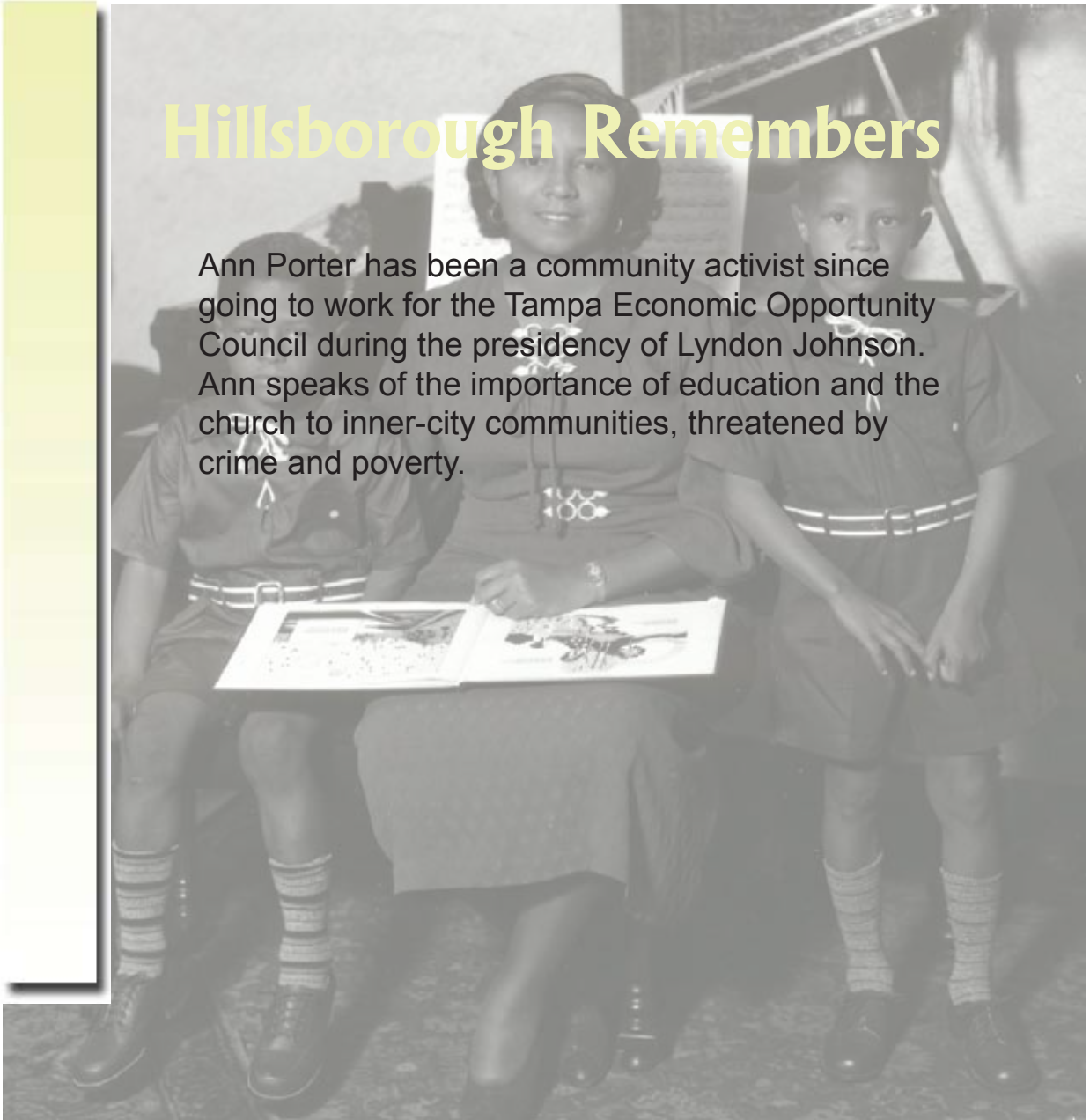


# *Ann Porter*

## Hillsborough Remembers

Ann Porter has been a community activist since going to work for the Tampa Economic Opportunity Council during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson. Ann speaks of the importance of education and the church to inner-city communities, threatened by crime and poverty.



[START TAPE 1, SIDE A]

*This is an interview with Mrs. Ann Porter (AP) from Tampa, Florida. I believe Mrs. Porter is going to talk to us about her activities and relations with the NAACP in Tampa. The interview is being conducted on August 3, 2001 in Mrs. Porter's home. The interviewer is Marti Everitt (ME), representing the Tampa-Hillsborough County Public Library system's oral history collection project.*

[Recorder is turned off and then back on]

**Ann Porter:** ( ) began to research ( ) of Tampa and--.

**Marti Everitt:** *This is an oral history project that the public library's doing on the history of Tampa, and the two directions that it's taking right now are: the Latin history in Ybor City and then the Tampa's integration/de-segregation. That's it.*

**AP:** Oh, my God. Well, I've got boxes and boxes and boxes of materials that used on the ( ) segregation and ( ) come out of that era, the segregation era. In Tampa, Hillsborough County, of course, went to segregated schools. In the earlier years, at Lincoln Elementary, we were living at the time, my parents living over in the inner city; that's Scott Street. If you're familiar with that part of the inner city, there's Nebraska Avenue and close to downtown. Well, that area ( ) the housing project, was called the slums and that's where a lot of our African-American kids, they grew up, were part of the civil rights movement. A lot of us grew up over there.

And we used to run barefoot back and forth in an area called the slums that was also known as ghettos. I can ( ) name ( ) to that, but I grew up over that way on that side of town. And as a small child, my parents drug me to the New Salem Church. And I do remember that back as far as five years old and ( ) Church, for all of what we did came from that old Baptist religion. And then into the integration of race, of equality, was really the prize. So prior to the housing project being built, the--, a lot of the black families lived predominantly in that era, in that area of town. And during that time, we

had the old Central Avenue, and that was our business district.

That's where we got our clothes, and that's where we shopped and did most of our eating and entertainment; all of it was done there. Then, time from time to time, we would go to downtown. Downtown to us was Franklin Street; that was the big downtown during that time. So, you know, our world sort of centered around right in our immediate community. ( ) I grew up out of there.

**ME:** *So were you born in Tampa?*

**AP:** No, I was born in Griffin, Georgia.

**ME:** *Oh, really?*

**AP:** Yeah. I was born in Griffin, Georgia. In fact, we had a family reunion two or three years ago down in Griffin, Georgia: all of our grandmothers-- my grandmother lives up there--, all of the kids. She always wanted the kids to meet on the fourth weekend in July, wherever we lived. And so they came from there.

**ME:** *How far?*

**AP:** From New Jersey, from Tampa, from Chicago, from Ohio, from Atlanta, from Florida; all of us converged on Griffin, Georgia this year. And when my folks brought me here when was four or five years old, they were leaving the oh, harsh Jim Crowe era in Georgia during that time to go to better places. And Tampa was evidently attractive to my dad-- one of nine children-- and his sister. So the two of them came to Tampa. And my dad came here and got a job as a ( ) and brought me and my mom. So that's how--.

**ME:** *How you ended up here? I wonder why--*

**AP:** ( ). [Laughter]

**ME:** *I wonder why he thought that Tampa was going to be better than Georgia.*

**AP:** Oh, my God, no- because in, in, in, in rural Georgia during that time, I mean, lynchings were common- lynchings in the

'20s, early '30s. And they were sharecroppers, so they really didn't make any money; they just worked for the second ( ) in-command person over there. It was a step up from slavery, and they would just say, "Well look, I'm not a slave. I get something." So they were taught that, in the end, they would get something.

And really, at the end of the year, they didn't get very much of anything, because by the time they paid for their-- they did not really talk about this-- by the time they paid for the food and the tools that they used in the field and their grain for their horses-- which most of them had one or two--, and even though there were nine children in my family that my grandpa could work, the kids started working when they were ten, eleven, twelve. My daddy was in the fourth grade. He had to work, so education, he barely write his name.

And so to come to Tampa was--. He worked with Latin folk; felt like you might be a human being, you know? That was a step up from sharecropping in Georgia, Georgia. So there was an in-flow. From whole history of the civil rights movement came out of places like south Georgia, and middle Georgia, and the small little towns, Alabama and Mississippi. But a lot of the blacks that you would call ( ) integration if you were up North and during that time left Georgia, because they had the lynchings, and the harshness, and the things that went on. Well, Tampa was supposedly the big hope for black folk, and they converged here to places like Tampa and other places around the country, integrating and looking for work, if they could get a start, if they could get a paycheck.

**ME:** *So working was a big change?*

**AP:** I mean, my Dad had moved up. He was in the--. You know, he'd go back to Georgia; he could walk around instead of ( ) because he made a salary. And my mom could cook and do the things, and she didn't have to work in a house with somebody. She could work in a restaurant, and she was an excellent cook, so she worked over at this German restaurant. And me and my dad had a job, and I'm an only child. I mean we

were, you know, we were up there, but we were ( ).

**ME:** *And you said you went to Lincoln for elementary school?*

**AP:** I went to Lincoln Elementary and ( ) still in that area, that ( ) elementary school. And we went to the church that was in that area; went to New Salem. And I went to the Booker Washington Junior High School, which you could walk to. It wasn't that far. We only had two high schools. We had, well, we had two, three elementary schools. We had two junior high schools and two senior high schools.

So I chose college prep, which meant nothing. When I became that age, you graduated during that time from junior high school to senior high school, because a lot of the kids just dropped out after junior high. So I went to Booker Washington, which was in our neighborhood, and then Middleton. I went to Middleton for two years: tenth, eleventh. And my last year, they had built Blake over by the river. And I finished my last year there.

**ME:** *And so Blake was still a black school then.*

**AP:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

**ME:** *What year, what year did you graduate?*

**AP:** That was in '55; somebody asked me the other day. By the time I married--. When I finished high school, I had married. My mother and dad had separated. My whole life's world had changed, and I married, and finished Blake at night. And it was the better off because my grades were so high that when I was in tenth, eleventh grade, that it was, it was easy for me to come in and in one year, you know, really just--. But I knew that I wouldn't at that time be able to go to college, after Dad and my mom had broke up. Then my mom, broken heart, and she died. So, you know, it was marriage time for me. There was no one else I could ( ). So ( ) that's it. And then those were the years that really brought a lot of what was going on in civil rights began to evolve, because that was in '57, '58-- back in that time-- and everything began to start

changing. So I was, was really struggling, and ( ), and mad at the world. And you know, it would be good for me to get out there and really do something that needed to be done. So I became involved with the NAACP.

**ME:** *OK now, what sort of things did you do?*

**AP:** I was the Urban League and the NAACP. It was basically sit-ins and lay-ins and that kind of thing, downtown Tampa or--

**ME:** *I read an interview about the sit-ins at the drug store.*

**AP:** Yeah, yeah, we were part of all of that.

**ME:** *Where were you at?*

***When the War on Poverty started during the Johnson Era, that's when I really began to get involved***

**AP:** Yeah, just among the crowd. Wasn't a leader with them because I was married, and I had--, by that time, I had my oldest child. And--. But it was just participating, wanting to be a part of what was going on.

**ME:** *Were you afraid?*

**AP:** Not really. I was sort of bitter and hot-headed during the time, and--

**ME:** *But were you afraid physically that you would be arrested? Or anything like that?*

**AP:** No.

**ME:** *It sounds like it was kind of calm.*

**AP:** Yeah, it didn't really--, you know, you really just didn't. We were fired up, and we use that now with the NAACP. So those were the early years, which for me during that time was like a minor role. And the one thing that I really cherished a lot was education, because I didn't get a chance to carry out my dream and so forth. And so it was later on that I did as an adult and was able to get into USF and graduate. So I'm an alumni of USF, but I was an adult by the time I finished. And prior to that time, though, the years sort of took different twists

for me. I was well-rounded. And I thank God for that, because I had to support those kids and at the same time, the Civil Rights Era meant a lot.

It--, that whole movement meant so much, and we were fighting for our lives. Political achievement and the poor, and how we were living in that slum condition, and we just couldn't seem to get out of it. And so when the War on Poverty started during the Johnson Era, that's when I really began to get involved, in more of a well-round way. And I started, started working; I was working on a degree. I had not gotten it, so a lot--. And then I had the children by then, divorced, and ( ). So I started working for Hillsborough County in the old community ( ) agency.

During that time, we were called Tampa Economic Opportunity Council, and it was the old War on Poverty, if you recall anything about the Johnson era. That was where I made my niche. And so I went into there, and I started out as an administrative secretary- an administrative secretary because I had the shorthand skills, and the typing skills, and all of those things, and the ambition and the initiative to develop difficult ( ).

And that's--. We ( ) Head Start; a lot of those I've read a lot about. We were able to get it going, and you see it today; they call me "The Grandmother." [Laughter] Well, because we were able to Head Start from--, the idea from California, and I was the administrative secretary for the agency. And I think that we, at that time, we had about seven or eight people on our staff-- War on Poverty staff-- for Hillsborough County.

And we had one black professional ( ), and they had me, and then they had a couple of others. And I tell you that I worked there 34, 35 years for Hillsborough County, that I knew from community action on into the system over the years that was community action agency. I gave--. We developed--, I developed every program I could think that

anybody else had anywhere. I began to write it, and I did have a few more skills than writing than a lot of the other people at that time in developed programs. So we went from 7 people on our staff to 500.

**ME:** Oh, my goodness.

**AP:** That's right. And programs all over Hillsborough County. ( ).

**ME:** What ( )?

**AP:** Well, I did one a month, and was over the--. I was able to get to the, the Johnson administration and work with those people that I'd met during civil rights and during the, the sit-ins and the lay-ins, the riotings, and the marching, and all that you did, all that you did to try and get some equality. Economically, we were still down, so I would move from the immigration part to the development part. So because of that, we were able to get all these different programs, and I probably ( ) some of them now.

I've got boxes and boxes of all this stuff, but we had some of the ones that are still around- the neighborhood service centers. All of those, we were able to get those funded, and I do the accounting for those over the years. We worked in conjunction with the old hospital ( ). ( ) Urban League was--. At the time, we were looking for people who had skills in social work. All of basically our blacks that went off to college came back as teachers, but we didn't have very many that did anything else. So we were looking for social workers, and the Urban League was able to get the grant for us for that one.

And we just started moving teachers that wanted to be do-gooders into social positions. And so we began a project, Project Hopeful. Oh, God, I don't know ( ) several of them. But they were all programs that dealt with the total holistic approach to families that was growing economically. A lot of them were ( ), I guess. ( ) so we did a lot of work like that, and we developed Project Independence. What almost every large organization in Hillsborough County had some program from the commission. During that time, we were the Tampa Economic Opportunity Council. You would

find--. I'd write grants that we had to come up with an idea that, you know, the money had to funnel through us because we were the low-income classes.

**ME:** Was it federally funded?

**AP:** It was federally funded. So funds came directly from the board to us as a non-profit entity.

**ME:** This project was funded by a grant.

**AP:** OK, so that's kind of what I did. I would come up with innovative ideas. And my ideas, as I'd travel around the country--. Some other folks would try to build on it and sell it back to the citizens of ours. We had a board that was ( ) and a director, and deputy director, and all those folks. But I was the agency ( ). I was still the person who had not finally gotten up the ( ), and so I had the connection with the low-income community, you know. I was one of them. I didn't go off to Florida A&M. I was right here.

**ME:** Right here.

**AP:** That's right. And so it kind of ( ) me into organized those folks on that level. And that was really the ( ) into the professional that I eventually became. But as a part of that, the job paid, you know, the rent, the bills, ( ) for the kids and so forth. But the community had, like, the NAACP and the other organizations. I can't. I still did it; I still played a role with it. Bob Gilder was our president of ( ). I started off with Matthew Gregory as president of the Tampa branch of the NAACP. And that was in the ( ) '60s- - late '60s-- when I moved here, that we began to grow economically. And you know, home ownership became a part of it.

Matthew Gregory, and he was our president back in the '60s. And ( ) had become a part of it. And he was making plans in terms of how the shifting would occur and what the plan would be in order to be ( ). And we came up with the formulas-- , heads of various committees that would play a role with it that came up with the formula. And we had 17 percent ( ) that came up with African-Americans in the community. So the formula would roughly become the 7; you

would get 17 percent in all of the schools. The faculty or the students, the activities, just whatever ( ). So that was the way which it began. So they gave up a predominantly black school, which, you know, hurt a lot of us to have to do that. We had to decide what was really the priorities for a lot of us in the community during that time was our children, the quality of education. And we had to give up the camaraderie with schoolmates in order to get--. And we were, we were immigrating. I mean, we were fighting for the housing, so that put us in different communities. We had to give up something, so we had to give up the community, I feel.

*ME: I know when they re-opened Blake a couple of years ago, there was a lot of talk about becoming again a traditionally black school, and wanting to keep it, to keep its heritage and not just turn it into a performing arts school.*

**AP:** Exactly. But in order to get integration during that time, we had to give up something. And that was--. I mean, we had to bargain, and had to work, and had to work, to try and come up with a way that we could do it, you know. ( ). And when we went to, when we went to buy food in Hillsborough County, the school board ( ). And we started the children and the families, but began to ( ) and deny their quality education. When you sit at the table, they all tell us, "You can ( )." How could we do it without giving up something? There was just no way that we could do it.

You could tell the white community, "You've got to give up and let 17 percent come in," in order to fill it out ( ). But we ended up at Blake. But now, the times--, the years have evolved to the point where there are more people who are a part of the NAACP movement and a part of the white community that are saying, "OK, we've done some things with integration, but we haven't gotten where we ought to be, so let's just pull it tight." And then if we do that, and we look off on the court case, ( ) Brown would be the quality that we wanted in 1954 and '55. You're willing to save your school; you're willing to get the quality teachers. Be willing to ( ).

In the meantime, ( ) just started back in integrated housing and gave us an opportunity for better housing. More whites moved in and out of areas, see, anyway. So listen, how long are we going to chase you? We just can't keep doing this in order to be equal, so status quo, and we'll do that. But you've got, you've got two mixes going on. You've got some who were saying, "Will this quality last, because you've got these low-income folks who are living here." Are they going to be able to afford, because community schools go with that community school picking up the tab.

Are we going to be able to continue to compete with you, when you've got the higher income. We're in the inner city. That's when you realize that's where the jobs are, when you're coming back and forth, because you've built your interstate and you can jump back and forth. And you can afford it and yet leave us here, with new homeowners, that we have to pick up the tab for all these kids. Something, somewhere in this milk is not completely clean. So that's the end of that again. And when, when the decision was made that-- OK-- when Robin ( ), Judge Robin ( ) made that decision and suggested to the school board--. I've got a whole basement of files on this decision.

*ME: And you're talking about the decision that they made just a few years ago to stop busing the kids down from Tampa?*

**AP:** Mm hmm. ( ) That's how we did it. We ( ). So, Robin ( ) decides--. Well, you know, all these lawyers-- and there are a lot of them--. Two systems around the country have already passed what the courts suggested there to be done in terms of integration. So what's wrong with Hillsborough County? Why don't you all try? So they tried.

I mean, the backlash came from all of us who were saying, "Hey, no way. You have not met it yet. You have not reached what we would call our goal in all these years, you know." A lot of people will say, "We will fight you about that. You have not gotten it." So that's what we did, and the fact that we won the first one. They appealed it to the regional level in Atlanta, at the district court,

and they won it at the district court- that they, they had met expectations on the project.

**ME:** *This now happened just three or four years ago, right?*

**AP:** About two and a half years, but this year we filed against ( ). Just recently, two or three months ago, we had taken it to the Supreme Court and they are saying, "We still have not reached it. You can give us this part, you can give us that part, but this thing is still not the way we want it to be. It's not. We are not getting what we want. And they are saying that, well, the kids now saying they want community schools."

And we're saying, "No way, Jose." We are still going to fight integration. We're not going to be these few little homeowners in the community, picking up the tab. Either you've got to come back--. Some of you got to come back; you've got to help us pick this thing up. [Laughter] We're not going to do nothing, America, picking up the tab on everybody else, because we know what it will become. Eventually, the drug runners, drug runners take over and there's not enough of us that's going to be strong enough to fight it off. And we are going to have an inner city that's just going to be full of crime and dilapidated old buildings. And we've seen it, and it happens in a lot of places. And we are not going to be left here like that.

**ME:** *Yeah.*

**AP:** So in my neighborhood, we look around over here, we're basically integrated. And at one time in the--. I moved here in '6--, I think, 7 or so. Around 1975, '80, I was so busy, running, running, running in the community, at my job and so forth, and the kids and, and just living a life. And I noticed, I sit around one or two weekends. And I looked, and I said, "God, there are white people in this neighborhood! Well, what happened? [Laughter] I can't believe it!" You know, and then we started with the break-ins and everything just started happening. You know, if you just, you just, the criminals just came in and they just started. And ( ) this is the most critical

thing. I was working at the Neighborhood Service Center in West Tampa ( ).

And--. But I--. We were housed over there. And I came home, and these two old senior citizens were living in that little townhouse across the street. The criminals came in through the back of their house with ( ); they was sitting there. They'd been in this neighborhood. They were the last ones still here, and they came in. And they were eating. And they came in and they robbed; they took everything. They were still sitting at the table eating; did not stop. They just kept on. And then when they finished, saw them stealing everything they had; they would just sit there. And then they went in their refrigerator and they took all the stuff out; it just broke my heart. It did. And I'm supposed to be ( ). [Laughter] And I had to call their children to tell them to come and see about their parents. They cried, and I cried with them. And we just--, it just made me sick. It just really made me sick.

They didn't harm them, though. And they just sit there; they just sit there. They stole everything they had out of that house while they sit there. And at that time, that turned it, and I started ( ). Well, ( ). Well, I went to the police department. I ( ) everybody, ( ). And we walked the neighborhood, and we fought off the bad people.

**ME:** *You hear about other neighborhoods around in Tampa now, that you are calling the police and say, "We have this major problem in our neighborhood. Why are you not down here helping us?"*

**AP:** You've got to ( ) the whole person. I recognize some people over here. I went from door to door, door to door, door to door, door to door, and I got them out. And we got our street signs, and we got all this other stuff, and we sat. I was working for the lady that lived in the next houses-- she's passed on now-- white lady that lived there. She'd sit at that window-- she was handicapped-- and she watched everything all around this way. And we did this, and block area by block area, all the way to the river. And the people around the river have better income. And I have a lot of friends that live around there, that socially we are

together, economically we are not.  
[Laughter]

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[START TAPE 1, SIDE B]

**AP:** This whole North Boulevard, just east of here, has been taken over. They've taken the whole neighborhood all the way back from Columbus Drive to the bridge, and from North Boulevard all the way back over through Nebraska. They have basically taken it.

**ME:** *So you mean it's like a crime-ridden area?*

**AP:** Oh yeah. ( ). Sandy, she was, was here; burned a lot of those houses, but it, it--

**ME:** *The crack houses, go on ( ) those.*

**AP:** Yeah, yeah. We had them all around here. Two, three of our crack houses in the neighborhood here. But I'm standing here, like this on North Boulevard, and I'm doing like this. And I'm telling the people at the river, "Look, this is what is going on." Now, how long do you think this poor little old grandmother can come here and do that? This was about 19--. We bought it from '8--,'83 or 4 to about '90. When we finally were able to get people interested in taking some resources in here, and then ( ). So I had a lot of young white friends that came in, and they started to help me. And they started buying a lot of the houses around here, and that kept ( ) somebody. And then the other people around the river began to join in.

**ME:** *Well sure, if you're going knocking on their back door.*

**AP:** That's right. And I'm saying, "Look, they're after me now. They're coming after you next." ( ). [Laughter] So they began to change it, and now it's coming on back. So that's, that--. It's been community--.

**ME:** *You have to be community-centered and community-generated, too.*

**AP:** There's still more of that for me than civil rights, I guess. But you, you know, you

submit, and then the political process. My bachelor's was in political science, so at one time I thought I would run for this or for that. And then I found that I could do more just working with people who wanted to be there-- who wanted to, you know, ( ) and all the other stuff that you've got to get, sitting in a meeting that I could help more people if I ( ). Or I worked with organizations at my church and try and rally the pastors and the various members of our church that wanted a good thing and a better life. And I could do more with community action and Hillsborough County government, and know all of the county commissioners, and know all the city councilmen, and working their campaigns and do things with them, get things done, and then work in the community and stay close to my ( ), my family. But I could do more than ( ). But I did, and I'm satisfied.

**ME:** *Tell me, tell me how the church was to ( ) civil rights movement and segregation and that.*

**AP:** Oh, the church was the rallying point.

**ME:** *My understanding is that they got the women involved through the churches.*

**AP:** Mm hmm. Yeah, a lot of the women--. Well, I did. My pastor asked me to do some things, but he knew I was ( ). But he asked me to do some things. But that's when I had their support with things that I wanted to do, anyway. And they were always there for me. But, but it was done through the churches-- from the marches that we did downtown from way back when we became integration-- was done from St. Paul's Church, downtown.

**ME:** *Would that be your meeting place? Or your working station?*

**AP:** That would be our meeting place. And our training place and so forth was the church. So the church was ( ). And I think Dr. Martin Luther King stimulated a lot of interest in the churches too, with the role that he played. And the NAACP, of course, was there because we had-- NAACP had-- the youth council. And they--, we had already organized to do certain things. So when Dr. King came, became involved in all

the boycotts and all the--. That was just another strategy to get us where we wanted to go. So the church is good, and they are still the backbone.

**ME:** *I was just listening to that radio piece this morning about the Martin Luther King III who is now the president, who has simply passed up a relationship with the church, ( )?*

**AP:** No, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; that's the--.

**ME:** *And they were saying that he doesn't come from a church background. He's never been minister of--. He's never had his own church, and that there are a lot of people in Southern Christian Leadership (SCLC) who feel that--*

**AP:** --he should have a ministry--

**ME:** --because that's holding him back.

**AP:** I don't know; I don't think he needs a ministry. He could easily do that. He had a sister that became ( ), who really became the minister in the family that, that's his love; that's all that she does. And so there's going to be mixed feelings about that, because there are a lot of us who were in the church who feel that the role of the minister should be in the Church, and should be there so that they can, can work with the people in a, a counseling position, and, and to do that for them.

**ME:** *Instead of a political position?*

**AP:** Instead of a political and leadership position, because when you do that, then you are rallying other people out there. And they feel that it should. If you're Baptist, especially, a lot of them have to be to become a minister. But a lot, a lot of the Baptists feel that the role of the minister should be in church, and that they should have assistants or co-pastors and other people to do, the, the small ( ).

**ME:** *Well, that was a question that I wanted to ask you. When the churches were so involved, didn't the ministers preach from the pulpit about these political integration issues?*

**AP:** Mm hmm. They did, and I felt that they should. I, I mean, my pastor does; most of the pastors I know do. But they don't get out there.

**ME:** ( ). *Very rarely do they preach politics, except Baptist Church does.*

**AP:** Yeah. The Baptist Church is ( ). And, and, and they, they, they differ from a lot of the other churches ( ). ( ) yelling about it. You know, you'll lecture and that kind of thing. The people that are, that will attend that church, most of them are high middle class and ( ). I mean, they are not going to get involved. They're going to their parties, and women are going to their social clubs. And that's it. But they'll write a check and--. But, but, the people who are going to be on the front line and who are going to really get down and, and, and work are those who ( ) their pastors. They are the ones who are exceptional. And it's still that way. My minister is going to be ( ); he's young: forty-six. But he and most of the other ones don't know. Most of the politicians in town, they ( ) in and out. I mean, the whole time they're in and out, because that's where you're going to find people who are going to go to the polls.

**ME:** *Right. Well, politicians now, they make a point of visiting churches.*

**AP:** If they're going to be successful. But I don't know; I differ with him with my, my ( ) because of, well, the ( ). Because his, his father, I mean, he came out of a family.

**ME:** *A pastoral family.*

**AP:** Uh-huh- of, of all pastors in it: sisters, a pastor man, and all of their friends are. And Coretta has been a strong Christian woman all of her life, and I don't think he really needs to do that. If he'll call for service, then you need to be out here with us. You need to be out here with the people. And they're--. Most of the women are out here doing it. And of course, the Baptist--, a lot of the Baptist churches do not accept women on the pulpit, so that's ( ). But the women had really been on the firing line a whole lot more. They have pushed the men up and then sit down. But the background and the

brain power behind all of these movements has been female.

**ME:** *Well, that's kind of a corollary to what you said about you can get more done if you didn't run for political office. You, you can, maybe in the church, get more done than if you're not a minister.*

**AP:** And I do it ( ). But, I chair the mother's board at church, the ( ). I chair the mother's board at my church, so I'm the highest woman in, in office. ( ) are Catholics. But the work that I need--. I'm back and forth on the phone with my pastor, got ( ) and the majority of the people in the church are female.

**ME:** ( ).

**AP:** Well, I turned around. Well, I turned around at my church. Where, therefore, when you really look at the power, and the power of who's doing what and who has the most influence, it's really the women. The women are paying their salaries; the women [Laughter] are the ones that are doing the work. They are doing the bake sales, and they bring the kids, and you know they're teaching the Sunday schools.

**ME:** *And they vote.*

**AP:** And they vote. So that's really a lot of women, a lot of black women did not join the feminist movement very much that there's a reason. But there's a reason, and the reason is because that's where the work is-- out there trying to help our sons and daughters. We don't have the strength of the men to do it, and you have to do it. There's nobody else, so you have to just, you have to carry it. But the men are there ( ). It's, you know, it's pretty bad right now.

**ME:** *Now that's a hard--.*

**AP:** After, after Jesse Jackson and Dr. King, you know we knew this all the time. But most of it became public ( ) we couldn't do what we could do before.

**ME:** *It makes you wonder how they take such risks.*

**AP:** I mean, it hurt us, it hurt us, but these are things that, that we know about. I mean they-- the black community-- we know these things. It wasn't no big surprise, not even to his wife, you know. There's no surprise. I mean, these are things that we all know about that we don't--, you know, really doesn't matter to us if they're doing something that should be done. You have to look at the positive. You can't have it all.

**ME:** *Mm hmm.*

**AP:** You have to look at the positive and you have to keep things strong, as long as you can. That they fall, [Laughter] fall like trees!

**ME:** *And when they fall, they fall hard.*

**AP:** They fall hard, and it does hurt. It does hurt. It hurts all of our people, you know. It hurts all of our people and I ( ). But that's part of the world that we live in, part of the world, and we all live in ( ).

**ME:** *Tell me about when you started. You, you said that you helped to get the charter for the Hillsborough County NAACP, but there was already a Tampa.*

**AP:** Mm hmm. At the Tampa, we had the Tampa grant in 1919, I believe, became the, the charter, and they lost it in the '20s. And they picked it up again in the late and early '30s. And so I became president of the Tampa branch. I worked up, I worked up through the ranks. ( ) member ( ) committee ( ) for a number of years, and then there's the secretary of the ( ). There's the vice president of--. [Laughter]

**ME:** *Boy, you could find every job as you went along.*

**AP:** Oh, yeah, but I, I really just wanted to be involved, and, and there was nobody else. And then they'd say, "OK, we'll just go and get her." You know, "She'll do it, she'll do it." And then I would do it. [Laughter] And that's what happened when I became president. I was vice president. I ran to be vice president. I never want--, I wanted a male to be the president. And--. But it--. Unfortunately, this one fell. And when he fell, he began to fall. Before he could totally ruin the branch, I stepped in and I asked him

if he would just go ahead and resign, and I carried out. He didn't want to, so we had to do some, you know, some inner fighting to get that done; you know, he left. And so I picked it up from there, and moved it from the Tampa branch, and began to get us involved in the state.

That was fate. That was my first cause. When I looked at all the records and I saw what condition the Tampa branch was in, and I went, "Oh no; oh this can't be." We couldn't be in this condition; we owed everybody in the world. Our phone bill was \$1,500, you know. The telephone companies doesn't even talk to us and everything, so--. And we had more offers, but NAACP offers where you could ( ). ( ). [Laughter] I went to the church, I went to the ministry, and they helped put on a, a luncheon. We did two luncheons at my church, and we got raised the money, enough that we could get a telephone. So we started with that. Man, I had to play with the politicians and so forth to be able to get an office, and got our office out at the mall-out at Eastlake Mall. They gave me office for a dollar a year.

**ME:** Oh, wow.

**AP:** So I had four offices, and I went to the county, and the county gave us furniture. So [Laughter] then I went to the warehouse, and we picked out this. And I had this big exclusive office ( ). [Laughter] And then I would ( ). [Laughter] I just went yelling "Help, help"; I went to ( ), I went to all these places, you know. And I said, "Really, what we want you to do is we want you to hire people." You know, "These are the things that, that I'm trying to get us to do, and I want to build on our youth and try to do things there." And then we ( ). Then I gave him my goals and the state goals, and what we needed to do there, and eventually--, and then came back to our own all people, and then said, "You know, you need to take off your \$10 membership. Enough of us can foot the membership for \$10 and we can pay for things ourselves." Now, these people were willing to help us, but we've got to do some things because, you know, this is the NAACP for colored people! I can't, you know, have these other people just give us everything and you not doing anything.

**ME:** That's the same thing you said with the white president ( ) the blacks.

**AP:** You've got to do it. So we all had to pull it together. And then, you know, we had--. I was very fortunate that I became president at a time wherein we could trust enough people. And I've worked with them so long that we could do these things. And they know that, you know, beyond the shadow of a doubt, what the NAACP goals were and what they needed to do to support it. They couldn't do it. They couldn't say it, but I could, you know, ( ) himself. ( ) that's how we worked the lines.

**ME:** About what year was that?

**AP:** 19--. Gosh--.

**ME:** I know the Congress got '96 or '97.

**AP:** '96. Well, see, when I became president, I worked as Tampa branch president three or four years before we were able to do what we eventually did. And it was something again that our state people, once that began, I went to all of their meetings. And I would have a, an all day, all night, all over the state of Florida- you know, hiking back and forth, driving back and forth, trying to represent us in Tampa. And, and so what happened is we had a Plant City branch of the NAACP. But our branch, once we grew to the extent that we did--. And I mean, I did us up to about three, four thousand members, so we became--.

**ME:** That's a big group.

**AP:** Yeah, we had a powerhouse. And I had a strong executive committee. And I--, we organized how were expected to, the officers that are required, and made us to the Tampa branch bylaws, and insisted that we have three vice presidents under the president. And I've charged all those presidents with taking over different committees. And I've sectioned them off with four strong--, each one of them had four strong committees. [Laughter] ( ), but I did it. [Laughter] We organized, we just got strong, and Tampa got strong. And we could go after the different fights that we needed to, to go after. One of them I started

filing suits on. Oh, God, the media named it, and I was after them.

We basically--, we were in court so much and so often that with a lot of places that are still going on. But one of the ones I was with the ( ) case, that it not be dropped. So the NAACP Legal Defense Fund appointed me to serve on the biracial committee. So I've been on--, I'm still on that-- on the biracial committee-- and still there to say this thing is not over, you know. I was very, very close, but was warned off. But I can deal with the bad times, you know. ( ), you know.

Earl helped me with a lot of what we were doing with the Tampa branch. And we go to meetings together, and we sit there. And if he knows my feelings and I know his, we just accept it, and we go on, you know. He doesn't agree with me, and I don't agree him. So we turn it over to the lawyers, and the lawyers deal with it. And that's the way we, we work together.

**ME:** *And it's not up to a professional to solve it.*

**AP:** No. No, no, no, no, no. Not if we want-- . It'll be here long after we both are cremated and dead and whatever gone in ( ).

**ME:** *The only experience I have with the busing in Hillsborough County is one year, my daughter was bused from Lutz, where we lived, down ( ) to a sixth grade center. And you could tell just by looking at that school that it wasn't a ( ).*

**AP:** That's what needed to be done. You needed to know that, and then maybe a lot of folk could understand why ( ), why the fight was going the way it was, because we could get the help then. You know, if you really knew, and if you feel that if it's there, then you knew that we'd know what policies we wanted, and you're going to want it, too. So that's what made the whole thing good.

**ME:** *Sure!*

**AP:** And so that's what made the whole thing good. If we've got to live in this thing together, I mean, we can't; we can't. I'm not letting anybody leave me with it. [Laughter]

We're all in this thing together. So that, that, that stimulated the growth of the Tampa branch, so that these same people then--.

And I was very close with Leon Russell, who's like a--, he's like a brother to me. We learned each other through this movement when I became president. He was state president, and I was very close to him. And he gave me appointments on the state board, and you know, so we pushed Tampa up. And as a result, the national level was my next move to get us, the Tampa League, then with the state, and then through the state on to the national level, and ( ) get that done. And we got that done. And we got that done. ( ) thrill of my life.

In fact, they wanted me to be regional--, they wanted a regional president. They wanted me to take Tampa and Clearwater and St. Pete, Lakeland, and all those. And I said, "Wait a minute! [Laughter] Wait a minute now! This is gone just a little bit far!" But we did it for Hillsborough County. And I promise that we will do it.

And I was tired, you know. Tampa had, prior to that time, beaten me down. And we had to get people that would claim them, that could walk in, and you didn't need to look at one and say that, you know, ( ) we had ( ) and stuff we could look at. And they could do it now, and I needed to relax. I'm not getting any younger, and I'm tired, and I've worked everyday. And I'm getting ready to retire from Hillsborough County, so I've got to let you all go, too. We talked about it, and I did it in three years. I told them after Tampa became this strong, that it had taken three years. And in three years we have it all done, and we did.

**ME:** *So when did you retire from--*

**AP:** Hillsborough County? December 30 or 31, 1999. I didn't want to work a day in the year 2000! [Laughter]

**ME:** *Millennium( ).*

**AP:** It started off ( ). [Laughter] So that's what happened. We finally-- and that was a happy day-- we finally got it, but we had to go before the national board back and forth in Baltimore and the state president. I got--.

You know, we brought in-- Well, at the national level, we had two different national presidents. There- this one, he probably--, you'd recognize him. ( ) the lower levels, the lower pictures, the lower-- I've promised the University of South Florida all of my papers.

**ME:** *You've promised them to them?*

**AP:** Mm.

**ME:** *Is that you?*

**AP:** Mm hmm.

**ME:** *OK, I don't recognize this man.*

**AP:** You don't recognize him? OK, the one that's sitting there.

**ME:** *He looks familiar, but I can't tell you.*

**AP:** That's Kweisi Mfume. He is the-- Kweisi Mfume. He's the national president of the NAACP.

**ME:** *Oh, wow.*

**AP:** Movie star.

**ME:** *He is good looking. I thought you were going to say that he was a movie star because he is a handsome man.*

**AP:** Yeah, that's Mfume. He came to Tampa a couple times, so he came for me. And that's Leon Russell, the other one, who was state president at that time. Leon, now he's, he's still on the national board, but he's not state president at this time. We have a woman ( ). ( ) changed my hair ( ).

**ME:** *I like that.*

**AP:** Oh! [Laughter] Yeah, I kept it ( ), and afterwards I said, "Oh, Lord, I don't care how old I am now! I'm not-- I have to be out here running for you." He was invited by the pastor to come down, and so that really helped out. And he was at the University of South Florida, so I took that opportunity to invite him, and he came to our church.

**ME:** *Oh, wow. I bet that was exciting.*

**AP:** It was very exciting. All the ( ) and all the ministers in the area came, and it was beautiful.

**ME:** *Oh, my God.*

**AP:** ( ). Where was I? I tell you.

**ME:** *It sounds like it must've been ( ). I mean, it sounds like ( ) work mean a lot then.*

**AP:** I mean, ( ) had. There were nights that, you know, I was up until three or four o'clock. And I'd sleep two hours, and get up and go to work ( ). And it helped do all of what needed to be done now with problems all night long, all night. I mean running for the ( ) NAACP, NAACP, NAACP. And I, I always answered my phone, you know, either at the office, and it would be full. That's the NAACP office; we had three secretaries. ( ) called for, and it just, you know, ( ) it really did.

**ME:** *Did you know that at the time?*

**AP:** I don't know. I, as-- I don't think so. I didn't realize it, you know. I didn't really see myself, you know, that much, and, and I was just always on the go.

**ME:** *I find sometimes when I go through really special times that I don't realize how upset or stressed out I am until I get past it. You know, ( ).*

**AP:** By the time I left the NAACP, and last year-- the year 2000-- was the very first year I didn't really have to get up and run, because I left the branch a year before. I was-- I served, I ran for office, and I had to do a two year term. So I was in the first year of that term when I made that decision that I would not run again, and that I was going to leave as president. So I started going to Sam Horton. You know, on the one hand, ( ). So I had a year to work with Sam, and then I--, you know, we decided when I would release the information. And we did that, and that gave him a year in that position. So with him having a year, that's how I did it--

**ME:** ( ).

**AP:** Yeah, Sam Horton, and we--. It took a lot of thought, but I thought ( ). [Laughter] I said, "Sam, if you don't, my doctors are telling me I'm not going to make it too much longer. I mean, I ( ). [Laughter] I'm too old, Sam. Oh, but you're not as fast!" [Laughter] And it's not like Sam. And oh, the hardest person in the world to convince was my first president. Oh.

**ME:** *To convince to let you retire?*

**AP:** Oh, my God, Leon. Leon held me up for so long. Leon held me up so long. I mean, ( ) Leon was saying, "You can't do this yet; you can't do this yet." And I'm standing here, him and I ( ) Sam Horton. ( ) told Leon. [Laughter]

**ME:** *Is it Horton ( )?*

**AP:** ( ).

**ME:** *And he's still president?*

**AP:** Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah, but he can't pass it on. ( ). He has not been able to pass it on.

**ME:** *Sometimes it's kind of hard to get anybody else to run; then you get it almost by default.*

**AP:** ( ). We won't let him go. I don't know anybody, either. ( ) best friend, and we have to do it again. And you can't leave; you can't, you can't just go. I mean, if you go, the only way you're going to go is kind of map it out like I did. Otherwise, they'll ( ).

**ME:** *Or just, all the work that you've done is going to be out the window.*

**AP:** ( ). All of them did; I just have to ( ). [Laughter] Sam Horton has become a lifesaver. And we've got good people; it's not really a problem. ( ) problem.

**ME:** *Mm hmm. ( ) the background--*

**AP:** Everything is automatic. All of the money that we owed--. I mean, we owed national over \$15,000. And they weren't going to recognize us, Tampa. And we did that plus, you know, we got all those numbers that built it back up to the point that we could, I could hope and I hope that in, in

Tampa- Hillsborough County, hope that two state agencies, two different ones--. And we were able to rally the mayor and rally the ( ). When I was in government, this gave me great opportunity to do that. If I was--.

**ME:** *Was that Sandy Freedman?*

**AP:** Sandy Freedman and Greco.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[END OF INTERVIEW]