

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

REV. WILLIE GRAY HICKMAN

INTERVIEW 1022

This is Dr. Joseph Patterson representing the Memories of New Bern Committee. My number is 1000. I am interviewing the Rev. W. G. Hickman at his office at 514 Queen Street in New Bern. This is also the office of the county unit of the NAACP of which Rev. Hickman is chairman. The number of the interview is 1022. The date is December 1, 1992.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, Rev. Hickman we're recording and I'm delighted to be here talking to you. I appreciate your letting me come. Before we get into some of the other questions I want to ask you about New Bern, I'd like for you to tell me something about yourself. I'd like to know where you were born, when you were born, who your parents were, about your growing up, and about what happened to you before you got to New Bern and when you came to New Bern. So I'll just turn it over to you now.

REV. HICKMAN: I was born down at Havelock. It was better known as Hickman Hill in that day, and of course before my time, it was called Piney Grove. That was a community. There was a Piney Grove station where the train stopped, so they named it that. My grandfather and his brother were magistrates and they had cases that they tried. Common cases like our magistrate here today tries in the city. I went to a one-teacher school.

DR. PATTERSON: May I interrupt you here? Tell me what year you were born.

REV. HICKMAN: I was born 1919, August 13, that makes me 73 years

old.

DR. PATTERSON: What is your full name?

REV. HICKMAN: My full name is Willie Gray Hickman.

DR. PATTERSON: So you were born in what's now Havelock and you started school there.

REV. HICKMAN: Yes. I started school at Croatan School. It was a one teacher elementary school. The teacher was named Mrs. Rebecca Whitehead. She had about forty-five students with myself at a one-teacher school.

DR. PATTERSON: This was an all black school?

REV. HICKMAN: All black.

DR. PATTERSON: There was no white school at Croatan at that time?

REV. HICKMAN: I don't recall of any white school at Croatan, no. It was all black. We had to walk two and a half to three miles to school every day. When I got to school, I being one of the larger boys, instead of me getting my books and getting my studies, I had to get an axe and go and cut wood for that big heater to keep the children warm. I made the door hinges that go on the door. It was such a time of depravation until they couldn't even get a carpenter to hang the door after the hinges broke. So I took an old boot and cut the boot up and used the leather with some tacks to make the door hinges. I grew up there in that community, and when I was about sixteen years old I left home for a job and went to Vanceboro. I worked on a farm with a man and his wife, Mr. and Mrs. George and Annie Buck. I almost grew up with them. In fact, Miss Annie is living now. She may be

around a hundred years old. I think I was a pretty smart young man cause I worked all the time, and Mr. Buck saw something in me that I didn't see. I could build most anything around the house. I'd build cabinets and shelves in the kitchen and many things on the farm that I would correct, wagon wheels and things like that, so he said to me one day, he said, "Boy, you need to be in school." He said, "You are too smart to be out here on the farm." That's the first time that anybody ever told me that I was really smart. So then I began to read newspapers and I began to read the Sun Journal Daily News. He was taking the paper, and when he finished reading the paper I would go get the paper. He would always save the paper for me. And reading the newspaper, I was inspired to order some books. I began to buy books and study and I enrolled in Scranton Pennsylvania correspondence school because I really wanted to be educated. And, of course, that went on. I worked on that farm for twenty dollars a month. That's all I was getting. Later on we worked for an acre of tobacco. After a while, I got married and came to Hickman Hill and started working at Cherry Point. After working at Cherry Point, my wife and I decided to raise some tobacco. We started raising tobacco down there. But that really wasn't what I wanted to do. I wanted to be of assistance to the community. I wanted to do something for myself and for my fellowman, so I began to read the Bible. I read through the Bible before I ever become a minister. I didn't have any idea of becoming a minister, but I have always been religious and I always believed in God and was a God fearing young man. When I was inspired to the

ministry, I was also inspired for higher learning and I wanted to go to college. I was married to Miss Helen Blanchard. I did go to Shaw University, but before I went to Shaw University, I was enrolled in several correspondence schools, like the American School in Chicago and various other schools which gave me a great sense of education.

Those schools helped prepare me for the universities of which I participated, such as Shaw University and Virginian Union Theological Seminary. I didn't finish either one, but thank God I was able to be a product of those universities and I learned a great deal. And of course, they brought me a pretty long way, because, I think it was 1962, it was in 1967, I was called to teach drafting at Havelock High under the Principal Mr. Danyus, and the superintendent of the Craven county public school was named Mr. Mayo. I taught drafting there.

I was a very successful teacher. Later on, I filled out the application for one of the most highest paying jobs in that day for blacks. It was with the North Carolina Council of Churches for migrant workers. I was informed by Mrs. Mary Baker. She was an insurance agent at Havelock and she was a fine Presbyterian Christian and I admired her very much. When I made that application, she took it to Raleigh. I was called in for an interview with about twenty other men with various degrees, PhD's and Master degrees, and I was chosen to be the housing director for the North Carolina Council of Churches for migrant workers for the state of North Carolina. That was one of the most highest paying and greatest recognized jobs for blacks since reconstruction.

Of course then, I was already involved in civil rights and I worked

with Dr. King and Andrew Young in Atlanta, Georgia and McIntosh, Georgia; Shula, Mississippi; Greenwood and Selma Alabama, and all through there. Of course when Andrew Young was appointed a seat, Director of the United Nations by President Carter, I knew I had a job in the United Nations somewhere in there with Andrew Young because of our relationship. And sure enough, he did offer me a position there.

Of course at that time, the rent was higher in New York than I had anticipated, and I had never paid any rent in my life anywhere. At the same time I was the director of equal opportunity for this six million dollar poverty program called Coastal Progress here in New Bern, and I decided to stay on with the program. It wasn't but ten thousand dollars a year but I was making double that with my construction work. So I held on to my construction work and my position with the Coastal Progress until it was de-designated. The employees went to various places, Cherry Point, Greensboro, and other places, but I still maintained my same position. I had my own business and my own church.

DR. PATTERSON: By that time you had become a minister, had you?

REV. HICKMAN: I was a minister then.

DR. PATTERSON: Were you ordained a minister, or how did that happen?

REV. HICKMAN: I began to preach in the Baptist Church because I was born a Baptist. I was ordained in the Baptist Church, and I served one of the highest positions in the Baptist church. I served as moderator of the Baptist church. And of course, I had about sixteen

churches under me as moderator. That was a pretty good size for a young man and for the community of which I was working in. I pastored two churches in that community.

DR. PATTERSON: Was this still at Havelock?

REV. HICKMAN: No, this was in Beaufort County, but I was still living in Havelock, my residence was still there. So I left Beaufort County and started pastoring a church in Pollocksville, North Carolina, Zion Chapel. I stayed there seven years in Pollocksville. After the expiration of seven years, I decided to get with the AME Zion Church.

I met Dr. J. A. Babbington-Johnson who was a graduate of Cambridge University in England. I'm not sure about that name. I may be wrong about that name. But anyway, he graduated from a school in England.

Oxford! That's where he went and he had a PhD in psychology. I loved him as good as I did my father. He brought me, in other words, he introduced the AME Zion church to me. After many weeks of elucidation, I understood the church and I decided to join, and I've been happy with it.

DR. PATTERSON: You've been a minister in this church ever since then?

REV. HICKMAN: Ever since then.

DR. PATTERSON: And you still have the Zion church in Pollocksville?

REV. HICKMAN: No, I'm pastoring in Maysville.

DR. PATTERSON: That's the one church you're with now?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes, I'm with this church now, but that wasn't

the first one. My first church in the AME Zion Church was Havelock, North Carolina down here, well, they call it Cherry Point, at Hyman Chapel. Then I went to Morehead City and pastored St. Stephen's AME Zion Church. From there to Grifton, I pastored Zion Temple, and from Zion Temple to Pollocksville. See, I pastored a Baptist Church for seven years in Pollocksville, now I'm going back to Pollocksville for nine years at Clinton Memorial. A fine church, fine people, and well educated people at Clinton Memorial.

DR. PATTERSON: Let me interrupt this just a moment and ask you about children. Do you have any children?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes sir.

DR. PATTERSON: How many?

REV. HICKMAN: I have five children. I have four boys and one girl. The girl is the oldest one and she's in Chicago. Irving, the one that you and your brother treated when he was broken up, he lives at Hickman Hill at the old homestead. He built him a home down there.

I have Alton. He's an employee for the United States government at Cherry Point. Willie Earl lives in New York in Brooklyn. He is a contractor. He does his own work like me in New York. Carol lives in Virginia. And of course the baby, Tony, was the one that was killed.

DR. PATTERSON: He was a teenager when that happened?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes. He was eighteen years old.

DR. PATTERSON: This was a road accident?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes sir.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, Rev. Hickman, as I understand it you are

head of the Craven County chapter of the NAACP, is that correct?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes sir.

DR. PATTERSON: Would you speak to your involvement in the NAACP, how your civil rights interest led you to this position and how long you've been in it?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes sir. I've always had an inclination to do something for myself and for my people after I realized there was a difference between my generation and white people economically. As I related to Andy Gross some time ago, and I guess I relate the same story to you, I was about thirteen years old and I was working for Kenneth Tillman at Havelock. I think I was getting about thirty cent a day. That's about as far back as I can remember. But I know we played a lot and we climbed trees and on rainy days we'd go in their house and play. One day the mother of Morris and Ruth called them and said, "You can't play with Billy anymore," and they wanted to know why, and she said, "Because he's a nigger." I heard that and it bothered me. As a child, I didn't know what to do with myself. I felt like life wasn't worth living in a way. I said, now what am I to do. I can't associate with human beings that love me and I love them. I heard Morris say, "Well, Mother, we love Billy. He's our friend." That's what bothered me, see. I really got angry. I felt like I needed to destroy something. But I grew out of it. One young man up in Vanceboro wrote an article about an article I wrote, but he didn't read it all. He thinks that I hate white people right on. Most white people are my best friends. I say one thing that I said in a speech

in Atlanta, "All the whites are not against me and all the blacks are not for me either." I decided then to read books and get involved with an organization that would tend to eradicate discrimination between races especially when it come to jobs and when it come to socialization. So I organized a NAACP branch called the Carteret and Craven County. That branch consisted of the areas of North Harlow and Newport, Hickman Hill. I was able to get five hundred people to register that had never registered in their life.

DR. PATTERSON: Now this was Craven County included in this?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes, it was in Craven County.

DR. PATTERSON: About what year was that?

REV. HICKMAN: That was in about 1941.

DR. PATTERSON: Now, this was a very early voter registration effort on the part of the black people.

REV. HICKMAN: Yes sir, it was early. It was early. I tell you how I got to register. I was the first one that registered to vote. Did you ever remember hearing of Bill Flanner who was the Clerk of the Superior Court here?

DR. PATTERSON: He's my relative.

REV. HICKMAN: He is?

DR. PATTERSON: My name is Joseph Flanner Patterson.

REV. HICKMAN: (laughter) Well, here is how I got to register. Now let me tell you the God's truth. They had the registration poll down at, it wasn't at Hickman Hill, it was about two and half miles up this way at Croatan. It was between Croatan and Hickman Hill.

Larry Cahoon had a store there that he was running, a small store just about the size of this room. That's where they were registering. That was the precinct. I went there to register, and when I walked in that store, they all looked at me as if I had come in there to break in that store. "What do you want?" I said, "I came to register because I want to vote." So Joe Hughes, he was the son of old man Tom Hughes who at that time was occupying the farm, the plantation, right down there where Carolina Pines is, he took me out in his car. Wouldn't even let me stand in there and register and ask me no questions among those other white folk. He took me outside in his automobile. Then he said, "You know, you have to recite the Preamble of the Constitution." Well, that was down my line cause I already knew it by heart. (laughter) So he told me to go ahead, and I said, "We, The People of the United States, in order to form a more perfect Union, to issue domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, support the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our prosperity, do establish and ordain this Constitution for the United States...", he cut me off right there. He cut me off! Said, "Don't go any further with me!" I was going to keep on with it. He said, "Now you have to recite the Constitution of North Carolina." I said, "What?!" He said, "You have to do that." I said, "I tell you what you do. You give me the book and you recite it and let me hold the book." He said, "No, it doesn't work that way." So I couldn't do it, not the Constitution of North Carolina. So he disqualified me to register. I walked out to the highway and I hitchhiked to New

Bern and I went to the courthouse, went in the room and office of the Clerk of the Superior Court at that time, Mr. Flanner, and I told Mr. Flanner my situation and what I wanted to do. He asked me my name and I told him and that word Hickman rang a bell with him. He said, "Well, Needham Hickman taught me law." "Mr. Flanner, I didn't know that, but I know Needham Hickman was a smart black man in his day. He was a magistrate down at Hickman Hill before I was born." They were good friends. He wrote a note and gave it to me and I took it down there and gave it to Joe Hughes and they let me register.

DR. PATTERSON: Was this in '41?

REV. HICKMAN: That was in 1940. I think it was in '40. I believe that President Truman after that ran for the President. So I got through that, and that's how I got the others down that way. Five hundred of them I put on the book to vote to register. So then I was president of the NAACP branch that I had organized down there.

DR. PATTERSON: And you've been president ever since.

REV. HICKMAN: Well, no, I haven't been president ever since. The newspaper did say I was a civil rights worker for forty years but a lot of people thought I'd been president forty years. I was president of that branch and then other men came to be president. So this branch here in New Bern, this term here will be my third term as president, cause there have been many presidents.

DR. PATTERSON: Rev. Hickman, would you tell me something about other organizations in town which have worked for the black people.

I know there was a racial commission in the early sixties. Jim Gavin

belonged on it and later Janet Latham and Murphy Smith and other people.

REV. HICKMAN: Yes. Let me see what the name of that organization was.

DR. PATTERSON: Brotherhood?

REV. HICKMAN: No. The one where Janet Latham and I and James Gavin and all worked on was called the Human Relation Council. That did more to bring people together. You'd be surprised. White and black worked on that council.

DR. PATTERSON: This was in what year?

REV. HICKMAN: That was during the sixties.

DR. PATTERSON: What did this organization accomplish?

REV. HICKMAN: The Human Relation organization accomplished a great deal. It brought about a stronger relationship between blacks and white. You see, before that, the whites stood off and gazed at blacks. Stared at them. But during the time of this, right at the peak of this human relationship council, it brought the white folks to a realization that blacks were as much human as they were. They had a humanistic concept of the whole frame of man, and the prospect was that they are people just like us. But somehow they hesitated to really mix with the black. At the same time, they were considerate and they were very sympathetic towards what we were trying to do, and I appreciate what that council did. I never will forget Janet Latham. She was one of the most concerned persons in that day, white or black, in that Human Relation Council because she was there every time and she did what she could.

DR. PATTERSON: Who were some other people on that council?

REV. HICKMAN: James Gavin, Janet Latham, Miss Bunn, a lawyer Dunn, well, Mrs. Dunn, Johnny Dunn's brother.

DR. PATTERSON: Mark.

REV. HICKMAN: Mark's wife.

DR. PATTERSON: Genevieve.

REV. HICKMAN: Genevieve. She was on there. There was a lot of people on there that I didn't know, because you see, if you remember back then, white and black didn't have too deep a relationship. The only thing you did was to observe each other. You just didn't know all of their names. I knew them by general observation. Those whom that I was close to, that I could communicate with, those were the ones that I noticed most.

DR. PATTERSON: Let me ask you this Rev. Hickman. In your position as a concerned black person and a concerned citizen, as head of the NAACP, would you comment on the way it was with black people as far as racial matters were concerned before the Civil Rights Act and then what happened when the Civil Rights Acts came along?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes sir. I can remember there was a store down between my home and New Bern called Ann's Coffee Shop. I stopped there one day to get a Coca-cola and the man told me that I had to drink it outside. I couldn't drink the Coca-cola in there. I didn't go in there to get any coffee. I just wanted a Coca-cola, and I had to drink it outside. There wasn't any public accommodations for blacks.

DR. PATTERSON: In New Bern?

REV. HICKMAN: In New Bern. But, you see, I've always been a very, you know, aggressive type person. I have never been mean, but I just didn't believe things were happening like that and I just ignored it. I would go in a restroom where it would say white only. I'd go in there. I was locked up in one in South Carolina about that. The cops came. A lady called the cops because I went in there. I didn't get along too bad with white folks. I didn't really get along too bad because I felt like I was just as good as they were, and if they said no about a situation, I would say yes and I would pursue it.

DR. PATTERSON: During those days before the civil rights movement, there were no public accommodations for blacks in New Bern downtown?

REV. HICKMAN: No sir. No sir.

DR. PATTERSON: Were blacks allowed into any of the restaurants downtown?

REV. HICKMAN: No sir. No sir. They were served at the window. Now, lawyer Frazier, I guess you'll interview him, I don't know whether he would remember this or not, but there was a restaurant downtown here called The Fish House and it was a fine restaurant where they sold seafood. We decided to go down there. We went to this fish restaurant, I don't know whether it was The Fish House, but anyway, they sold seafood there, and the man saw us coming and he ran to the door to close that door and I got my leg in the door before he could close it. He pushed the door and Frazier was behind me pushing me. And I said, "Look man, get this door off of my leg here!" (laughter)

So he opened the door and then we walked on in. After we got in there he said, "Well, we can't serve you all until the Supreme Court makes a ruling." I remember him saying that, and Frazier saying "Well, I don't know what you're talking about. We just came in here to get some food." We came on out without being served. Robert Whitehead and I went to Moore's Bar-be-que, which was right there where Scotchman's store is now. Right up there on Broad Street where Trinity Church is, Moore's Bar-be-que was there. We went there and Mr. Moore said, "You all have to go to the window." I said, "Well, we're not going to the window. We just wanted some bar-be-que. We've been buying bar-be-que here and there's no use in us going to any window." He said, "I can't serve you in here." So since he refused, we filed a suit against him with Frazier. Frazier used my son, Irving Hickman, who was just a boy. The one who you worked on. Irving was about maybe 5, or 6 years old, or 7, but he had to use a child. He won the case in Federal court down here in New Bern and they fined John Moore \$5,000 and he had to move his business from Broad Street. He moved it down to the Ferry Road, Streets Ferry, over there where Weyerhauser is, somewhere over in there. That's where he went, and then he left there and went out there on 17 where he is now. And of course, next was the Holiday Inn. We didn't have much problem in integrating the Holiday Inn. But those stores downtown, we had pretty good problems about that.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, tell me about some of the things that happened when you say there were problems about that.

REV. HICKMAN: The same building that they have the Country Kitchen, right there, I don't recall the name of that business. That's where some real problems started there. A lot of them were locked up, were jailed, because they didn't want to serve them inside, they would serve them to the window. They had some Marines to come from Cherry Point, and some of those Marines were locked up.

DR. PATTERSON: Black Marines?

REV. HICKMAN: Black Marine. They got in it, see. After a while, they broke that up. Then they went downtown. We would march. We would march downtown, and of course, we didn't have too much police protection because they were against what we were doing. And of course, we had pretty good leadership. Black people were more together then than they are now. They are not together now. They are after each others throat now. But along then, they were together.

DR. PATTERSON: This was in the sixties?

REV. HICKMAN: It was in the sixties. And of course, Howard Johnson in Jacksonville and other large establishments, we didn't have too much trouble integrating those places.

DR. PATTERSON: Now when you had marches downtown in New Bern, you'd march down Broad Street or Middle Street?

REV. HICKMAN: Marched down Broad Street. We would just march on a place that refused us. We would come together and organize and just march on them like we did all over the United States.

DR. PATTERSON: Did you have sit-ins at the eating places?

REV. HICKMAN: We had sit-ins at many places. Cause what happened

is, when you're refused to be served, then that's when we would congregate outside the place and then decide to go in and just sit back there. See, the first sit-in was up here in Greensboro, North Carolina.

DR. PATTERSON: Yeah, I know.

REV. HICKMAN: That was first, but that spread all over this whole United States. That stimulated the morale of the people and intensified the realization of getting our job done and accomplishing our aim from those sit-ins. Then from the sit-in, came the demonstrations, they would then march. They would march on a store and boycott.

DR. PATTERSON: Was there any violence downtown or in New Bern during that time?

REV. HICKMAN: There was a little violence. Sometimes policemen would hit, would strike a youth. They had motorcycles then. They ran over one girl with a motorcycle here. But there wasn't any real violence here. There wasn't any real violence here because the black people here were so organized together until whenever they congregated, the police department followed them. But there were very few of them beat up or harassed by police. There has been more blacks harassed by policemen since then than there were then here in the city of New Bern.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, what happened in New Bern when Dr. King was killed?

REV. HICKMAN: When Dr. King was killed, I wasn't in New Bern that night when they did have a problem here. They had marches, and

of course, I understand there was some cars turned over, but it wasn't as bad as it was in other cities. I came to New Bern that night, because you see, I was living in Hickman Hill. I lived way down there. When Dr. King was killed, I was teaching at Havelock High School. I was a drafting teacher then. When they had his funeral, I came from the school cross to the highway there at Havelock to a place called Past Time. I bought my dinner and I was sitting there eating and the tv was on and they had that funeral. It was some funeral. That lady where was running the place there saw that about two or three blacks was in there looking at that funeral on tv, she cut the tv off. (laughter) She went and cut it off. So when she cut it off, then I had to leave because I really wanted to see it. I had plenty time cause I didn't have to go back to my classroom until about another hour. But I didn't get a chance to see the funeral on national television. That's how bad it was down there.

DR. PATTERSON: New Bern really was pretty much under control then.

REV. HICKMAN: It was in pretty much control.

DR. PATTERSON: Someone told me that traffic was routed away from Broad Street and away from Five Points that night because of difficulties.

REV. HICKMAN: It was. But they had it under pretty good control here.

DR. PATTERSON: Rev. Hickman, when the schools became segregated, did that make a big difference for the black people?

REV. HICKMAN: You mean when they became integrated?

DR. PATTERSON: I mean when they became integrated.

REV. HICKMAN: When our schools became integrated, you know, it was new. It was a new thing and it was something that black people looked forward to because they were prohibited from socializing with white people. See, this is why that gave Adam and Eve incentive to eat the unforbidden fruit, because they were forbidden not to eat it. (laughter) This is the way it was with the most young blacks then. They just wanted to know, "Why can't we? We just can't understand why can't we sit down and eat with white people. What are we gonna do to them?" You see what I'm saying? So it was a such to satisfy the curiosity more than anything else. I used to hear them say, "Well, look, when I get in that white school, when I go to the white school, I'm gonna learn this and I'm gonna do this." This is just what they're planning cause it's something they had never done and had been prohibited from going all these years. It was a strange, exciting challenge to them! It was different. After they got in it, they began to learn, they found out that they had better school.

DR. PATTERSON: That the blacks had better schools.

REV. HICKMAN: No, that the whites had better school. They found that out, see. And they found out that the curriculum of education was different from where they came from. They found that out. And of course the reason was, what just like I said about the hinges that I made for the door to my school, the one-teacher school, it was black and they didn't care about the door falling in and nothing like that.

DR. PATTERSON: When integration did take place in the schools all over the country, but particularly in the New Bern schools, did it go pretty smoothly or did it not go smoothly?

REV. HICKMAN: It didn't go bad like it did at other places. I remember one incidence out here at New Bern High. There was a white boy. He wasn't a white, he was a Jew. He was a Jew. I'm not gonna call the man's name, the father of this young man, cause he's a businessman here now. His son started a riot out there. He called them niggers out there, and he was a Jew. They had some problems out there. A few of them got locked up in jail. I had a nephew, he's a doctor. He has a PhD in Black History, Avon Drake. He was a student at Greensboro. He was going to Greensboro College. And of course, he helped lead a lot of the demonstrations here. He was just a boy but he was very ambitious and very energetic. They locked up a bunch of young children for demonstrating and so on, but there wasn't any violence. I don't recall us having much violence here during that revolution.

DR. PATTERSON: I don't think anybody has said to me that there were any severe injuries, and certainly, there were no deaths.

REV. HICKMAN: I didn't see any. No, there wasn't no death.

DR. PATTERSON: So it sounds like things went reasonably well compared to other places.

REV. HICKMAN: It went reasonably well.

DR. PATTERSON: What's it been like since then? How have things evolved in New Bern?

REV. HICKMAN: Here is how it's been since then. Now as I said, my concept towards white people is just different from a lot of blacks.

I think I have about the only church that is integrated with white people. When I preached over here in this conference, I opened that conference up for the North Carolina Conference, four different races of people was in my choir. It ain't never happened in the whole North Carolina Conference before. The reason it happened is because I have for twenty-five years, I've gone out and recruited white people. I say, "Come to my church Sunday." The other ministers are reluctant to do that, but I'm not, and they come.

DR. PATTERSON: Has that attitude been prevalent in New Bern do you think?

REV. HICKMAN: No sir. They say I was crazy. But at least it worked with me and I have had no problem. I've had some to tell me they was coming and they didn't come, and then I've had some to tell me, say, "Well, I'll probably stick with my own church."

DR. PATTERSON: Have the black people accepted integration with some satisfaction or have they been disappointed?

REV. HICKMAN: They have been disappointed. Not socially, but they have been disappointed in the economic situation because the jobs have been provided mostly for white people, the high paying jobs. Now as head of the NAACP I handle about eight complaints a month, and I would say, maybe, just about three out of the eight are legitimate.

About three complaints out of the eight are legitimate. Of course the others, the employee sometimes come late and he doesn't know that

he is being monitored, and of course then his employer reprimand him or exterminate him, excommunicate him rather, from his position, and he thinks that he's taking advantage of him. Then other times, the employee is sensitive to racism and he sometime thinks he's treated like this is because he is black. I would say it runs about fifty/fifty in my estimation.

DR. PATTERSON: If we can look back beyond the civil rights movement, could you comment about the living conditions of the black people in New Bern prior to civil rights?

REV. HICKMAN: I really can. From my observation, the living conditions of black people in New Bern was not one third as good as it is now. Not only that, the health were not as good. They are living longer now then they lived back there, on an average, because they have better medical care and they have better facilities. They have better drinking water. They get better treatment from the doctors and hospitals. It's much better.

DR. PATTERSON: Before the civil rights change, did people in the black community have indoor plumbing?

REV. HICKMAN: I don't know. Well, I know they didn't have it in the rural area and a very few in the city, except like West Street, Bern Street. Every since I can remember, they've always had pretty good homes in that part of town. But places like Duffyfield had those outdoor toilets.

DR. PATTERSON: There still are a lot of problems in the Duffyfield area. Do you think that's gotten any better out there?

REV. HICKMAN: It's better. Everything has gotten better.

DR. PATTERSON: Everything is better?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes sir. Yes sir. Everything has gotten better.

The white and black, their relationship is better. When I was boy, I used to walk to school, the white children would come by on the school bus. They were riding and we were walking. And they would come by there hollering, "Walk niggers", and call us niggers while we were walking. What broke that up, I threw some pepsi cola bottles, coca-cola bottles, on the school bus one day. My brother and I ran through the woods home. We didn't go down the road. Then we were afraid to go home cause we were afraid that my mother was gonna kill us about it, cause the other children got home and told it before we got there.

So I was afraid to go in the house cause I already knew what was gonna happened. But that's the only time my mother didn't whip me. She didn't whip me. I told her what they had done and I told her what I did.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you think, Rev. Hickman, that the black people in New Bern and the white people really get along pretty well now?

REV. HICKMAN: Well, they aren't saying too much to each other and they aren't having much trouble, but the trouble is under the surface. It's laying there. What I mean by the troubles under the surface, there are things that need to be done that cannot be done now under the circumstances. The black man is in the valley of the shadow of death. He is in worse shape now than he was in the civil right revolution.

DR. PATTERSON: Why is that?

REV. HICKMAN: In the civil right revolution he was fighting to greater achievements, and after the Supreme Court ruling, civil right became the law of the land, he stopped. The black people just sat right down. They became complacent over the gains that they made during the sixties. By becoming complacent, sin begin to corrode the minds of young blacks. That's what did it. That's what did it, see. He just sit down and didn't try to do as soon as civil right became the law of the land, as I said. So the most of them, at least two thirds of the blacks, became that way and the organization seemed to dwindle down. The ambition and motivation of young people, saying they've been transferred in another stream, substituted for dope, for whiskey, for cigarettes, and things like that, and violent. That is what is plaguing this black community, and there ain't but one way for them to get out of it.

DR. PATTERSON: What's that?

REV. HICKMAN: The only way that this black man is going be happy now, he's got to have more support from the white man.

DR. PATTERSON: That's true in New Bern?

REV. HICKMAN: Everywhere. It's because that the black man is living in a programmatic world. He was programmed where he was back yonder. So he has to be programmed out, many black people haven't got out of slaves psychologically. He hasn't got out of it yet. For an instance, there's a lot of blacks thinks that certain things they can't do now that white people resent. White people don't resent it,

they think that way because that's where their minds are. Many of them don't want to join the NAACP, is afraid of NAACP, cause back there if they had a job and was a member of the NAACP, they would be terminated.

Some of the blacks think that now when it's not true, that's what I'm trying to say. The other thing is, blacks will listen to white people more than they will their own color. Eighty percent of them will. And you see, the reason that a white man can help this black man so much now is because he will listen to him, he respects him very highly. But the only thing, the white man don't mind calling him up on the phone or writing him a letter, but he don't want to get that close to him. When he learns to get closer to this black man, he will learn that he's getting this black man out of the valley of shadow of death.

DR. PATTERSON: You and I had a talk just a few days ago and we talked about dissention among the black people and you carried that back to the slave mentality and the slave categories. Would you speak to that?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes. See, during the slave time, they had the house slave and field slave. Of course, this house slave knew all the techniques of the farm and the house and this house slave informed his master about everything that the black did in the field and had many of them lynched. Jealousy spun out of the house slave and field slave and it follows us on down today. You see, this field slave hated the house slave because he was living better, he was getting along better, and of course, this type jealousy seemed to haunt the black

race tremendously.

DR. PATTERSON: It still exists?

REV. HICKMAN: It still exists.

DR. PATTERSON: You think that's a major reason for divisiveness between blacks now days?

REV. HICKMAN: That's one of the reasons. That's one of the reasons because they were not born that way and God did not design them that way and they were not that way in Africa and they're not that way over there now. It was the way that they were treated. And of course, even human nature incites jealousy between the sex, like women, but it's not extreme jealousy. This one looks a little better and dresses a little better, and they might make some comments about that, but that's as far as it will go.

DR. PATTERSON: Do you think, Rev. Hickman, in New Bern since the civil rights movement, that the black people are a united force or are they a divided force?

REV. HICKMAN: They are divided. They are too many blacks who are trying to do the same thing. Some of them don't believe in organization. When you have an organization, it takes people in the organization to make the organization amenable to the community. Why would you be in this organization and then form another organization within this organization, like they do churches. They have more churches than what they need! Ain't no sense in them having all these churches. They don't have enough people to fill them. They got all these different organizations in the black community. I can't even

name all of the different organizations. The reason they organize, I guess, is because one is trying to sometime excel the other in ability.

If we could just come together and make this one organization be highlights of our time and let's include all our brothers and sisters in this and see how this work. I think that's the way they need to do.

DR. PATTERSON: Looking back from where you are now to pre-integration days and then the period of integration and since then, can you recall certain people in New Bern, Craven County, who played a leading role in all of this?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes sir.

DR. PATTERSON: Who are some of these people?

REV. HICKMAN: Rev. Buckshot Nixon. They called him Buckshot Nixon. He was a real good civil right advocate. I call it like that.

A lot of people, black and white, resents the way he expresses himself and the way he dressed and his language, but he was one of the best.

He would really stand up and he would just lead out. Of course he had some ways about him that people didn't go along with, but at the same time he did well. Of course, James Gavin was another one, but mostly, Gavin was political. He didn't take any part in the revolutionary processing, but he would deal with politicians and things like that and he would do it on behalf of his race. I liked that about him. But they all won't that way and are not that way now. We have what you call "Uncle Tom" in our race, and he ain't good for the white, he ain't good for the black cause he's not going to be truthful. He

just does things out of fear. That's what they call an "Uncle Tom".

DR. PATTERSON: Who were some of the white folks you remember who played a leading role in all of this?

REV. HICKMAN: Mr. Cedric Boyd downtown there. I think he was one of the city inspectors. He didn't put himself out on the forefront, but I thought that he was a very moderate man. There were some who probably didn't think so, but I did because I dealt with him. I know when they had funerals, to black's churches, I would always see him. There were many white people who was sympathetic toward this situation, but they had more to lose than the blacks, so they feared the white community; so therefore, they just wouldn't take the lead.

DR. PATTERSON: Did Livingston Stallings play a role in all of this?

REV. HICKMAN: Politically he did. He was a man I was trying to think of. I tell you, Livingston Stallings tried to help both races. He really did. The reason that he leaned some toward the black, but not that far, was because of his political involvement. That was why, and that's the only reason that he did it.

DR. PATTERSON: Now that all of this has come to pass, is there integration in New Bern in churches?

REV. HICKMAN: Just a few. I don't know of any church in New Bern. Now, Havelock has some. My church, I've always have been integrated for twenty-five years cause I've always had some white people in every church I've pastored. I'd go out and find somebody would come in. I think that more of these churches in New Bern would

be integrated if these pastors would invite these people, man and his family to come to his church and hear his singing once in a while.

I think it's just as much the responsibility of having the ground prepared for the corn as the corn prepared for the ground. So the responsibility rests upon both. I think sometime I should take the lead. See, I don't know how you feel until I go and talk with you.

DR. PATTERSON: During the period of integration, how did the white churches in New Bern respond to black people? I understand that there were some obliged to attend white churches?

REV. HICKMAN: Let me tell you this. Throughout this whole country, not only New Bern, there weren't but one church that raised its hand in the defense of the civil right movement toward blacks and that was the Catholic church. The Presbyterian church was sympathetic towards us. But while people were dying in the street and while they jailed twenty thousand and five hundred black men and women during the revolution and they burnt up five hundred churches and they spent over two hundred billion dollars for that civil right movement, the other churches, and while men and women were dying and while they were being shot in the street with high power rifles and water hose, the white church ain't raised its hands in the defense. I tell you that right now. And I think if the church had spoken out, we wouldn't have had that problem.

DR. PATTERSON: Rev. Hickman, in your position as a minister now, let me ask you about the position of the church in the black community

now compared to the way it was when you came along as a young man and through the years. Is the church stronger?

REV. HICKMAN: No sir. The black church is financially strong, but see, that don't help the church cause that is not what the church was designed for. God did not design the church for to have money.

Any church that's got bank account and they drawing interest on that money they don't use, that's a sin, because God didn't design the church like that. If the church would do what God designed them to do, we wouldn't have all these people in soup lines. See, that's the money that God told them to take and help the poor with.

DR. PATTERSON: What is the church like in New Bern these days?

REV. HICKMAN: The churches in New Bern, at least the black church, cause I don't go to many white churches, I have preached to some.

DR. PATTERSON: I really mean the black church.

REV. HICKMAN: The black church here in New Bern is not as strong as it was. Now they are just as emotional sometime, but emotionalism is not Christianity. They don't have the respect that they had years ago and the black minister is not respected as he was. They have no respect for him no more than they do someone that has never been to church. So it has fallen somewhere. The black church, somewhere down the line, has failed. What it needs to do now, it needs a fresh baptism in the faith of their Father. They need a new reverence for God and spiritual values. They need a better understanding of the brotherhood of man and the Fatherhood of God.

DR. PATTERSON: When I was a boy, I lived on New Street, and one

of my real memories is seeing black people parade down the street dressed in white, heading for the baptism in the river. That doesn't happen these days.

REV. HICKMAN: Now they have pools in the churches these days.

DR. PATTERSON: What do you see for the future of the black church in New Bern?

REV. HICKMAN: Well, I tell you, it looks bleak to me now, unless they make some drastic change. I mean, they have a larger membership. I don't know that whether the membership has diminished, but that membership don't mean nothing. What really mean is what this civilization is going to do for this young black tomorrow. This is what we need to prepare for. How are we going to save and keep our young people from the vicissitudes of this world now? The greatest work now of the black church is that inculcating principle of illustrating a doctrine of faith among their young people. This doctrine here can save and keep him from the graveyard now and from the prison.

DR. PATTERSON: What do you see as your personal role in New Bern as far the church is concern, as far as black civil rights are concerned? How does it look to you as an individual? Where are you headed? Where will you go?

REV. HICKMAN: Right now, as far as civil rights are concerned, there aren't too many blacks that are interested in the civil rights. The organizations now are interested in politics and getting some money out of politicians for getting them some votes. Now, everybody

need to be interested in civil rights because civil rights brings about a better relationship in a community and it helps the economy. It helps that black man over there that makes some progress wherein he wouldn't break in your house. He would break in your house tomorrow night if he knew that he could get enough money to buy him some cigarettes or something like that. But if this relationship was what it ought to be, he would by pass breaking into houses because, see, the economics situation would be changed and the economy would be better. Right now we are standing on the threshold of a new chain because of the new president that we have. The blacks have better hope under this man administration than they have in the past. For twelve years they've been really suffering because all the social programs and things like that have been wiped out.

DR. PATTERSON: Are you going to continue in your ministry?

REV. HICKMAN: I'm going to try. I'm going to enjoy it.

DR. PATTERSON: You're 73 now.

REV. HICKMAN: I'm 73 and I preach every Sunday. I make speeches all around and I writes articles for the newspapers, editorials, and I enjoy it.

DR. PATTERSON: And you will continue to stay active in the NAACP?

REV. HICKMAN: Yeah, I'm trying to stay active. I have a problem here today with a certain bank that I respect very much. One of our charter members have been really insulted. Not because so much of her performance, but because the way that she is designed. Her humanistic way of life, her built, somebody has made some comments

against that and that's something I don't want to deal with. I don't even like to get into things like that. Sometimes I have to.

DR. PATTERSON: I have read that the black people are now realizing that this black power, has been white power before, but now this black power, and although the blacks resented the white power when the whites were powerful, now they themselves have power and they are using it in a way they were critical of before and that hate is building up in them more and more. Is this true?

REV. HICKMAN: The hate is not building up against white people in black. I'm going tell you that right now. The hates in black is against one another. (phone rings)

DR. PATTERSON: The man you just talked to on the phone, who was that?

REV. HICKMAN: The man that I just talked to on the phone that called me, his name is Manny Lacoda. He is from Cuba and he is my godson.

DR. PATTERSON: He's white?

REV. HICKMAN: He's white. Here is how he became my godson. And God did this. I was pastoring a certain church and I went through a lot of trouble in that church. Out of all the churches I've been pastor, I never had any trouble with any of them except this one. So this was my last Sunday at this church. I didn't hardly know what to do because I had been harassed and that church. The people wouldn't be still and they were walking around and they were doing some of everything in the church that was against the religious worship. This

young man walked in that church. When he walked in that church and took him a seat up there the front, everybody got quiet. Nobody was walking around and talking, and everybody looked toward him. I preached the best sermon that I had preached that whole year, but yet, that was my last day there because I was going to leave there and go to the conference and be sent to another church. He came up and want to join the church. He heard my sermon. I said, "Son, I'm leaving here today. This is my last sermon here and I ain't coming back here any more." He wanted to know where I was going and I said I don't know because I am an AME Zion minister and I got to go to the conference and the bishop will appoint me somewhere. He gave me his card and I gave him my phone number. When I went where I am now, I called him and told him where I was. His wife was in college in Tennessee, Tennessee State. He went and got his wife out of college and brought her down there and they joined my church. I asked him why and he said he don't know why he was there. He don't know why he went there. He had never been there before. He said something just told him in his mind to go in that church. If he hadn't of gone in there that day, I don't know what would of happened because I was really mad. I was mad at those people walking around in there just like they would be in a joint somewhere. They resented me being there because I just wouldn't let them carry on and do what they want to do. They just resented it and it was a troubled situation.

DR. PATTERSON: And he became your godson?

REV. HICKMAN: He became my godson. He is a fine young man.

He's a Christian. I'm a preacher and I'm not as good a Christian as he is.

DR. PATTERSON: Is he a New Bernian?

REV. HICKMAN: No sir. He lives in Havelock.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, Rev. Hickman, maybe this is a good place to stop this interview, on this happy note about your godson. That is a great thing. You have any other thoughts you'd like to add to this interview?

REV. HICKMAN: Well, the only thought that I would like to add is that I don't want no white person no where to think that I have anything against white people, because that's not true. The article that came out that I told a reporter of the local news about when I was a boy and how I grew up, has nothing to do with me now being a man. It's sixty years. I get along fine with them. I get along well with most of the black. I'm very optimistic with a better relationship between the races. I look that way. I think that's the way for all of us to look. I'm not a pessimist about life. I'm optimistic about it because I think we should all look toward greater achievement. This is what I'm praying for. I'm praying that this young generation will have a greater and better relationship, greater union between the races and between churches and between company. I would like to see these churches emerge first of all. I would like to see the white and black churches worshipping the same God. Now there's some white people, Doctor, did you know, that some white people have been taught that there separatism in Heaven in race, cause I've talked with them

and they believe that. (laughter) You can't do much with him. He believes that when he goes to Heaven that these blacks are going to be over here and he's going to be over there. Now he believe that.

I think it's pathetic that we let our mind go that way and that our parents lead children to think that. But there are many thousands like that.

DR. PATTERSON: Well, Rev. Hickman, from a personal standpoint, I've really enjoyed this very much.

REV. HICKMAN: I've enjoyed it Doc. I've enjoyed it. Maybe I made some grammatical errors in my language, because having to deal with so many different things, you know, different kinds of people, I probably done that, but I've done my best in trying to memorize, cause my memory is not as good. When I first started to pastor Clinton Memorial at Pollocksville, I didn't use any manuscript because I write out my sermons and read them. I could remember them, I didn't have to go over them. But now I have to jot down and write most of it.

DR. PATTERSON: That's not bad. Well, from the standpoint of the Memories of New Bern program, which I'm representing, this has been a fine interview and you have given us valuable information about the situation in New Bern and around here and over the country and this is going to help us a great deal.

REV. HICKMAN: I appreciate that.

DR. PATTERSON: We do thank you very much for talking to us.

REV. HICKMAN: Thank you. Yes sir. Glad to do it.

DR. PATTERSON: So I'm gonna cut this off now Rev. Hickman.

REV. HICKMAN: The city government is not like it was in the olden days. The city government now is almost corrupted.

DR. PATTERSON: You want that on tape?

REV. HICKMAN: Yes sir. Yes sir. I think the city government need to be changed. We need to change the city government and we need to change the county government because the citizens of the city and the citizens of the county have certainly been treated uncitizenized and unchristianized. We are the taxpayers. We're the people who keep our government going and they survive by the taxpayer's money, the money that we make. We love our city and we love our county. We love our towns and countries, but we certainly think that the government of our city has certainly taken advantage of the poor people, of people that cannot and don't have the power to stand up and fight back. They come and tear your house down that you live in. They'll tear your house down that belong to you and make you pay them for tearing down your house. I think we need a new government! I think we need that.

I think if the people of Craven County got together to see this, cause I'm fix'n to write an article on it, we need to start now of screening potential politicians for the new government. I think it would be a new millennium for New Bern and Craven County.

END OF INTERVIEW