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Interviewer: Lareatha Clay
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Lareatha Clay: LC
Anderson White: AW

TRANSCRIPT BEGIN

LC: Okay. We were talking about the grand jury—I think. So you said that you were the only Black on the grand jury.

AW: Right, right. And so when the asked Sister Peacock and Brother Peacock to come up. And the foreman of the grand jury asked the jurymen did they have any questions. And I think given on what case we were on, and we were told about it by the secretary who read a report off to us before Sister Peacock and Brother Peacock were down there. As soon after they had gotten there, well, everything struck kind of silent as far as I'm concerned. Then I began to start asking questions—trying to get some clues and lead way about what did happen. And so, I found out enough just over the whole thing—I didn't know that right at the time that that case were closed or not. It's—it was just one of them things. And the next thing I understood, and I asked the foreman—was this a stalwart? And he said, “well I guess so unless they repeal it.” You know. And I say, well—

LC: So the case was closed?

AW: Yeah. Well, I asked Sister Peacock several questions. And Brother Peacock. I say, “how did the boy—did the girl, do you know for sure that they were communicating with one another? And they say yes. And I say, “how do you know for sure? By telephone, or by mail, or what?” And she said by mail. And I say, “by what form of fashion by mail?” And she said she got a letter here where she—I said, you give the letter to the secretary, let her read it to this court. These jurymen. And they got the letter and read it and a lot of nasty things go in the letter—

LC: Really?

AW: Yeah. And well, ain't nobody seemed to—thought too much of it. And so, you know. [Inaudible]. So I asked everything I know trying to get something, anybody—

LC: Everybody else just sat there?

AW: Yeah, they might have asked a few questions, but not too deep. Later I understand that Brother Cecil turned this over to the NAACP. And they're the one's that handled it, I believe.

They got [inaudible name] I believe it was—and I understand he paid out some money [inaudible]. And finally I think Brother Cecil said he messed up the money. Now this thing still—it come alive again. And I think it will.

LC: Why do you say that?

AW: Well under the Justice Department—not being questioned through me—but I do have a lot of connections with the Justice Department in Washington DC. They called me on a lot of things. They talked to me personally. And they were just plain poor people, you know. And they talk with me about a bunch of things going on in court—the election and things like that. My opinions about what—and I am the representative of—anointed representative—of Newton County. And I been this for about—through DETCOG—

LC: DETCOG?

AW: Yes DETCOG. You don't know about DETCOG? It's Clay(??) County, DETCOG. I'll show you some literature in a few minutes. It's very—industry. So what happened, we kind of get over here on Walter Days—he's the director, he's a Black guy—[inaudible] it's white and Black—most often it's white. And DETCOG, he's the director of DETCOG. I'll show you some literature of it. We have a meeting every—all the time.

LC: Okay. Spell that?

AW: DETCOG—Let me see [laughs]. Lillie—will you get me one of those DECOG books in there? Get me one of them folders. Look in the little office back there in the back and get me one of them folders back there. One of the brown folders. Alright.

LILLIE WHITE: What did you say?

AW: Will you look in the little office back there and get me one of them DECOG folders with the brown envelope on it?

LILLIE WHITE: Okay.

AW: This is something to help—DECOG is—Deep East Texas Council of Governments. You got it?

LC: [Laughs] Yeah, I got it. Okay.

AW: [Laughs] And at that time—I've got an old mind, my brain done wore out—that's what it is: Deep East Texas Council of Governments.

LC: Okay. And so you were saying through the Justice Department that you—so have they asked about the Peacock thing recently?

AW: No, no. But this came up in the Bird thing. Boy, Bird is a good friend of mine. The old man, the daddy that got killed? Bird. Yeah, we grew up together. I used to live in Jasper when I was a young one. And me and Bird, we were good friends.

LC: And is that what they called Cecil Peacock? Bird?

AW: No, I'm talking bout Bird. [Crosstalk]. In Jasper. The big deal—about dragging the Black boy.

LC: Oh, Bird! Okay.

[Crosstalk]

AW: [Flips through papers, mail] Let me see there might be something—

LC: Well we've got it now! He remembered the name.

LILLIE WHITE: Getting old is hard—keep in the mind—

AW: Yeah, they keep this old Black boy [inaudible]. Just about every month I get this—just something they found [inaudible]. And there is some of DETCOM.

[Crosstalk]

LILLIE WHITE: Getting older—they keep telling them, they can't remember as good as they can when they younger.

AW: Well see I wore out my brain years ago! I done a lot of studying, day and night. Why I can tell you. I used to stay on the go. She used to get mad at me about being bothered(??) when everything come up. I used to stay on the go—yeah I used to stay on the go. Of course Black people give me a bad name, I don't know why. Of course you know how that go when—you'll get a name too if enough Blacks around you! You know how it go, don't you, bro! [Laughter] If you ever get to be a foreman or kind of a head man on a job—[Crosstalk] [Laughter].

LC: [Laughs] I know what you're talking about.

AW: You don't want that one there!

LC: [Laughs] Yeah, I got it on there!

[Laughter]

LC: I'm just trying to get the real deal, man!

AW: You're going to play this back for your mama, and she is going to laugh!

LC: Okay. So now I got that. So—

AW: I was an anointed representative, see there on the back of that envelope—

LC: Yes it's an economic development district. That's what it is.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: So that came up on the Bird—bill? I'm thinking it would.

AW: Yeah. They be researching. Do you know what effect this takes on the state when something bad like that happen? It don't just be that particular case. This reach out.

LC: Meaning—what?

AW: The peoples in that surrounding and what they believe in—they question and they give some history too. You know what I mean?

LC: Yes. So it came up again. Man.

AW: Yeah I wish you didn't have that in.

LC: [Laughs] [Crosstalk] I'll take that part out when I write it.

AW: Where do this—where will this be at?

LC: It's just going to be at our Shankleville Historical Society Collection. I had looked at—

AW: You going to send out some of this to some of the members?

LC: Not like this. Not word for word. But the overall plan is to—

AW: Okay. Well you got some people who don't understand. They take nothing and make something out of it. You know?

LC: Yes. Nobody's going to hear the whole tape but me and whoever transcribes it—it'll probably be me.

AW: I'm sitting here telling you—both y'all—a whole lot. Being an uneducated man—I've been through it. I mean, I don't meet strangers—of course I mix with white and Black—and when I want to know something, that's something else. I get on my peoples all of the time—I hate to hear that they said and I'm hearing anytime a meeting come up and it's about something in Newton or somewhere I want to be there. First hand—that's the only way you're going to learn. Ain't that right? And I'm very concerned about that thing right there [inaudible]. And of course I be knowing a lot of the things but I don't say too much, I don't feel to.

LC: So when you were on the grand jury, was that like the biggest case y'all ever talked about? Anthony Peacock?

AW: No. But it was for me—I thought it was very important and I was very concerned about that. I was very concerned. I wanted to find out the facts for two reasons. I just wanted—of course I knew there had to be some hate in the deal, but I wanted to find out if that's the reason—the real fact—the reason—that he got—I would say assassinated. And then I wanted to because I was concerned about the family and I was concerned about the young man because he was very—he was an asset to the community. He probably would have progressed himself were he been with his sister at [inaudible] and could've went further enough to [inaudible] you know, I mean if a person—if he got that input and apply himself, ain't no end to it. Ain't that right?

LC: Yes that's right. Did—[pause] —I forgot what I was getting ready to ask—oh well. I had one more question about that, but I forgot what it was.

AW: Yeah, but now you made mention of the Bird—made the connection to the Bird case. You know, I think it had been handed down to the Justice Department, and they were the ones to bring these things in as history. When they get additional facts to deal with. A lot of time when you hear—they tell of a place getting burnt down, say like Newton County Courthouse, well it's

not all the times accident. You know what I'm saying. Behind those doors be a lot of documents and things that could be detrimental to certain people or a group if it come up again. And so you never know, you never know. And I always said that everything happen or said or that is for a reason.

LC: So are you involved in getting the Newton County Courthouse restored?

AW: In a way. Now, I'm concerned about it, yes. It's kind of a twofold deal. It's real hard—and I asked to get involved, I wasn't asked—and in certain instances I am. See that comes under Historical Society, don't it. You know, you know about Historic. Outside I can't do too much or anything with it. And of course I know the president [inaudible name] is the president of Historic here in Newton County. You ever met [inaudible first name] Hine? She used to be the president. Ms. Hine out here in Burkeville she about 90 years old—

LC: She got black hair?

AW: No.

LC: The lady I met was—she used to teach at Newton—

AW: The lady Hine used to be a teacher in Burkeville. Oh, you're talking about Ms. Smith.

LC: No her name was something else.

AW: Her name Bonnie Smith?

LC: No.

AW: Was she in the Historical Society?

LC: Yes she was the president for awhile—she was president like last April—April, May, June, somewhere around there—

AW: Are you sure it wasn't Ms. Bonnie Smith?

LC: No I don't think so—and she was put off. And the last person I talked to was another woman—

AW: That succeeded her.

LC: Yes. She had been a president before, and then this lady was president for awhile, and then she was taken off or something and now this other lady is.

AW: Okay. I knew all of them and they know me. They got a little [inaudible] in the old courthouse sat in [inaudible name] Hall. But Black history come up it show some of the Black people that they much had my picture in there

LC: Well the reason I ask about the courthouse—we were in Newton a few minutes ago, before we came here. That's why we were late—

AW: You went by the concert hall, didn't you?

LC: Yes. Sure did. And I was telling Clayee(??) at the Texas Historical Commission gave the Courthouse three million dollars to help restore it—

AW: You are 100% right! You sure got that right.

LC: But right now they just—they just put a roof on it to try and hold it until they get ready—

AW: Yeah they going to put the rest—the tile and the bell on later on.

LC: As far as you know—when are they scheduled to have it finished?

AW: I don't know. I'm going to a court meeting Monday and I'll—Judge, he'll relay all that to me and that's one thing I was going to ask him. I get the Newton paper every week and they usually put it in the paper before they make a move like that. But the last move that they had—they made mention about the three million dollars—but it's going to take—we roughly estimate it's going to take around about six to do the job.

LC: And that's why we gave the three—because the insurance is supposed to do three.

AW: Yeah that's true. And then we got another deal out here—for a few thousand or something like that, eight hundred—

LC: Well let's get back to the history here. In your growing up—you didn't grow up in Shankleville—

AW: Sure did!

LC: Oh okay. You said something about—

AW: I was right there—I been on the go when I was younger. See right now—we married in 1953—and I almost just say—I was 27—and I almost just say I settled down. And I've been in and out of Shankleville since then with some of the job but I've been right here more than ever.

LC: in 1953—what month and what day were y'all married?

AW: April the third.

LC: So y'all have a 50th anniversary in April?

AW: That's right.

LC: What are y'all going to do?

AW: [Inaudible] I said, No way that's money that's thrown down the drain, no I don't want to go do that! [Inaudible] they have a little civic center there.

LC: So how did y'all meet? Let's get on that.

AW: That's the question there! That's a great question. I was [laughs] I might've got married three times before I met my wife. You know a girl called Bebe Wiley?

LC: Yes.

AW: Her name is Elnora.

LC: You used to like her?

AW: Well she liked me [inaudible]

[Laughter]

LC: Why didn't you like her?

AW: Well she moved a little too fast for me. And something else too. I love her! She and I, we were good friends going to school. Close. And then the Brown girl appear—she's in California. [Inaudible]. And Edward Peacock's daughter [inaudible].

LC: What was her name—Edward Peacock's daughter?

AW: Ruby. That's the oldest. And she passed away—yeah, Ruby. Of course you asked me—

LC: How did you and your wife meet?

AW: Oh yeah!

LC: You were both in Shankleville, right?

AW: Yes. Wasn't no big deal for me because I knew the background on my wife. And I didn't know her first husband—he got killed so they say. I probably seen him—seem like to me as somebody I would talk to. But anyhow—that brother of mine moved up from up there in [inaudible name] back down. And she had boughten this little house down here from Aunt Susie's niece, Ms. Idie.

LC: Idie, what?

AW: Idie Gatlin.

LC: Okay.

AW: And she had bought this little house from her—a four room house. And she had two children. But they don't really talk about this. Them kids, they better not. But anyhow. I always said, When I do marry I have a lot of experience from out there when I was out there in the world with women and so forth. And I said, If I ever married I wanted somebody I could put confidence in and somebody to take care of my earnings. I used to hear other folks say, "Oh boy, you got the wrong one! She'll throw more out the back door than you can bring in the front!"

[Laughter]

And I still didn't want nothing like that. And I knew my wife. I knew her family and where she's from. Good, nice people, hardworking people. And I've always been a hard worker myself. And that's the reason she wanted me—and that's the reason I wanted her—and we somewhat went to school together—I'm about almost two years older than she is. When that brother of mine moved her—and he cracked a joke with me about he had moved a widow down the road there and he

said, “Boy you ain’t going to ever marry her,” said, “I moved in one of your schoolmates down the road there.” And I said, Who is that? And he told me.

LC: This is your brother O.C.?

AW: Yes. You remember O.C.?

LC: No sir, I just remember y’all talking about it.

AW: Yeah. I got his picture there somewhere on the wall. From when he was in the army.

LC: So anyway. He said that he moved her—

AW: Oh yeah. And he say “Oh yeah, and by the way [inaudible].” And I had two trucks, and I used to come by the store—wasn’t many cars—wasn’t no care store in Shankleville—you might see [inaudible]. Your grandfather was one of the ones who had a vehicle back then, back in these woods. And I had a couple of trucks you know. I did—I had a Ford six-four car and I used to send it down there and let her drive it before I married her. Anyhow. One day she was at the store there in Newton—she had bought some fence wire—I keep this in mind—she had bought some fence wire to make a chicken yard. And she was standing on the corner—she was sitting on the corner of the store there—corner store—hardware store—and I stopped. I seen her and I come over to her and I say, You got a way home? And she said, “No, are you going up there?” And I said, Yeah. I said, Okay and I stopped. She told me she had some wire and some this and that and I said, Okay I’ll back on up to the—and get it. And so I loaded it on and she got in. And I picked up somebody else down around Liberty. And I put them out at Liberty and I said, Oh I want a chance to talk to her! And I began to talk to her. And I said, Well I didn’t know your husband. I said, you got [inaudible] about two years ago. She said, “Yeah I did.” And I said, Well I guess you haven’t thought of marrying again, huh? She laughed and looked at me. And I said, Oh yeah I got you now!

[Laughter]

I say, Well I know you’re over there—as we come on then getting close to something—you better go ahead and get your words in we won’t be there before long. And I went talking first I say, Well you got you a friend? “No not exactly.” I say, Well good for you—and that sound pretty good for me too! And she say, “Why?” And I say, Well I don’t have one—what about having—just sitting, having just a school talk with you one night?

LC: What’s a school talk?

AW: Oh. Talk about school days—you know [laughter]. She says, “Oh you’re just trying to tease me.” And I say, No it’s for real. She says she wasn’t expecting for me to jump her [laughter]. And she say, “Oh, you’ve got a bunch of girlfriends.” No, I say, I’ll tell you what I had a bunch of girlfriends but I begin to look for awhile now—you see how old I am? And she say, “Yeah I know about” —

LC: How old were you?

AW: At that time? Probably about 25. Oh yeah about 25—close to 26. I didn't court her a little more than a year. So next she say—when I put the stuff on her and she say, “Well I'll think about it.” I say yeah, You can see me. And one day I was going out and there was a trail that come out over there by Aunt Janet—and I seen her coming up the hill and she had a big pink bag and she was walking. And I say, Oh. And I stopped her and I put—I picked up that pink bag and toted it up the hill and carried her on home and about that time I come to see her and she told me, “Yeah, I believe you meant what you said.” Only two times somebody told her this and that one me and she had her boyfriend—a preacher—James—I forget his name. Lived down in Morris near Liberty. And I got jealous one time he carried her to church—and I wasn't going regular like I do now—so I stopped that.

LC: [Laughs] How'd you stop that?

AW: I went to Reverend Rayford and told him to keep him away from her. I say, I ain't jealous but I don't want him to feel like he's outdoing me.

[Laughter]

And somehow we go along now for a good while and the next thing you know we began to talk about getting married.

LC: So did y'all have a big wedding?

AW: No! We was married on the front porch at her little house.

LC: You got any pictures?

AW: Yeah we probably do. You ever hear about him—I think y'all related to Reverend Burke—he walk kind of lame foot like that when he walked—he lived in Newton. He married us. Henry Travillion—

LC: The oil man?

AW: No.

LC: Oh you talking about Ruby Lee's brother.

AW: Yeah. And he was trying to hear a word about who all we got there—but he was over at the girl he liked kept giving her rides. That was a big deal back then! [Laughter]

And we were married there on the front porch in 1953. Coming up April it will be 50 years go.

LC: Did you have a reception and cake and stuff?

AW: Yeah. After they left and my wife and me ate [laughter]. Wasn't too much left that they didn't eat. I enjoyed it. And guess what? Since that day I think we have slept apart—might've been two nights—since we've been married.

LC: Well I think we'll end the tape there before it runs out.

[Laughter]

AW: Yeah you go on and do that!

LC: Okay. Thank you very much.

AW: Me and her the ones that built this house.

LC: I remember that.

AW: Yeah we did. After we got married. I rode and I had just finished my house—and I wanted to get this on the tape—when we back up and go back to the church—

TRANSCRIPT END