

MS450_031

Interviewer: Bayor, Ronald H.

Interviewee: Thompson, Robert

Interview date: 1985-07-17

Transcription date: 2014

**Georgia Institute of Technology Archives, Ron Bayor Papers
(MS450)**

RONALD BAYOR: [00:00:00] OK, so let's begin with this -- that Atlanta Housing Council report, and the six areas designated for black expansion. I guess I was curious, first of all, why -- why the black leadership would designate areas rather than just try and expand what areas were possible.

ROBERT THOMPSON: You must go back to '46, '45, where there was the Ku Klux Klan marching up and down [Cover?] Street, Chestnut Street, harassing blacks. There was a hate organization called Columbians --

BAYOR: Yeah, I think I've heard of them.

THOMPSON: -- dynamiting homes of blacks who had moved into the Kennedy, Jet, Fox area, census tracts 8 and 7; that's northwest Atlanta up there. [00:01:00] So the blacks got together under the leadership of the late W.H. [Ajax?], a contractor, a very wealthy contractor, and we formed the Atlanta Housing Council. We met weekly at the offices -- his offices in the Rucker Building at the corner of Piedmont and Alden Avenues.

BAYOR: Yeah, that's one the (inaudible).

THOMPSON: Right. That was his office -- to find a solution to the problems of blacks and housing. Veterans were coming back, housing was being built for whites; very, very little was being done for blacks. So we decided, the better part of (inaudible), to find areas that blacks could move into peaceably. So we set -- [00:02:00] the council designated these six expansion areas in this city, mostly outside of the old city limits of Atlanta, which at that time had approximately 27 square miles [of land?]. We recognized that in '46, '47, '48, one official of Georgia Power Company had built Oglethorpe Apartments near Oglethorpe University, [six or eight?] -- 11 units with that one. And W.H. Aiken had to -- or finally got 24 units of Section 6 or 8 units. Which is now occupied by Morris Brown College at the corner of Walnut -- [00:03:00] or Vine and MLK. So there was a tremendous imbalance of housing made available to blacks. About 1,000 units -- I forget the guy's name who built the [Winnona Park?] Apartments.

BAYOR: So really, you were trying to find housing, then, that you could move into without any kind of violence erupting?

THOMPSON: Right. Because the town was about to explode.

BAYOR: Yeah, so I've read, yeah.

THOMPSON: And at the same time as we designated these areas, we said to the city fathers, here are safe areas that blacks, who own land in many of them, should be able to develop housing for blacks, or Negroes at that particular time. The city fathers and the leaders of (inaudible) the idea.

[00:04:00]

BAYOR: That's the Metropolitan Planning Council (inaudible).

THOMPSON: It became firmly fixed in the minds of the people at that time that these were areas, safe areas, that blacks could move in. At the same time, the housing council found 52 acres of land owned by the county, Fulton County, at the corner -- the northwest corner of West Lake and Simpson, which is now occupied by Allen Temple AME Church. We at the Urban League, and the council, sought to acquire that 52 acre plot from the county and build housing. We had approximately 100 or more veterans attending meetings at the offices of the Urban League [00:05:00] and the [Handon Building?], to make an effort to try to acquire that land. That land was subsequently sold by the county to another developer, white, who, in turn, later sold it to a black developer by the name of [Wool?], a contractor who built houses in that area. That happened -- it must have been somewhere between '50 and '55 that that area was developed. No sooner than we had gotten the plan -- this plan of the

council fixed on the minds of the city fathers and blacks, we at the Urban League made another land ownership analysis of all of the land, between Bankhead Avenue and the Fulton County line on the south. You had a map, approximately 20 by 30 feet, and you knew the names and addresses of every landowner in that particular area. And we proceeded at that point to obtain a retail estate broker, and black financiers, professionals, to buy land in that area. One of the successful -- some of the successful developments that occurred in that area were the [Chenault?] (inaudible), [00:07:00] and [Ben Chenault?] bought 128 acres of land to the west of Southwest Community Hospital, which is down there in a very quiet (inaudible). Another -- another tract of land was acquired by -- a 52 acre tract of land was acquired by Dr. J.B. Harris on Peyton Road (inaudible). What [moved?] the development -- at the same time, another development was taking place, namely, Q.B. Williamson, (inaudible). [00:08:00] Q.B. Williamson, [L.D. Milton?], W.S. Cannon, see, (inaudible), yeah, Cannon with a C, *et al.*, bought a 200-acre tract of land, which is now known as [Capitol?] (inaudible). So while the -- it was kind of a -- what they were developing at that time, it was kind of a --

BAYOR: Let me check this here.

THOMPSON: What we were developing at that time was kind of a --
(inaudible) --

BAYOR: Yeah.

THOMPSON: It was kind of a leapfrog principle -- principle. We
were hemmed in.

BAYOR: Yeah, that I could -- from what I could gather, from
what --

THOMPSON: We were hemmed in, [00:09:00] because shortly after
World War II, the late Dr. R.A. Billings wanted to build a
home at the corner of Chickamauga and MLK. That's before
you get to -- Mozley Park, I mean this way. And the whites
objected, because the whites lived in that part of the --
southwest part of the city. So we recognized that we were
fast becoming boxed in. So what we did, we jumped over.
It was a leapfrog process. We read the law. We found this
area, where I now live.

BAYOR: This was white, too.

THOMPSON: No, no. This was vacant land.

BAYOR: Oh, OK.

THOMPSON: All this was vacant. See, the whites had lived -- you
know where you came under the -- under (inaudible)?

BAYOR: Yeah.

THOMPSON: That was a white church there. The whites then moved,
sold that church to Union Baptist Church, black, [00:10:00]

and went to the intersection of [Sewell?] and [Lyndhurst?] and built a huge, beautiful church. And they say, "We are away from the niggers at last." But little do they realize that we had gone beyond Sewell, Southwest Hospital, bought 128 acres. See, the Chenaults had. Dr. Harris had bought land on Peyton Road. OK? The black businessmen bought Crestwood Forest land. Boyle Realty Company bought land on -- on the Crestwood Forest area. So the whites then were -- these whites, down here, but in the Mozley Park area, were pocketed. And we had jumped over, [00:11:00] bought land. Nobody can stop you from buying land. And one of the key persons in this was Morris Abram.

BAYOR: Yeah, I'd like to speak to him on Tuesday, because (inaudible).

THOMPSON: Yeah. We -- the land came into the white real estate firm, [Adam Gates?], that's the name. Right. Morris was the person who then turned, deeded the land to the Chenaults, to pay \$30,000 for the 128 acres.

BAYOR: So he was the intermediary.

THOMPSON: Just an intermediary. J.B. Harris paid \$6,000 for the 52 acres on Peyton Road. What these -- what the black businessmen paid for the land up in Peyton Forest, I don't know, but Q.B. Williamson will be happy to tell you -- to give you that story.

BAYOR: I'll (inaudible).

THOMPSON: Sure.

BAYOR: In terms of the black community being hemmed in,
[00:12:00] why would the government particularly care about
that? I mean, they didn't seem to care very much about
anything else. Why would they --

THOMPSON: We determined that after -- it shouldn't -- it would
not be determined by them, by whites. We found -- and down
in the southwest, the Federal penitentiary, and got a
developer -- there was a man down there who developed his
property. We went to Doraville, found Sally Parsons, who
lived on the north side of Industrial Boulevard. And
blacks had lived on the site where the General Motors plant
is now.

BAYOR: (inaudible)

THOMPSON: General Motors at Doraville. OK? And the --
basically General Motors came into the city of Atlanta and
said they wanted to build a plant. [Scott Candler?] said,
"Good! We'll condemn the houses of the niggers." General
Motors said "No, we don't do business like that. We will
buy their land, we will cross the street to where Sally
Parsons lives, who had lots of land, and relocate, sell the
blacks the land, and help them to build their houses."

BAYOR: I didn't know the corporation was so decent.

THOMPSON: General Motors did that.

BAYOR: That's interesting. That's --

THOMPSON: Now, that's a part of his-- and I'm glad you're taping this, because I may not live long enough to get this out on tape.

BAYOR: Now, this is something I never -- I never came across at all, that's why --

THOMPSON: And the reason that -- and the reason that General Motors wanted to put the plant where it is now located, is that it's on solid rock, and they had to have solid rock for their stamping machines, to stamp the bodies. So -- secondly, it was at the railroad, and this is where General -- that's the history of the General Motors plant at Doraville.

BAYOR: And I guess when General Motors says something, nobody else complained. I mean, they weren't --

THOMPSON: (inaudible), yes. "That isn't the way we do business down here. We just move the niggers." But General Motors said no. Another area, in the [expansion era?], was Margaret Mitchell Drive. The highway split that community, a little black community. And we tried our best, Margaret Mitchell -- it was called Old Bolton Road at that time.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

THOMPSON: And we tried our best to get the blacks improved, to improve the housing, get water and sewer, use of sanitary facilities. Because the whites were moving and surrounding. And one of my good friends, George Goodwin -- you may hear of George Goodwin -- George Goodwin is a very, very fine person. He is with -- he's a newspaperman, now with the firm of [Bell and Standard?], I believe, downtown, George L. Goodwin. At first maybe we should talk to him.

BAYOR: And he's with -- sure.

(15:19 - 15:58 interruption from outside room not transcribed)

BAYOR: And, let's see, [00:16:00], George Goodwin is with [Kuner?].

THOMPSON: A public relations firm. It was Bell and Standard, and it was Bell and Standard, and it may be something else. This is George L. Goodwin.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

THOMPSON: George was a member of the -- (inaudible) -- of a church on Moores Mill Road. And one Saturday afternoon he asked me to come up and meet with the people up there at the church to solicit their assistance in trying to improve the positions of blacks in that area. He was a former board member of the Urban League and a longtime friend of blacks, and for good in the city. Just a very decent guy.

BAYOR: But white.

THOMPSON: Yes, he's white.

BAYOR: [00:17:00] (inaudible). Yes, in terms of these six or so black expansion areas, I take it that Hartsfield had something to do with allowing this to happen or approving it.

THOMPSON: Hartsfield had nothing to do with it.

BAYOR: OK, this was done all beyond the city government, then.

THOMPSON: This was done by a private project. We did this. And what made all of this work was that in about 1949, '50, we formed what was called -- well, two things happened. We formed the Negro Voters League. Black Republicans, black Democrats came together, became a very powerful entity.

BAYOR: That was the [Walden Dobbs?]?

THOMPSON: [00:18:00] Right. Secondly, we formed the All Citizens Registration Committee. And what we did -- Wade Hamilton, Jake Henderson, the late C.A. [Bako?], and myself --

BAYOR: (inaudible).

THOMPSON: -- sat down in Mr. Henderson's apartment, when he was manager of (inaudible) -- of the housing project over here on Chestnut Street. And we discussed the formation. And we decided that we would organize a campaign to increase voter registration. My particular role was to lay out the

city [00:19:00] by census tracts, by blocks, and get enumeration for every block in the city. We called the people together and told them that we were going to do it. And we had census tract captains and block workers.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

THOMPSON: And in six weeks we put 25,000 blacks on the vote -- approximately 25,000.

BAYOR: And this is what -- this is what, I take it, made Hartsfield sit up and take notice.

THOMPSON: Oh, sure. And made it. Because as I understand it, during his very first administration, I was in the service at that time. But he said, "Well, I can't do anything because you ain't got the vote." OK, we got the vote. And then he just flip-flopped.

BAYOR: Because then there was the hiring of black police.

THOMPSON: That didn't come until much later.

BAYOR: OK, but that was, I guess, related to the --

THOMPSON: [00:20:00] Oh, sure. Not only that, but we were able to loosen money from white institutions.

BAYOR: Oh, because of the voting. What sort of money, and for what?

THOMPSON: For housing. I'll give you an example of the clout that we had at that particular time. I read that Connecticut General Life Insurance Company was making

residential loans in the city of Atlanta. And I have correspondence somewhere in here. I wrote a letter to the president of Connecticut General and asked why -- or if he would make loans to Negroes at that time. I don't recall as to whether or not I got a reply. But I did get a call from the late -- the person who was named to the housing project over here on [Ashwood?] -- [00:21:00] it was named after -- he was connected with [Adam Gates?] -- John O. Childs. John O. Childs called me at the Urban League and said, "Bob, I understand that you need some money from Connecticut General. Why didn't you tell me that you wanted money?" "Mr. Childs, I didn't know that you were the correspondent for Connecticut General." "How much money do you want?" "I want two loans of \$20-25,000 each, mainly for the late H.M. Jackson, a housing official, and James Gilbert, of the housing." Those two loans were made.

BAYOR: To be used for black housing, mortgages?

THOMPSON: Mortgages, yeah.

BAYOR: How about the banks in town? How about the Trust Company and those?

THOMPSON: Well, the Trust Company -- you see, banks don't really make it. [00:22:00] But I can say this in favor of Atlanta Federal, which is now Georgia Federal. W.O. Duvall had

loaned -- or made many mortgages to Aiken, W.H. Aiken, for loans.

BAYOR: White?

THOMPSON: Oh, yes.

BAYOR: He's white.

THOMPSON: That's right.

BAYOR: So in -- well, just in terms of summing that part, in terms of black leaders there who are pushing through certain areas, these are the areas that they felt they could get without violence, and these were the areas that blacks really wanted to --

THOMPSON: And blacks owned the land.

BAYOR: OK, that's important. (inaudible).

THOMPSON: And the other -- the other thing that we failed with, I failed -- when I recorded this, there's a great deal of regret -- I failed to show blacks -- I kept saying it, [00:23:00] I said, "You ought to allow them -- you've got this -- these areas designated" -- and blacks are beginning to build and buy houses and develop it -- "you should be looking at the area between I-85, I-75, and Downtown Five Points." I call that the Golden Triangle. And every now and then I run across the old-timers who say, "I wish I had listened."

BAYOR: That's right.

THOMPSON: They didn't listen. They listened to this area here, and other areas, but I could not get them to go into that area. They would be multi-- blacks would have been multi-millionaires.

BAYOR: Oh, sure. Atlanta at that time was just -- I guess it was cheap because it was decaying.

THOMPSON: For sure.

BAYOR: OK, let me mention a few other things. I came across a few agreements between the Empire Real Estate Board and the city on racial transition in certain southwest neighborhoods. In other words, an agreement between [00:24:00] Empire and the city in 1952, for example, to a boundary line for black expansion at the northern part of Westview Drive, which was pretty close to here. And I was curious about, why -- again, why blacks would accept that type of boundary line with the city stepping in as an intermediary.

THOMPSON: Violence.

BAYOR: Again, violence. (inaudible). Same thing, the agreements with the Westside Mutual Development Corporation?

THOMPSON: Violence.

BAYOR: Yeah, you know, I guess that would be related to why blacks who had bought homes were being harassed would agree

to sell it back to whites and get out of that neighborhood.
Because I came across that a few times (inaudible).

THOMPSON: What happened over here in the Mozley Park area, you see, this area from Anderson Avenue was all vacant, vacant land. We found the owners. [00:25:00] Instead of trying to get blacks to put money to buy land, we encouraged the blacks who owned the land across the street, and beyond, the Chenaults, to develop it. We got Knox Corporation, at that time, it was -- an interesting sideline here. Tom Cousins came to our office and said, "I represent the Knox Corporation." And we got into things we can -- of interest to us. I said, good. Down the road here, about three blocks, there are 67 houses that the Chenaults entered into contract with the Knox Corporation, with Cousins -- Tom Cousins.

BAYOR: Now, why was he interested in that, besides making money?

THOMPSON: He was employed by Knox Corporation at that time.

[00:26:00]

BAYOR: Now, in other words, the Knox Corporation, that was here -- that would be --

THOMPSON: No, it was located in Thomson, Georgia.

BAYOR: OK. A white firm?

THOMPSON: A white firm, and they were in prefab houses.

BAYOR: So they sort of just (inaudible).

THOMPSON: Of course. What they did was, the Chenaults owned the land. The Knox Corporation came in, got the streets paved, the water, the sewer, and everything. The Chenaults went to the closing of the [knolls?], when the houses were sold, and picked up \$1,666 per lot, and they hadn't done anything. And Tom Cousins, that was his beginning.

BAYOR: I didn't realize he was involved in that. That's interesting, too.

THOMPSON: Tom would tell you today that -- if you talk with him, we became very good friends after that. And I kept saying to him, "Tom, you've got to come downtown. [00:27:00] You've got to come downtown." "Bob, I am." I said, "Now, the Georgia Tech of the Metropolitan Planning Council, and Georgia Tech (inaudible), have made a study of the hole in Atlanta's heart." I said, "(inaudible) of the railroads. Why don't you come on down and do something about it?" And Tom -- if you talk to him, he'll tell you that probably I had something to do with his development downtown today. We've been friends a long, long time.

BAYOR: Well, I can see, if it goes back to (inaudible), yeah. Let's see, I also came across a 1954 agreement on the Collier Heights area regarding an access road being used as the dividing line. This seems to be one of a number of

cases of highways being used as dividing lines, boundary lines. And again, was it acceptable to the black community to accept this --

THOMPSON: [00:28:00] Collier Heights area?

BAYOR: Yeah, I don't know what you call it.

THOMPSON: Which --

BAYOR: Well, this 1954 agreement. But it's the same kind of agreement for using I-20 as a -- as a boundary line, too, going through the Adamsville area. You know, I -- what I'm finding out, now that I've gone through the Hartsfield papers and the (inaudible) planning papers, and what I could gather was that some roads were actually put in certain directions, and moved around in certain directions, simply to provide the buffer that they needed between the black and white communities.

THOMPSON: In the Collier Heights area?

BAYOR: Yeah, and in the Adamsville area. Yeah, in Adamsville, the route that the West Expressway, which became -- this road, was used a boundary line, according to the city planning bureau report. It was actually -- I don't know how much this was going through the black community, but certainly the city planning board was using that road specifically as a dividing line.

THOMPSON: [00:29:00] The Perimeter -- the circular road around the city?

BAYOR: Yes. Well, I-20, in this case I-20, the West Expressway.

THOMPSON: No, no. I-20 was scheduled to come on this side of the railroad tracks. We got it moved to the other side of the railroad. It would have destroyed all of these homes. It would have been much more expensive to put the highway through here.

BAYOR: How about as a dividing line?

THOMPSON: No, there's no dividing line, because this was all black.

BAYOR: Yeah. OK, I'll have to recheck that thing. Again, I came across a lot of access roads being talked about as dividing lines. This is from the Hartsfield papers, but as he would write -- people saying, "We have to hurry up and finish up the so-and-so access road, because the people -- the white people in the area are getting nervous, [00:30:00] and we have to build that road to keep them feeling secure, because the black community" --

THOMPSON: There weren't any roads built. There weren't any roads built. The nearest thing that -- one of the damnable things that Hartsfield and the Fulton County Commissioner did, when Dr. Harris bought the 52 acres of land on Peyton

Road. The County Commissioners and the city of Atlanta did the following. They ran a spur line from this railroad across MLK to -- to make an industrial site, to block westward expansion. But hell, we were much beyond that at that time.

BAYOR: So what was the purpose of that, then?

THOMPSON: The purpose of it, he wanted to block the westward expansion of blacks going into Audubon Forest, way down on Cascade, and the fine areas down there. But he did not know that blacks had bought 128 acres, and we had formed a corporation called [00:31:00] Western Land Incorporated, and bought 85 acres on the east side of Fayetteville Road, across -- just -- no, Southwest Hospital. That corporation was headed by Walden, myself, Dr. J.B. Harris, and [Marcie?]. We formed that corporation and bought that 85 acres for \$30,000, and in 19 -- let's see, 1950; we sold it in about 1962 for \$85,000.

BAYOR: I understand you were then sort of bouncing over the buffer zones.

THOMPSON: We had gone over.

BAYOR: Yeah, yeah. Another thing that sort of relates to that, the highways being used to displace blacks. That's something else I came across, that the highway through the city, the north-south highway, was planned with the idea of

cutting through black neighborhoods, [00:32:00] (inaudible) 75-85 cutting through Auburn Avenue, that the highway was shifted from a route west of the business area. It was supposed to be originally elevated over the [railroad gulch?], and it was switched to the eastern route to cut through and displace blacks in that Auburn Avenue area. And this was done apparently at the insistence of city leaders.

THOMPSON: Why?

BAYOR: You haven't come across anything like that at all?

THOMPSON: Why? There was a planner by the name of [Lachner?] --

BAYOR: Yeah, this highway still (inaudible).

THOMPSON: The Lachner plan called for a highway to go through the (inaudible), and it ran into a bottleneck because it would have gone right through Grady Hospital. OK? So they moved the road, Downtown Connector, to its present location. And you'll notice that it is -- you come in -- you come into Atlanta from the north, [00:33:00] and you've got kind a curve there.

BAYOR: Right, to swing around to the east.

THOMPSON: That's right. They swung around the black community, because we had the power, at that time, to influence the location of the road. And what they wanted to go right straight through, the Atlanta Life building, which in turn

would have gone straight through Grady Hospital. And it would cost -- it would have been too expensive.

BAYOR: But how about going over the railroad gulch, though?

That would have been (inaudible).

THOMPSON: The railroad bridge near the --

BAYOR: Yeah.

THOMPSON: It would have been expensive, too, but not nearly as expensive as it would -- where they're now looking, [the road?].

BAYOR: Yeah, because there's not -- isn't that the same kind of cut through to Auburn Avenue, which was certainly -- it cut through that section.

THOMPSON: It cut over all of that. But that highway didn't displace too many people. [00:34:00] What displaced blacks in that area was the urban renewal.

BAYOR: OK.

THOMPSON: And the interesting thing there, on that urban renewal (inaudible), there were three urban renewal projects. The [Lawson?] Washington Street projects, the Auburn Avenue project, let's see, (inaudible). I can't -- I don't recall the third one that was approved at that time. But we at the Urban League said, "Well, if you want to displace these people, you've got to have some place to put them." We said that the barrier of Rockdale Park would be a

relocation (inaudible) area. [00:35:00] And the Federal pen area. At the same time, the Atlanta Housing Authority had an allocation to build 2,000 public housing units. And one of the executives -- a Mr. Farrell, I think his name was -- wanted to put all 2,000 of them on -- in South Atlanta, where we had -- where we had built High Point Apartments. And we said no, put 1,000 down there and put the other 1,000 out in Rockdale Park.

BAYOR: And they agreed to it?

THOMPSON: Yes.

BAYOR: I think two things that relate to what you just brought up. First of all, the use of public housing as buffers. And I came across, again, the use of Joel Chandler Harris Homes, which started as a white project --

THOMPSON: Yes.

BAYOR: -- as a buffer. Was that -- was that true, was that -
-

THOMPSON: [00:36:00] (inaudible)

BAYOR: OK. And also the use of public housing to move black -- the black population to the west side. I came across a number of things like that, that there seemed to be almost a set plan to just uproot the black community out of the central area and move it to the west side during the '50s. Now, I don't know what the black community's response to

that was. I've got a few quotes saying they were sort of bitter that no public housing was built up at Northside. Everything was being shifted over to the west side and southwest area.

THOMPSON: There wasn't any vacant land in northeast Atlanta to build public housing, OK, except the Atlanta Housing Authority wanted to acquire a site, a tract of land near the old [Everson?] Hospital.

BAYOR: Right, I remember that.

THOMPSON: And the Baptist minister -- [00:37:00] what is that (inaudible) name -- got up in City Hall and prayed a long prayer -- oh, what is that guy's name -- and very -- he may be dead or very, very aged now -- one prominent Baptist minister.

BAYOR: I have come across his name, too. I don't remember it, though.

THOMPSON: That we don't want this project over northeast Atlanta. At the same time, the city of Atlanta was about to issue a -- have a bond referendum to widen North Avenue, which at that time dead-ended at Sears Roebuck.

BAYOR: Really?

THOMPSON: And we said, OK, we don't approve, we won't go along with it, because we want North Avenue open all the way.

[00:38:00] And there was a white guy at the hall, City

Hall, named [Joe?] -- and again, it's frustrating, the name escapes me -- and the Uptown Improvement Association fought to keep North Avenue from being widened beyond Sears Roebuck. But we said, if you do, you won't pass the bond program.

BAYOR: Now, to widen it past Sears Roebuck, would have meant what, now?

THOMPSON: Opening that up all the way east. Because you go down -- I can't remember that street -- where Sears Roebuck is, the corner of Ponce de Leon and some street. And we said that North Avenue must be widened, and all the way through. Because blacks had moved -- [00:39:00] the whites want -- didn't want blacks to cross North Avenue and Ponce de Leon. So they wanted to keep North Avenue closed.

BAYOR: I also came across some information that there was an effort to rezone North Avenue for commercial purposes, again, I think as a commercial buffer --

THOMPSON: That's right, that is true. They tried all of that.

BAYOR: OK, let's see. OK, there's also -- again, as buffers, from what I've read, the purpose of the stadium, where it was put; the purpose of the Civic Center, and where it was put. Were they located there, again, to displace the black community on the south side and to act as buffers between the black community and the business (inaudible)?

THOMPSON: No. That was -- the stadium was in an urban renewal area.

BAYOR: Yeah.

THOMPSON: And Ivan Allen got the stadium there, [00:40:00] even when he didn't have title to the land. He was hell-bent on getting the stadium and a baseball team here. So he acted. And this was no effort to displace blacks. It was already an urban renewal area.

BAYOR: And the Civic Center, same thing?

THOMPSON: The Civic Center?

BAYOR: (inaudible) bottom area?

THOMPSON: A lot of that bottom area was an urban renewal area, too.

BAYOR: So there's no reason why federal projects couldn't be put in those urban renewal areas, is that right?

THOMPSON: Blacks could have bought land and developed the same damn thing.

BAYOR: That's right. (inaudible) could be the develop-- the new housing, (inaudible).

THOMPSON: Yes. But at the same time, the stadium was -- to my way of thinking, it's the best place for it. I'm not too concerned that housing should be -- should be down there, because it was a horrible hellhole, [00:41:00] when they

got to clean that area out. And we knew that the stadium -

-

BAYOR: But you also needed housing.

THOMPSON: Yes, but we were -- we were making plans for housing.

We had the 221 Houses, we had the private enterprise houses, 608, we had 220 -- 203 Houses. Blacks were building all over the city of Atlanta. Moving these blacks out. And what I guess I'm saying is, that somebody coming in and looking at this, as if to say, well, the city did this; the whites did this -- the blacks determined to (inaudible) their own future.

BAYOR: That's part of what I wanted to hear. You know, the white part is really written up in a lot of books.

THOMPSON: Yes.

BAYOR: I don't know if the black part is really (inaudible).

THOMPSON: We determined where we wanted to live, to a very great extent.

BAYOR: So you did have some leverage with City Hall, and your leverage was through the votes --

THOMPSON: Through the votes.

BAYOR: Especially on bond voting.

THOMPSON: That's right. That's right. Another example of the power of the vote, [00:42:00] when Ivan Allen decided to run to become mayor, we had a meeting out at the home of

L.B. Milton on West -- on Waterford Road. And this was initiated by, I think, Milton, [Yates?], maybe it had been [Grace Hamilton?], and some others. I attended that meeting. And one of the things we said to him, we want Simpson Street from North Avenue -- or Northside Drive to Ashby Street widened. Give us commitment that you will do this, and we will put you in office. And he agreed.

BAYOR: It was done?

THOMPSON: It was done.

BAYOR: That's the way the government works, I guess.

THOMPSON: The county commissioners reneged on their part.

[00:43:00] The county was supposed to pick up the widening of Simpson Road from Ashby Street to West Lake, to widen and straighten it out. The county commissioners failed to do this.

BAYOR: So the city kept its deal, but the county didn't, I guess.

THOMPSON: That's right.

BAYOR: That was another area I wanted to bring up, too. If -
- let's see, here we go. It struck me that there were certain areas where the -- oh, yeah. Certain areas where the city government tried to keep blacks from changing those areas by offering better city services. It seemed to me before that a lot of black areas didn't have paved

streets, were poorly served by sanitation services, and so on, and so on. And it seemed like when the city got the Empire Real Estate Board to agree to stay in a certain area, [00:44:00] there was now an effort made by the city to provide things like paved roads, and water and sewer, and so on, if the blacks agreed to a certain boundary line.

THOMPSON: Unh-unh.

BAYOR: You didn't see that, either. OK.

THOMPSON: No. No. You must realize that in subdivisions, the developer had to pay the cost of the streets, the water, the water line. The city put in the sewer lines, the city put in the water lines, but all of the other things were borne by the developer. So in Peyton Forest -- or Crestwood Forest, black money and entrepreneurship, you know, did that. Down here in Peyton -- in Peyton Forest -- Peyton Forest is [Harris's?] -- the developer did all of that.

BAYOR: OK, no help from the city, then?

THOMPSON: [00:45:00] Oh, yes. We got help from the city, because once the development was approved, the city had to go in and do these things.

BAYOR: Well, they didn't have to --

THOMPSON: No, they didn't --

BAYOR: But they never did it before.

THOMPSON: We didn't have large scale subdivisions done before, either. They had to put these things in. Nobody's going to -- no developer or mortgager is going to put money in a subdivision on dirt roads.

BAYOR: Agreed. But, you know, my thinking was that the city was willing to agree -- also, again, to certain expansion areas, with the stipulation that the blacks would stay there, and they would provide them with --

THOMPSON: No, no, no, no, no. No. We put those roads in, black money and white money put those roads in to Peyton Forest, Crestwood Forest, and other subdivisions. We were treated just like any other white subdivision. [00:46:00] They had to do that. Because [Duvall?] would have raised hell -- (inaudible) would have raised hell if you wanted to put all of this money into a subdivision with dirt roads.

BAYOR: Yeah, I guess he would. How about -- all right, I've come across some cases, for example, Westview Drive, the black community was allowed to go to about 100 yards of Westview Drive. Westview Drive was the boundary line. And from what I -- what I gather that the 100 yards leading to Westview Drive was not paved. And that was, again, the thought that Westview Drive was a buffer, and the 100 yards of unpaved road was supposed to be a buffer, also. And I

got the feeling the city paved and didn't pave roads
depending on --

THOMPSON: Westview Drive was always paved.

BAYOR: Well, the roads leading up to Westview Drive.

THOMPSON: There were no roads unpaved leading into Westview
Drive.

BAYOR: I think I read that in the article (inaudible) [Alicia
McIntyre?] wrote. I'm just trying to --

THOMPSON: No roads were unpaved. [00:47:00] The only road that
was deliberately cut or unpaved was Fair Street between
Chickamauga and the railroad. That was the only paved
road. Westview Drive and -- was a main artery. It's paved
all the way through, ever since I've been here.

BAYOR: OK, but how about, again, the roads leading up to
Westview Drive?

THOMPSON: On both sides.

BAYOR: Paved also?

THOMPSON: Sure.

BAYOR: How about situations in which the roads would be paved
leading from one black subdivision to another, and in a way
that...

(break in audio)

THOMPSON: ...they finally approved High Point Apartments, \$55 a
month -- and \$55 a month, I'm sorry, instead of \$45. And

blacks moved into that apartment. Then we got the Housing Authority to build 1,000 units on the east side of the street. [00:48:00] And that opened up that whole area. What we -- what we were doing at that time, we used government to help blacks move out of the 24-square-mile, or whatever square -- or whatever the acres were of Atlanta, move of this small area, because Hartsfield, during his first administration, (inaudible) -- and during his first administration, appealed to Buckhead, "Do you want the niggers to run Atlanta? You've got to come into the city of Atlanta."

BAYOR: Yeah, I came across a lot of private papers that said just that.

THOMPSON: Right. (inaudible). So we used the public housing authority, [00:49:00] took the project out of Rockdale Park, put down here in South Atlanta. So this helps us to get out, while at the same time, private blacks were buying land and developing it, too. So we used practically every opportunity that we -- instrument that we had available to us to break out, because Atlanta was in the process of expanding its city limits to 118 square miles. And if we were going to get out, that was the particular time to get out.

BAYOR: That's right. That's right. So you don't remember anything about -- again, getting back to this High Point Apartments, for instance, this highway business that was involved there, about sending a delegation to Washington to change the route of the road?

THOMPSON: I don't -- I'm not aware of that.

BAYOR: And getting back to this outlying area that is, again -- I came across in 1961 a letter [00:50:00] from [Kim You?] to Cecil Alexander on the Ben Hill section, in which apparently the FHA had approved 221 housing for whites in that area but not for blacks. So I was curious why.

THOMPSON: They -- back to a gentleman, a retired Army man by the name of General (inaudible).

BAYOR: Was it Malcolm?

THOMPSON: Malcolm Jones.

BAYOR: He's still around.

THOMPSON: Is he still around?

BAYOR: Yeah.

THOMPSON: Hah hah. I haven't seen Malcolm in years. The city -
- the city policy was x number of units for whites, x number of units for blacks, OK? And they said, OK, what about these units? We prevailed upon the city to put 221 units and (inaudible) [00:51:00] down there where the [commons?] were -- and now that area is demolished now --

prevailed upon the city to put 221 units on Fairburn Road west of the Harper High School. It was -- if it had been left to Malcolm, (inaudible) would not have gotten those 221, (inaudible), yeah, he wasn't that bad.

BAYOR: He was no friend.

THOMPSON: Well, we made a friend out of him.

BAYOR: The -- apparently, you felt -- you thought housing for blacks could sell in the outlying areas. That was one of the points you apparently made.

THOMPSON: Yes.

BAYOR: And apparently the FAH rejected outlying black housing. And particularly, the race advisor to the FAH, a fellow named [Al Thompson?], [00:52:00] who was black, opposed outlying 221 housing for blacks. And I was curious why -- why a black FAH official would oppose outlying projects.

THOMPSON: Al did not oppose the project down in Ben Hill.

BAYOR: The 221.

THOMPSON: He did not oppose the 221 houses built on the west side of Hightower Road, which at that time was outside of the city limits. Both projects were outside of the city limits. But Al had administrator (inaudible) who were, to some extent, negative. And Al was a real friend on the inside who helped us tremendously. [00:53:00] The FHA

houses in Crestwood Forest, the FHA houses in Peyton Forest, anywhere, Al was right there assisting. Of course, Al was a part of the Housing Council, as was H.M. Jack-- Hubert M. Jackson, who -- Al was the racial relations advisor for FHA. H. -- Hubert M. Jackson was racial advisor -- racial -- race relations advisor to the PHA. They -- their offices were segregated. They were located in Odd Fellows Building on Auburn Avenue. They were not allowed --

BAYOR: In the government building.

THOMPSON: Where the rest of their -- where their counterparts there. And it was not until -- [00:54:00] I forget the year, but I think it was more or less when Bob Weaver became secretary, he said, "Hell, this doesn't make sense. You go there, where your other co-workers are, Al, and Hubert, you go where your PHA people are." So --

BAYOR: If he opposed outlying housing for blacks, it would be simply because of pressure from his superiors.

THOMPSON: I'm not too sure that he did, by virtue of the fact that, as I indicated, the 221 houses west of Hightower, he had to approve those, and he did approve those. He approved the 221 houses on Poole Creek, because Al was a part of the Atlanta Housing Council that designated the expansion areas. And Poole Creek was in, at that time, I

think -- I'm not certain about this -- census tract FC-20, [00:55:00] as it was called at that time. So Al approved that. He approved the area down south of the Federal penitentiary.

BAYOR: OK, so he was -- so he was definitely a supportive friend.

THOMPSON: That's right.

BAYOR: Yeah, OK.

THOMPSON: I've got to get me some more (inaudible). Could I get you something?

BAYOR: No, no, thanks. I'm all right.

THOMPSON: Do you like beer? Do you want a cold beer?

BAYOR: Oh, OK. Beer would be fine, sure.

THOMPSON: Wine or (inaudible)?

BAYOR: Beer would be fine.

(break in audio)

THOMPSON: I remember personally searching for funds to support... Because we recognized that the (inaudible) -- [00:56:00] that there's only a certain amount of land available at any given time in the city for a multiplicity of uses.

BAYOR: Oh, that's true.

THOMPSON: So we contacted the -- of course, the insurance company, labor unions. And finally, we went to -- we were

asked by the Ford Foundation to submit -- this had two men, down to (inaudible) to talk to J.B. [Blayton?] and the chairman of -- my daughter at that time, to submit a proposal to the Ford Foundation that would attempt to enlarge the middle class. As you know, as a sociologist, lives are sharply pyramided, OK? The Ford Foundation at that time was interested [00:57:00] -- and McGeorge Bundy was the top honcho there then -- a program that would enlarge this middle class, so that it wouldn't be so sharply pyramided. So we (inaudible) we thought a beautiful proposal (inaudible) the Ford Foundation, in which we asked the Ford Foundation to deposit 190-some million dollars in black financial institutions, that is, moneys which would be paid back to the Ford Foundation, banks would pay it back at specified period of time, (inaudible) payback at a longer period of time, because it would be invested in mortgages [00:58:00] at a rate. Since you've got 100 and -- you've got a billion, put \$198 million toward that -- I think it's a hundred -- if you say \$198 million. And the Ford Foundation would get all of its principal back, plus two percent. The institutions would lend the money. Then the institutions and the Ford Foundation would, in turn, create another organization...

(58:34 - 58:43 interruption not transcribed)

(break in audio)

THOMPSON: -- paid back to the Ford Foundation. This was going about '69. [00:59:00] So the Ford Foundation sent three representatives to Atlanta, namely, Christopher Edward, who is now head of the United Negro College Fund; the treasurer of the Ford Foundation, and two other gentlemen.

(inaudible) to have been here before to talk with us. We met at the home of J.B. (inaudible), who was a CPA, one of the first black CPAs in the country, to discuss this proposal. And after a whole evening of eating and drinking, I drove them back to the hotel, and the treasurer said, "Quite a provocative idea, Mr. Thompson, but we'll have to study it." So I said, "Please do let us know." Got back, Christopher and me, [01:00:00] who grew up in the same town that I did, in [Waynesboro?], wrote and said, "Bob, that's a hell of an idea, but it's too big." I said, "Hell, you're talking about lifting the economy of blacks (inaudible)." And maybe 35 or 40 banks, savings and loan associations. They turned the idea down, to our dismay. And apparently, in the meantime, Milton and I went to New York. And when the bankers finished, we talked them and pleaded (inaudible). And they said, "Well, we would have to think about that." Then in 19-- I left the Urban League in 60-- in '64. And [01:01:00] this is another thing I got

from them when I reopening the case while I was with the government. March the 6th, 1969. [Keith Harder?] had -- that made us -- made me feel very (inaudible). The Ford Foundation, at the same time, had lost about \$100 million in an investment in Canada. They didn't get a goddamn dime back.

BAYOR: And -- (inaudible) invest in Canada.

THOMPSON: But we were asking, not for a gift, but just a deposit. [01:02:00]

BAYOR: Well, I guess things between '62 and '69 had changed, quite a bit.

THOMPSON: The revolution -- the revolution.

BAYOR: That's right. It changed it.

THOMPSON: And we were way ahead of their thinking, according to them at that time.

BAYOR: That's interesting. Let's -- well, let me get back to just this MARTA thing, the transit thing again. Once again, let me get this clear. The transit company was willing to go only as far as the white area in this -- in this section and wasn't serving the black community. Is that -- is that right? And then agreed to serve the black community once this area was developed more fully, and the --

THOMPSON: After the whites moved out.

BAYOR: After the whites moved out, and again, after the transportation was desegregated (inaudible).

THOMPSON: No, no, no.

BAYOR: Because the whites moved out --

THOMPSON: Yeah, the whites moved out. See, MARTA came later.

Like --

BAYOR: Right.

THOMPSON: OK.

BAYOR: But the streetcars (inaudible).

THOMPSON: [01:03:00] Yeah. The streetcars and buses.

BAYOR: So in other words, to avoid violence, they served only the white community. If the whites moved out --

THOMPSON: This -- on this, I can even -- I can only speak for this area.

BAYOR: I'm sorry.

THOMPSON: OK. As I indicated, the bus stopped at MLK and Chappell. And because Mozley Park was all white, when I built this house in 1950, you rode through this area. And my daughter could never understand why she couldn't go in the Mozley Park pool. And she was becoming very, very bitter. And here I have come from the war, and I had -- I was a member of the American Veterans Committee, [Joey Little?], [Johnny?] (inaudible), [Jasper Sells?], and just a whole host of beautiful people, you know, whites,

[01:04:00] in (inaudible) and elsewhere. So she was becoming very bitter. So we decided that to overcome this bitterness, and -- against whites, where we could undergo it, she couldn't. So we sent her to school in Massachusetts, for four years of high school. And then made a hell of a hard bad mistake, because she got a scholarship to Coe College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, far away. And that was a hell of a hard -- bad mistake. And so finally [she just?] said, "I hate our -- I hate the Midwest, I hate (inaudible), I hate this. I'll quit school, or else come back to Atlanta, or I want to go back to school east," because she had gone to Stockbridge School in Massachusetts.

BAYOR: That's (inaudible) from Iowa.

THOMPSON: (inaudible), and I didn't know until I began to talk to some of my (inaudible). [01:05:00] They said, "Bob, why did you send her to the Mississippi of the West?" I said, "What?"

BAYOR: Oh, really.

THOMPSON: Yeah, that's what they called Coe College. Two black girls (inaudible), and they expected these two black girls to (inaudible). But having gone to quote "a good school," she was not accustomed to this.

BAYOR: I never heard about Coe College.

THOMPSON: If you ever have a child, don't send her to Coe.

(inaudible).

BAYOR: But anyway, so the MARTA thing, the streetcar thing was simply to serve the white community, not the blacks. And so this area became black, so the whites in Mozley Park moved out. Then they didn't have to worry about any kind of conflict on the streetcars.

THOMPSON: Not only conflict, but peace in the city. Of course, some of those -- really sad. They didn't want any the whites in the Mozley Park area, because blacks had to come through.

BAYOR: So they wanted to just keep the streetcars all white if he could.

THOMPSON: [01:06:00] Not necessarily.

BAYOR: Or all black, if he could?

THOMPSON: Well, don't put it exactly like that. I think what he was trying to say is -- and I think I'm being kind to him now -- this was (inaudible), and this was a (inaudible) time. This was a very volatile area, the Mozley Park area was. And anything could have happened. John Calhoun, one of the -- he was about 85, 86 years old, called me one Saturday and said he wanted me to meet him at Chicamauga and Mozley Place. And this was an area white at that time. When we got there, we were surrounded by whites. Very,

very vociferously, who wanted to do bodily harm, so we had to back away. But gradually the whites began to say, "We'll sell. We'll sell. We'll sell. We'll sell."

BAYOR: After they sold, then the streetcars came out.

THOMPSON: That's right.

BAYOR: OK, that's -- [01:07:00] let's see what else did I want to (inaudible)? Oh, yeah, this effort to develop integrated neighborhoods. I came across this Southwest Atlanta Alliance for Progress, which seems to be one of the few organizations in the city actually pushing for integrated neighborhoods.

THOMPSON: Ramona [Clayton?], do you know her?

BAYOR: No, what's her name?

THOMPSON: It's Ramona Clayton, a very attractive, vivacious woman, beautiful. She was connected with one of the radio stations or television stations.

BAYOR: Is she still in the city?

THOMPSON: Yes.

BAYOR: And she was head of this, or --

THOMPSON: Yeah, she lived down in the southwest section, and she did her damndest to kind of stabilize the community and keep the whites from running.

BAYOR: Yeah, that would have been a trick, I guess.

THOMPSON: Yes.

BAYOR: Now, was the city supportive in any way of integration? Or were they simply pushing for [01:08:00] separate black, separate white neighborhoods? They weren't really interested in integration.

THOMPSON: I don't think the city was pushing in any way, either way. Blacks were doing this on their own. We had no help from the city. Now, [Zanona?] -- doing the interesting -- being the leader in that effort down there can tell you more about what the city did or did not do.

BAYOR: Because again, the impression I got from my reading was that the city wasn't interested in integrated neighborhoods. They were interested simply in no violence. Whatever would bring about no violence -- and they felt that segregation was the way to bring that about, just keep the blacks and whites separated for as much as possible. I take it that's what that whole Peyton Road war was really about.

THOMPSON: No, it was --

BAYOR: Different area, of course.

THOMPSON: No, no, Peyton Road was a part of [Collier?] in the southwest.

BAYOR: Oh, it is -- OK, (inaudible).

THOMPSON: [01:09:00] A white plumber who lived on Peyton Road was in the process of getting a divorce from his wife, and

to spite her, he said -- he sold his property out, did not know what (inaudible).

BAYOR: Is that (inaudible)?

THOMPSON: No, (inaudible). And who bought the house, for \$50,000 -- I think \$50,000. He could have paid for it in cash, but he -- (inaudible) funded it. Then blacks began to buy the houses on Peyton Road. Not all of the whites wanted to sell. Some did; some didn't. (inaudible) having money, (inaudible) money that they had (inaudible), [01:10:00] and the whites decided to sell, [one by one?]. Plus, Allen came in to this area, just to help stabilize the situation. He inadvertently and ineptly (inaudible). Stayed there about a day, if that long. One or two days later, he got out, (inaudible). And the whites then began to flee.

BAYOR: Well, he claimed he was trying to calm the whites rather than keep out the blacks. That was his justification for that.

THOMPSON: Yeah, whatever [the damn Negroes?] --

BAYOR: (inaudible).

THOMPSON: (inaudible). Mind you, Allan had made one other big mistake. Years ago, he had wanted to put all the blacks down in south Georgia. Do you know the Atlanta [bus?]? All the blacks in Georgia (inaudible). [01:11:00] I don't

know what actually changed Ivan. He was a very busy man. But they -- the leadership of Atlanta -- white leadership of Atlanta at that time insisted on [business?], Allan, (inaudible). And a preacher somewhere in my paper.

BAYOR: Just one the bankers (inaudible).

THOMPSON: (inaudible). Yeah, a wonderful thing. Apparently they saw [01:12:00] the handwriting on the wall, blacks with all the political power, with the money, they were making waves, (inaudible), this all changed the attitude.

BAYOR: And self-interest?

THOMPSON: I don't know if it's self-interest, or whatever. I say self-interest is no longer the economic (inaudible). And the city -- the city changed. Attitudes changed, leadership changed.

BAYOR: And Allan's election was probably due to black votes, anyway.

THOMPSON: That's right.

BAYOR: He had to change.

THOMPSON: That's right.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

THOMPSON: Before I left earlier, I was called by the executive -
- (inaudible) now, but definitely became (inaudible)
Chamber of Commerce of one of the North Carolina cities
called and asked me for names of blacks who I would

recommend [01:13:00] for the Chamber of Commerce, and I gave them a long list of names. That was approximately [1969?]. The thing had begun to change. I recall once talking to John O. Childs. I said, "Mr. Childs, who are you voting for?" This was in the First Federal of Georgia conference room. He said, "Bob, you tell me who you're voting for, and I'll tell you who I'm voting for." We had fun, just that thought, and that (inaudible). Anything that I was concerned with at that time, I could always pick up the phone and call John O. Childs. I could also pick up the phone and call (inaudible).

BAYOR: And they weren't a --

THOMPSON: (inaudible).

BAYOR: The one (inaudible) ten years earlier.

THOMPSON: Mr. Sibley listened. I tell you how I came to know him. I bought some stock in (inaudible). [01:14:00] When it was \$800 a share, and the board of directors, they voted a 10-to-1 split, so then I (inaudible) shares. And I -- one day, I decided I would go to the stockholders' meeting. (inaudible), I'm the only black there. (inaudible). He then became chairman of the (inaudible) that was concerned with desegregating the public schools (inaudible). And I got to meet his son, who was about 10 years younger than I am. And we would maintain this friendship over the years.

At each turn, I got to know these people from Trust
(inaudible) and Georgia Bank.

BAYOR: So it sounds like they were really flexible when it
came time to make those decisions.

THOMPSON: Yes, definitely. [01:15:00] Years later, I was on the
board of the charity of [Fitz Home?], and we gave some
money. Mrs. [Yates?] and I went to see him and ask for
some money, and he said, "Well, we need \$25,000." And he
said, "Well, this is a (inaudible), my share is \$5.00.
OK."

BAYOR: And how much do you think that all of this was a form
of -- let's see if the white primary had still been in
effect, the county unit system had still been in effect --

THOMPSON: He would not have been (inaudible).

BAYOR: He would not have (inaudible). That's what I thought.

THOMPSON: (inaudible) then the south -- I think it was the south
gate, or wasn't it the south? [Mart Haver?] was --

BAYOR: Mart Haver (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

THOMPSON: Harold Fleming was (inaudible) counsel at that time.
Another wonderful guy; Harold Fleming was a -- is now a
president of the Potomac Institute in Washington. And
(inaudible).

BAYOR: (overlapping dialogue; inaudible).

THOMPSON: Huh?

BAYOR: What was his role?

THOMPSON: [01:16:00] Oh, he was head of the southern (inaudible) -- the (inaudible) -- head of southern (inaudible) council after George Mitchell left. Then left here and went to Washington to head the Potomac Institute.

BAYOR: OK, the -- let's see, there was just one other thing I wanted to get your thoughts on, oh, yeah. OK. I heard a lot about (inaudible) compromise in Atlanta to help avoid any kind of big riots or disorders. And Atlanta became the civil rights center, I would say. And I was just curious, the fact that Atlanta became the civil rights center, did it have anything to do with this tradition with black-white communication which had been developed earlier? In other words, the desire to work out problems with nonviolent means and through compromise. Is this -- is this myth or fact? OK, and there was sort of a tradition of whites and blacks sitting down together, [01:17:00] trying to work out their problems, and --

THOMPSON: You see, fortunately for Atlanta, what makes -- I often ask myself, what makes Atlanta so different from any other Southern city, or any other city in the United States? The colleges, the leadership that comes out that, right? Blacks -- the black community, black Atlanta, the banks, and our life, savings and loans, growing slowly,

slowly, and we -- they communicated with their counterparts in the white -- they have to be. So there was always this kind of communication on that level. And then when blacks began to flex their muscles, economically and politically, there was more communication. And they sat down together, [01:18:00] many a deal was made at the -- in the offices of the Atlanta Urban League. Fortunately, when the Columbians and Ku Klux Klan were raging in the city of Atlanta, and they wanted to keep the Atlanta Urban League out of the Community Chest, as it was called at that time, it was Dick Rich who said to the power structure, "If you keep the Urban League out, who's going to pick up the tab? Because they have contributed to housing, to forming a hospital, and they have put out many a fire. Now who's going to pick up that tab?"

BAYOR: This is the same Dick Rich who gave so much trouble about desegregating his own store.

THOMPSON: Yes. But you see, that was -- that came later, desegregation. But I'm talking about the period now when we were threatened with being cut off from the Community Chest. Many other Urban Leagues throughout the Southeast were kicked out. [01:19:00] Jacksonville, New Orleans, Richmond, you name it. They're all cut out.

BAYOR: And it didn't happen here, you would say, because there was sort of a history of the two groups talking to each other.

THOMPSON: That's right.

BAYOR: Do you think Martin Luther King, Jr., was influenced by this at all, the fact that he was a leader of a nonviolent protest movement?

THOMPSON: Martin Luther King's father (inaudible), the old man, was a Democrat in the Voters League. Walden was a Democrat. Cochrane was a Democrat. Thompson was a Democrat. In other words, as a Republican, there was Charles Dobbs, et al. OK. So we came together because we were black. And they listened.

BAYOR: The whites listened.

THOMPSON: The whites listened.

BAYOR: Because I was just curious, everybody speaks about [01:20:00] the influence of Gandhi on King. As I was wondering --

THOMPSON: He may have.

BAYOR: You know, I just wondered if Atlanta had any influence on King.

THOMPSON: [I have?] a goddamn criticism on Martin Luther King. Martin Luther King didn't stay here that much. But it was his father who laid the groundwork.

BAYOR: Well, he must have gotten something out of his father,
too, in terms of --

THOMPSON: He may have.

BAYOR: -- his style, in terms of working with whites.

THOMPSON: He may, he may have. But you know, but Martin Luther
King came to Atlanta from Dexter Baptist Church in
Montgomery, (inaudible).

BAYOR: But he grew up here, though.

THOMPSON: Yeah, but he was (inaudible) went to Morehouse, then
went to school up North.

BAYOR: Yeah, I would have liked to speak to King, Jr., so
(inaudible).

THOMPSON: I wish I could you could have met his father.

BAYOR: Well, him and Benjamin Mays were two people who I
really would have loved to meet. It's just, unfortunately
they died.

THOMPSON: The great Brother Mays.

BAYOR: These two had a influence in so many ways in the
community.

THOMPSON: Well, yes, particularly at Morehouse, [01:21:00]
(inaudible).

BAYOR: In terms of his influence among the leadership that
came out of Morehouse, too.

THOMPSON: Well, they had Marion, but they had many people who
(inaudible) who did not like Mays. Mays was a damn
dictator.

BAYOR: Oh, really.

THOMPSON: Shit, yeah.

BAYOR: I heard that about King, Sr., a little bit, too, I
suppose.

THOMPSON: King, Sr., (inaudible) his church, but in the
community, King, Sr., was always a part of the community.
[Borders?], on the other hand, same -- Borders was a
brother who helped him to get his first project through.

BAYOR: Peachtree [Houses?]?

THOMPSON: Yeah, Peachtree Garden (inaudible).

BAYOR: Well, just -- I -- one of the things I want to look at
is just, why did black Atlanta develop differently than a
city like Birmingham, for example? Why we didn't have the
problems here that they had there?

THOMPSON: Leadership.

BAYOR: Black leadership, white leadership?

THOMPSON: White leadership.

BAYOR: Willing to -- willing to talk. [01:22:00] And what --
and recognizing black power, surely.

THOMPSON: In 1950 -- 1955, I think it was, the Commission on
Race and Housing, headed by the former president of the

[Farrow?] Savings Bank in New York, Earl B. [Stevens?], headed the commission funded by the Ford Foundation to make a comparative study, which you alluded to -- comparative studies of Atlanta-Birmingham. Dr. Howland Lewis and I went into Birmingham, where we found -- talking to A.G. Gaston -- that the white savings and loan associations and mortgage bankers in Birmingham contested the application of Gaston to have a savings and loan association. I said, "A.G., where is the record?" He said, "You go and talk to Arthur Shores." I went to Shores's office, got the document, and read it, [01:23:00] and was dumbfounded to find that the white financial institutions, all of them, protested the Greensboro -- [Federal Home Loan Bank board?] at that time, which subsequently moved to Atlanta -- Gaston having a savings and loan association. After reading the document, I said to Howland, you're going to fight. I picked up the phone and called Grace Hamilton, I called Dr. [Aaron Reeve?]; I called Lester Grainger in New York; the former president of the NAACP, Roy Wilkins; I say, "This is the story of what's happening. Do something about it." Grace Hamilton had a friend by the name of Francis Williams, who was on Senator Lehman's staff in New York. Senator Lehman -- [01:24:00] in the meantime, we called Chuck [Bolton?], head of the American Veterans Committee at

that time. And Washington was deluged with questions.

"Why are you denying this black man this thing?" This was like January. At the same time, Autherine Lucy was trying to get into the University of Alabama.

BAYOR: This was what, now, early '60s years? Well, (inaudible)?

THOMPSON: This was -- when we were over there, this was '55, '56. OK? We came back to Atlanta and still began to call and talk to people about the white savings and loan associations, the bankers of mortgage, because the banks -- or the mortgage companies over there would (inaudible) money for nine or ten years. No 20, no 30 year mortgages. Six weeks later, I had a telephone call [01:25:00] from the president of the Federal Home Loan Bank board in Washington. He said, "Mr. Thompson, we had a true application of A.G. Gaston. They have until September the 1st to raise \$1,000,000 from 1,000 people." They got the message in Birmingham before I got it. The blacks in Birmingham pulled all their money out of their banks and savings and loans and mortgage companies in Birmingham, and by September the 1st, they had about \$1,500,000. So it was chartered. Now, that's a (inaudible) association, that's larger than [Luther?] Federal here in Atlanta.

BAYOR: The thing is, I guess, in Atlanta we got started much earlier, so they get as much flak from the --

THOMPSON: [Reese Als?] was starting a bank around 1921.

BAYOR: Yeah, I think the importance of the insurance company here and the banks that really was able to, I guess, allow blacks to begin moving out to the west side in the first place, [01:26:00] in terms of buying homes. And that really isn't true in a lot of other cities.

THOMPSON: That's right.

BAYOR: And there's the leadership.

THOMPSON: The leadership. See, Birmingham was an absentee ownership town.

BAYOR: You know, just in terms of the violence that erupted in Birmingham, that you didn't see here, it seemed to me that the whites here were a little more, I don't know, realistic about dealing with the black community than --

THOMPSON: They're educated. We've got the colleges and universities here. They don't have that in Birmingham.

BAYOR: What, the whites were better educated? I know the blacks were better educated.

THOMPSON: The whites there -- the whites here, in my opinion, they're more enlightened than the whites in Birmingham. The mentality is quite different. Industrial town, absentee owners; here, this is a white collar town.

BAYOR: Of course, I guess Atlanta was very touchy about its image, too. That seems to be a big factor.

THOMPSON: (laughter)

BAYOR: Well, you know, I sit here all the time reading the Chamber of Commerce stuff, [01:27:00] you know, "Yeah, we really would like to continue segregation in the schools, but boy, it's bad for our image if there's violence here. So let's compromise." Or whatever. OK, I guess -- I guess that covers it pretty well, pretty much, what I wanted to speak to you about. Yeah. If I have any more questions, do you mind if I call you some other time and -- ?

THOMPSON: I don't mind, anytime.

BAYOR: (inaudible).

THOMPSON: The past three years, I have had the opportunity and pleasure of talking to the group of kids, [Pembroke?] Atlanta, and meet up at the -- what's the (inaudible) up in north Atlanta, north Georgia, [Hour Ahead?].

BAYOR: Oh, yeah, (inaudible).

THOMPSON: And it's sponsored by [01:28:00] one of the persons I know, Mrs. Davis, the city councilman up in Buckhead, and Dr. [Jay Browning?]. Do you know Dr. Browning?

BAYOR: No, unfortunately, no.

THOMPSON: She's president of -- well, she's connected with this group, and she's also a president of the group called

Inroads Atlanta, an organization that attempts to place qualified, highly skilled blacks in key jobs throughout this city and state. And I have a -- I have thoroughly enjoyed (inaudible). And what I was asked to do initially, three years ago, was to list blacks who made very, very valuable contributions, [01:29:00] in terms of expansion, politics, and life, and I think you'll find in there a wealth of names and persons who are... Did you happen to pick up the article that I wrote for [Philon?]

BAYOR: I haven't seen that yet. I know about it. There's still a lot of people I want to speak to. I have a whole list of whites and blacks that I want to get in touch with. In fact, I was supposed to get -- have an interview with Ivan Allen yesterday, but he got sick. Yeah, he's going to be out of commission for about two weeks, but I guess Grace Hammond is the next one that I want to speak to, (inaudible).

THOMPSON: (inaudible).

BAYOR: Yeah. Are there any pictures that I could possibly borrow and get back to you at all?

THOMPSON: Well, let's see. I'm looking to (inaudible).

BAYOR: OK. Because I could take them for a few days [01:30:00] and bring them back to your house. Yeah, it's no big trip for me, really.

THOMPSON: I'm looking at a whole lot of things on the Urban League. (inaudible), I thought I had a copy of an article on (inaudible).

END OF AUDIO FILE