INTERVIEWEE: Hobart Taylor, Sr.

INTERVIEWER: Joe B. Frantz

DATE : January 29, 1972

F: You say your people came from Texas?

T: Yes. My people were native Texans. I don't know where they came [from] into Texas, but I do know that Captain John Sales, who was an important man in the legislature of Texas, owned my people in slavery time. I understand that he came from Attica, New York into Texas before the Civil War. Where my people came from I don't know, I'm not able to say. But I do know that my grandfather Mr. Shoemaker--.

[interruption]

F: We'll go back now to Brenham and to Gay Hill.

T: Shall I start there? Yes, my people were slaves up at Gay Hill. I'm from Brenham, and I've gone over that period of my grandfather. After they were emancipated in Brenham, my grandfather's master advised him to go down in South Texas because the land up there around Brenham had been worked by slaves so long that it was poor.

F: Did he have a family of his own by this time?

T: He had ten boys when he left there.

F: Any girls?

T: Yes, four or five girls. He went down in South Texas around about 1876.

F: Where did he go?

T: He went down to Kendleton, Texas in Fort Bend County. It took them two years to travel from Brenham to down on Turkey Creek in Fort Bend County, they were two years meandering along, traveling along.

F: That must have been quite a trip.

T: It was quite a trip. It was just about sixty miles.

F: About how old was your grandfather by this time?

T: My grandfather by this time was a mature man, because all of his boys were born in Brenham. He had ten boys and four girls. They went down there and he bought his first 600 acres of land and started developing that section of the country.

F: Where did he get the money?

T: He got it at 10 cents an acre. He made that 10 cents for each pair of shoes when he was in slavery. When he was emancipated he had $600 in dimes that the master had kept for him.

F: I see. Every time he sold a pair of shoes, he was buying another acre.

T: He wasn't buying the acre then, but he bought the land after he was free. He was freed in 1865. It was about 1876 before they started this migration south. They started down there with 600 acres of land and it took a long time to develop it, it was rough land, it hadn't been cultivated before. Most of it was state land, and they paid 10 cents an acre for it.

For some time the Republican party took credit for the freedom of the American Negro. All the Negroes in Fort Bend County--we had officials down in Fort Bend County, high sheriffs and district clerks. My uncle was county commissioner down there in Fort Bend County, and my father was a businessman. He was a rancher and a cattleman, and later developed into a successful construction man. You call it construction now, but we called it teaming contracting. That would be before this final construction came into being.

After the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments to the Constitution, it left Fort Bend County with 10,000 free people--Negroes that had their full freedom, and there were only 150 white people who were poll tax taxpayers. Consequently the control of that county was in the hands

of the Negroes until about 1900. Do you understand?

F: Yes, I understand.

T: Until about 1900. We had high sheriffs, we had members of the legislature, and we had everything that pertained to political office. The white people and the Negroes had a friendship together that lasted all these years because of that early political participation. And along in that time the white people of this country began to import foreigners to come into this country. That's when the Germans, when the Bohemians, and all these other races came in, and of course they were regarded as white and it set up that kind of hatred between the groups. That's the reason we're still laboring with that thing. Those people had lost their free labor and things like that, and after they had the right to vote they controlled that county. Now, Fort Bend County, Wharton County, Harris County, and Matagorda County were dominant Negro counties. It created the kind of a situation in there where the races got along pretty good together. They intermixed and they mixed. Of course there wasn't any legal mixing, you know, but they mixed and it created a lot of mulattos through all our people.

My father was exiled from Fort Bend County because of his participation in the Republican party. He was exiled; Henry Ferguson was exiled, who used to be our assayer for Fort Bend County; Charlie Ferguson, who used to be district clerk for Fort Bend County; and Anglish? Brown, who was a businessman, a saloon man, was exiled from that county. The Fergusons filed suit against Fort Bend County and recovered a $40,000 suit.

F: They were just forced out and had to just leave what they owned?

T: That's right, they were just forced out. The white people who were in the Republican center in there moved away, all of them moved away.

F: And just left it to the Democrats.

T: That's right.

F: You remember the old Populist movement that they used to have back about the 1890's--I know you don't remember it personally, but did you hear your people speak of it?

T: No. We had what they called the Jaybirds and the Peckerwoods. Now that's the kind of movement they had. The Republican party were the Peckerwoods, and the Democrats were the Jaybirds. Now we had that kind of feud among the people in that state.

F: Did the fact that your grandmother was a mulatto create any particular problems for her or opportunities or anything?

T: No.

F: I judge your grandfather was pure Negro.

T: Yes, he was part Indian too, but they had no problems.

F: When your father was exiled, did he just have to go off and leave his land?

T: Go off and leave his land. Well, my grandfather bought the land, and after he died, of course they divided the land in Fort Bend County among the twelve or fourteen children. But when my father was exiled from there he had to go off and leave every little thing he had.

F: Do you remember your grandfather?

T: No, I don't remember him.

F: He was dead before you came along or before you were old enough to remember.

T: I don't remember him a bit.

F: Where were you born?

T: I was born in Wharton.

F: You were still in Fort Bend County then?

T: That's right. After my father was exiled, he went over into Wharton County, and I was born in Wharton.

F: What did your father do after he was exiled?

T: After he was exiled he went into Wharton and developed himself by working from one plantation to another, and he finally accumulated 700 acres of land in his lifetime.

F: Was he fearful back in Fort Bend County that they might do harm to him?

T: That was just a Jaybird rule. They had what was known as the white man colony. And when they got together and after they had forced all the Republican white people out of the county, the Jaybird party, which was the Democrats, had control. Papa wasn't exactly afraid, but he was just forced out of the county.

F: It just seemed better to leave.

T: Yes.

F: Was he able to sell his land?

T: No, the land belonged to my grandfather.

F: I see.

T: And then in later years they divided it up. When my father went over into Wharton County, he had to come up by his own bootstraps. He made a very successful situation in Wharton County.

F: And you grew up there in Wharton County.

T: I grew up in Wharton County.

F: What was it like when you were a little boy in those days?

T: I would say that we had such a thing as understanding among white and colored. And if you were progressive, the white people went along with you in Wharton County. I don't know anything about any hate between races.

F: Did you have any little white boys who were your friends?

T: We played together, the Russes and the Halls and the Clines, we all played together, we didn't have any feeling about it. In those days my father was referred to all the time as Uncle Jack and my mother was referred to as Aunt Millie. Nearly every Sunday the county judge or some of the big folks down there would come down to dinner at Aunt Millie's. It was a regular fraternizing affair. We didn't have any of that other feeling about race.

F: You had a little bit of the same experience I did. My closest friend until I was about 6 years old was a little Negro boy named Charles Fred, who lived five or six blocks from where I did and used to come over when his mother would come, and we'd play. I remember one time his mother dragging me off him because I had been to church and seen a baptizing and so I insisted on baptizing Charles Fred, and she didn't think that's what he needed.

When were you born?

T: I was born in 1902.

F: How many other brothers and sisters did you have?

T: I had one brother. My brother went to Chicago, and my sisters live here with me. I have two sisters who live here in Houston where I live. I'll tell you one of the interesting things that might be of interest to you. My father called us up one morning, my brother was twelve years older than I, and told us: "Now,boys, I'll tell you. You and these Ferguson boys that run the cattle together and rope together, and the Halls boys, and all of them--they're getting to be about 17 or 18 years old. It is the custom to refer to them as Mister."

My brother had graduated from college and he said, "Well, I'll tell you, Papa, before I refer to Barnes and all these boys as Mister, we were all born and raised together, I'll leave." But I conformed. My

brother left and went to Chicago. He died up there in Chicago, but he was fairly successful. But I conformed; it was pretty hard to take, But I went on and called them Mister; even though we were boys together, I called them Mister. My brother wouldn't conform to that, and he left.

F: Did you continue to be friends?

T: Oh, yes, right today. When cars were rationed I was in the transportation business here in Houston, and I'd send those boys cars that they couldn't get down there--the Harrison boys, the Herndon? boys and all of them. And we never had a cross word. And I never would go to collect the money. They'd bring the money back to me. We had that kind of friendship.

The man that got me into Houston here was Mr. Roberts, the president of our bank in Wharton. There was another one, a vice president of our bank, E. G. Brooks. They've always been as nice to me as anybody you ever saw in your life. When I came to Houston a letter of introduction to the bankers came first. Mr. Roberts wrote them and said, "I want Hobart to have every opportunity down there in Houston because I think he's above the average of his group, and I want him to come down there because he'll have a bigger opportunity to succeed."

I got acquainted with Jesse Jones.

F: How did your brother happen to go to college? That's rather unusual for that period; neither white nor blacks went through college very--.

T: My father was progressive for that time, he sent us all to college. My brother and all of his children went to college. Being successful, I suppose that we had--

F: Where did your brother go?

T: My brother went to Paul Quinn.

F: Oh, up in Waco.

T: Yes. He went on to Fisk University. Fisk was one of the best schools we had at that time under the segregated system.

F: What was his business?

T: My brother was a school teacher, he was strictly a school teacher. Of course he died in Chicago; he had some substance, but I don't think he ever got acquainted in the business circles like I did in Houston.

F: You were the only boy left when he went off.

T: That's right.

F: Were you the baby in the family?

T: No, my two sisters are younger than I am. There weren't but two boys.

F: Where did your mother come from?

T: My mother came from Columbus, Texas.

F: How did she happen to meet your father?

T: They all were living there in Kendleton in the same section. You see, Kendleton was new land, newly developed country, and we had a migration of Negroes from Columbus, Colorado County, Washington County, and all the lower counties.

F: How did you keep the whites from moving in on this new land?

T: They just didn't want it. You see, the Bohemians were about a mile from there, Beasley was about a mile. The Negro people had about 11,000 acres in there that they colonized on themselves and bought, along at the time my grandfather bought the 600 acres. But you had that kind of separation among races.

F: Did your father ever take any active part in politics beyond just supporting candidates and voting? Did he run himself?

T: No, he never did run himself, but he said something about who <u>was</u> running. And that was a political reason that you had this Republican and Democrat--white man's union and all that kind of thing.

F: By the time you got to Wharton, I suppose any political opportunity for the Negro man had just closed down, hadn't it?

T: It wasn't closed in Wharton. Now when he got to Wharton they had what was known as the Hope Adams killing. You had had this Jaybird and Peckerwood riot in Fort Bend County, and that thing lasted for about two or three months. They almost fought a war. You've got a history of it. When we got to Wharton, Hope Adams started to run on what he called the independent ticket, but in those days they'd kill any white man that broke ranks to run on an independent ticket. Hope Adams was killed shortly after my father got to Wharton. They had the large Negro vote, you know, but they all had to be Republicans. During that period they formed this white man's union, and they disqualified the Negro vote in the Democratic party and you couldn't vote anything but the Republican party. That lasted until 1944, before you could vote in the Democratic party. We had to continue to fight here in Houston; we had the NAACP who led the fight and got us freed to where we could vote any way we wanted to vote.

F: What kind of school opportunity did you have in Wharton County?

T: We had a Negro school, a school that opened after cotton picking was done. And it closed when cotton chopping time came. That was the kind of situation we had to come through.

F: How many grades did it go?

T: It went to ten or eleven grades. You see, we had to finish high school after we went to Prairie because you had no school in this section.

F: Then you went on up to Prairie View.

T: That's right.

F: When you got up to be a teen-ager, did the white and the Negro boys continue to play together? Did you play ball together?

T: We didn't play too much together, but I'll tell you what we did. We had a friendship that went on down through the years, and it's still that. It's an unusual situation; with some people there has been a difference in their experiences. I've never had any bad experiences with your people. In Wharton when I first came out of school, I was the first automobile salesman in that county.

F: Oh, really?

T: That's right.

F: What were you selling?

T: Selling Fords.

F: The old Model T.

T: The old Model T. I was selling Fords; I was the first automobile salesman in the county.

F: How did that happen?

T: Mr. Roberts, my good friend who was the banker and Papa's good friend. My father owned a big contracting organization in Wharton County. He built all the roads. We had a hundred Missouri mules. He built all the roads and the canals and everything in that county. Anybody that would want something like that done would see Uncle Jack.

F: Did you ever work for him?

T: Oh, yes.

F: One of his crews?

T: Oh, yes. When school was out in the summer I would go to the levy camp, we had what we called levy camps.

F: What's a levy camp?

T: A levy camp is where you build roads and you build canals and things like that. My father had a hundred Missouri mules, and the mules did the work on the levy camps.

F: Did you sleep out at the camp, or did you go back home at night?

T: We had our own tents.

F: That was great for a boy, wasn't it?

T: Oh, yes, greatest life you ever saw. I learned to shake the plow, and that was the highest paid job on the levy camp, if you were a plow shaker.

F: What does that mean?

T: You see, on the levy camp you had to plow the ground up and move it with scrapers--move the dirt with scrapers on the levy camp; that is, if you were building a canal, if you were building a road, you had to have scrapers to move that dirt on the road.

F: You used mule-drawn scrapers?

T: That's right. And we used mule-drawn plows, plow teams. For about every twelve teams, that would be twenty-four mules, you'd have a plow team of four up. And in a hundred you had about five plow teams. If you were building roads you had a different situation.

F: Where did they get the term "shaking the plow?"

T: That's where you got your biggest money. I got $2.25 a day to shake the plow. The reason they called it shaking the plow was because the plow was so heavy and big.

F: I don't quite have this clear in my mind yet. The plow comes along and digs up the earth and then you push it or scrape it into the shape you want?

T: No, it digs up the earth, then you've got what's called a scraper. You'd load the dirt in the scraper and move the dirt wherever you wanted it, across the street or up the street to wherever you wanted it. That's why you have ditches on each side of the road. That dirt is brought out from over there in the center. That's the way your highways

are built, that's the whole theory of the highways.

If you were digging canals where you were going to rice farm, you would take all that dirt out and put it on each side of the road and leave that hole down there, maybe twelve feet deep. In the early days of public works, we built dirt tanks. When we first started to finding oil, all of these tanks were filled with dirt. You'd let the water and dirt run in there together, and the water would settle to the bottom, then the oil on top. We'd build ten acre tanks with nothing but dirt. Take all that dirt out and bring it out and pile it up all around that ten acre block, pile it up to where you'd have a depth of probably fifteen feet. We built it with dirt, nothing else. Now they've got oil tanks already built, just set them down and go on drilling oil.

F: They would set oil in there then.

T: That's right.

F: Pump it in?

T: Yes, they'd pump it in from out in the fields. It was fascinating back there in those days.

F: How did your father happen to get into that business?

T: He just got into it. He owned a big plantation there. In fact, my father had the labor of the city. He had the labor of the city because he worked anywhere from a hundred to five and six hundred men all the time. And he had virtually the control of the workers in the city. When it was rice farming in the fall of the year, he'd use about six hundred men.

F: All Negroes?

T: All Negroes.

F: That would make him a pretty big employer.

T: He was a very big employer.

F: How come some white man didn't get jealous of him and move in on it?

T: They just didn't do it. We had some white Taylors down there in that county, big men, big plantation owners, but they were good friends of ours. We didn't have any jealousy. In fact, we've been a member of the club all our lives. Some people are just acceptable.

F: Did you ever chop any cotton?

T: Yes, sir, I chopped cotton for my father. We had fifteen to twenty tenants on our plantation. I chopped cotton for my father and for various members of the families on the plantation. I picked cotton. I used to pick 500 pounds of cotton a day. Then I was a good cattleman, a good cowboy.

F: Did you used to rope?

T: Rope, ride, anything.

F: Break horses?

T: That's right.

F: Did you ever think about being a cowboy?

T: It was fun to me.

F: Strictly a young man's game.

T: Oh, yes, it was a lot of fun.

F: The rodeo hadn't been developed at that time, had it?

T: No, but early back there they used to have those roping contests, where you'd have entire grown beef there. But they ruled it out in the legislature. And the rodeo hadn't come into being. Of course it came into being when I was about 22 or 23, something like that. I roped in many a rodeo.

F: Oh, you have!

T: Oh, yes. But I wouldn't ride those pitching horses in a rodeo.

F Your bones began to set a little bit.

T: They made it too tough for me.

F: I've always rather gathered there wasn't color distinction among cowboys. If you could do the job, that's all that mattered.

T: That's all. Now you take the big cattlemen, like the Pierce Estate--my father worked for the Pierce Estate for 26 years. They were great rice farmers back then. The Pierce Estate's cowmen were virtually all Negro, only they had a boss by the name of Clay McSpann?. They didn't have any feeling, all of those men rode together, and they roped together and everything else.

F: They just worked to get the job done.

T: That's right. There never was much feeling there.

F: Did you live in town or did you live out on the place?

T: My mother had a home in town, in the city of Wharton, and we traveled backwards and forwards to the ranch.

F: How far out of town was the ranch?

T: The ranch was about eight miles out of town.

F: With the kind of wet weather you can have down around Wharton and the soil, etc., there must have been a lot of road work to do. I would think after one of those heavy rains you had to get right back out, didn't you?

T: Those heavy rains didn't stop us because they had pretty good roads. They built those roads and kept them up, just like they've done now. Of course they've got all asphalt roads now, hard-surfaced roads out in that country.

F: Was there much of a sand and gravel business then?

T: Oh, yes.

F: Did your father go into that?

T: He was in it. Wherever you had teaming contractors, maybe you'd have

a teaming contractor move so many yards of gravel, maybe you'd have a contractor build a canal. You had the tools to do it with. You had the wagons; we kept about forty or fifty wagons on hand, and we were hauling rice in the fall of the year and things like that. He had a pretty big outfit. I would think that with his housing and all that kind of thing, he kept an outfit that was worth probably a hundred thousand dollars or more.

F: He must have been one of the biggest businessmen around Wharton.

T: He was.

F: He had no problem getting credit then when he had to have it?

T: When you could deliver, our banks didn't pay any attention to that. Mr. Roberts happened to come along with old man G. C. Gifford, one of the first bankers in that town, and we never had any trouble.

My father never did have to make a financial statement to the bank back in those days. They knew him. They knew everything that everybody had. He was a big landowner.

F: As they used to say, he carried his character in his face.

T: That's right. He never made a financial statement. And if he said he needed ten mules, if the ten mules were going to be $2,000, whatever he needed, ask them and then those big mule men would send him the mules.

F: He bought his mules locally.

T: Yes, but he had a special price.

F: Just because of quantity.

T: We always had to change a lot. He'd usually buy them young, you know, and break them himself.

F: Did you get to be a pretty good mule skinner?

T: Oh, yes, I think I was a good one.

F: Did you have an old-time wagon yard there in Wharton where people hung around and gathered?

T: You had blacksmith shops, that's where the people hung around and gathered, at the blacksmith shop. You had Russ' blacksmith shop. But the main gathering place was up at the drugstore. That's where Papa and all those big white people in there always hung around and talked business. Masses of our people were over at Hi Connors? but my father never did waste any time over there. He stayed among the active businessmen.

F: Could the businessmen sit down and have a cup of coffee together, or was there that line drawn in those days?

T: They wouldn't have a cup of coffee together, but they'd come to your house and have dinner with you.

F: It didn't really make much sense, did it?

T: It didn't make much sense. They didn't have any eating place where they could eat together, but they'd come to your house.

F: Did you visit other churches?

T: No. I went to the African Methodist Church.

F: Did the white people ever come to your church?

T: Oh, yes, when they wanted something done.

F: What do you mean, when they wanted something done?

T: After you got the right to vote, if they needed a vote they'd come. But most of that has passed away. I think this is true. I don't know what happened to create such a feeling, but I've never been exposed to it. Now you take all the boys that came along with me like the Harrisons and Northingtons and all those people--.

F: I knew some of the Northington boys that came from down there around Egypt.

T: Yes. All those boys are my friends. They'd pick up the phone and say, "Hobart, I need a car," or, "I need two cars. I've got a couple of people." I'd say, "Okay, I'll send them to you." I'd send them down there to them and they'd leave work and come up here to bring me the money. I never collected for any favors I had to do for those boys.

F: Did you become a car salesman before you went to Prairie View or after you went to Prairie View?

T: That was after I went to Prairie View.

F: How come you went to Prairie View and your brother went to Paul Quinn?

T: I saw that politically I'd have a better opportunity coming from Prairie View than I would going to Paul Quinn, because Paul Quinn was the church school and I wouldn't have the power of the State of Texas behind me, that's why I went to Prairie View.

F: You were thinking even then.

T: I think I was. My father said, "Well, if you want to do that, go ahead and do it."

F: You had to take some high school courses when you went to Prairie View?

T: That's right.

F: How long did you have to take them?

T: About a year. I was through in about a year because we had ten grades at Wharton.

F: Did you have the same teachers for the high school courses that you had in the college end of Prairie View?

T: No.

F: It was a separate high school arrangement?

T: That's right.

F: How long did you stay at Prairie View?

T: Four years.

F: You went all the way through?

T: That's right.

F: What did you get your degree in?

T: I got my degree in agriculture.

F: Did you ever think of becoming a farmer or a rancher?

T: My father wanted me to do that because I would understand the mechanisms of farming and ranching. I got my degree in agriculture and then I went on to a professional school in the field of life insurance at Wharton School of Finance.

F: Up in Pennsylvania.

T: Yes. I was a life insurance man for a good long while in the life insurance companies, and I saw a bigger opportunity to spread myself. I couldn't buy any stock in those companies so I went into business for myself. I went into the transportation business.

F: Why couldn't you buy stock?

T: Those companies that were formed were Negro companies, and they wouldn't sell you any stock.

F: They remained private.

T: That's right. They wouldn't sell you any, so that's what got me out of the business. I went into the transportation business and got a franchise from the city of Houston, and I stayed in that business thirty years.

F: Were you in the life insurance business here in Houston?

T: That's right. I was the first Negro producer in any of the big local companies to produce a million dollars a year, and after I saw they wouldn't give me an opportunity to take any growth I went into business for myself. Of course the banks all backed me. I never had any trouble.

F: After you finished Prairie View, did you go right on to the Wharton School of Finance, or did you go back to Wharton, Texas?

T: I went back to Wharton, Texas. I went to Wharton in 1923.

F: And sold cars?

T: Yes. You see, I went back to Wharton and I was a car salesman in Wharton and I could go on anybody's plantation and sell cars.

F: How long did you sell cars?

T: I sold cars for about two years or three.

F: How did you happen to get that job?

T: Mr. Roberts gave it to me.

F: He had the Ford agency?

T: No, Mr. Roberts was the executor of the Gifford Estate. He was over the whole Gifford Estate that owned the Ford agency.

When I came to Houston I didn't come here like an ordinary fellow might. I had letters of introduction to people that stood for something, and I developed a very interesting business because I moved and traded around with two and three hundred cars a year.

F: You came here in the car business?

T: No, I came here and went into the transportation business. I got a franchise from the city of Houston and I ran that franchise for thirty years.

F: Did you ever sell insurance here?

T: Yes, I sold insurance here until 1928.

F: How did you happen to go to Wharton, you decided that you wanted to do something more than to sell cars?

T: No, when I got to be noticed by the president of the company, he said, "Well, you seem to be a bright boy and we're going to send you to Wharton School of Finance."

F: The insurance company?

T: Yes.

F: Did you start selling insurance while you were still in the car selling--?

T: No. Mr. Roberts had sent me to Houston where I'd have larger opportunities.

F: You'd already moved to Houston then?

T: That's right.

F: Did you know you were coming here to sell insurance?

T: Oh, yes, because I was selling a little on the side while I was selling cars.

F: Did it kind of scare you at that time? You were just a kid in his 20's, to come in and take on the city of Houston.

T: No, it didn't scare me. You know we weren't too large a city at that time in 1925.

F: How did you make your contacts after you got here, as far as people to sell to?

T: Mr. Roberts had told Mr. King, Jesse Jones and them that I was a successful fellow and was above the average, and that anytime I needed any money in Houston, whatever I wanted to do, advance me as much as $10,000. That's the kind of introduction that I had.

F: Did you see all of these men after you got to Houston?

T: That's right. I used to borrow a little money from them, up to $5 or $10,000 at a time and pay them back. When I went into business for myself, I needed more money then and they supplied it.

F: Jesse Jones used to have a reputation of being a pretty hard man with a dollar. Did you have any problems with him?

T: Not a bit. He said that I was one of the few men of my race who could return money that I borrowed. I never did have a delinquent note, and

he used to loan me up to $300,000, and the First City National Bank used to do the same thing. I never had a delinquent note.

F: You sold insurance here then for how long?

T: I quit selling insurance after 1928.

F: And that's when you got the taxi franchise?

T: That's right.

F: Was that hard to get? How did you happen to pick that in the first place?

T: Mr. Brooks knew that my dad was in an allied business. I told him that I thought I'd like to have a franchise and pay insurance and things like that; that I wasn't going to run it unless I could run it right. He wrote Mr. Nagle in Houston, who was in the City Hall, and Mr. Nagle arranged for me to get a 200 unit permit and they gave it to me. Now that thing is worth millions of dollars.

F: Did you have any hopes of 200 units, or was that just sort of to give you room to grow in?

T: It gave me room to grow in.

F: How did you get started that time? Did you borrow the money?

T: I borrowed $10,000 the first thing and started it.

F: And bought cabs.

T: And bought cabs, and I stayed there.

F: What kind of cabs did you buy?

T: Plymouth.

F: Plymouth was still a pretty new car then, wasn't it?

T: Yes, a very good car. Of course I made some improvements on the Plymouth to develop into a taxicab package.

F: In what way?

T: I developed it to a kind of car where you had a cushion that wouldn't

sling, and it would do 100,000 miles without any _____, and developed a spring because I was running on the Negro streets, the rough parts of town. I developed all of those things for Plymouth.

F: The city of Houston didn't pave the Negro part of town?

T: That's right.

F: You must have hit every chug hole in town at some time or another.

T: That's right. I gathered the information and sent it in to the Plymouth company and had my cars made like I wanted them. That's the reason why, I think, that Plymouth is one of the foremost cars in operation as a taxicab.

F: How did you handle your first cabs? Did you buy them outright?

T: Bought them outright with a discount.

F: How many could you get for $10,000?

T: They cost me about $900 at the time with the discounts. Uncle Jesse showed me how to do it. We paid cash for them. It made them discount them to about--the first $10,000 I had about $4,000 of discount that came back to me. And Uncle Jesse said, "Put it in the bank because you'll need it down the road. And as you go along, pay cash for those things."

F: It was cheaper to borrow the money and pay cash than to try to finance yourself?

T: That's right. You see, the banks would loan me all the money I wanted and that's the way I operated.

F: Where did you set up your office?

T: My office was on Dowling Street.

F: I'm sure it wasn't as high-powered as it is nowadays with dispatchers and all that sort of thing.

T: Oh, yes, I had dispatchers, but during that time we had stands. We had

telephone arrangements where you'd have stands in all the various parts of the town. I had stands at the Union Station, stands downtown.

F: So if I wanted a cab I could call--

T: Just walk there to that phone and pick it up, if there wasn't one standing there. That phone would tie you in to the main office.

F: That gave you a fairly expensive operation at the beginning, didn't it?

T: It cost me a lot of money to run, but I made a lot of money. I had all the stations.

F: Where did you get your drivers?

T: I had no trouble. That secret is in knowing how to get along with people, and I managed people and I never had any problem.

F: Did you get to know future drivers through selling insurance to them?

T: No, I didn't do that. I'll tell you what I did. My great secret was in handling my people. One of the great secrets of handling your people, so many of your drivers would get tickets and things like that and wouldn't appear, and whenever one driver had to go down there, if a policeman came out there looking for him I never told anything which was a lie. Consequently it developed before I was in business two years, if they needed anybody out at my place, "if he drives for H. T. Cab Company, just call Taylor." They'd call me and say, "I've got a warrant down here for such-and-such." I wouldn't send him by himself, I'd go with him. That was one of the main things to do in protecting the people because there would be a lot of times when people would have a tendency to overpower him or do something to him that wasn't right and I'd go with him.

F: They never would do anything like that if you were along?

T: No. Of course I got along with all the policemen, I got along with the

chief and things like that. I probably had a good insight. I was a churchman, a Christian gentleman, and folks didn't ask me to do anything wrong. I always remembered my friends at Christmas, and judges and everybody, and it wasn't long before I got acquainted. I had about 600 lawsuits where people would get hurt or hit or something like that, but after I got to know the right people it just all disappeared.

F: Did you have any trouble from the white competition?

T: No. You see, at that time we only had cabs for white people and cabs for Negroes, but for some reason I could haul white people.

F: I was going to ask you, did you take calls from white people?

T: That's right, and nobody bothered me. And I'd tell the chief of police, "Now look, Mr. So-and-So wants to be picked up at such-and-such a place. What do you think about it?" "Go ahead, Taylor, you run the right kind of business, and we don't have to worry about it." We took calls from white people and everybody.

F: Did you use mostly young drivers or aged?

T: I always tried to use drivers that were above 25, because they don't work out so well when they're young.

F: You need a little more maturity.

T: Just a little more maturity. I had no trouble.

F: Did you have any really bad wrecks in that period?

T: Sometimes you did. Maybe in that whole period we didn't have over three or four serious wrecks. If you used those more mature men, you didn't have many wrecks, you weren't exposed to many.

F: Did you get completely out of the insurance business?

T: Oh, yes, I got completely out.

F: I thought maybe you wrote your own insurance.

T: No, I had another good friend of mine that wrote my insurance, and I

had a great credit on my insurance. I handled my boys in such a way that--I'd give them good bonuses and say, "If you have no wreck I'm going to do this and do this." And then I set up my own finance situation for the boys and charged them only 4 percent. Whatever was left above the principal I'd divide it among them at the end of the year.

F: Did you subfranchise to some cab drivers, or did you own all your own cabs?

T: I didn't own all my own cabs. I subfranchised to some of the drivers; those boys who were all right and had developed there with me, I let them buy them.

F: You in a sense just charged for the service of operating?

T: That's right.

F: In those first days, was it sort of touch-and-go for awhile until you got established, or did you prosper from the beginning?

T: I tried to run my business so that I wouldn't lose any money. I had a big service station on the side.

F: Also serviced your own cabs.

T: That's right. The service station was profitable. I don't think we lost any money because I remember we made $5,000 one month during the gas wars. Every time a gas war would come on, you'd keep the tanks full and when you'd get your gas war and the gas would drop, then you'd sell that gas out. When you got through with those gas wars you'd probably have a lot of hidden profit. Always keep your tanks full. We had such a fight here with this gasoline business, and we made lots of money out of those gas wars.

F: Was the fight between brands or between black and white?

T: The fights were between the big gasoline companies.

F: And the independents.

T: That's right.

F: Did you sell one of the major gasoline brands?

T: Oh, yes, I always sold a major.

F: What was your station?

T: My station was Texaco.

F: Where?

T: Down on Dowling Street.

F: Whereabouts on Dowling?

T: About the 2,000 block on Dowling.

F: Did you take much of a part in civic affairs, either wholly or for the Negro community?

T: Oh, yes. I was a big church man, I had to be interested in my people if I wanted to be successful. Anything that came up in the Negro community that was of any value I took part in it.

F: Were you one of those that sort of kept the pressure on to improve the streets?

T: Oh, yes. We kept on dealing with the mayors. When we got the vote, all these problems began to change, and we supported the right people.

F: Did you belong to the NAACP?

T: Yes.

F: Was it fairly effective around here?

T: Very. Our big job was to get the right to vote. It took us twenty-five years. We started back in 1920, and we didn't get the right to vote until after twenty-five years. You see, we knew that we couldn't vote in the Democratic party, it was a worthless situation. Times are changing all the time.

F: For a long time there to vote Republican was just wasted.

T: That's right, you were just wasting your time. We knew that the powers

and strengths were in the Democratic party. But I don't know but what we've made a lot of serious mistakes in this thing. Of course it's going to take us a long time. In building a race it just takes time.

F: Of course on something like the vote the tragedy there is that you're having to get back what you'd had a half a century earlier.

T: That's right. You see, we would have been a different people. Out of all of that so many of us are different, that you don't know. The South is a place nobody knows. I've never been mistreated by a white man in my life. All the people at Wharton, when I go down there--I've got a lot of land holdings down there and ranching down there--it's just like any other white man down there. The rule was, for instance, when you ginned cotton off a man's place you made the checks payable to him and that was wrong, but they would do the same thing for us that they would do to any white land owner. I think a lot of the things that we come in contact with is due to not knowing, not knowing how this thing works. As rapid as we can communicate with this white man, the better he's going to understand us. All he's interested in is making money.

F: You have to educate him as much as he does you.

T: He's interested in making money. My grandmother used to say, "Boys, let me tell you something. My master, old Colonel Sales, was one of the finest men in this world. But he knew the rattle of money. If you youngsters don't learn the rattle of money early, you're not going to get any."

But I think we've made a lot of mistakes, but they've been colonial mistakes. Now all of this problem that we've got with this young Negro, it's hard to make these younger Negroes understand. We've got a definite, tremendous--.

F: It's hard to make a young white understand, my friend.

T: I think the young white man thinks we've been lying to him about this race question. The young white man wants to go on and accept us and give us an opportunity to develop and build. Well, we older fellows have already had that opportunity. We had some of the richest and the wealthiest Negroes in this country, but they didn't publicize it. Nobody publicized it. I've never been in jail, I've never been exposed to a lot of things that other people in my race are exposed to, I don't know anything about it. Hobart, Jr. doesn't know anything about it. All the white folks, so far as we're concerned, are our friends. We don't know anything about it.

I've been with Lyndon Johnson for twenty-five years until he got to be President, and those are some of the things that you don't write.

But I'll tell you what you do. In the days of my father if you went in a neighborhood like Wharton and asked for somebody of leadership and responsibility, they would tell you, "Uncle Jack, Aunt Millie, or the Miles', or the Eddie Robinsons', or this or that," and if you ever were sent to Uncle So-and-So over there, you could trust him, but if he ever said "Old So-and-So," he wasn't the type. They had that kind of distinction, I've analyzed it. They wouldn't dare refer to my mother other than Aunt Millie, they wouldn't make her feel bad. There was some reason for them saying Uncle and Aunt, when here I am of a dark color and here he is white, and I'm his uncle.

Now take Jesse Jones. Jesse Jones thought more of my calling him Uncle Jesse, he enjoyed it better than anybody. I called him the same thing that his nephew called him, John.

F: How did you get to calling him that?

T: John referred to him one day as "Uncle Jesse, so-and-so," and he had

us up there together--I wanted John to make a speech for us. Finally I said, "Well, Uncle Jesse don't care," and that just tickled him. Until the day he died he wanted me to call him uncle, just like John Jones. It tickled him more than anything you ever saw in your life, the idea of his being my uncle.

F: How long did your father last? When did he die?

T: My father died in 1918.

F: Was he still using mules, or had the scraper come in yet?

T: Mules were just passing out. We had a hundred mules to get rid of after that.

F: I was going to ask, what did you do with his business?

T: We ran it on for about five or six years until those mules got older.

F: You just gradually sold it off and let it die away?

T: Just let it die away. All those old plows we used to use teaming, you know, cultivating and things, we finally had to junk them--after the big farming came in, Roosevelt came to power, and they began to kill the sheep and kill the hogs and cattle, and we gradually got down to where we didn't have any mules or anything like that and we began to use tractors. Now the big farmers used tractors, and the big farmers used cotton pickers. Where we used to have to have hands to pick cotton, that cotton picker picks twenty-five and thirty bales a day. All you have to do is dump it on in and cover it up with a tarpaulin or something until you get through picking. You've got a corn puller and you don't need any labor for that; you've got hay balers, you don't need any labor but about two men. The whole thing is revolutionized.

F: Do you still operate a farm down there?

T: Oh, yes, but I lease it to big farmers. You see, the big farmer is just going to work 500 acres or 1,000 acres, and he has got tractor

drivers. I don't have but about a couple of hundred head of cattle now, and the rest of the pasture I lease it out to other cattle people.

F: Was your wife a Houston girl?

T: She's from Ohio.

F: Where did you meet her?

T: I met her in school.

F: Up at Wharton or Prairie View?

T: Up at Wharton.

F: Was she in the University of Pennsylvania?

T: Yes, she was in the University of Pennsylvania at the time.

F: What was she doing? What was her interest?

T: She was a school teacher. She teaches the mentally retarded.

F: You brought her on back into Wharton?

T: That's right, back into Houston.

F: Did she have much problem adjusting to living down here?

T: I never have seen a person from Ohio that was as well liked by these Southerners as she is. She believed people were just people, and all you had to do was to be understood by people. I've never seen anything too drastic that we can't solve in this race feeling. I don't have a white man that I know of--and if I had to name all the people who helped me up in the world, I couldn't name anybody of any consequence but members of your race, to be frank with you. Starting at Wharton, starting at Wharton! But of course my father kept us busy, like I kept Hobart busy. I never let Hobart run on the streets a day in his life. If he wanted to go some place, I went with him, or his mama went with him.

F: How many children did you have?

T: Just one, didn't have time.

F: I see. Hobart was born here?

T: Yes.

F: Did he go through school here, or did you send him off to school?

T: He went through school here, started at Blackshear and then to high school, and then to Prairie View, and then to Howard, and then to the University of Michigan.

F: He has made a fine career.

T: I kept him busy.

F: Did he ever drive a cab for you?

T: No, he never did. I kept him in school all the time. He'd come down and work on the switchboard for me, he'd do that sometimes, but I kept him off in school all the time.

F: What did you do as far as the business is concerned, the taxi business? Did you sort of catch up on your obligations, say, after you borrowed that first $10,000 and got started, did you borrow and expand and just keep paying out and borrowing and expanding?

T: That's right. I gradually got to the place where I could use all my own gasoline, I didn't have to look to customers outside.

F: You closed down the service station as such, except for yourself?

T: Except for myself.

F: How many cabs did you finally have franchised?

T: I had franchised the 200. Now that franchise is worth about two million dollars or more.

F: Did you ever have any problems renewing the franchise? How long did the franchise last?

T: You don't have to renew it. It'll last as long as the city of Houston lasts. All you have to do is pay the tax on it. Taxes run about $14,000 a year.

F: They keep going up, like everything else.

T: You can lease it for $140,000 a year.

F: Do you still actively run it?

T: No, I don't touch it. I consult and advise.

F: You look in once in awhile.

T: Oh, yes, and show him a lot of the things that he ought to know. But that franchise is a valuable thing. It takes a lot of work to get those franchises out of the city of Houston.

F: How long did you have to wait to get a franchise? Did it go in pretty quickly?

T: You see, I had a lot of power from my people down in Wharton, E. G. Brooks and B. C. Roberts--

F: They must have had good connections here.

T: Oh, yes, they did. Mr. Roberts is a very prominent man. He is a member of the board of directors of the Houston Light and Power, and a big stockholder. They had connections.

F: Did you have a Negro taxi company here when you started?

T: There had been two or three here and they passed away.

F: Weren't just well run or well financed? Just a kind of jake-leg operation?

T: Well, most people get a little profit and they think they can spend that profit, but you've got to save that profit because the time is coming when you need it, they are going to ask you for it down the road. Like you see in all big business now, when you come up here with this pollution, look at the millions of dollars these big corporations have got to pay. It's going to be so after awhile I doubt that you can make money. You're polluting. Of course we're fortunate that so far--of course these taxi cabs are polluting, I reckon that's the reason

the city continues to go up. I don't know, but this pollution is the thing that's going to break a lot of people, because we've got to have clean air. But I leased all of those permits to Yellow Cab.

F: I don't want to pry too much, but did you have to grease any palms to get the franchise?

T: No. After you get big enough with folks behind you, sometimes you have to do some little things for people. What I like to do is do things for people. I never shall forget, there was a man--I don't remember his name now, but he used to be a section foreman down at Wharton out the other side of Lane City. Ed Raymond was his name. Papa carried him some cows down there to milk when he first came in there as a section foreman on the King Belt Railroad.

F: Was this a white man or a Negro?

T: White man. Papa and them built that railroad. The section foreman came in there, and he carried Ed Raymond five fine milk cows down there. In those days people milked cows. They were good milk cows, and Ed Raymond kept those cattle for my father for about twenty years. He raised him thirty head of cattle and gave every one of them to him. When Ed Raymond got ready to leave there, a guy would come down and brand up all your cattle each year, and he raised him thirty head of cattle, gave them to him just like that. Now that was a white man. I told Hobart about it. I said, "If ever we start a business that expands into what we think it's going to expand in and create a foundation, I'm going to hunt Ed Raymond's children, or any of his offspring." And they did my father that way--white people used to milk our cows all over the country. He had a special breed of cattle, Durham cattle that make good milk cows. They used to milk our cattle all the time.

The man on whose place Papa farmed before he was able to buy land,

he gave him 1500 acres of land he could just use to raise cattle on. Said, "Jack, I tell you what you do. Let people milk these cows and they'll be clannish, they'll run in little groups. There are woods there and people will think this is the same cattle, they'll always run in little groups to themselves. They'll segregate themselves."

But I think my people have it fortunate because they've had the right attitude, they've had the American attitude.

F: Did Hobart, Jr. have any problems growing up here? He was well-to-do etc., and yet he was still restricted.

T: Not a bit.

F: They never bothered him.

T: Not a bit, because they knew I was bringing him up right. I carried him with me, and he didn't have any problem. He knows all the bankers in town, the Harveys and everybody like that.

F: Did you have any predominantly Negro banks when you came here?

T: No, we didn't have any.

F: Do you now?

T: Yes. We've got the Riverside National Bank and we've got two or three building and loan associations.

F: Are you involved in any of them?

T: No. I would have been in the Riverside National Bank but one of the fellows who was helping organize the bank, I had pledged $10,000 as stock in that bank, and he saw an opportunity to write an article that involved Hobart and he never did come back to me to get the money.

F: How did you get to know Lyndon Johnson?

T: I was always interested in politics, all my life. My daddy, long before he could vote, could electioneer for those white people down there in Wharton County, and they believed in him. He was one of those

types that they had a lot of faith in and confidence because he handled the labor force of the county. He was interested in it. He could go tell a man something, and it was there. He was influential without a vote, he was very influential.

The South is a peculiar place. A man has virtually got to have a classical education to live in the South, it used to be, but it's getting better. There used to be a time that you couldn't live in the South unless you had a classical education. You had to have that type of adjustment that was unusual, but I think we're coming.

F: It's awfully easy to oversimplify, and people do, you know, on what the South is because they see one element and they say, "That's the South."

T: That's wrong.

F: You and I know better of course, it's a tremendously complicated--.

T: There was not a single person in Wharton County that if you went to him to inquire about my people, the Taylors, that wouldn't tell you, "I'm going to tell you now, if you wanted to go see Aunt Millie or Uncle Jack, they're top people. They think like we think." They didn't hesitate to tell you. Mr. King used to tell me at the bank before he retired, and F. M. Law? at the First International Bank used to tell me--if I had somebody I wanted to see of his group I'd go ask Mr. Law and he'd write them a note, or pick up the phone and call them and say, "I'm sending Hobart Taylor over there, one of the finest colored citizens we've got. And I want to tell you that our bank would loan him a hundred thousand dollars and not even look back." That's what most all the business people or industry did. If I wanted him to do anything, he'd go do it. "Hobart, I've never met you before but Mr. Law said he'd loan you a hundred thousand dollars and not look back." I'd say, "Well, this is very gracious of him."

But it's different. Some people are reacting in the South that have never seen some of the things that we complained of. And then a lot of the things we complained of is because of bad judgment. A man has got to use good judgment.

F: You never did have much of that problem of having to go around to the back door?

T: I never have gone to anybody's back door, I've seen him in his office. That's never been in my making.

F: Did you ever get involved as an investor in any of the predominantly white businesses here?

T: Oh, yes, real estate and all like that. Nobody bothered me. I've bought a lot of real estate in this town and sold a lot.

F: Not necessarily in black sections but all over town?

T: No, I bought everywhere, all around between here and the airport. If I saw something that I wanted, maybe some time I'd have to get a member of your race to go tie it down for me, but I've always got a lot of those friends who will help. Now we do that sometimes.

F: We started talking about Lyndon Johnson.

T: I'll tell you how I got acquainted with Lyndon Johnson. Sam Lowe knew my people from Brenham, he was collector of customs under the Kennedy Administration and went back when Lyndon was running for the Senate. Sam Lowe was active in politics down here, and Sam Lowe came from Brenham. He knew all of my people in Brenham. He just retired year before last. We got together on Lyndon Johnson 'way back there twenty-five years ago and we've helped him all the way.

F: You could vote when he ran for the Senate in 1948.

T: Oh, yes.

F: Did you campaign actively or behind the scenes?

T: We put money in and we campaigned for him actively because we believed in him. When Lyndon was elected, I made substantial contributions to his campaign over the years.

F: And he was aware of what you were doing.

T: Oh, yes. We were friends.

F: You'd met him meanwhile.

T: Oh, yes, we were friends. There were times when we would meet--.

F: When was your first meeting?

T: It must have been nearly twenty years ago. There were times when it wasn't so expedient for us to have large Negro gatherings developed from the political situations, and we wouldn't show up so that we wouldn't hurt Lyndon. But anyway he understood what we were doing, and it finally got to the place where we could sit down and break bread together. It was pretty rugged before then but we still supported him. I had Hobart to do everything that he could for Lyndon when he was running for President. I carried him over there to meet Lyndon on several occasions when Lyndon was in the Senate and when he was Majority Leader. Every time we had something going on in Washington of any consequence I'd send Hobart tickets to it and not worry about going myself, and tell him to bring his wife with him. I had him meet Lyndon on many, many occasions, so when Lyndon got to be Vice President he wanted Hobart to come to Washington with him. And of course he went to Washington.

I was up to see him not long ago, and we spent his birthday with him. He said that Hobart was the most loyal youngster that he'd ever seen in his life.

F: You were up to see President Johnson?

T: Yes.

F: Where? Up at the ranch?

T: Yes. I go up there all the time because we're friends.

F: Did you visit him in the White House?

T: Yes, my wife and myself on many occasions were invited to the White House.

F: For sort of formal affairs?

T: Yes, we went on formal affairs. He didn't slight my people when he got to be President. My people think that Lyndon Johnson has given us a second emancipation. My people think that Lyndon has done more for the American Negro than any man that has ever been President of the United States. They would like to have him to come down and speak to them once a year, but I just don't want to ask him. The last time he was down here when Barbara Jordan was going to announce that she was going to run for the legislature in Washington, Lyndon came down here and blessed her, and you never saw such a turnout. They just think he's the greatest man there is. He's a Southerner. Of course Lyndon said that after we got the right to vote he knew that that would be the cure for this whole situation, and it's curing very, very rapidly.

F: He passed that first civil rights act in seventy-five years when he was Senate Majority Leader. Did he ever talk to you about the things he wanted to get done like that?

T: That's right.

F: Did he talk or did he listen?

T: He talked. Lyndon did more to give us freedom, full citizenship, than any man that has ever been President of the United States.

F: Do you see much of the young militants?

T: I don't think there's too much to disturb us in this young militant, it's just a young person that doesn't know. With age and ripening he'll come to his senses, even as young white men. You see, you've

got a large number of people who are not in the mainstream.

F: You're right there.

T: Both white and black. And as they develop to where they can come into more of the stream of American life, they'll cool off. That's my feeling.

But I have never felt any other way. Every race of people there is has got to fight his way up the American way. He has got to learn to get along with people. I think I've succeeded in having Hobart understand that. He's on so many of the big boards like United States Steel and on the board of directors of Standard Oil of Ohio and big grocery chains and things like that. People are just people. I think most of this thing has built up fast, America probably was built too fast. We're just people that like to move, and I'm built just like the American white man. I can't stay still to save my life.

F: Since you gained the right to vote, have you always gone Democratic?

T: Yes, all colored people are Democrats. The Republican party has lost us entirely. My father may have voted the Republican ticket until he died--.

F: But that was a different situation.

T: Until he died. And all that bunch that was living back in the 1890's--

F: Bill McDonald.

T: Bill McDonald and my father and all of them were big friends and they were big politicians. The Burnets and Tarvers used to be big politicians. But the Democrats have been coming back since we got in the Democratic party. Roosevelt changed the whole Negro thinking.

They say that Humphrey felt that you could control the economics of this country by killing the hogs and killing the chickens and one stuff and another, but I'll tell you one thing we have done. We have

driven all the rural people that are not prepared for life to the city.

F: They're the real emigrant group today, they haven't come across the border--they have just moved to town and they're lost as if they had just got off the boat in many instances.

T: That's right. It's unfortunate that this community, this state, or this part of the South hasn't given the Negro the kind of training that would enable him to think like anybody else.

But I don't know. My papa thought just like anybody else along in that day, and Papa was a slave. He went to night school, worked on the wharf in Galveston and went to night school to learn. Now you've got a situation here with a lot of young people with I don't know what complaints. But you've got all these people integrating and coming into town. We've got nobody out in the rural areas anymore. There aren't two families out there where I was raised.

F: That's the reason I asked you awhile ago if you still farmed, but you lease so I didn't go through that question, but I wondered where you get help on the farm. Hired hands have gone, you know.

T: You don't need them. The hired hand had to go. I used to pick 500 pounds of cotton a day--

F: Just about a bale.

T: That's right. You've got no more cotton pickers. A bale of cotton is about 1600 pounds. You've got no more cotton pickers, you've got no more cotton choppers, you've got no more corn pullers. All that stuff is done by machinery. Just think of it. You go down two rows of corn here with your corn puller, it pulls the corn off the stalk and shucks the corn and shells it. All you do is empty the shelled corn in your truck, you don't fool with the cob anymore, you throw the cob away. You don't need anything like that. The average farmer can't

raise over five or six acres of cotton. On the average little farm a man working twenty-five acres land can't raise over two or three acres--

F: He used to talk about forty acres because that was really just the maximum he could handle.

T: That's right. But you've got machinery now that does the job, and it doesn't get too hot for that machinery. It can get too hot to plow a mule, but with that machinery it doesn't get too hot. You break up your land as soon as you get through clearing it out; you turn right around and break it up so it will get all the winter rains and everything like that. You just don't need the people out there.

F: But you don't have any place to put them in town either.

T: I don't think you do. That's what has created our problem. I don't think that's the only thing that creates that extremist. All the towns are beginnning to give Negroes better jobs, and as we improve in our job situation, in about four or five years from now you'll see a turn in this thing. We're hungry right now, and we are not prepared to function in a big society like this in the cities and we're going to lose a lot of people.

F: Do the young militants ever come to you and try to urge you to change your stand on this?

T: No. I send for them. We work with them all the time. You see, I have been the instructor of the Bible class in my church forty-five years, and I've had the opportunity to touch a lot of young people.

F: Is that a men's Bible class?

T: Yes. I've had the opportunity to touch a lot of people and come in contact with a lot of people, and I belong to most of the active things and we try to set the right example. We've made a lot of headway in this thing. Some people think that Herman Short?, our police chief

down there, has done a lot, but it has been us, and the members of your race of good will that has cooled this thing off. We've set the example. You can't change people by going out and beating them in the head.

F: Something like that that happened out at Texas Southern about six or seven years ago--

T: That had no right to happen.

F: Do you get called on in something like that for advice or "what do we do, or what have we done wrong?"

T: We have talked about it. We talk in the big circles, you know, but they know they made a mistake. Bob Eckhardt told them that we had been in conference. And it was the biggest mistake that was ever made.

F: In what way?

T: _____ Shaw? was responsible for that. What could those poor little Negro children do? Nothing! Let them cool off, they couldn't do anything. There was nothing they could do. They weren't prepared to fight a police situation, and it was all uncalled for. There was no need at all because we had close enough contact, we had a lot of militants, all they were going to want to do was talk, and all they had to do was pay no attention to them. None whatever. All that's uncalled for. We had hands on our people, but Shaw preferred to do it and there was nothing we could do to keep him from it.

If you've noticed, in this last mayor's election, the Negro vote almost beat Welch. But with all the white people he could get out, with all the hate he could put in it, he didn't win this thing from Hoffheinz but by 14,000 votes, and the Negro put the largest vote of record in Houston. And in 1972 you're going to have three times more Negroes registered because we're paying for it. We've got our men out and we're

going to register every available Negro out here, and that will stop it. That will stop this thing. Then they'll respect us more, we'll have a bigger opportunity--we're not going to tell them who to vote for, but we're going to register them to vote. Let the campaign fellows put on the campaign and get them, but we're going to have--

F: They'll know you're there.

T: That's right. We'll have 300,000 Negro votes, and that'll talk anywhere. We're not going to tell them who to vote for, we're going to let the fellows campaign for them, but they'll be more useful as citizens when they're able to exercise their franchise. And that's our program, and that's the thing we're going to do. I don't hesitate to tell you that I'm underwriting it because I want my people to be useful and have something in themselves that will make people respect them. You can't do this thing unless you have character.

F: Have you been able to work pretty closely with Bob Eckhardt? He's an old friend of mine, I might add.

T: Oh yes. Bob's a big friend of mine. Sure I help raise all the money Bob wants. Bob has been a very liberal boy, he's a good one. He came out of the University of Texas, and you know the University of Texas has the reputation of being one of the most liberal schools in the country.. Did you know that? They have that kind of reputation. And Bob's a great boy. Bob Eckhardt's all right. He's filling in in that Albert Thomas position wonderfully, he's doing a wonderful job.

F: Is Barbara Jordan going to be able to get a good congressional district to run from? That issue has been up in the air.

T: I think our white people are going to vote for her, that's the only representative we have from Texas, and she's a good clean girl.

F: She's a powerful girl.

T: She's a good clean girl, and this thing isn't race. I have just as much right to make a contribution to this society as you.

F: Right.

T: And we're gradually developing where those opportunities are going to come. I've told Hobart, "I'm going to send you anywhere you can get the truth, anywhere you can learn the truth."

[end of tape]

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By Hobart Taylor, Sr.

to the

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In accordance with Sec. 507 of the Federal Property and Administrative Services Act of 1949, as amended (44 U.S.C. 397) and regulations issued thereunder (41 CFR 101-10), I, Hobart Taylor, Sr., hereinafter referred to as the donor, hereby give, donate, and convey to the United States of America for eventual deposit in the proposed Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, and for administration therein by the authorities thereof, a tape and transcript of a personal statement approved by me and prepared for the purpose of deposit in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library. The gift of this material is made subject to the following terms and conditions:

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Signed Hobart Taylor, Jr. for Executor of Estate of H.T., Sr.
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