

The Civil Rights Movement in Alabama

Alabama A&M University

The Case of Mobile

**Speakers: Janet Owens LeFlore,
Burton R. LeFlore, O.B. Purifoy**

Tonight's program, The Case of Mobile, is the next to the last program in this fourteen weeks' series, which started on August 30, 2001. Really, this has been a fantastic series; it has been well received and supported by you who have attended these weekly symposiums. And really, it is because of your support that this series has been a success. So I would like for all of you to give yourselves a hand. Some of you have attended all of the programs, others have attended all but one or two. Some attended as many as possible, but we want to express our appreciation for all who attended any of the programs; so again, we say thank you for not only being here tonight but for staying with us throughout the entire thirteen weeks. Well, it will be thirteen weeks next Tuesday, which will be the last program. We certainly deeply appreciate your support in coming out. We also want to express our appreciation to the planning committee. I am not going to indicate who the planning committee is tonight because I think all of you who have been here each night, I think you know who the planning committee is by now. But, we certainly want to express our appreciation to the planning committee. If those on the planning committee want to stand and take a bow, please feel free to do so. We also want to express our appreciation to others who have aided in weekly preparation. What I mean by that is those who have provided the refreshments and those who have helped to set up the chairs, certainly at A&M's campus because that is what we have had to do, whether we have been here at the multipurpose room or whether we have been over at the Knight

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Reception Center. Those who helped set the chairs up, those who helped to man the doors, hand out brochures and program evaluations and also those who helped to man the PA system during the question and answer period, I would like for you to at least give them a hand as well.

Because of protocol, I will acknowledge the sponsors. Please bear with me in indicating that those who helped to make this entire series were as follows in terms of funding: The Alabama Humanities Foundation; a state program of the National Endowment of the Humanities; Senator Hank Sanders; the Huntsville Times; DESE Research, Inc; Mevatec, Inc; Alabama representative, Laura Hall; Alabama A&M University Office of the President, Office of the Provost; the State Black Archives Research Center and Museum; Title III Telecommunication and Distance Learning. Of course, we have acknowledged the terrific role that they have played in videotaping these programs each night and so we certainly express our appreciation to them. In addition, we express thanks also the Office of Student Affairs and the Honor Center at Alabama A&M, in addition to the Sociology and Social Work, History and Political Science. At the University of Alabama in Huntsville: The Office of the President; Office of the Provost; History Forum/Bankhead Foundation; Sociology/Social Issues Symposium; Humanities Center; Division of Continuing Education; Honors Program; Office of Multicultural Affairs; Office of Student Affairs; UAH Copy Center. And so, we are certainly thankful to them for the contribution that they have made in terms of the financial support that they have given. I want to simply mention that next week's program, of course, is the last program. If you have paid attention to your brochures, you

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will notice that that program is scheduled for December 4, which is on Tuesday, not Thursday, Tuesday, and it will be in the same location here on the campus of Alabama A&M University. That is, in the multipurpose room which is also now called the Clyde Foster Multipurpose Room. So if you happen to see that, it's the same place. Do not become confused by that. And then, of course, tonight's program is *The Case of Mobile* and I will ask Dr. Jack Ellis to come and introduce the presenters, those who will be taking part in the panel and provide the context for the program.

Jack Ellis: I want to add to what Professor Johnson has just said in extending my appreciation to those of you who have attended so many of these wonderful symposiums and I especially want to commend the students from Decatur. Somehow, I think you have been here almost every night if memory serves me right. This is something because tonight when I saw flooding streets and tornado alerts, I thought to myself, "I know one group that I'm sure is going to be there, it's those Decatur students." Some day, I think that you probably know by now the magnitude of heroes that you have seen over the last thirteen to fourteen weeks. I think that some day in your old age you will think back to these times and these are ordinary people that we have seen, including those that are on our stage tonight and so we are just thrilled to have you here.

This fall's series on the Civil Rights Movement in Alabama has revealed a number of patterns that mark the campaign for justice and equality here in our own state. One is the rich diversity of events occurring within Alabama's different regions and cities. As we saw in the example of Huntsville, these events were not simply the faint echoes of a recurring drama played out by Dr. King and the SCLC, which some

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historians regard as the almost mythical core narrative of the movement. Rather, they bore the imprint of local circumstances and local conditions reflecting longstanding race relations, economic forces and political traditions. Another is the sheer longevity of the movement as was evident in last week's presentation on CG Gomillion and the Tuskegee Civic Association which had been going on long before the Montgomery Bus Boycott. Put another way, what happened in Tuskegee, Montgomery, Huntsville, Birmingham and so on during the 1950's and 1960's represented the culmination of decades of struggle and revealed a powerful and enduring local culture that African-Americans had managed to sustain within their own communities over years of oppression. These things are clearly illustrated in the case of Coastal and Catholic Mobile, the state's oldest and second largest city; it's only seaport in the city where the very notion of race itself defies easy definition. It was nevertheless a segregated city, one that had known its share of racial violence. An example (and this is something that my colleague, Professor Williamson, has been working on for years) was the riot that took place in May 1943 in the yards of the Alabama Dry Dock and Shipbuilding Company which was under federal contract at the time to build ships for the war effort. An attempt was made to allow black workers to move from menial jobs to positions as welders and shipbuilders and this provoked a violent response on the part of white workers, most of these coming from the rural areas of Alabama and Mississippi. Over 100 black workers were injured in the 1943 riots and peace returned only when the government sent in troops from nearby Brookley Air Force Base. Although African-Americans made up 36 percent of Mobile's population in 1950, they were still being denied access to education and jobs generally

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not shared in the cities post-World War II boom. Yet, during the 1960's, Mobile witnessed none of the confrontational tactics occurring in the streets of Birmingham and Selma. The historian, _____, author of a book on the Civil Rights Movement in Mobile, which is scheduled to be published by the University of Alabama Press, points out that Mobile was the only large city in the state during the 1960's that did not have a major civil rights demonstration. She attributes this fact primarily to the leadership of two people, both of whom typified in her words, "The new deal influence liberal alliance in the south forged during the 1930's." One of these individuals was Joseph Langan who had grown up in an Irish Catholic family that lived in a racially mixed neighborhood of Mobile. He had risen to statewide prominence after winning a seat in the Alabama legislature in 1939. Following military service in World War II, which served to deepen his understanding of the injustices faced by black people everywhere, Langan returned to Mobile and resumed his political career winning a seat in the Alabama senate and then in 1953 one of three seats on the Mobile City Commission. Until his defeat in 1969 during the black power insurgency associated with a new group calling itself the Neighborhood Organization Workers of Mobile, or NOW, which denied him the support he had long enjoyed in the black community. Langan stood as a remarkable visionary among Alabama's white politicians, a rare and eloquent voice for reason and reconciliation in matters of race.

The second was an African-American postal worker named John L. LeFlore, born in Mobile in 1903. The son of a laborer, LeFlore passed the Post Office Civil Service examination in 1922 and became a letter carrier. He was one of the few blacks to be

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allowed to take the Civil Service examinations in the 1920's and 1930's. The job provided him with a measure of protection against economic reprisals during his later career, a distinct advantage for one who even as a young man had proved capable of defending himself in personal encounters with racism, something I was discussing with his grandson at lunch today. In 1926, LeFlore reorganized the defunct Mobile branch of the NAACP and during the administration of Governor Bibb Graves, between 1926 and 1930, became one of the state's most visible civil rights activists. Until 1956, when attorney general John Patterson outlawed the NAACP in Alabama, LeFlore served as executive secretary of the Mobile branch and though he countered Patterson's action by creating the Nonpartisan Voters League, which you are going to hear about tonight, he continued his affiliation with the NAACP which was later legalized once again in the 1960's. Now working through the NAACP during the 1930's and 1940's, LeFlore fought numerous battles on behalf of African-Americans, things that we need to remember today. In court, he challenged the railroads in the matter of equal pay for black brakemen and firemen and fought both the railroads and the railroad unions when they failed to protect the seniority of black workers. He defended the cause of black seaman on ships sailing in and out of Mobile Bay, including their right to stay in integrated hotels while in port. He especially denounced the multitude of lynchings occurring in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana after World War II, carrying out onsite and often dangerous investigations and publicizing the failure of local police authorities and the FBI to find the killers, as in the case of the black veteran such as George Dorsey, who was murdered along with three others outside Monroe, Georgia in the year 1946. In alliance with white

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liberals, LeFlore labored tirelessly during the late 1940's and 1950's to expand voting rights for African-Americans, to increase job opportunities in shipbuilding and in such federal establishments as the Post Office and Brookley Air Force Base. In addition, he won a major victory in persuading the Mobile County School Board to equalize the salaries of black and white teachers. LeFlore's was truly a remarkable life and has been featured in an excellent film produced by Public Television in the Mobile County public schools entitled "A Quiet Revolution."

The John LeFlore legacy is our own focus tonight and before introducing our guests, I would like to mention two or three other people who wanted to be with us but who were unable to do so. One of these is former Mayor Langan, who is now 90 years old, still articulate, still eager to talk about his life, but following a recent bout with illness, simply was unable to make the trip up to Huntsville. The same is true for Mr. J.C. Randolph who is the former treasurer of the Nonpartisan Voters League. He told me he is now 88 years old, but he expressed his regrets with a wish that I convey this message to the young people in the audience and so here it is, "Don't relinquish what we have already accomplished but nurture it and build upon it. I have carried the torch as far as I can and pass it on to you, confident that you will go forth." So that is Mr. Randolph's message to the young people tonight. Finally, I note with sadness the absence tonight of Dr. Walker B. LeFlore who passed away in October. Dr. Walker LeFlore was a Mobile native who decided to study medicine during his student years at St. Augustine College, which is a private Episcopal school in Raleigh, North Carolina,

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where he also met his future wife, Janet E. Owens. He received his medical degree at Meharry and practiced many years in Mobile until his death. In a tape interview that I did with him at his medical clinic in October of 1988, Dr. LeFlore recounted with pride his parents' influence on his life, which he said had always shaped his own practice of medicine.

We are honored in having as our guests Dr. LeFlore's wife, Janet Owens LeFlore and their son, Burton LeFlore. They will discuss their own unique perspectives of John LeFlore's career and we hope that our efforts tonight will stand as fitting tribute to the memory of his son, Dr. Walker B. LeFlore. Born in Wilmington, North Carolina, Janet Owens LeFlore received her undergraduate degree from St. Augustine and for several years thereafter taught chemistry and algebra in the schools of Mobile, Wilmington and Atlanta. She began work on her Masters Degree in chemistry at Atlanta University and while her husband was finishing his medical degree at Meharry, completed her Masters at Fisk, teaching and doing research in infraredspectography. She continued her research at Smith, Kline and French Research Industries and then taught chemistry at Bishop State Community College after she and Dr. LeFlore returned to Mobile in 1965. From that point forward, and despite fulltime duties as a mother and chemistry teacher, Janet Owens LeFlore became deeply involved in the community activities of her father-in-law, assisting him in a multitude of tasks, from correspondence and proofreading to scheduling. She was thus an eyewitness to remarkable civil rights careers in the 20th century. Those of you who have seen the film, "A Quiet Revolution," will recall her own detailed and insightful recollection of John LeFlore's life and work.

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We are also honored to have Burton LeFlore who will also share personal memories as well as insights that he has gained in studying and now writing about his grandfather's life. Mr. LeFlore graduated from a Mobile High School that only recently has been named in his grandfather's honor. From there, and while working part-time on the Mobile Press Register, he went on to earn a Bachelors Degree at the University of South Alabama and then completed his law studies at Florida State in 1997. He has taught business law at the University of North Carolina in Wilmington where he served as visiting professor and he stayed active there as well as active as president of the family real estate business in Mobile. Added to these achievements, a film study at NYU film school, and he is presently owner of a company called Film at Work, which produces films and videos for global distribution.

Finally, we welcome Mr. O.B. Purifoy, one of the veterans of the civil rights struggles in Mobile who took an active role in the Nonpartisan Voters League as executive secretary and second vice president and is among those featured in this very powerful film, "A Quiet Revolution." Born in Andalusia, Alabama in 1914, Mr. Purifoy studied Business Management at Alabama State in Montgomery before entering the army during World War II. After serving in Europe and the Philippines, he returned to Andalusia to open an insurance firm, later moving to Dothan, before finally settling in Mobile in 1947. Mr. Purifoy was one of John LeFlore's closest collaborators and he will share with us tonight also some of his memories of that experience. We're going to start with Burton LeFlore who is going to spend a few minutes talking about his own work and recollections of the life of John LeFlore. Afterwards, Mrs. LeFlore and Mr. Purifoy will

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offer some comments and recollections along the same line and then we're going to open this up to informal discussion and questions from the floor. Please join me in extending a very warm welcome to our guests tonight.

Burton LeFlore: How is everyone doing this evening. I would just like to thank, first of all, all of you for coming out tonight, I mean with all this rain and everything. I know this was just a good evening just to kind of call it quits and go home and just watch some television and lay down, but I thank you all for being here. I would also like to thank Dr. Jack Ellis and Dr. James Johnson for having us here in response from this symposium tonight. Once again, I am just honored to be here. I guess another reason why I am certainly happy that everyone came out tonight is because am I am here tonight to honor my grandfather and discuss his legacy and some of his work, there is also a new generation waiting to be born. I have a newborn on the way and I sort of risked missing the birth of my newborn to be here tonight, so I would have been really upset if no one would have shown up. I hope I will be able to get back in time for that. I am going to talk a little but briefly about growing up with John LeFlore as a grandfather and then I want to discuss a little bit about some of his work. Obviously, I will not be able to get into everything in the amount of time that I have. Dr. Ellis has mentioned a number of things, but growing up as his grandson was rather uneventful. He was a good grandfather. We spent a lot of time together, but as a child I was not aware of who he was. I was not aware of the things that he had been involved in or things he had done. He was just granddaddy to me. I did not know he had even been a Civil Rights activist. I believed at that time, when I was born, I think that was near the time when he retired from the postal service,

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so he was basically retired. He was working very closely with the Non-Partisan Voters League at that time. We spent a lot of time together and my recollections with him are very vivid. My grandfather passed away in 1976 and I was about 10 years old. I think I was about in the 5th grade then. So, I was lucky enough to have been old enough to have formed a relationship with him and to have gotten to know him. He was just a very humble person. He was a very kind person. He was very kind to me. He spent a lot of time. He took me to church. Now, he belonged to a Baptist church, but the church that we would normally go to was a church called the Unitarian Fellowship. The Unitarian Fellowship was more or a less the church where people went and there was some spiritualism going on. There was also a an open forum for many of those individuals to get up and talk about the various things that were going on in the community and state, nationally, etc. I think that is why he enjoyed that particular church because obviously he was very attuned to what was going on during that time. He was also very interested in knowing what other people thought about what was going on, and not just the African-American people but the entire community of Mobile as well. Unitarian Fellowship was a nondenominational, racially integrated church. So, I remember those Sundays going to church with him very vivid. I remember that he was a night owl. He stayed up late at night sometimes a lot and maybe I have inherited that from him. He was a night owl and I remember some nights he would come in and he would be hungry. He would eat a little midnight snack and he would watch a little television. I remember he loved cottage cheese and I hate cottage cheese. That was another very vivid memory of mine the fact that he always ate cottage cheese and of course my grandmother was the homemaker. She

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was a very good cook. She cooked just about every day but on Fridays she would always cook gumbo. She would always cook gumbo and she would always have fish, mashed potatoes, vinegar and (what do you call that) cucumbers...vinegar and cucumbers. I remember having those Friday evening dinners with my grandfather, my mother and my father and my brother and that was always a lot of fun. Of course, now, as far as his involvement in certain things...Now, there are several things I think were very prevalent in my mind where my grandfather is concerned and of course, one was the fact that there house was bombed in 1967. At that time, I do not have any recollection of the house being bombed. I do not have any recollection of the old house, but I do remember my grandfather coming and staying with us for about 6 months or so while they were reconstructing the house. I think my grandmother went and stayed with their next door neighbor at some point or something like that. The biggest recollection of the house being bombed was the fact that at some point or another I realized, gee, there house was bombed and there are actually pictures in books of them standing out in front of the house after the bombing. First, the anger that I felt and thinking was gee, someone actually tried to kill my grandparents, these innocent people here. Then, the other the thing that really infuriated me was the fact that I could have been there. If my mother had dropped me off over there that night, I might not be standing here today and that was the very infuriating thing I think which has caused me a lot of thought. It reminds me very much of those four girls who died in the Birmingham Church bombing. Of course, luckily, neither one of my grandparents passed away in that bombing and of course I was not there, so that was great. That has always been something that has bothered me over the years. Another thing

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that I remember about my grandfather was the Non-Partisan Voters League meeting. Now, I never knew what was going on in these meetings. I never knew what was being discussed in these meetings. Mr. Purifoy could probably attest to this. Probably, the gist of it was that I was just a teenager and I was being so bad and so obnoxious. People were probably sitting around thinking, why does, you know, he not quiet this kid down. Why does he not tell this kid to sit down? No one ever said anything. So, at that point, I think I started to realize that some of these people had a little respect for my grandfather because obviously they put up with my obnoxious behavior. Now, the final recollection, of course, was when he ran for the House of Representatives and that was a big thing. My recollection of that was I really did not (once again) know, understand or appreciate the extent of his commitment to Civil Rights or the extent of his commitment to serving humanity. That was a pretty big event and when he won we were obviously very proud of him at that time. Then, of course, I attended John LeFlore High School, which was named after my grandfather. At that point, I think I started to realize, you know, gee, well, it looks like granddad was a pretty heavy hitter around here. You know he actually had a whole high school named after him. That is a pretty big accomplishment here. In many senses, I am very proud to have been part of his legacy. I am very proud to have been his grandson and very proud of him, but also being his grandson has been a double-edge sword. It has been a benefit in many ways and it has been a detriment in many ways, but I think the benefits have certainly outweighed the detriments.

Now, as far as his works and achievements, first of all, his childhood is very interesting and his development as a child. He was born in 1904 or 1903. His father

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passed away when he was about 9 months old, so he was basically raised by his mother and by his older siblings. Now, his mother was a very industrious lady. She had a gumbo fillet business and she made fillet for gumbo. The interesting thing about how he grew up and the interesting thing about his family life as a child was that she required all the children to work. They all had to work. They all had to hold down jobs and they all had to bring their money back to help support the family. So, my grandfather from the time he was four or five years old he held down a job; he worked, you know, literally as much as he could when he was not in school. He sold newspapers. I think one gentleman that was a friend of his once told me that they use to go down to Brookley Field and they would dive for golf balls. If they got a bucket full, they got like 50 cents or a dime or something. They would actually dive into the lake and fish these golf balls out of the lake and that was sort of recreational for them, but they also got paid for it. Basically, his early childhood was characterized by work and I think that sort of helped instill his work ethic.

I think the turning point in my grandfather's life was when he was about 17 years old, right after he graduated from high school. He was on a street cart in Mobile and at that time there were Jim Crow street carts and he was asked to move by a man who had gotten on to the street cart and he refused to move. At that point, there was an altercation between the two gentleman and obviously my grandfather was arrested. I think that was the turning point in his life. I think that maybe from his childhood experiences, having had to work so much as a young child and having not really grown up with his father around, that maybe had something to do with his development in terms of him wanting to become an activist. I think that was the turning point for him. I think that was when he

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realized that he wanted to spend a large majority of his life working to try to change some of the inequities in society.

Now, I believe in 1923 he married my grandmother, Teah LeFlore, which brings us to the first major portion of his work which was trying to integrate or desegregate the national railroad system in the Pullman cars. Based on my research, understanding and knowledge of this early part of his life, I think that is when he and my grandmother got married. They took a honeymoon trip to St. Louis. Obviously, at that point, I think this was his first exposure not only to the segregation but to the Jim Crow situations on those railroad carts. Obviously, he was obviously incensed about the segregation on the street carts in the city of Mobile, he saw this as an opportunity, his first opportunity to try to change and to try to start working towards bringing about some type of social change. That was of course one of the first things that he began to work on and ultimately he was successful. He may not have been given much credit for it but he and other members of the NAACP at that time were probably some of the foremost fighters in terms of trying to change the national railroad system at that time.

Now, around 1925 or 1926, he founded the Mobile branch of the NAACP. Of course, as many of you may know, at that particular time, that was a very unpopular thing to be talking about. As a group of activists or a group of people who wanted to try and accomplish something in their communities or in the state, certainly, I think there was a great deal of fear. I think they were more or less in a situation where it was like, well, what are we going to do; are we going to try and do something about this or are we just going to kind of sit down and just let these things go on that we feel are wrong? Of

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course, I think that was also part of my grandfather's whole philosophy in terms of the fact. He was a very quiet person. He was not a Malcolm X. He was not a Martin Luther King. He was not a Medgar Evers. He was not someone who was willing to go out in the streets and march. He was not someone willing to speak publicly in an open form. I mean, he spoke publicly quite frequently, but he would never put himself in a position where he felt like he might be in danger. There were death threats made on his life quite frequently. As a matter of fact, one of the things that my father has really ever told me about my grandfather was the fact that he use to go down and check my grandfather's mail for him. He would go down during World War II or World War I. I believe it was World War I. He would go down during World War I and there would be postcards in his mailbox. He would pull the mail out and there would be a statement in there about something to the effect of like, nigger, we are going to get you after the big one's through. My father was very adamant about not being involved in politics at all. He wanted nothing to do with politics. He wanted nothing to do with activists. He wanted nothing to do with any of that stuff. I think while that stemmed from his having grown up with John LeFlore and grown up as John LeFlore's son. Many of his thoughts and recollections of my grandfather were basically that I was just worried they were just going to kill the guy. One day, he was just going to leave for work and just was not going to come home, like many of those people did in the September 11th bombing of the World Trade Center. That was his fear. He lived with a lot of fear during the early part of his life. I think fear that his father was either going to be killed or that his father was going to lose his job and what was his family going to do at that point because my grandmother

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was the homemaker. Those are really the main things that my father use to talk about to me. He never really talked about the things that John LeFlore was involved or anything. He just really talked about those fears that his father was going to be killed and the fears that his father would be fired from his job. Those were his main concerns at that time.

During the 1940's and 1950's, John LeFlore focused a lot of his time and attention on voting rights. Voting Rights became very important. He was very active and certainly as a postal worker and a federal employee. He was not suppose to get involved in many of these issues. He was accused at one point of violating the Hatch Act. Of course, that was another instance where the postal service kind of came down on him and he was censored and reprimanded for having been involved in some of these activities. He never wavered. He never faltered. He hung in there. He was always active during the early 1920's and the 1940's, in terms of trying to change a lot of things that were going on in the postal system, various segregated bathrooms. He was very active about trying to desegregate the bathrooms, the lunch counters, the eating areas and the fact that Black postal workers were not allowed to at that time to work as clerks. He was very active in trying to encourage the postal services not only locally but nationally to promote minorities into more responsible positions other then letter carriers. Certainly, as we see now today, that has occurred.

The interesting thing about his marriage to Teah is that during the early 1920's Teah's father was also a postman. I think he was attracted to Teah, but I think he also wanted to get in good with her father because he saw this as sort of a dual opportunity. He was going to get the girl and he was going to get the job too; that was his whole goal.

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I guess he figured, you know, if he could get the job at the post service, which was a pretty good job for a minority at that time, (which is still a pretty good job for anyone at this particular time) he was going to get the girl and he was going to get the job. I think he wanted to endear himself to my grandmother's father at that point to sort of accomplish that dual goal. Obviously, this man had the inroads to the girl and to the job. Sorry, I am skipping around a little bit, but we are moving back into the 1940's and 1950's. Now, another thing of course (I will not have time to talk about every little thing that he was involved in, but I just want to try and talk about some of the noteworthy or some of the more important things) was the bus segregation. In Mobile, the bus system was integrated or desegregated during about 1956 or 1957, which many of you know that was way before Rosa Parks in Montgomery and the Bus Boycott in Montgomery. They did it peaceful in Mobile. They did it peacefully and basically my grandfather and local politicians like Joe Langan got together and said, look, we got to do something about this; what are we going to do? So, there strategy and there program was look, what we are going to do is... We are going to have a black man get on the bus and he is going to sit in the front of the bus and he is going to be arrested. Once he is arrested, we are going to go to court and we are going to have this city ordinance invalidated and that was it. It was all planned. There was no impromptu action here. This was all orchestrated by these organizations, by the NAACP, by the city counsel and by the mayor. It was all orchestrated. It was all planned. It was all scripted. They had it all planned out and basically I think it was probably one of the smoothest procedures that any city in

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Alabama had experienced in terms of desegregating the bus system. Once again, this was in 1956.

Another thing, of course, he did a lot during the 1940's and 1950's was investigate a lot of lynchings during the 1940's and 1950's. There were lynchings in Mississippi that he investigated. There were lynchings in Georgia that he investigated and what they would do...I have two little interesting stories regarding the lynchings. One story I got to tell you is the story about his older brother, George LeFlore. George had just gotten a divorce and he was living with my grandmother and grandfather at the time. I believe this was the Munroe, Georgia lynching he was about to investigate. My grandfather was leaving the house to go and investigate this lynching. His brother George (who was perhaps a little less interested in being involved in the Civil Rights Movement, risking his life or getting deeply entrenched or even remotely entrenched in any of the things that were going on at that time) said to him, you are crazy; you are an absolute fool; there is no way that you are going to go up to Munroe, Georgia after this lynching and ride your black self into that county and investigate a lynching. Because when you get there, as soon as they see you drive across the county line, you are going to be the next person lynched. He said, you are not going, as a big brother to a little brother; there is no way. They literally got into a fistfight in the front yard of my grandfather's home because my grandfather said, look, there is no way. I am going, that is all there is to it. If you want to stay here, go right ahead, be my guest, but I got to do what I got to do. He investigated these lynchings and he wrote articles for the Chicago Defender, which was an African-American publication out of Chicago. He was sort of a staff correspondent for

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the Chicago Defender. Very often when he would investigate one of these lynchings, he would write back to the Chicago Defender and they would print an article about the findings of his investigation.

Now, another very interesting thing that many of you may not know (I am sure that Mr. Purifoy probably knows about this) is that one of his very close activist friends, Wiley Bolden...Now, my grandfather was a relatively dark-skinned man. Wiley Bolden was a very fair skin man. Wiley Bolden was like he was almost white. When they would go to investigate some of these lynchings, my grandfather would ride in the trunk of the car. Wiley Bolden would drive the car because just to an average onlooker (say there was a sheriff or someone driving around or some people driving around maybe looking for these activists who were coming in to try and investigate the lynching)...If they would sort of glance over and see Wiley Bolden driving a car, they would assume he is just another white man. They would not have even raised an eyebrow about it. Of course, now that was the protocol; that was the procedure. When they would go into these counties to investigate these lynchings, Wiley Bolden would drive and John LeFlore would ride in the trunk until they got to where they needed to go and until they got to some area where they could figure they were safe.

At some point or another, during the 1960's, he retired from the postal service and he became very active with an organization called the Non-Partisans Voters League. The philosophy behind the Non-Partisan Voters League was basically the fact that these individuals had reached a point in their lives, in their careers and in their whole struggle that they had realized that they did not want to affiliate themselves with any particular

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party. They did not want to affiliate themselves with the Democrat. They did not want to affiliate themselves with the Republican. They were going to affiliate themselves with whoever was willing to listen to them, whoever was willing to serve their agenda and with whoever shared a similar outlook or at least with that candidate who perhaps more than the other candidate saw things the way that they saw things; people who were interested in trying to help this organization. They never wanted to necessarily say, well, we are just going to vote straight Democrat. We are just going to vote straight Republican. We are going to vote for the person who we feel is going to best represent our interests and our goals and that was the real philosophy behind the Non-Partisan Voters League. Now, the Non-Partisan Voters League became involved in a number of things. During that time, I think my grandfather had accomplished a great deal during his life in terms of helping to gain voting rights, desegregating lunch counters, restaurants, bathrooms, railroad cars, buses and employment opportunities. I mean he did a large amount of work in terms of trying to help minorities gain access to better employment opportunities. He spent a lot of his time coaching minorities in how to pass these exams that were initially formulated to preclude them from voting during the early 1950's. He spent a lot of his time coaching and talking with various employers around the city of Mobile and around the state about benefits of employing minorities or at least at terms of just looking at the idea. He would say to these employers, how about just having a few interviews. We have 5 people here who would like to interview with your company. You know, you do not have to hire him but just talk to them, just have them in. You might find somebody you like. You might find somebody you may want to hire, just give them

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a chance. He spent a lot of time doing that. Once he got involved in the Non-Partisan Voters League, he and the other activists, Mr. Purifoy and Mr. Bolden and many other who were involved in the Non-Partisan Voters League at that time, became involved in trying test cases. If they focused in on something that they felt was a necessary evil so to speak, they would then file a test case in court. At that point, once the test case went through, normally those cases they won.

During the early 1960's and many people may not be aware of this, John LeFlore and the Non-Partisan Voters League were instrumental. They were almost completely responsible for integrating the University of Alabama. When Vivian Malone Jones went to the University of Alabama during the Governor Wallace stand in the doors of the University of Alabama, the Non-Partisan Voters League and John LeFlore were right behind her. I think actually my son asked me once if granddaddy was involved in integrating the University of Alabama and there is all this footage of Governor Wallace standing in the doorway, where was he? That is a very important point because granddaddy, John LeFlore, was not one who believed in risking his life. He was the _____. He was the caboose. He was the engine. He was the engineer, but he would very often stand back and let things happen once they occurred. Once again, he never, other than perhaps investigating some of these lynchings, put himself in a situation where his life would be in danger. Once again, during that particular time, the Non-Partisan Voters League sponsored Vivian Malone and they were right behind her there at the University of Alabama. Now, the Bertie Mae Davis case is another case that they worked on once they finished with the University of Alabama and that case involved integrating

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the Murphy High School in Mobile, Alabama. Bertie Mae Davis of course was a young girl and public school student there in Mobile and John LeFlore basically decided that he was going to have her as their spokesperson and as their test student so to speak. He spent a lot of time with her talking with her about what to expect and what it was going to be like. He explained to her that it was very important that she be brave and that this was a new situation, but this was something that had to be done. He explained to her also that once you do this, you are going to be a part of history. You are helping to make history. Of course, that went over fairly well, the integration of Murphy High School, which later led to the integration of other high schools in the Mobile area. Then, of course, during the latter part of the 1960's, the next big case that they worked on was the Bolden versus City of Mobile case and that case was the case that basically changed the city form of government in Mobile. The original city form of government was comprised of three council members that were elected at large. The notion that the Non-Partisan Voters League formulated was with three council members that are elected from the city at large. Based on this, there was no way that various communities and various factions within the city were going to have any voice because we had the same two, three or four guys that were just being reelected over, over and over again. This was shortly after Joe Langan was voted out of office. Now, what happened with Joe Langan was that when the neighborhood, organized workers came along during the latter 1960's, their whole philosophy was so different from John LeFlore's philosophy. These guys were like, you know, they were ready. Their philosophy was more along the line of Malcolm X's philosophy. They wanted to fight fire with fire. They said, if they want to bomb churches

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or houses in our community, then we are going to go bomb churches and houses in their community. If they want to kill our people in our community, we are gonna go kill people in their community. Of course, this was totally alien to John LeFlore's philosophy. John LeFlore's philosophy was look, let us work this thing out. Let us sit down and let us work this thing through the courts. Let us file these cases in court. Let us get some rulings on these cases. Let us go to the city counsel. Let us go to the legislature. Let us go to congress. Let us lobby in congress. Let us lobby in the legislature. Let us try and change these things. We do not want to go killing people or bombing people or tit for tat or burn for burn. We do not want to do that. We just want to bring about peaceful harmonious change and that is what John LeFlore always worked for. Of course, the Bolden versus the City of Mobile, as I was indicating, came after Joe Langan being voted out of office. The NOW Organization was also very instrumental in Joe Langan being voted out of office. I think they realized that they wanted to upset the whole fabric of Mobile, so to speak. They want to bring about change and as their organization said; they wanted it now. They did not want it next week. They did not want it next month or next year. They wanted it now. Even though, Joe Langan had much Black support in the city of Mobile, the NOW Organization turned their back on Joe Langan. They said, look, if Joe Langan is working with this John LeFlore and this Non-Partisan Voters League, he is not getting our vote. We do not want to have anything to do with Joe Langan. We are going to do our own thing. So, many of the blacks who voted for Joe Langan initially did not vote for Joe Langan during the election previous to the Bolden versus City of Mobile case, which involved changing the city's form of government. Of course, the Bolden versus City of

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Mobile case was a successful case and the city of Mobile form of government was changed. We now have a city form of government that is comprised of I believe six or seven council members from various districts within the community and of course one mayor. So, that was of course probably one of the final local accomplishments of my grandfather. Of course, finally, during the 1970's, he focused his efforts on running for political office. He initially ran for congress. He did not win that election. Shortly thereafter, he ran for the House of Representatives. He was elected to the House of Representatives I believe in 1974. This was about two or three years before his death. To the best of my knowledge and if I am wrong if anyone can correct me on this, I do believe that he was the first African-American to be elected to the Alabama House of Representatives since reconstruction. I do believe that he was. If anyone knows anything different, please let me know. During the 1970's, he was elected to the House of Representatives and of course in January of 1976, he passed away.

Closing: In closing, I would just like to say that if we look over history and if we look at Alabama history, we have to realize that the Civil Rights Movement did not begin during the 1960's. The Civil Rights Movement did not begin during the 1950's with Brown versus Board of Education. The Civil Rights Movement certainly did not begin in 1925 when John LeFlore, Wiley Bolden, Mr. Purifoy and all those guys began working in Mobile. Certainly, the Civil Rights Movement began when the first African slave was brought here into the Civil Rights Movement; that is when the Civil Rights Movement began. We also have to realize, especially you young students back there, that there were many people who were out here working for civil rights. Many of them were behind

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scenes way before the 1960's, way before the 1950's, way before Medgar Evers, way before Malcolm X and way before Martin Luther King. Way before any of these people were even born. You know, there were people who were out there working diligently to bring out peaceful change in the state. Finally, in closing, I would like to say too if you look at the history of Alabama, if you look at Birmingham, if you look at Montgomery and you look at many of the things that went on in Birmingham and Montgomery during that time with as much violence that went on there, Mobile was light years ahead of Birmingham. Mobile was light years ahead of Selma because of the philosophies of people like John LeFlore, Non-Partisan Voters League, Mr. Purifoy and Mr. Bolden. Many of the changes that they brought about during that time were brought about peacefully. They were brought about litigiously. They were brought about through the court system. They were brought about through negotiation and were brought about through litigation. They were brought about through legislation, so to speak. That was the way that many of these people were able to bring about change during that time. I think that was also the way that many of Mobilians were able to achieve certain changes in the social fabric of the city through the work of many of these activists like my grandfather John LeFlore. I believe that I have just about used up all of my time. So, thank you all for being here.

Janet LeFlore: I don't think that my son left too much for me to say. Do you think he covered it Mr. Purifoy? There is one thing that I would like to add to it though, just one little thing, and of course this is typical. As he mentioned the changes to the form of government from the at-large form to the city council form. It was like as if it was just

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something that was done, but it really wasn't. My husband and I were in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the 1960's. He was at Albert Einstein and working on his residency in internal medicine. John LeFlore called and said, "Janet, I want you to find out what kind of government they have in the city of Philadelphia." I said, "What do you mean? It's just like it is anywhere else, John." He said, "Find out. An at-large form of government or is it a council form of government." I asked my husband, "What is he talking about?" He was listening to John and I didn't quite get it. He said, "Well, just find out and let me know." So, as we discussed it, he said it was probably another project of status and I found out for him and I called him. I said, "Why John? Why do you want to know". He said, "Because, the form of government here in Mobile has to be changed." He said it with such conviction. I said, "John, you cannot change the form of city government in Mobile, Alabama." He said, "Oh, yes I can. If I start it and don't finish it, someone will be here to finish it for me." Well, he started it, but it wasn't quite as candidly as one could say. It involved about ten or twelve years of hard work, calling cities here and there and everywhere. He was writing to city officials who were not going to answer your little note. They hardly give you time on the telephone, telling you the kind of form of government that they have. So, when my husband and I would go somewhere, anywhere and everywhere we'd go, check on the kind of government that they have there. See what's working for them. It took a number of years to do this. It took a lot of reading and interpretation to do this research. It started in the 1960's and in 1976, the ruling came down that the change of government had to take place. Now, after John LeFlore, the Non-Partisan Voters League, Purifoy and Ben Bolden and all of them...After they got enough

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history and after enough research had been done, Mobile, Alabama was under the fire because they could see on paper that the government, which was an at-large form of government did not allow the fair practice of government for everybody there. The minorities could definitely be segregated against and this was evident, not with just the research that had been done in other cities, which would indicate that Mobile should change the city form of government, but with what Mobile, itself, had shown to Mobilians. So, they had a case and that was their technique. Non-Partisan Voters League just wanted a case, a real case; so, they took it to the courts. Of course, they lost the first one. They took it to the higher court; this started in the 1960's. In 1976, it was sent to the Fifth District Court and the Fifth District Court declared that the form of government practiced in Mobile, Alabama, an at-large form of government allowed so many inequities that the minorities in Mobile, Alabama could be segregated again. John LeFlore died January 30, 1976. In September 1976, the Fifth District Court declared that the form of government in Mobile, Alabama, must be/should be/must be changed and then it changed from an at-large form of government to a council form of government and that is the kind of government that Mobile practices today. I am a witness that this is the best form of government, at least for Mobile, Alabama, and this was done by John LeFlore as executive secretary of the Non-Partisan Voters League and all those other members of the Non-Partisan Voters League who participated in this research. It was called Bolden versus City of Mobile. That was the case that went down in history. It changed the city form of government of Mobile. As my son said, I am so glad to see the change of the city's form of government. It was not like that at all. It was somebody's

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calling, writing, reading and analyzing the research that had taken place ten to twelve years and 1965 is when I actively became involved with it and 1976 is when the Fifth District Court said that the government should be changed. I think it has worked out very well to have the divided into seven districts and each district now is represented by a council person and the mayor, of course, is the top of it all. It is not like one man or two, three or four men ruling the whole city of Mobile. Surely, if you are living in one district and I am in another district, you cannot know what my needs are; it is my district and that is what it was all about. Of course, there was segregation all over Mobile at that time, still. When we came back from Philadelphia to Mobile, there was a lot of segregation and this form of government did help to rule out a lot of the segregation which was there. This was witnessed by me, but it took more than just a little effort; it took a lot of effort. This was John LeFlore's dream. He went to Queens, New York, the latter part of the 1950's and the he returned the early part of the 1960's. Queens, New York had this kind of government there and probably other cities in New York. He said, it seemed to be such a fair type of government. Of course, when he called me in Philadelphia asking me what kind of government did we have there, it did not make sense to me at all. In the long run, it made a lot of sense. I did put forth quite a bit of effort as all of the members of the Non-Partisan Voters League put forth quite a bit of effort to change the city's form of government and that is the one that we practice today. I guess Mr. Purifoy could attest to the fact that it is a better form of government. John LeFlore worked all these years. He worked a long, long time. As a child in Wilmington, North Carolina, my dad was a postman also. There was a little paper called, The Postal Alliance, which came out

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probably two times a month. When my dad got that paper, he looked for John LeFlore. He would find something in there that John LeFlore did. We would have to sit down and listen to it. Is this something? He crossed in the middle of the street and they are putting him in jail for this. He came in a minute late and they are putting him in jail for this. He has his bag on the left side instead of the right side and they are putting him in jail. That is John LeFlore in Mobile, Alabama. This is the Hatch Act that he has violated. They are going to kick him off of his job, but that is the most courageous man in the history of the times. He said, "I want to meet John LeFlore of Mobile, Alabama." So, he sent his daughter to _____ College and his daughter met John LeFlore's son. John LeFlore's son did not intend to let her go. So, when I introduced him to my mom and dad, (I must have been in my third year and he was in his senior year) my dad said to my husband, (which I call Beck)"would you happen to know a John LeFlore in Mobile, Alabama? My husband said, "Yes. John LeFlore's my dad." My dad said, "Would he be the civil rights worker?" He said, "Oh, yes. That's my dad." He said, "Well, I want to shake your hand." So, after that, Beck said to me, "I've got it made," and I guess he did. Knowing John LeFlore and working with him was a glorious experience for me and I think it opened up my mind to bigger and better things. I think it made me a better person. I could never be as courageous as John LeFlore. I remember that John LeFlore said to me that you cannot walk through life being afraid. You have to walk through life being unafraid. If you walk through life being afraid, you are not really going through life. I think this was right after I had the telephone, but I lived literally lived around their house all the time. I answered the telephone once and this gentleman was saying that he

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wanted to know what was the size of John LeFlore. I said, "The size of his shoe? What do you want to know for?" He wanted to know so he could make the shoes with cement that would fit him, so if they killed him and dropped him in the Mobile Bay, he would stay down and he would never come up. He would never float up. When I mentioned this to John and his wife Teah, they were unmoved and I was scared to death. They were unmoved. It did not phase them at all. I said, "Well, aren't you afraid, Teah?" She said, "No, it comes all the time." John said that was just somebody being a prankster. I could not understand how these two people could not be disturbed by this kind of message on the telephone. Of course, I thought it was really real that somebody was going to really do that. Of course, they did not because they had so many messages like that. They already had I think about one or two shots in the window, but no one was killed. Of course, John had so many instances where I guess his life was really laid on the line. The Non-Partisan Voters League (I have to give it to you all Mr. Purifoy) really did protect him. They never allowed him to go out from a meeting at night without someone on both sides of John. Before John went out, they had two or three people go out and canvas the area, go across to the parking lot where he had his car parked and kind of go around the neighborhood. Then, they would come back in and give their reporting and then two of the other would escort John LeFlore to his car. They gave him as much protection as any group of people could possibly give. So, regarding the case of Bolden versus the City of Mobile, it took over ten to twelve years to get that and that was the way it was with so many of the cases. It takes a long time. It takes the efforts of a lot of good thinking people. It takes a lot of good thinking. It takes a lot for a man to decide that he is going to

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go this way because he knows that his life might be on line. It takes a really courageous man and John LeFlore was the man and the members of the Non-Partisan Voters League. They were really courageous, Reverend Hope, he was courageous. He was getting old when I started working with you all. Mr. Purifoy, I am not going to talk any longer.

Mr. Purifoy is going to tell the rest of it. They are courageous. It takes a lot of thinking and as I thought about it at several times of my life, John would call me at night, twelve o'clock, and say, "Would you listen to this Janet? How do you like this?" or he would call me at night and say, "Could you come over and read something for me? Please, just read it for me. Look for the i's and look for the t's. See if I dotted the i's and crossed the t's. Just type what I want you to type." It takes a lot out of your day. It takes a lot out of your time. It takes a lot out of your thinking. You have to program yourself to do this. You have to make a lot of changes in your life in order to do this. In the end, you have to think it is probably going to be worthwhile and it was. So, I do not regret any time at all that I gave to this program of John LeFlore and the Non-Partisan Voters League and that is all I am going to say.

O.B. Purifoy: With what has been said, I do not know really where to begin. (inaudible) I am proud that I was asked to come to Huntsville. It is not a new place to me, but it is an old place that maybe some ten or fifteen years ago I came and I saw this university because...I say university now because it was Alabama A&M College for Black Students I think. I came up to bring my grandson to school and of course, I left. Let me say that what I intend talking about tonight are some of the incidents that we had to go through with in living in Mobile, Alabama. Mobile is a good town; don't let anybody tell you

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different. It is a good town. Even now, I can say it is a good town. First, I am going to start with the hospitals in and around our city. We visited (let me see if I can name some of them) Mobile _____ Hospital and South Alabama. (inaudible) I want to say in visiting those hospitals, back when they were talking about, back in the 1950's and the 1960's, black people had a very, very small area in which you could go into the hospitals. You had to be darn good to get in there even at that because they just did not want you in that hospital. After we talked with these people through John LeFlore, John would call the sisters and us. He would call the presidents of the hospitals. We sat down and talked with the sisters and we talked with the presidents of the hospitals. Do you know that when we left those places, we left with an understanding that if you send your blacks out here you will find that the hospitals are going to be different and they were. They were very good about things like that. We even came up to Greenville to what was (inaudible). Some of you may remember that one. We had a John _____ up there. He was the president of the hospital. (inaudible) That is where I was born. I met him and I told him. I said, "John, how is it you can't let any blacks come into this hospital?" He said, "O.B., what makes you think that?" I said, "Simply because I am told that, that they can't come into the hospital in Greenville, Alabama." He said, "Well, how long are you going to be here." I told him, "I'll be up here." He said, "Well, you come back in here to see me the day after tomorrow and I'll show you some black patients in this hospital." It happened. How he made it work, I do not know, but it worked. We also had what was known as the Greyhound bus terminal in Mobile. That was a bus stop. If you have ever tried to ride the greyhound bus back in the 1940's, 1950's and the 1960's, of course, you would know

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that what I am about to say is real. You got on the bus. You walked to the back and there was a curtain on that bus. You had to get beyond that curtain if you were going to ride on that bus. Lots of you people do not believe that. Well, alright, I did not know that you were that young. Anyway, that was something we had to do. We went down to the Greyhound bus station, Mr. Bolden, myself and two or three others of the Non-Partisan Voters League. We sat down and talked with the manager of this station. We did not sit down. We stood and he sat down. Well, he talked and he talked and after we explained to him what we were there for and why we were there, you should know that the bus stations in Mobile, Alabama changed. It changed. It definitely changed. There were several late-night eating places in Mobile at this time. One was called Fletcher's. John LeFlore was carrying mail back then. I decided that we were going to go down there and try eating at Fletcher's Barbecue. Well, you know what happened. We were abused, not bruised but abused. We could have gotten bruised had we decided to eat there anyway that day. We just took the abuse and decided that we were going to talk to Mr. Fletcher, the man who owned the place and see what we could do. We talked to him. You know he closed that restaurant, closed it and moved it out on Airport Boulevard. They thought we would not eat there, but we decided that we were going to eat out there. We did eat there and we had a good time eating there. It was very, very nice. It was mentioned about the dry docks in Mobile. We had a lot of blacks working out there, but they were working as workmen at the minimum task you could perform. They were ordering ships. They were picking up trash; they were doing all of that. When we talked to these gentlemen at the dry docks, it was within six month that we had supervisors in maybe three or four

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departments at Alabama state dry docks. This was a trying situation because it was here that they said you would never see a black supervisor in Alabama dry docks. Like I said, within six months, we had three people out there and they were supervisors. Now, we went on to Angus which is about forty miles from Mobile. We have about two thousand people working there now. Mr. P was the man who ran Angus and he was a Mr. P alright. He was a Mr. P and he spelled his name p, e. That is why I do not mind spelling it because that is the way he spelled his name. We have people working down in Angus. (inaudible) They are building them now. Let's come back to Mobile and bus situation. We talked a little bit about the bus station, but we did not talk about the bus drivers. We do have _____ by Mr. Bolden and Randolph. I do not think I was in on this one. Bolden and Randolph went down and they talked with the man at the bus station and we do have bus drivers. Following that discussion that they had, we have black bus drivers and some of them live and drive right out of Mobile, Alabama. We have the third largest water systems in the state of Alabama. Mobile Water and Sewage is a big place. That is a big, big place and we have about three or four thousand people working for them. (inaudible) That Thursday, they had a meeting. They called all of the workers, laid them off for a day and called all of them in. They sat in big groups all around Mobile Water and Sewage. In less than two months, we had blacks driving trucks going all over the city doing what they do without any whites because they did the work, but they just had to have a white person along with them. The league was very, very good. It was a city where men and women could sit down and talk. All of you whites in Huntsville know that before the space center got here, you just did not believe there were going to be

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blacks out there that were working in the areas as they were working in the space center. You did not believe that they would be setting up those very valuable rocks or what have you. Right now, I believe you have fifteen hundred. We can talk a lot about the struggle. We can talk a lot about the things that we did and did not do, but we have had some wonderful experiences. I would not trade them for anything because it is here that I learned my lesson. Now, I work individually for the Atlanta Life Insurance Company. I am retired and I am happy of it, but I still work with the Non-Partisan Voters League in Mobile. If you are every in that area, look us up. We will do anything we can. We just about know everybody in Mobile.

Mr. Joe Langan was a wonderful person. After he came back from the army...I was in the army the same time he was in the army. After he came back, he ran and won the election as city councilman. The city government and Mobile are going to have a strange case come up. I do not believe that Mrs. LeFlore knows about this just yet. In the election of government, we have councilman and we have _____. We have to have a minority of five in order to pass anything in the city. Recently, less than two months ago, we had three new persons that were elected to this council. One of them have come up with that we do not need a majority in order to get something happening in the black community. You know about what is probably going to happen. That is why we are going to have another _____ come up in Mobile because we are not going to have just one man come in and change what has been effective and has been helpful in Mobile and helpful in the state of Alabama. It has been helpful in the whole United States. I think the works of John LeFlore was the beginning of this. I think that John LeFlore gave to the

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black people an insight that would help them realize that the ways to maintain it is to sit down and talk. I do not know who the mayor of Huntsville is now, but maybe if you sit down and talk with him you may find him out. You can talk with him; I would think. The way that we grew up in Mobile is by talking to the mayor. We talk to the city police chief. We talk to the councilmen. If you have talked with the man and go there with the right idea, you can leave with a better idea and I know that I have used up my time. I want to thank you for listening.

Janet LeFlore: When my husband and I came back to Mobile from Philadelphia, my husband absolutely, beyond a shadow of doubt, definitely qualified to practice medicine at any hospital in the whole United States of America. He could only go to one little hospital. It was overcrowded with all the blacks that had to go there because as he mentioned the hospitals did not allow the blacks into their beds and so forth. John at that time was trying to get Dr. Foster a position in Mobile. Just at the time that my husband got there...My husband had applied to all of them and had not heard from any of them, boy, was he surprised because he really knew he would get in, but he did not get in. John LeFlore went into the hospital. He talked to the administrators and said, it is not right. This is what John LeFlore believed in doing as Mr. Purifoy just pointed out. He said, "I believe if you take a right and wrong to any person in the United States of America (of course, he was wrong) and say to them, "Is it right for you to keep a man from feeding his family. Is it right for you to kick a man out of a position just because he is black? My son has not heard from any of these hospitals here. He has not been admitted to anyone except for down at the base." The sister was really surprised and she said, "I never got his

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application, but that is okay. He need not send it. Tell him to call me tomorrow and he will be admitted to this facility.” Then, Mobile Infirmary said the same thing and then South Alabama Hospital. Dr. LeFlore was admitted to all of the hospitals within twenty-four hours and there were no incidents, none whatsoever. That was the personal experience I thought of when Mr. Purifoy was talking. Thank you.

Q: (inaudible)

A: You have a good question there. I cannot answer you fully. Mobile is strangely a town of politics where if you carry the right idea, then you got the right answer. You can do that today. You can count on that. If you carry the right idea, you get the right answer.

A: Yes, politics are involved if I may answer that question. They are definitely. We are talking about politics. There are good politics and there are bad politics. You know that. I know that. We are talking about one versus the other. You know there is right and there is wrong and that is what we have to face in life. You are either right or you are wrong. You are either on the right side of the street or the wrong side of the street. This is what I keep saying about John LeFlore because I was so intermittently involved with him. He believed going to you and saying to you, “Would you consider opening up a job to a man who happens to black. He is very good and deserves a good. Can you consider the idea that it is wrong to keep a man out of a job just because his skin is not the color of your skin?” He believed going to a man. He nagged them to death, over and over, writing them notes and calling them on the telephone saying, “Can we have a conference? Can you have a conference with me? Can I have five or ten minutes of your time?” It usually ended up being twenty-five or thirty minutes of his time, but he did it. Isn’t that what

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politics are all about? We are living in a political world. This is a political arena. There is right in it and there is wrong in it. We all know that. John LeFlore, Non-Partisan Voters League and the NAACP were trying to right some of the wrong. Even if you were blind, even if you could not see, you knew these were inequities that should not be, particularly in the United States of America. It took a long, long struggle and it did not start in 1960. It did not start with Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King did his part surely and God bless him and we all love him, but it started long before the sit-ins. It started long before _____. It started with (inaudible) pushing and striving and praying that this change would take place with honor and without fighting in the street and without kicking and slamming each other but just negotiating. If the negotiating could not take place in an office, then they would take it to the court, particularly after the Civil Rights Bill was passed.

Q: (inaudible)

A: Let me say this. Yes, he was a lawyer and then no, he was not a lawyer, but there is no lawyer that knew much more law than John LeFlore. He worked and he worked and he worked. He went to the post office during the day and put his time in there. He came home and got a little bit of rest, two or three hours. He took his soak in the bathtub and then he started working at his typewriter in the Non-Partisan Voters League or in the NAACP office and then he worked until two, three or four o' clock in the morning. The night that his house was bombed (if you can believe in this and I think I do) he sat each night in a particular chair in front of two windows in his home. He sat at his nice dining room table that he had to clean off daily in order to eat there because it had pages all over

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the place. He sat there and he worked. He pecked away at that typewriter. He went to the meetings. He did all of this. He worked. I would say out of twenty-four hours a day he must have given at least eighteen hours of time to do this work. One other thing, he took a course at a college and I will not name the professor. He told me this. He said, "I just noticed that John just kept asking questions and asking questions. Then, suddenly, I didn't see John anymore. He left the class." So, I called and asked, "Why did you leave the class? Have you left the class for good?" He said, "Well, I wasn't learning too much." Then, he said, "You knew more than I did. You knew more of the history than I did." He was a well, rounded man. He did not graduate from college, but he could hold a good conversation and give you the facts on practically any subject that you approached him with.

A: That is an interesting question because actually John LeFlore probably should have been a lawyer. It is interesting that you would raise that point. He was a very articulate man. That is another recollection of mine. He loved words. He was a brilliant man. As I said, he never really got the opportunity to go to college. He certainly never got the opportunity to go to law school. Much of his work in civil rights was work that he did really out of the goodness of his heart. This was not something he got paid for. He was a postal worker. He was a mail carrier. That was his job. That is how he earned a living and that is how he paid his bills. That is how he feed his family, bought a car and home, whatever. That was his job. If anything happened in Mobile, I say maybe from (I would was born in 1965, so I know anything after that) 1950 through 1976, if someone felt they had been discriminated against, if someone felt they had been wronged, if someone had

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been beaten by the police, if someone felt that they had been wrongfully arrested or if they had been discriminated against in employment, the first person they went to talk to was not an attorney; it was John LeFlore. Very often, I think about the fact of what would it have been like had he been an attorney. If he had been an attorney, my goodness, you never know what the possibility would have been. I mean, I am an attorney and frankly speaking, I do not have half of the guts that this guy had. Of course, I live in a different time and I have a very different viewpoint about life and many other issues. So, it really is not mandatory that I have the guts that he had because I do not have to face the things that he had to face. I do not have to worry about many of things he had to worry about. Society is very different today as opposed to the way society was then. I think the interesting thing about him having been an attorney was the fact that he was not. Possibly, had he been an attorney, he would have been more or less in a situation where he would have had to pick and choose more so than just being a humanitarian. You know, I went to school with a lot of very, very wealthy people. Many of these people whose grandfathers and great-grandfathers started big businesses, etc., etc. My grandfather was not a wealthy man. He was not a wealthy man when he died. He was not a rich man when he died. He left behind a great legacy. He left behind thousands of people who remembered him, respected him, believed in what he stood for and who cherished his memory. Once again, he was not a wealthy man, but I think had he been an attorney, he would have made decisions based on pecuniary concerns as opposed to having made decisions based on humanitarian concern. His decisions may have been a little different. He may have had to back away from certain things because he would have been scared

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that he would have jeopardized his life had he gotten involved or he may have gotten involved in things because maybe there was a pecuniary interest, or financial interest, whereas that was never really a motivating factor. Really, once again, all of the things that he did as far as civil rights are concerned, those were things he was never compensated for. This was time, maybe three, four or five hours a day that he spent, maybe twenty, thirty hours a week that he may have spent working with the NAACP, working with the Non-Partisan Voters League or working with various organizations, political leaders, members of the community, etc., etc. He was not paid for any of this stuff. This was all out of his own dedication, out of his own devotion and his own humanitarian spirits.

Q: With bus drivers, were they allowed to drive throughout the whole state or just in Mobile? The next question is what kind of tactics was used to appeal the Jim Crow laws? What kind of angles was used with the injustice that was against human rights?

A: If I came to you and said to you, "Do you think it's right for you to run over this child in the middle of the street or should you drive around this child who is in the middle of street?" What would you say to me? Which is right and which is wrong? One is right and one is wrong. Would you drive over that child in the middle of the street or would you drive around that child in the middle of the street so that you would not kill it? It is the matter of working with a man's conscious and going to a man, a leader, who is helping to make the rules and who is making the law and present the law to that man. Let him think about it. Is it right or is it wrong? This is a human being. The only difference is that your skin is one color and this man's skin is another color. Should we segregate on the basis of

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color? No. I good thinking person whether he is black, green, white or purple could not say anything to that question except, it is the law or that is wrong. That was his technique.

Q: Mrs. LeFlore, while not meaning to understate the racism in the northern states as well as the south, I am wondering if Philadelphia's system might have been a little bit different from Mobile and did you ever intend on not returning to the south?

A: Yes. When we went to Philadelphia, we were going to buy a home in Philadelphia, we noticed that the realtors were taking us to middle class homes that were owned by whites. Then, we noticed that in these neighborhoods, for the most part, there was integration. They were quite a few blacks and very few whites. Then, we learned that we bought blacks. We bought the homes from the whites and they moved out, way out, to North Philadelphia. Philadelphia had two people who thought well of themselves. They had been taught to think well of themselves. Learn it. Do it right. Do not do it halfway. Do it all the way. So, when we bought this house and they moved out; this is segregation in Philadelphia. That is what we were up against. My husband thought about his mother and father growing old in Mobile by themselves, so he came back to Mobile. Now, Mobile did need desperately black doctors. I say black doctors because there were blacks in Mobile that desperately needed medical care and there were not enough black doctors in Mobile to give them that care. They were several black doctors then. White doctors did not turn them away, but proud blacks did not want to go into a white doctor's office and sit where they had to sit, waiting for services. How could you trust a man with your life who was not going to let you sit with his other patients. It was that kind of situation, you know, just thinking through it. So, we had not planned to come back to Alabama. I did

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not particularly want to come back to Alabama, but I was a dutiful wife and I followed my husband back to Alabama. The same things began happening in Alabama. We started to buy a home and the same thing was happening. So, my husband and I said, "Well, we'll buy all of that when we get enough money and we will make our own subdivision," and we did it.

Q: First of all, I would like to thank all of you for coming in this weather. It is kind of a two-part question but kind of short. First, how did you stay so focused on your work in helping John LeFlore and second, what advice would you give to a young person today to help make sure that the progress in America continues.

A: First of all, you have got to believe in yourself. Okay? My grandmother was raised under a mother who got you up out of the bed and gave you tasks to do all day long. You were doing this and doing that. Everyday you had to study and you had to learn math. Everyday, you had to devote a little bit of time to that and everyday you had to be functional. _____ father said who said to you, "You have to work. You must work. You must do a good job." He had five daughters and three sons. He told his daughters they were not prissy or attractive unless you can work. So, what daughter would not want to be attractive to a father? So, you worked and you worked and you worked. You swept the kitchen and you swept the sidewalk. You washed the dishes, all except my sister; she would not wash dishes, but you learned how to do these things. They were embedded in you and you had a mother who said, "You can't rest in the bed unless you are sick. You have to do this." Your whole day is programmed. So, this is what you learn to do to make the maximum use of what God has given to use, some energy. You just learn how to

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work. When I was teaching at Fisk University, I also worked at the Atomic Energy Commission in a very sophisticated stage of chemistry, which I had to learn and then put in use. I held down two full-time jobs while my husband was in medical school. That was very, very hard, but I did it. I also gave our son some time. When I went to Mobile and started helping with the Non-Partisan Voters League, all this reading and listening to John LeFlore, it was hard, but it was worthwhile. I had attuned myself, my body, my energies and everything I had to working. You are working. So, you just do it and you do not ignore your children. You give them good, quality time. What is wrong with my son sitting on my lap while I am talking to somebody in Timbuktu about changing the city's form of government? This is what you do. Work always, my dear, maximum work, each day of your life. Go all the way. Do it. You can do it.

Closing: In reference to your question and your question as well. I have always had that same question, not only about John LeFlore, but many people who bring about change in history. How are they able to do this? I also know about Janet Owens LeFlore in 1965 when she went back to Mobile. I know a little bit about the things she was doing in the Non-Partisan Voters League. I know she had a full-time career teaching chemistry at Bishop. I can barely do one job teaching full-time and in addition to raising a family. The other thing, which is just a general comment in relation to politics, from the historical point of view, all change in a sense is ultimately political change. Tactics are different. Tactics that worked in Selma and Birmingham may not work in other areas. It seems to me that LeFlore and the Non-Partisan Voters League arrived at the best tactics given the circumstances they found in a coastal and catholic. He reminds me of the _____

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about war. He says, "War is the continuation of diplomacy by other means." I think in a way politics are the same way.

I have really enjoyed this session tonight. It has been a privilege to have Burton her and Janet Owens LeFlore and Mr. Purifoy. I appreciate you all coming out and please join them in one more round of applause.