycott and you decided to try that in Macon. Was there some sort of reading a newspaper, seeing an effective technique, and then attempting of that technique in Macon?

JR: I believe it was more of a reading a newspaper and seeing a TV and taught at conferences, but I can't say there was a formal line of communication that would that would direct us to do these things. With all of the boycotts and sit-ins, those were just common tactics that evolved during the civil rights movement, and it was used in so many different places. I don't think there was any form of communications. There might have been in some instances, but I think most of it was local and sort of spontaneous.

AW: How involved was Mercer University in the movement?

JR: There were some Mercer students that took place in the movement and Mercer, at the time, had President Harris there. President Harris was a very progressive man. I think he finished from Mercer, and at the time he was president of Tulane, and he left Tulane and came back to his alma mater and became president. He was very supportive and some of the faculty members were supportive, especially the brother and sister team of Joe Hendricks and Jean Hendricks. They were very active and, of course, Mercer admitted its first from Africa named Sam Oni and that was under President Harris. That caused uproar amongst some of the students and their parents. Further, there was a ruling the Tattnall Square church that was on campus had to allow blacks and eventually

the church left the campus. So there was involvement from Mercer and some of its students.

SW: How did the black community take the enrollment of Sam Oni?

JR: They were supportive. There was a Christian missionary that came to Africa and he graduated from Mercer. Apparently, he talked about Mercer all the time, and it made Sam want to go to Mercer. So he came to Macon to go Mercer, and then Mercer enrolled him. Being converted to Christianity, Sam thought it was just right for him to go to church right there on campus.

SW: Did the community see the enrollment of Sam Oni as a sign of encouragement?

JR: Oh yeah, and after that Mercer admitted a tremendous number of black students. At the time, I think Joe Hendricks was the dean of students, and he helped to facilitate it. Mercer probably integrated faster than other public or private institution in the state of Georgia.

AW: So in that way, would you say that Mercer helped lead, not only Macon but also Georgia toward the integration of schools?

JR: I don't know that I could say that, but I can say that Mercer had a substantial involvement in the whole process of integrating. Well, I think it might have influenced some of the other schools. Basically, people were pursuing a lawsuit against the University of Georgia. This made the University of Georgia enroll its first couple black students. There was no lawsuit, at all, to integrate Mercer. The school itself did it.

AW: Who were some of the other leaders that were in the movement?

JR: There was Robert Byers, Albert Billingsley, a wealth of different preachers, ... S. Evans, and ... McKee. There were a lot of them.

AW: Were they mostly teenagers?

JR: No, those names that I just said were adults. Initially, there were not a lot of teenagers and children in the movement because parents were afraid of what would happen to them. So consequently most of them were my family members or they came from my church. Not all of them, but the majority were my family members or they came from my church.

AW: Did you see a lot of support from the churches?

JR: Not initially, but later on the churches got on board. Though some pastors were so opposed to the things that we were doing and my father said that I wouldn't go to a

church that wouldn't to support me and try to tame my rights. I remember at one church, the basket was passed, and he would put metal slugs into the collection dish. He did not support a preacher who did not support the fight for freedom, but there were some black preachers that tried to do that.

AW: Did receive support from the local black professionals, such as doctors, dentists, and attorneys?

JR: There was support. There were only about maybe three black doctors, one black attorney, and maybe two or three black dentists, but they were supportive. There was a black doctor, who back in the 50's and 60's, Dr. Williams, and he was the president of the NAACP. He left under pressure to Detroit. Those who were here and participated—most of the professionals, at the time—were schoolteachers, and they were scared for their job, but some of them took part and a lot of them took part undercover for bonds and stuff like that.

SW: So you would say most of the support came from everyday people?

JR: I would say that they were on the frontlines.

James Crawley: Before closing, is there anything in particular that you would like other people to know in specifics regarding the Civil Rights movement in Macon?

JR: I think that when you compare it to other places, Macon was integrated rather easily as compared to other places. Maybe not easily, but it was done basically through negotiations and not through direct action. Some through lawsuits, but mostly through negotiations, and that's what I think set Macon apart from other areas that experienced a lot of violence. It was a unique thing, for us in Macon, to integrate without a lot of violence.

AW: On one final note, comparing to the 1960's and 70's to today, how much progress has been made overall in equality?

JR: I'd say that we made great strides, but there's still some resistance in some areas. I would say overall, if I did on a scale of 1 to 10, it would be probably at a 7 and ½ or 8 here in Macon. There are problems that are residual to the practice of segregation. The schools need to be addressed, and I think the problems with the school are because of recurring acts with segregation of schools and the equity and funding it will just continue. An example would be just something simple like books. I seldom got a new book. The books that came to black schools had been used for years at the white schools. When we got the books, there would be five or six different names in the book. There was not equal money spent on educating black children, and I think that is a vestige of the era. I think that's one of the problems that still haunt us. One of the reasons the schools are still—there's still a disparity in the schools. There's a difference

between the kids that go to better schools. There are still some residual effects here in Macon, but hopefully we will work through them. That's my feeling about it right now.

AW: I think that's all the time we have. Thank you so much for your time.

JR: Thank you very much for having me.