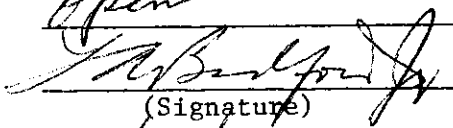


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Interview with  
Judge L. A. Bedford, Jr.  
March 28, 1977

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas  
Interviewer: John Bodnar  
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Oral History Collection

Judge L. A. Bedford, Jr.

Interviewer: John Bodnar

Place of Interview: Dallas, Texas

Date: March 28, 1977

Mr. Bodnar: This is John Bodnar interviewing Judge L. A. Bedford, Jr., for the North Texas State University Oral History Collection. The interview is taking place on March 28, 1977, in Dallas, Texas. I'm interviewing Judge Bedford in order to get his reminiscences and impressions concerning his work as legal counsel in desegregation cases for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in the city of Dallas during the period from approximately 1955 to 1961. The cases with which this interview is concerned are cited as follows: Bell vs. Rippy, 133 F. Supp. 811 (1955); Bell vs. Rippy, 146 F. Supp. 485 (1956); Borders vs. Rippy, 184 F. Supp. 402 (1960); Borders vs. Rippy 188 F. Supp. 231 (1960); and Borders vs. Rippy, 195 F. Supp. 732 (1961).

Okay, Judge Bedford, the first thing I'd like you to do is give us some short accounting of your background beginning with your date and place of birth.

Bedford: I was born in Dallas, Texas, on January 23, 1926. My parents are L. A. Bedford, which is Lewis A. Bedford, Sr., and Callie Bedford. I grew up here in Dallas, Texas, in what was known then as North Dallas at the Thomas-Hall Street area. I went to elementary school as well as high school in Dallas, elementary being B. F. Durrell and Booker T. Washington High School. All my life was basically spent in Dallas except that period when I left to go to school. I attended Prairie View College and Brooklyn Law School. Outside of my years in school, my childhood as well as my adult life has been spent in Dallas.

Bodnar: You were in the military for a short time.

Bedford: I was not in the military.

Bodnar: You were not in the military?

Bedford: Right.

Bodnar: And the type of practice you've had in Dallas has been primarily civil law practice? Criminal?

Bedford: Well, I guess the best thing we could say is that it would be the general practice of law. I'm not specialized in any particular field. I've handled civil cases as well as criminal cases. I guess I have maybe a third of my work as civil, or half of it could be civil and another third or half could be in the criminal field. I suppose that I have. . . one-third

or half could be in the criminal field. I suppose that I have. . . one-third or my work is probably criminal. One-third may involve domestic relations or probate with the others just a hodge-podge of a number of other legal problems. I've practiced in Dallas since 1951. I graduated from Brooklyn Law School in 1950. I returned to Dallas and passed the bar in 1951, and I've been practicing in Dallas ever since.

Bodnar: All right, you're now a municipal judge in Dallas.

Bedford: Yes. I was appointed to the municipal court bench in 1966. I'm known as an associate judge, which is not a full-time judge. An associate judge is usually called in in case of illness or if there is a need for a judge to come in while the other judges may be on vacation; there may be an extra case that needs to be tried. Of course, being an associate judge, I am allowed to carry on my practice. The only restriction is that I cannot practice law in the municipal courts of the city of Dallas.

Bodnar: Did you seek that appointment, or was it sort of offered to you?

Bedford: Well, it was sort of offered to me in the sense. . . I think one of the judges asked me to send in a resume' to the city attorney's office. I sent in the resume', and as a result

of sending in the resume' I was appointed. So I felt that by telling me to send in the resume', I probably had been discussed, and it was more or less, I would say, offered in the sense, I guess, that they felt it was time to get a black judge on the city bench.

Bodnar: I see. Was that specifically brought up to you at the time --that they wanted a black judge?

Bedford: No, no.

Bodnar: You just had that feeling from it.

Bedford: Well, since I was the first black judge (chuckle), I assume that somebody said, "Well, look we need. . ." and since I was approached, I think it was obvious that I was black, so it may have been that. I cannot say that they specifically said, "We want you because you are black."

Bodnar: Okay. Judge Bedford, how did you get into work on the desegregation cases?

Bedford: When I finished from law school, there were about, oh, six or seven black lawyers in Dallas who were very, very active in desegregation cases. They all worked with the NAACP-- both the state and the national offices of the NAACP. When I graduated from law school and passed the bar, it was just something that I didn't even think of as to how I got into it. It was just something that you do because the leading

black attorneys in Dallas were very much involved in school cases and all sorts of desegregation cases. The lawyers who were actually involved were W. J. Durham and C. B. Bunkley, who were both leading black attorneys here in Dallas and in the state.

Bodnar: What type of work did you do during the desegregation cases? Can you tell something about what your part was?

Bedford: Well, I would say at the very beginning my role was a minor role. The major roles were filled by Durham, Bunkley, Tate, and probably Thurgood Marshall.

Bodnar: That would be Mr. U. Simpson Tate, who was the regional counsel for the NAACP.

Bedford: That's right. U. Simpson Tate was regional counsel for the NAACP. Thurgood Marshall, who is now associate justice of the Supreme Court, and C. B. Bunkley, who is now deceased, who was an attorney here in Dallas--practicing attorney here in Dallas--and W. J. Durham, who is now deceased, who was a practicing attorney here in Dallas. My role was, I would suppose, to research, do odd jobs, like, I guess, the ordinary law clerk would do. I did not plan strategy (chuckle). I was just there to help and aid in assisting in any way they thought that I could. I was not by myself; there were quite a few lawyers who were active in this manner. J. L. Turner,

who is still practicing law here, worked with us--J. L. Turner, Jr. There was also Kenneth Holbert. Mr. Holbert's now in Washington. I think he's with HUD or the Equal Employment Office--I'm not sure. Romeo Williams, who is now deceased, was one of the lawyers who represented the kids in the sit-ins. In the 1960's, he was killed in a car-train accident.

Bodnar: That's Mr. Williams?

Bedford: Romeo Williams, yes.

Bodnar: Killed in a car-train accident?

Bedford: Yes, in the sixties he and one of the young ladies involved in the sit-ins. . . we were down in Marshall at the time representing the kids who was involved in the sit-ins, and he and one of the students was killed in this car accident. They were down. . . the student was down for trial. She had been asked to come back for trial, and during that period of time he was killed in a car-train accident.

Bodnar: Judge Bedford, was there a reason there was a suit filed in Dallas, or was this just a matter of course after the Brown decision to file as many suits as you could, or was there a particular reason for Dallas as such?

Bedford: I will say this--I had nothing to do with the planning of strategy, but I will say that Dallas at that time was a very strong citadel as far as NAACP was concerned. First of all,



the regional office for the NAACP is located in Dallas, and that included Texas and, I think, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Louisiana. Secondly, your region attorney was located in Dallas, and you had two of the outstanding civil rights lawyers, as far as black attorneys were concerned, located here in Dallas.

Bodnar: That's Mr. Durham and Mr. Bunckley.

Bedford: Right. They had been quite active in a number of civil rights cases prior to the school case. To mention a few, I think the decision of Smith vs. Allwright, which was led by Durham and assisted by Bunckley, whereby a suit was filed to break the Democratic white primary--the strangle-hold thing. It was a private party, and the blacks could not vote in the primary--only in general elections. This suit was filed by Mr. Durham and Bunckley, and, of course, it was eventually won by the Supreme Court saying that to deny blacks the right to vote in the primary was really, in effect, denying the right to vote period because whoever won the Democratic primary usually won the general election.

Also, those two attorneys had been instrumental in filing the suit. . . Sweatt in his efforts to gain admission to the University of Texas law school. . . I think it's Sweatt vs. Painter. Of course, they had opportunities to appeal that

case, and it had gone up to the Supreme Court, and they won that.

So you have two landmark decisions that was basically out of Texas and out of Dallas by Dallas lawyers. I think that these decisions had an effect all over the country as far as the primary voting is concerned and entrance into law school. So it was just a natural situation, as far as I'm concerned, for Dallas to be the place for the suit to be filed, since you had your strong suits here--well, your strongpoints by being your lawyers and your regional headquarters.

Bodnar: Thurgood Marshall--at that time was he not the head national counsel for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People?

Bedford: No, he was not the head counsel there. There is an NAACP, and then there was the Legal Defense Fund. Now these are two separate organizations. Thurgood Marshall was head counsel for the Legal Defense Fund. This fund operated separately and apart from the regular NAACP. So he was head counsel for the Legal Defense Fund. There was a head counsel for the NAACP, but I cannot recall his name at this time. I think it was Carter, a fellow by the name of Carter, I'm not sure.

Bodnar: There was a Mr. Carter who is listed as one of the attorneys  
--Robert Carter?

Bedford: No.

Bodnar: Robert L. Carter.

Bedford: I think so. Robert Carter represented. . . you had two  
distance organizations--both incorporated. Now the NAACP  
was a distinct organization, and you had the Legal Defense  
Fund and that was distinct. So you had Carter, who repre-  
sented the NAACP, and his name had been signed to the pleadance  
file as the attorney for the NAACP, while Thurgood's name--  
Thurgood Marshall's name--was signed as attorney for the  
Legal Defense Fund.

Bodnar: I see. All right, why did Mr. Marshall. . . well, he's now  
Justice Marshall. Was there any particular reason he came  
to Dallas to help, or was this just a normal matter at that  
time? Did you ask for him?

Bedford: I think that at that time it was a procedure that if a case  
of any magnitude had developed. . . and we had what we called  
associated attorneys within the NAACP, so there was sort of  
a line of connection between--line of communication between  
--local attorneys and the Legal Defense Fund. Whenever a  
local attorney filed a suit and he needed help--financial  
or whether he needed briefing--he could always call the

national office and say, "I need some help in this particular area. I have a suit involving (whatever the subject matter was), and I think it's going to have a great importance on what the situation would be concerning blacks and their rights." The national office, if they felt that it was a worthy cause, would send in help--financial or an attorney or both.

Bodnar: Was there a good working relationship between all the attorneys?

Bedford: I think that there was an excellent working relationship between the attorneys because they had one single purpose. When you say a good working relationship, I mean when they were on the case together and they all have the same point of view. If that's what you're saying, then I'm saying "yes." When you're talking about a working relationship other than NAACP work, I can't say that there was always a good working relationship. But I'm saying when it came to NAACP business or the business of trying to secure civil rights for blacks, then the focus was on one thing--"Let's do the best job possible." And they would work very well together and very, very hard and very dedicated towards that purpose.

Bodnar: Well, in particular there has been some indication in other areas that sometimes local attorneys resented national organizations sending people, and then sometimes the attorneys

for the national organization sort of felt that they weren't getting competent help from the local area. I assume you're saying that there was nothing of this nature.

Bedford: Well, I think Dallas was very fortunate because. . . I hate to keep repeating myself, being redundant, but I think Dallas was very fortunate because Dallas had some outstanding black attorneys here. Their work was of such quality that I don't think that the national offices would ever say that "There isn't qualified black attorneys in Dallas to handle the cases." Those who came in, like Thurgood. . . he came in not on a basis of, "Well, I'm here; I'm going to take over," but it was more or less of a partnership-type arrangement. Thurgood spent a lot of time in Texas during those years in the '50's because there was a lot of things going on in the '50's. I don't think he came in with the idea that he knew it all, but he relied very heavily on the local attorneys. And the local attorneys. . . they were friends, first of all, as I say. They had a good, friendly relationship as well as a professional relationship. I think that made for a good, solid team.

Bodnar: And very definitely you would say that if there was any type of resentment from the local people towards the national organization or any national attorneys who didn't feel they

were dealing with competent people in the local area, it definitely did not occur in this area.

Bedford: To my knowledge it didn't.

Bodnar: Okay. Then would you say the local strategy was determined by the local attorneys like Mr. Bunkley and Durham and Mr. Tate or by the national attorneys like Mr. Rogers and Mr. Marshall?

Bedford: I would say it was determined by local attorneys.

Bodnar: Local attorneys laid out the basic strategy first and got assistance from the people from the national association.

Bedford: Right.

Bodnar: One other thing we've come across in researching civil rights areas is that a lot of times the black attorneys have felt a necessity to have a white attorney with them, if for no other reason than public relations, when they went to court. Did you ever feel that this was discussed in the Dallas area?

Bedford: It was never discussed as far as I was concerned. . . as far as I know of. One reason. . . and again, black attorneys in Dallas were very competent. I don't think that there were ever any white attorneys who were really clamoring to be a part of this. I don't recall any whites volunteering; there may have been one or two who volunteered and gave some aid and assistance in some of the school cases. I think I

can recall one from a firm here who actively participated . . . or maybe researched or was a part of it. But as a whole, there were not any number of whites who even wanted to be involved. A white attorney was never considered. As I say, these black attorneys had had success all over the state of Texas without the need of having a white attorney appear in court with them. So therefore, I think the general rule was--general opinion was--that "If we can't do it, it can't be done. We can do it better than anybody else because we know what the problem is." That's basically my impression. It was never discussed; no one ever said anything. There was one firm that, I think, on one occasion. . . I'm not certain it was on a school case or a civil case, but I'm sure on some of our cases that may have had something to do with civil rights and did lend aid and assistance.

Bodnar: Do you remember any of the names of the white attorneys? You said there may have been one or two. Can you recall them?

Bedford: The firm had to be Mullinax and Wells.

Bodnar: Which one?

Bedford: Mullinax and Wells--a firm where Senator Mauzy is now a partner in. I do recall that they lent some assistance at one time in some case with Durham. I can't recall the nature

of the case, but I do recall them lending some assistance.

Bodnar: As far as you know, other than this one law firm, then, no prominent attorneys or law firms in Dallas offered assistance.

Bedford: Nothing. Not to my knowledge.

Bodnar: Okay. Not to your knowledge. All right, since he's now an associate justice on the Supreme Court, I wouldn't mind if you could say a few words about what you thought of Justice Marshall; what it was like to work with him; what you thought his qualifications were at that time.

Bedford: Well, he was a very easy person to work with. He was a very friendly, fun-loving type fellow, and it was kind of (chuckle) difficult to see him as he is and perhaps think of him as Supreme Court justice. Because as a young lawyer, Thurgood was not what you may say a very serious person who talked law all the time. He liked to have fun; he liked to joke; he liked to kid. But he also knew how to get down to business. I think if there's anything I admired about him it was the fact that he was very flexible. He'd come in and he'd talk to all of us and kid us and say jokes and things like that, but then when it came time to really work and to really go about the business at hand, he could work long and hard hours briefing, discussing the points. He was just a



regular fellow. I think that's my best recollection as far as he's concerned.

I have not seen or talked to him since he got appointed. The last time I think he was in Dallas was when he was the solicitor general of the United States. He came here for a tribute to W. J. Durham at that time. He was the guest speaker. Or either he may have been on the Circuit Court of Appeals, but I know he came--he was either solicitor general or on the Circuit Court of Appeals.

But he was an extraordinary person in the sense--or he is an extraordinary person--in the sense that he could relax a person very easily and you didn't mind working for him. At least I didn't. I felt highly honored to be a part of the whole group.

Bodnar: And you obviously thought he was rather a competent attorney.

Bedford: Oh, no question about it! I felt he was very competent. There wasn't any question about that. I'm just bringing up the idea that outside of his competency, he was a--what you would say--a very regular fellow.

Bodnar: A good person to be around.

Bedford: A good person to be around, yes.

Bodnar: Judge Bedford, now I'd like to get into something else. Another thing that we have come up with in different areas

is that in desegregation cases a lot of times school officials and school attorneys themselves did not mind if the school was desegregated; but they felt they had to go through the motion of going to court, that they had to get a federal judge's decision in order to go back to the white population within their areas and say, "Well, look, we have to do it." What was your feeling in working with the school officials and the school attorneys? Did you feel this was so in their case, or did you feel that the people working for the school were, themselves, definitely opposed to desegregation?

Bedford: Well, I'd like to change something that you're saying. You're saying school officials and school attorneys. I think the school attorneys only react and act out of what they've been told by the school officials. So I think we're dealing primarily with the school officials. If school officials had to go through the act or felt it was necessary to go through the act, the school attorney would go along because he represents that client. So my idea was, here in Dallas, that the school officials had informed their attorneys that "We do not want integration of the school system," and as such, the attorneys for the school officials tried as best they could, and they were succeeded in keeping (chuckle) the integration of the school system from coming about.

Bodnar: Now did you have any personal relations with the school officials, or is this just from what you read in the paper, what you were informed from people?

Bedford: I had no personal relations with any of the school officials. It was assumed by the lawyers who represented the NAACP that the efforts made by the board of education and school officials in Dallas were sincere efforts to keep the schools from being integrated and not a sham just to say, "Well, the courts made us do it." I think that's pretty well borne out by the fact that that was almost twenty years ago and we haven't made it yet (chuckle).

Bodnar: Judge Bedford, during the time that you were going to court, was there ever any active effort either on the part of the NAACP to contact the school or on the part of the school to contact the NAACP and see what you could work out out of court?

Bedford: I never recalled any effort of that nature being made. To the best of my knowledge, there was never any effort being made, and there never was an effort made to sort of reconcile the differences and have an agreed judgment. I don't ever recall any efforts of that nature. I'm sure that lawyers talked; I'm sure that there was conversation between some of the attorneys for the school board and Durham and Bunkley

and Thurgood, so forth and so on. But as far as I can recall, there was no conversation on, "Let's work out an agreement."

Bodnar: I see. Then as far as you know, there was never any effort on the part of the NAACP itself to contact the school and see what you could work out ahead of time?

Bedford: Not that I know of.

Bodnar: And to your knowledge, there was never any contact from the school officials back to the NAACP saying, "We'd like to work it out this way."

Bedford: Not that I know of.

Bodnar: Were you personally familiar with Mr. A. J. Thuss, who in the earlier years was the attorney for the schools?

Bedford: The only thing I can recall is that Mr. Thuss was the first attorney hired by the school board to handle the case filed for the desegregation of public schools. I knew later he died, but I just don't know very much about him.

Bodnar: Then did you have any personal workings with any of their subsequent attorneys? I have a Mr. Henry Strasburger and a Mark Martin in my notes. You yourself did not come into contact with them?

Bedford: No. No, I did not come into contact with them. They dealt primarily with C. B. Bunkley or W. J. Durham in their relationships.

Bodnar: I see. From what you heard from other people, was there, once again, sort of a smooth working relationship between the NAACP attorneys and school attorneys, or do you think there was any hostility between the attorneys as such when they were going to court?

Bedford: I don't think there was any hostility between the attorneys. I think that the attorneys who represented the school board were being paid to do a job, and they were trying to do a job. As I said previously, I cannot say that the attorneys for the school board were doing this out of an issue that they felt that they were normally committed to you. As I said previously, I cannot say that the attorneys for the school board were doing this out of an issue that they felt that they were morally committed to you. As far as I could see, they just were hired, and I guess the school board wanted the best attorneys they could get, and they just hired a firm, and that firm represented their clients like most firms or most attorneys would represent their clients to the best of their ability. I don't think that there was any real hostility that transcended the courtroom.

Bodnar: I see. Okay, now I'd like to move on to the judges who originally heard these cases. The original two cases were heard by Judge Atwell--that'd be Judge William H. Atwell--and then subsequently three others under the title Borders

vs. Rippy were heard by Judge T. Whitfield Davidson. I'd like your opinion on things. How did you feel the judges themselves felt about desegregation, and did you think that the NAACP could actually win in a local case or were you just putting forth your best case on the hopes that you could win when you took it up to the appeals court?

Bedford: I think it was the general strategy at that time to not worry too much what happened in the district court, but to make sure that you perfected a good record so that when you went to the 5th Circuit or to the Supreme Court at least you'd have something to go on. So I think any lawyer tries to put forth his best case at the district level, so when he does appeal it at least he'll have something to go on and to have a record to go on and to send up to the higher courts.

There was only one real incident that I think stands out in my mind about the judges and the cases, and I can't say which judge it was--whether it was Judge Atwell or Judge Davidson. But during the course of one of the trials, the lawyers had made certain motions, and after they had made certain motions, one of the judges began to read his decision. His decision had already been prepared and documented, and he began to read his decision. He was reminded that the

NAACP had not had an opportunity as yet to put on their witnesses. He said, "Oh, I'm sorry," and he said, "Well, go ahead and put on your witnesses. Your witnesses!" After the witnesses were put on, then he went right back to his same decision and began reading again, which sort of let us know that his mind was made up prior to (chuckle) hearing any of the testimony and that he had already prepared his judgment and his decision. He let us put on the testimony, and after the testimony was concluded, he went right back to the same decision.

Bodnar: Judge Bedford, do you recall anything about the opinion that he read or anything he said in it? Any of his comments, whether they were in general or what the decision amounted to?

Bedford: Oh, it's been such a long time ago. One of them talked a great deal about. . . his father or grandfather used to have slaves, and the slaves lived on the place and how well they had gotten along together. I guess it would be. . .

Bodnar: Was that the occasion on which he had the opinion. . .

Bedford: I'm not sure. I'm not sure. But they talked. . . one talked a great deal about his family's relationship with blacks and coloreds and sort of the old syndrome that, you know, "When I was a child, we played together," and that, "Somebody

raised me. . ." and sort of that type of situation. I can't recall word for word and maybe I shouldn't even try, but I do know there was some talk about coming up together and being with black folks and having them live on his land and so forth and so on and having slaveholders and the progress that we have made in the last seventy or eighty years, which was part of the decision. I'm not sure that it had anything to do with whether or not (chuckle) we were being denied a constitutional right, but it was still part of the decision.

Bodnar: How did the black attorneys react to this? I mean, you must have had something to say about it afterwards.

Bedford: Well, I think most black attorneys were pretty well insulated. They expected anything and it didn't really phase them.

Bodnar: And they got it.

Bedford: It didn't really phase them a great deal. I think being a black attorney in the early '40's and '50's and being very active in civil rights, they were sort of immune to it. This type of immunity sort of was passed down, so even though I'd just started practicing law, I wasn't disappointed at anything that happened because we sort of felt that "Okay, we might get the little end of the stock," whether we deserved it or not, you know. The question was, "Do the best you can and appeal it."



Bodnar: In other words, for the most part you expected whatever victories you would achieve would come from the 5th Circuit Court and not from the local judges themselves?

Bedford: Right. Yes, I think that was the general plan and general understanding.

Bodnar: Do you think that was a nationwide feeling, or do you feel that that was just restricted to this area or most of the South? From having dealt with the attorneys, what can you say on this, please?

Bedford: I think that most attorneys felt, "Make you a very good case and a very good record so you can appeal it." I think that was true in most areas of the South. They felt that they would have to go to the 5th Circuit or even maybe to the Supreme Court.

Bodnar: I'd just like to return very briefly to something you mentioned before, and that was on the one occasion--whenever it was--where the judge had a prepared opinion. Now when you go into a district court, both sides present their side, but haven't you sent in briefs ahead of time?

Bedford: No, they had not sent in briefs. The best I can recall, they had not sent in any briefs ahead of time to. . . well, even if they had sent in briefs, you have facts. Unless the judge has heard the facts of the case. . . if it was just on

a question of law, then that's something different. But there was some facts that had to be presented to the court. To have a decision made before you've heard the facts sort of precludes a person from feeling that he is getting the benefit of the doubt (chuckle), you know.

Bodnar: And in this case, you are saying it was out of order on the part of the judge to read the decision before. . . or have this decision prepared before he had heard both sides in the courtroom?

Bedford: I would say if it's a fact issue involved, where each side has a right to present witnesses, then it would be out of order.

Bodnar: I see. But in your opinion on this one, it certainly was.

Bedford: We had some witnesses that we wanted to put on to testify.

Bodnar: Well, in a case like this, basically what you would have been talking about is the number of schools that existed in the Dallas area--what amount of integration there had been.

Bedford: Well, not only that--the effects of segregated schools on the black child--because this is part of it. In the original Brown vs. Topeka case, we are arguing that the system itself is terribly wrong. We had parents who were going to testify and other persons who needed to testify in this matter to bring out these facts that would fall in line with the Supreme Court decision of Brown.

Bodnar: I see. All right, Judge Bedford, during the time that you were working on the desegregation cases, did you experience what you might call any retaliation from the white community, such as any threatening notes or letters?

Bedford: Oh, I think most of the black lawyers in the '50's received threatening letters. . . what you might call crank letters. It didn't bother anyone, I don't think. They'd receive a letter, and they'd just sort of make a big joke out of it.

I think the only thing that came rather serious as far as the black lawyers was concerned was that there was an effort made to file a charge of barratry against the black lawyers. This has to do with going out and drumming up lawsuits. It had been alleged that the black lawyers who represented the NAACP had gone off and had requested persons to file or be plaintiffs in the lawsuit. Therefore, it was in violation of the kind of ethics, and it was a question as to whether or not those of us who had signed the original petition were guilty of barratry and whether the. . . well, the efforts could be made to have us disbarred because of violation of ethics.

I don't really think that this moved very far as far as I am able to learn. It did create some worry (chuckle) as far as I was concerned, as far as the other lawyers were concerned, because to be disbarred would have been a disastrous thing for

most of us. But it did come up, and there was talk about whether or not we would be disbarred.

But fortunately Durham had in his possession a contract between those who asked to be plaintiffs and himself, asking him to represent them in the school case, so I think more than anything else quieted the matter down. Had Durham not had written authorization, and if it had been on a word of mouth deal, I don't know how far this thing would have gone.

Bodnar: In other words, if it were not for that document that Mr. Durham had. . .

Bedford: Yes. Yes.

Bodnar: . . . they may have been able--if not to carry through on it--at least to take it far enough to hassle the black attorneys involved.

Bedford: That's right. Durham had contracts for all those who were plaintiffs, and when they really got into it, I think he probably said, "Look, I have a contract here saying that these people have asked me to represent them in the filing of this lawsuit against the Dallas Independent School District." But that was the only real hassle that I can really think of outside of a few crank letters, which didn't upset anyone.

Bodnar: Okay, before we leave this, could you say a few words on how the attorneys did come to represent these people involved--the plaintiffs?

Bedford: Well, I can't say how other than the fact that in most sections of the country there was a growing feeling of blacks that, "Look, I have the right under the law to a better education, to a better life, or to have my civil rights protected." Durham was known as the foremost civil rights lawyers in the state of Texas, and Bunckley, I suppose, was the number two man, and they worked very well together. So when problems of civil rights and the denial of equal opportunities came up in the state of Texas, the first names that came to mind was W. J. Durham or C. B. Bunckley. I mean, this was just something. . . in fact, it wasn't just in Dallas. They tried cases all over the state, you see--Houston and San Antonio, wherever there was a need. W. J. Durham and C. B. Bunckley were the foremost attorneys here in their particular area of concern.

Bodnar: I see. But for the most part, did not these people approach attorneys like Mr. Durham and Mr. Bunckley through the NAACP itself?

Bedford: They may have. I don't know. I wasn't in that particular area where I would know how they came into being. I just know that I worked with them more or less on the legal side, and I was not sure as to whether they approached the NAACP and then the NAACP sent them to their lawyers. That very well may have been the case--that the person goes to the NAACP and says, "I have

a problem. I've been denied some right, and I want you to help me." And they say, "Okay, well, you go talk to our lawyer."

Bodnar: Even if this came up at a local NAACP meeting, and they agreed that they would like to file suit against the local school board--as long as individuals at that groups said that they had minor children and would like to have such a suit filed, as long as they took the action themselves and then requested assistance, that this would be entirely legal.

Bedford: That in my opinion is entirely legal and entirely ethical.

Bodnar: Right. Then the only thing that would have been out of order is if the attorneys themselves went out in the community and said, "We would like to file suit. Do you volunteer?"

Bedford: Yes.

Bodnar: And to your knowledge, this did not occur?

Bedford: That did not occur.

Bodnar: What occurred was that it came together through the NAACP.

Bedford: To the best of my knowledge, that's the way the plaintiffs came in--through the NAACP--and then they said, "Well, we'll turn your challenge over to our lawyer."

Bodnar: And to your knowledge, then, this charge of barratry--there was no real basis for it.

Bedford: No, but it did cause concern, you know. I don't think anyone likes to think that he would be disbarred or that he could not actively engage in his chosen profession because of some

unethical conduct, shall I say. But it caused a lot of worry --I'll tell you that (chuckle). Even though, say, a guy like Bunckley, who had maybe young children, what else is he going to do? It caused worry.

Bodnar: Would you say, possibly, that the worry on the part of the black attorneys was increased by the fact that should there have been at least enough evidence for them to take you to the bar, that they would have not expected, shall you say, equal treatment before the Bar Association of the State of Texas.

Bedford: Well, it was very difficult to . . . let me say this. Now when you say equal treatment before the State Bar of Texas, before you deal with the state bar--all of us are members of the state bar--but before you have to deal with the state bar, you have to deal with your local bar. Members of your grievances committees usually are made up of the members of your local bar. Now if you have no blacks who were accepted in your local bar --it was a segregated as your school system--then you didn't expect a great deal of compassion (chuckle), shall I say, from a segregated bar association who would have to judge you for trying to desegregate the school system and they themselves was a segregated organization which had refused membership of blacks in the Dallas Bar Association.

Bodnar: It was possible, then, for them to refuse membership to you in the Dallas Bar Association?

Bedford: Well, they did. Application was made to the Dallas Bar Association, and they either didn't apply. . . and I would say in the last ten or maybe no more than fifteen years have blacks been members of the Dallas Bar. But I'm saying in the last ten years basically . . .

Bodnar: Are you a member of the Dallas Bar Association?

Bedford: Yes, I am.

Bodnar: Could you explain the small technical difference for me, then. You must be admitted to the bar to practice law, but yet you said you were denied membership in the Dallas Bar Association. Could you explain the difference between those two terms?

Bedford: All right. Now we'll talk about the State Bar of Texas. The Bar Association naturally is made up of a number of other local associations. Now there is no way you can practice law in the State of Texas unless you have been admitted by the bar. Now this is basically the licensing end of it, as far as I see. You pass the Bar Association, and you have your letters of recommendation saying that you're a qualified and fit person; you're admitted to practice law in the State of Texas. Now the mere fact that you can go in and out of any courtroom in the State of Texas and practice law is fine. But now when you deal with the actual workings of the Bar Association--and they have so many areas and districts--in those districts, if there's



a grievance brought up against a member, then those people at the local level handle that grievance. The people who would handle those grievances would be persons who are members of the Dallas Bar Association because they would be the ones that would decide who should be . . . well, they are the ones who acted in the state bar, and the president of the state bar and the other members all worked with the local group. So it would be very difficult for us to, what I would say, get a fair hearing when the organization that would primarily hear the grievances against us would be an organization that was totally lily-white, totally segregated, and who did not want blacks as members even on a professional level. This is what we're talking about. We weren't talking about going to school. . .

Bodnar: Not even the social level.

Bedford: Well, I don't think anybody. . . I think that social level "kick" has overplayed. I don't think that anybody was very interested in the social level. I wasn't; I don't think anybody was. I never heard anybody really talk about the social level.

Bodnar: Okay, now to make sure I have this properly. You would apply for license, which is handled by the State Bar Association.

Bedford: Yes.

Bodnar: And you would get your license to practice, which meant that in name you were a member of the State Bar Association. But

what you were denied was membership in the local bar association.

Bedford: Right.

Bodnar: But all of the grievance committees and so forth were made up from members--were chosen by the members--of the local bar.

Bedford: Well, usually they were usually chosen from the local bar, even if it chose them on a statewide basis. The president or the chairman of that committee would go and check with somebody with the local bar and say, "I need somebody on this committee. Who shall I have on this committee?" you see. And he'd say, "Well, somebody from the Bar Association." Naturally, you wouldn't pick an outsider (chuckle). Oh, those who made up the major committees that had to do with the . . . well, which really has to do with the policing of lawyers are members of the local bar.

Bodnar: And you were flat-out denied membership in the local bar associations at that time?

Bedford: Right.

Bodnar: So then actually your membership in the State Bar Association would have been simply nominal.

Bedford: That's right, as far as I'm concerned.

Bodnar: You were admitted to the point where they had to admit you and give you your license to practice.

Bedford: That's right.

Bodnar: Without being able to get membership in the local association, there was no way you could affect the policies of the State Bar or have any effect as far as grievance committees and all that was concerned.

Bedford: In my opinion, none whatsoever.

Bodnar: And as a result, if someone could have brought anything with any substance at all, even if the black attorney was in the final realm correct, still he would be worried because he wouldn't be certain of fair treatment because all of this was controlled very strongly by the local bar association.

Bedford: That's right, if I have it right (chuckle).

Bodnar: (Chuckle) Okay, as I said, I'm just trying to clarify some of these type things as we go along on it. Okay, I'd like to return, then. . . you mentioned retaliation against individuals. You said that it was a matter of course that black attorneys did get notes. You called them prank notes. Can you recall some of the examples of the type of notes they were and something that was in them.

Bedford: Well, sometimes they were threatening, saying that something bad was going to happen. Some would say, "Well, we can't understand why niggers want to be around white folks," you know, things of that nature. Some were two or three pages

long; some may be a very short note; some may be a cartoon drawing showing a black being hung or shot or something of that nature. Some were from women; some were from men. It wasn't any set pattern. Sometimes they would call. I didn't get a lot of calls. Most of it came through the mail, but sometimes they would call and say a few little things and hang up. That wasn't the norm. The norm was to get something in the mail.

Bodnar: Do you think you can make some estimate of how often you received a note like that when you were, you know, hearing the . . . working on the desegregation cases?

Bedford: These things were received only when an issue was hot and when there was a newspaper or radio account. I would say that when the school case was filed, being heard--at the time it was being heard or was getting ready to go to trial--you received a number of those letters. I remember a little period during the time that there were some question about the Fair Park and blacks only being admitted to the Fair Park for rides only on one day, which was called "Negro Day at the State Fair." They could go out other days, but they could not fully ride on the amusement-type rides. If they wanted to go into the different buildings, they could, but they were limited in their participation, you see. If they wanted to spend some money, like maybe

buying hot dogs, fine, you know (chuckle). If you wanted to throw a ball or try to get the ring over the hoop or whatever, there wasn't any problem about that.

Bodnar: That was in the '50's?

Bedford: Yes, that was in the '50's. But if you wanted to ride in one of the amusement-type rides, then that would mean that you would have to get, perhaps, in contact with whites, so they didn't allow that. We had a big . . . well, there was a picketing of the Fair Park in the '50's on what we called "Negro Day at the Fair," and there was quite a division in the black community as to whether to support or not to support "Negro Day at the Fair." The idea was that . . . I don't think that the hostility was against "Negro Day at the Fair." I think the hostility was against that being the only day that you could fully participate in the fair. That to me was the main issue. So we had picketings and things of that nature, and you'd get your prank calls. When we were down at H. L. Green picketing for the right to eat at lunch counters, you know, that was the time that you'd get prank calls and letters.

Bodnar: Well, during a period like that, when you had some intensity in the civil rights area, could you estimate about how many prank calls you would get in a given week?

Bedford: As I said again, the big thing would be your letters. You wouldn't get half as many calls as you would letters. I don't

know. . . I saved some of them, but I can't even find them now (chuckle), but I don't have any idea. . . it's been so long. . . well, maybe twenty years ago at least.

Bodnar: When did they stop "Negro Day at Fair Park?"

Bedford: I think it must have been in the '60's. I'm not sure.

Bodnar: That was when they finally opened Fair Park on an equal basis?

Bedford: Yes. The whole conception as far as "Negro Day" was concerned . . . when I was a kid, there were two days when I could go to the Fair Park. I could go to the Fair Park on the 19th of June and "Negro Day." Those were the days that they just said, "Okay, this is your day. You come in and you enjoy it." On the 20th of June, I could not go to the Fair Park and have the same pleasures and privileges as I had on the 19th. Nor could I do the same thing after "Negro Day," which was usually on Monday. If I went that Tuesday, then I would be probably turned away from a number of things that I had the right to enjoy that Monday.

Bodnar: I don't think this is important for history, but out of curiosity, did "Negro Day" happen to fall during the state fair?

Bedford: Did it happen to fall?

Bodnar: During the state fair?

Bedford: Oh, yes, yes.

Bodnar: It was one day during. . .

Bedford: It was one day during the state fair.

Bodnar: And the rest of the year you could not go on the rides. You just go in and walk around.

Bedford: That's right.

Bodnar: I see. I have to ask this question, Judge Bedford, in that you're talking about the '50's and into the early '60's. At this time, there was still a great deal of violence, particularly in the South, and blacks were killed. . . and other civil rights workers. How can you say that the black attorneys just passed off these crank letters and, you know, threatening phone calls?

Bedford: Well, I'll say this. I think that the black attorneys in Dallas. . . you know, Dallas is a peculiar place. Dallas has never wanted a bad image. I think most black attorneys felt relatively safe in Dallas. I think that if there was any fear, you would have fear outside of Dallas. Maybe if you'd go to some of the smaller East Texas towns, there would be a question in your mind as to your safety, but you didn't have that feeling in Dallas. At least I never did feel it from Durham; I never did feel it from Bunckley; and we had had attorneys--black attorneys--in Dallas who had been here for a long time, even who had not been active in civil rights, like J. L. Turner, who was a very outstanding attorney. He dealt primarily in real property cases and probate, and he had practiced in the

courts to Dallas. If you're a lawyer--a black lawyer--you aren't going to have too many cases against black lawyers. You're going to usually find a white lawyer on the other side. So you don't expect to say, "Well, I'm going to practice law, and as a result, I'm going to try most of my cases against black lawyers." You say, "Well, if I practice law in Dallas, I'm going to try all my cases--if not a majority of them--against white lawyers." So a precedent had been set by the older lawyers in Dallas. There was a fellow named Mason, who had been here for many, many years. Oh, Dallas has had lawyers--black lawyers--for some time, and apparently nothing had ever happened to any of them, so I guess we had no reason to fear in Dallas.

Bodnar: I see. Would you say this held true for the black community as a whole and that the civil rights leaders, other than attorneys, would have also felt relatively safe--that they would receive their crank letters and calls but really weren't worried about any physical harm?

Bedford: You know, sometimes you may be worried about physical harm, but you sort of dismiss it. You can't go around just shuddering and thinking that, you know, "Harm's going to come to me." It's like practicing law. If I have to worry about the defendant and what he's going to think of me because of whatever



side I'm on, then I couldn't very well practice law if I represent the plaintiff and had to worry about the defendant's reaction or vice versa.

Dallas was not a non-violent town. I want you to know that during that period of time there were bombings in Dallas, especially in South Dallas and in North Dallas. I think most of the violence occurred when blacks moved into what had been formerly white neighborhoods. There were a number of bombings where black homes and black stores were bombed. But other than that. . . well, there were other acts of violence that, I suppose, had marked history, but these were isolated. I don't think the black community lived in total fear like they may have in other places. There were acts of violence where Mr. Porter wanted to serve on the jury some years ago. The best I can recall, they told him that, you know, "Go home. We don't need you on the jury," and he demanded and insisted that he be given the right to serve on the jury. They said, "Well, we'll pay you (chuckle)," you know, "what you're due and go home." As a result, because he refused to leave, he was thrown down the courthouse steps and later lost his sight. I don't really think he ever really recovered from the injury.

Bodnar: Did anyone file a suit connected with that?

Bedford: No.

Bodnar: The people who threw him down the steps--were they police or officials or . . .

Bedford: I don't have the slightest idea.

Bodnar: They just could have been people around at the time.

Bedford: I know that he was thrown down the courthouse steps because he wanted to serve on the jury, and he refused to be brushed off. This happened.

Bodnar: Do you recall about when that happened?

Bedford: I may have been in college. It may have been in the '40's.

Bodnar: I see. Then as far as retaliation against individuals, you felt that no one was really that concerned.

Bedford: No.

Bodnar: Although there had been violence in Dallas, none of it seemed to be directly associated with these desegregation cases as such.

Bedford: That's right. And nothing against a lawyer as such.

Bodnar: I see. And you feel there is a possibility, then, that other civil rights workers may have had a little bit more to fear than attorneys?

Bedford: Well, yes, I would say so. I really. . .I'm going to retract that because I don't think those who were working. . . if they had any fear, they didn't show it. So I just don't think that there was any fear. We did not have the background in Dallas. . .

or maybe in this particular area of Dallas--or Texas, shall I say--that would create the same kind of fear that they may have had in other southern states where persons have been actually killed, lynched, or lawyers themselves had been shot at or homes bombed and things of that nature. We just never did have that there. So since we had no precedent of that, we had no fear. I think sometimes in order to have fear, you have to have a precedence for the fear--a basis of the fear--but we didn't have that.

Bodnar: All right, Judge Bedford, still on retaliation, can you tell me what you recall about the efforts on the part of the state attorney general to take action against the NAACP, itself, when the desegregation cases started? I'd like your opinion on how effective you thought the attorney general's efforts were.

Bedford: Well, I can recall that. . . I think it was John Ben Shephard at the time who was attorney general of the State of Texas. A suit was filed by the attorney general's office in Tyler, Texas, at that time alleging that the NAACP was a foreign corporation doing business in Texas in violation of the laws of the State of Texas and that it should be enjoined from performing any acts in Texas. This was against the NAACP--the national organization--and also basically it was to shut down the NAACP from doing any sort of work in Texas. I can recall

the case was tried. . . was filed in a Judge Dunagan's court, if I remember correctly. I know it was in Tyler, Texas. As a result, W. J. Durham, C. B. Bunckley, and Thurgood were the lead attorneys. They were in Tyler, Texas, for approximately a month trying this case. They had subpoenaed most of the records, and, if I'm not mistaken, they had courts of inquiry. The Department of Public Safety officers had gone in and asked for and received the records of the NAACP's office---not only the state office but the local offices. That was a very crucial period for the NAACP. Even though there were certain restrictions put on the NAACP and its operation, I think it did achieve its desired effects because I think the NAACP was considerably weakened by the efforts of the attorney general. It did not kill the NAACP, but I think it did have its affect on it and created, in my opinion, some fear among some of the leaders who had been very active. It was sort of like a purge. Everybody was under a cloud of doubt and suspicion, you know, and the state offices, as well as the local offices, were really being pressed by this suit. I think that it had an effect on the NAACP. Maybe time would have had an effect because you had a new movement coming in in the '60's, certainly, and maybe that movement was going to come anyway. But I think that the strength of the NAACP was certainly diluted because of the suit filed by the attorney general.

Bodnar: Can you state more particularly what people would have to fear from the actions by the state against the NAACP?

Bedford: Well, first of all, there were a number of blacks who supported the NAACP but who did not openly say, "I supported the NAACP." You had teachers who would give money, but, you know, "Don't use my name" (chuckle), or things of that nature, see. Because they felt that the NAACP was, at that time, a hated group. They felt that the NAACP was almost equated with being Communist, you know. They'd say, "You're a member of the NAACP; you're against everything that's American to say that you want equal rights," (chuckle) you know. So that's the way the NAACP was perceived at that time. Of course, now the NAACP is a very good organization. Nobody perceives it as an organization trying to destroy the American system anymore. But those persons who didn't want to be actively involved in the struggle but who wanted to give finance and funds to . . . all of a sudden their names are going to be published, you know: "We're going to go and find out. . . we want the list of all your members," see. You had people who had to deal in the community who didn't want others to know--they didn't want the white community to know--that they supported the NAACP for fear that they would have some retaliatory against them, whether they would lose their job as a principal of the school, whether they would lose his

job as a teacher, or just whether he would lose her job as a maid, you know. "You gave money to that NAACP--you're fired." So to expose the membership of the NAACP meant that the whole membership, then, would be exposed to some retaliatory action by the white employer.

Bodnar: I see. And you feel it did have a definite effect?

Bedford: I do.

Bodnar: Okay, Judge Bedford, since you participated as an attorney in desegregation cases in the early years, starting--well, the first date I have here, I believe, is '55--do you feel that the situations, from your point of view, would have been improved if we'd have had stronger national leadership at the time? In particular, it's been alleged that if President Eisenhower would have spoken up much stronger in favor of the Brown decision, that could have avoided a lot of difficulty.

Bedford: I don't think there's any question that your national leadership sets the key to anything. It's sort of like . . . people don't look down to see what's supposed to go up, but they look up to see what's supposed to come down to them. So as the tone is set by your national leadership, so the local leaders . . . to kind of give you an example, one of the things that I've often said, when we talk about the problems we've had in the '60's with law and order, and when they talk about respect for the court and respect for your system of justice. . . I've

always felt that the attacks up on the Supreme Court, because of its rulings concerning civil rights cases and civil liberties. . . it's kind of difficult to attack the highest court and say that they are no good or to hang them or to do whatever we need to impeach them and that the Warren court is the worst court in the world and then turn around shortly thereafter and say, "But respect this state court," or "this district court," or "this justice of the peace court." It just doesn't work that way. And it's the same thing even with when the governor says, "Well, I don't care what the law says. I'm going to do it this way." And then he later says, "Well, everybody ought to respect the law." You should respect the law. You just can't be at the head and expect those who are under you to have more respect than you do. So it is my opinion that whenever the President takes an affirmative stand--whether they like it or not--he is the head, and people do react to how the head of any organization or country reacts. So the President can set the tone. No matter what it is, he sets the tone because he is the President and no one else is the President but him. If the President doesn't care or gives it a glancing look, then the rest give it a glancing look if even a look at all! If the President is affirmative in his actions, then the others become more affirmative. They might not be as affirmative, but at least things do happen.

Bodnar: And you believe that Eisenhower's wavering attitude on school desegregation was a detriment to your purposes?

Bedford: I think if he'd been much stronger, he could have solved a number of the problems by just saying, "This is the law and this is the way it is." Say, a Harry Truman. Let's use him for example because I was in law school when he said, "Look, there's going to be no more segregation in the armed services." He said it and he meant it, and even though there perhaps still exists some, it's not on the basis that it was because he took the initiative and said, "This is it." I think that if President Eisenhower said, "As far as I'm concerned, this is it. The Supreme Court has said this. This is it. This is the law, and I'm going to make sure it is followed," I think it would have had a whole different tone.

Bodnar: Judge Bedford, do you feel that if Eisenhower had taken a strong stand, in your dealings with the school board here in Dallas, do you think they would have fought desegregation less and that they would have been more willing to initiate desegregation policies?

Bedford: I can't really say. Only thing I can say is that Dallas was a very strong base for Eisenhower for President, so maybe they liked the stand he took (chuckle).

Bodnar: But do you think the fact that it was a strong base for Eisenhower, then the reverse would be true? If he would have said,



"This is now the law. We have to do it," that it could have had an effect on the people in Dallas?

Bedford: It could have. I really can't. . . it's a question that is very difficult to answer, but I think wherever the President takes a strong stand. . . President Johnson in 19 . . . I guess it was '64 when he came out and said, "Look, this is the way . . . I'm asking Congress to pass these bills," and he made the statement over the radio. Now even though there may have been persons who said, "I don't like it," here was the President of the United States saying that, "This has to be done. All citizens are entitled to this as a matter of right."

Bodnar: Talking about these civil rights acts.

Bedford: That's right. Now that itself created an attitude that, "Well, we may not like it, but this is it," you know.

Bodnar: And you feel that Kennedy's election in 1960 helped the cause for black rights?

Bedford: Sure. Right.

Bodnar: Could you feel the difference yourself as a civil rights attorney then?

Bedford: Well, I tell you one of the main things I can really say about this particular issue is that Kenneth Holby, who was the young black attorney. . . for the first time, he got involved in the campaign. He ended up in Washington, and no blacks had ever

before gotten to Washington. All the sudden, there were black attorneys being asked to come into government service. As far as I'm concerned. . . I don't have any knowledge as to how it was in Chicago or New York, but I'm saying that black attorneys began to appear on the scene in government offices. The question of fair employment became more pronounced. These are some of the things that happened as a result of his election. I know Kenneth left Dallas and went to Washington as an attorney with HEW. I'm not sure whether it's HUD or HEW. But anyway, he got into the labor, housing, or something of that nature. It could have been with the Labor Department. But we began to move into areas that we had not moved in before.

Bodnar: When did the Dallas Bar start accepting black members?

Bedford: I think about ten years ago.

Bodnar: About ten years ago?

Bedford: Yes.

Bodnar: Do you feel that Lyndon B. Johnson was beneficial to the black cause?

Bedford: Without any question. As far as I'm personally concerned, I think Lyndon B. Johnson probably was the only person who could have carried out Kennedy's dreams or his programs. . . the Civil Rights Act. I have another (chuckle). . . maybe this is, as we say, a sort of sidecar comment, but it has always been my

opinion that when a southerner decides that this is the right thing to do that he's more steadfast in his beliefs than those from other areas of the country. So when Lyndon B. Johnson decided, "This is what needs to be done," I think he was very sincere and he wasn't going to waver from his intentions and purposes. That's just my comments, you know. Justice Black, who sat on the Supreme Court, when he got to the Supreme Court, he says, "Well, this is the way I feel about it," and then he didn't waver. So that's just a little comment as to when a person who has been raised in one area and one type of life sees something different and says that everybody--black or white--are entitled to it, he's pretty steadfast once he takes that into consideration (chuckle).

Bodnar: And you'd say that firmness, once they make up their mind, holds true for both white and black southerners?

Bedford: Well, I don't know when you say white and black southerners. See, most black Southerners don't have that choice (chuckle). Because, see, he can say, well, the only choice he has is to be passive or active, but he doesn't have a choice other than that. Maybe you could say that they do have a choice.

Bodnar: All right, very briefly. . . it's not really our topic, but do you think there was a wavering in support after the Nixon election?

Bedford: Yes.

Bodnar: What about through the presidency of Gerald Ford? Do you think that it still stayed down?

Bedford: I think it did. I think it stayed down for two reasons. Number one, the country was in such turmoil as to what happened during the Nixon years that the main issue then was to try to get the country back in line and to try to get things straight. "We have to worry about that before we worry about what's for blacks or denials of rights," because that was the major problem with the country itself. You just couldn't say that it had affected just one segment or one racial group.

Bodnar: And you think there will be a change with the Carter presidency.

Bedford: I think so. I think it's already changed. Well, I'll put it like this--there are high hopes.

Bodnar: Do you believe your feelings are those of the black community?

Bedford: Yes. High hopes.

Bodnar: Now this is a good question, Judge Bedford. Do you think it was worth it?

Bedford: Oh, I wouldn't trade it for anything in the world. First of all, I met some outstanding lawyers who gave me an image to work with. Second of all, it gave me a sense of self-confidence whereby I felt being black had nothing to do with my ability as a lawyer because of the trailblazers like C. B. Bunckley and like W. J. Durham and like Thurgood. It enriched me, as

far as I'm concerned, to have lawyers like Romeo Williams, who was living in Marshall at the time of the sit-ins, who became involved and maybe as an indirect result lost his life. But he was all part of this. I wouldn't have missed it. I really enjoyed just being with these guys. I felt that black lawyers had done a great deal to make the Constitution a living document rather than a piece of paper. I'm very grateful that I had the opportunity to work with those who have brought about a change. And this change is not only for blacks but this change is for whites. It benefited them as well as it benefited the blacks.

Bodnar: Do you think the black people have benefited from desegregation?

Bedford: Yes.

Bodnar: Could you be more specific?

Bedford: All right. First of all, we deal with economics. To be able to get a job. . . when you go downtown, you may walk in any store, and you will see sales personnel--black . . . both women and men. In 1950, you could go into that same store, and you would see an elevator operator or a porter but nobody selling anything. Maybe you couldn't even go into the store; maybe they didn't even want your business, see. In 1950, you didn't see any blacks driving certain things like city buses. Now you see blacks who drive city buses. They didn't even have black

garbage men--trash men. And now you have. . . now these jobs may be not too important, but it shows you that when you're discriminated against, you can't even get a menial job. There were not black. . . basically firemen. Nobody read the water meter. We had to fight to even get postmen. . . to work for the government. So there are so many jobs that you have-- opportunities that you have. . . telephone operators--you don't have to have a degree to be a telephone operator. So these are the things that make the fight important because, as a result, someone has a new job that he would not have had or she would not have had because the jobs were strictly domestic or common labor, and there were a few who taught school and were professionals.

Bodnar: Judge Bedford, since you did represent the NAACP on other civil rights cases, I take it from what you're saying, what you mean is that all this emanated from the Brown decision.

Bedford: No, not all of this. There were a lot of cases that I think were. . . I think when we talk about the Brown decision, we're talking about basically the schools. But when we say all this, I'm talking about the hiring practices, home ownership, and the right to live wherever you desire. The Brown case. . . a lot of these things were in the works and just went along with the Brown case. The Brown case, to me, dealt with, "Let's talk about

education and public schools." I don't think the Brown case was the whole cornerstone of this--except in education. There were cases that. . . even just the right to eat in a dining car, you know, on interstate travel. These cases had been . . . these cases had gone before the Supreme Court. The right to have a pullman car, you know; the right to be segregated in a different car, on the bus--all these cases were important, and they were not part of the Brown case. But it was all something that the NAACP had been involved in.

Bodnar: I see. Then you consider the Brown case important, but it certainly would have not stood alone. You need all of the support from these other areas that were going on.

Bedford: That's right. That's right.

Bodnar: Well, Judge Bedford, I've aksed you a lot of questions. Is there anything that you wish to say at this time?

Bedford: Well, no. I just say again that if I had to say anything, I would pay compliments and respects to the men who, I think, have done an excellent job in working with the cases. In my mind that would be W. J. Durham and C. B. Bunckley, who, to me, worked very hard and who contributed a great deal to the progress through these particular types of civil rights cases.

Bodnar: Well, thank you very much, Judge Bedford.