

William Sneed, Sr. Interviewed by Charles Jones on 3/18/76

My name is Charles Jones interviewing William Sneed, Sr. He's a resident of Middletown and I'm going to be talking with him about his life in Middletown and about certain matters involving his professional life here.

Q: Mr. Sneed, would you begin by describing the circumstances by which you arrived in Middletown?

A: Well, I came here in 1929 with the former Senator Pierson's wife down in Pinehurst, North Carolina, and I've been here ever since. I came here to work with her. I met her down in Pinehurst and we talked about conditions there, etc., and she asked if I'd like to come to work for her so I said I would and I came up here and it's where I settled, and I've been here since. I raised my family here, went to school here in the school system in Middletown and I've just been here ever since. I've seen it grow from a very small community to what it is today, a lot of changes. When I came to this town we had Middletown, Cromwell, Portland. We had less than two hundred families, black families, in 1929. You didn't see many black people around. I guess today we must have about ten thousand today, we must have ten thousand. But in those days it was kind of an () town. So I worked there at the orchard. I never worked much in the city. I worked with Pierson since I came. I worked for him for eleven years.

Q: What kind of work was this?

A: Florist - A. N. Pierson Florist up in Cromwell. At that time that was the largest florist in the world. I think since that time it has been changed. Some florist up in Canada has become the largest in the world. I guess A. N. Pierson is still the second largest. I stayed there until the war. I left there during the war and went to New Britain. I started working in a defense plant. I worked a short while, for a few months, with a coal company over there. Then I worked in the defense plant. I stayed at the defense plant in New Britain during the war until 1942. Then I came back to Middletown and I worked in a defense plant in Middletown, at Wilcox Crittenden Marine Hardware. Then I left there and I opened a poolroom here in town. At that time you were frozen on the job. You know, during the war if you didn't work on that job, of course, they put you in the Army. I opened a poolroom. I was working nights. They put me on nights and it was a little too much and so I left that job and found myself in the Army. However, that didn't last too long. I was only in the Service for six months. I got out of the Service and came back to a war plant. I had a job, a contract, over at Fafnir Bearing in New Britain. They were making bearings for a big monster tank that America was giving Russia during the war. We were cutting 80mm bars, pretty rugged men to handle those bars. So I went back to Fafnir Bearing and stayed there until the war was over. Since that time I've worked on two different jobs. I worked over in Meriden for a while, a foundry, Charles Parker Foundry. I worked there for a couple of years and then I went to American Cyanamid. I stayed there about a year and a half and I got too fat and gave up that job and I went back () and then I worked a couple more years in the foundry and I went back to American Cyanamid and stayed there until I retired in 1972. Since my retirement I had a very serious sickness in '72 and '73 and I thought I wouldn't live long, but I made it. So now I'm just washing cars and that's about it. You know, during the time that I was here we

never had any Negro business in the town. There were very few Negro businesses. I opened up a poolroom here back in 19-, oh, I guess it was 1939, about there. In 1939 or '40 I opened a poolroom here and that was the first, really, that was the first Negro business I can recall--a poolroom. Then we, after that, we opened an ice cream parlor. We had a club here prior to that, the Varsity Social Club. The thing closed and, of course, I opened it up after it closed down. There weren't many people here at that time. During the war it became a pretty big club. There was a lot of traffic during the war, all the fellows going into the Service, you know. We'd have a party for them, you know, and we had all kinds of kits for Servicemen, little kits, you know, some kind of token to send them off to the Service. Most of the people who came here were Service people who came to my club and we got a kick out of that. Really, the first to leave this town, blacks to leave this town for the Service, was in 1940, and one of the fellows that lives down the street here, I think his name is Arthur had a man up in Hartford. That was the main recruitment center. They had a fellow at the head of them, I think it was a Corporal (Abraham). A corporal was a big man when the war was started. And this corporal Abraham, he was the head of everything up there and, of course, they had a volunteering system at that time. You could volunteer to go into the Service and if you lived down the State, farther up north, or wherever, you had to come to Hartford. That was the reception center. That was the only one too in New England at that time. Oh, later they opened up in New Haven. At that time everybody had to go to Hartford. So they weren't taking no blacks in the Service. I remember the first fellow that volunteered was Arthur Cooper and we bought a big silk handkerchief. We all signed our name on this thing, all his friends, you know. Then we sent him off. We thought he was gone. He had got up there that day. He got there early in the morning but he didn't get his () in Hartford. They sent him back to Middletown. At that time they told him they wasn't taking any blacks in the Army and then they had quite a bit of discussion about him and a few others from downstate. (). And they came up in the morning, up to Hartford, hitched a ride up there and they got turned down. They didn't even examine them. They just sent them back because they didn't want the blacks. Then they started with the (IOB?) and the NAACP. Some of them, I think, exist now. They was raising a big fuss about these things and this Corporal Abraham, I'll never forget, he made the statement, he said his job was to supply men for the Army and if the Army wanted men six feet tall, blonde hair and blue eyes, that was the kind of man he wanted to supply. He said the Army had no facilities for Negroes at that time and they wasn't taking any--and they didn't take them. That didn't last long because then it got hot, real hot over there and then they started taking them then. At the start (Frank Wright?), he was the first to leave here for the service. They sent him back and then later on they did take him because things started changing, () and he was over there from 1940 to late in '46 before he got back. A very fortunate man; he came back alive. But the Army really didn't have, when the war first started, they really didn't have facilities for black people. They didn't have them. I remember when I went into the Army, and this was in '43, we were taken out to Missouri, Camp Crowther, Missouri. They never told you where you was going. They just say you was going west, east, north, or whatever. It was always, "Destination Unknown". I know we left Fort Devon about 4:30 in the afternoon and we got out close to Albany, going West. We had a close call. Then it started to (pretty near chow time?). They didn't have a G.I. car and we were segregated. They didn't have a G.I. car for the

blacks, just for the whites, and I'll NEVER forget that. And we was way out, near, getting close to Ohio before we ate that night. When we ate that night they brought in food. They didn't have enough food for us. After all the food was served out we had (). I don't recall how many cars there was. I know we had, think it was three, two or three, black cars, although black wasn't, you know, (). They did have a G.I. car. They had quite a bit of food, so those people ate and a lot of those guys, you know, they ate and they had, you know, potatoes, pork chops and you know they took the food off those fellows' plates and put it on plates for us. Oh, yes. (). It wasn't bad at all, the food we got, before we started to eat and well, I was afraid, you know, we got out, I think it was Clinton, Ohio. They started feeding us (apple pie) and then the next day, of course, they had these USO's in Indiana. I remember there was a place there, Muncie, Indiana, had a very nice USO and canteen. And then, Bellafonte, Ohio, that was the best I've ever seen. So everywhere we stopped from then on, you know, there would be women and children coming and crying and they had to sit with us, buying us sandwiches, candy. They were very good to the servicemen, very good. A memory that I still cherish. I had a lot of experiences the short time I was in there. I don't know what happened to those in a long time, but I had a lot of memories in the short time I was in the service. But times have changed now, considerably. But those were the dark days as far as I was concerned. Those were the dark days. Many, many a strange thing happened. Sitting now and thinking it over, and thinking back, I just don't know how we made it. I don't know how we made it! We did it. And I never had much, never had much of a good life. It just was a struggle, you know, for survival until later years. Things started to turn a little bit, you know. I can't say that I've ever had a rough life because when I look back now I just wonder how I made it. And I only figured out I was much better off than a whole lot of other people. I've always been glad of that, but you need more than that. But it was a struggle. It's rough now. Then in later years, you know, I got to get a little bit closer in the government, you know. I started to serve on a commission. So I began to see a little bit better on the inside what had been happening all the time. (). I started on the, well, I think I've been on the Town Committee here. I've been on the Town Committee for twenty years, about twenty years I've been on the Middletown Committee. I served on the Zoning Board of Appeals for ten years and I served awhile on the Human Relations Board, and I served another six years on the Redevelopment Agency Commission. I've been off that now for about two years. () and I'm just beginning to realize during the last two or three years, I'm just beginning to really understand what it's all about, this political thing, and I've never had any stigma, you know. I always looked at the parties out of the corner of my eyes, you know, and wondered about them. The last five years I've had a very good look at the parties, a very good look at them. Many of the thoughts that I had about them before (). I wasn't too sure. I'm positive now, no doubt in my mind. I found, you know, it's one of those things, you know other people, about the parties. I found out and I'm glad I lived long enough to learn first-hand that political parties are not for any minorities. They're not for the minorities and, I think, I'm convinced, that they're not for any (group).

Q: Is that based on your opinion involving national politics, or is that primarily as a result of your activity in local politics? Was it a combination of both?

A: This is national politics. This is national politics. Local politics can't hurt you too

much. They can't hurt you too much. It's the national politics that really hurt you. Local politics can hurt you too, but that's about the same as the national politics. Local is the same thing; the only difference is the national is on such a large scale, something that got you off the (). But the result is about the same whether it's local or not. It's about the same and what I have found through all kinds of research, I found that the politicians, they are there for their immediate family and friends and there are certain things that are automatic and you've got to do for yourself and whoever gets in there, he's gonna just about do those automatic things. But the mass of the people, they don't know what's going on and the easiest thing in the world to do is to watch somebody's mind--the easiest thing in the world. And that is the most difficult thing for people to understand. The politicians, they know how to do that. They didn't start that last week. They was doing that long before we came along and it was a case of those that got there first got the mostest. They set up the standards and then all that comes along just has to be (defended?). No one has been able to break this down. I'm not advocating breaking down the system. All I'm saying is that there certainly should be some kind of happy medium to the masses of the people. This little small group in number should be dealt with. They're able to take advantage of the people and exploit them. And, of course, we talk about other countries; you know, what other countries do, etc. This is the greatest country in the world. To me, this is all cheap rhetoric. You get all kinds of argument. They made statements like (). I've seen a whole lot. I've seen just about--I've been all over the world and I didn't miss much, and I've been all eyes and ears. And I want to tell you, everywhere you go you find the rich and the poor. You're going to find them everywhere. And the things that I have never been able to understand, of course I haven't lived in those other countries, but you don't have to live in those countries to get a little understanding. All the countries I've been in, I was real welcome as I was an American. This is the truth. I've been in Communist countries, Socialist countries, all of them, the people told me that I was, you know, treated good because I had some money. When you start talking about money (). For many, many years I didn't know anything about the world and people telling you go somewhere you got American money in your pocket people would stand on their heads for the American dollar. But that's a lot of garbage! (). But I've been in places where you could hardly spend American money. In England, I mean I was in England a couple of years ago and I had the damndest time trying to spend American money. They wouldn't see it. They wanted shillings or pounds, or something. They wanted their money. They didn't want the American money. And I was so surprised---to tell you the truth, it was the first experience a long time ago when I was in Spain. There the American money was (). Because their money and our money was on the same keel, not much difference, and it was the first place I had ever known, the only place I was in, where they didn't make a fuss about American money was in Italy--because Italy has the lousiest money in the world [Laughter]. This is true. You don't need music to go marching day-to-day; look at it tomorrow. (). You get some gold, I don't know. You get some Italian gold, you go and try to sell it. There's no big demand for that. I don't know why. You don't consider it's gold. You don't consider it's gold in other countries, of course. But the main gold countries, naturally, are England, Switzerland and Germany, France and, I think, (Bulgaria?), the one that (), but all the() is gold too. But the worst gold that I ever () there the gold, not only the gold, the currency, same thing. I've been in places where you () makes perfect. You couldn't

spend your money in any part of the world, at least if you can't go and just spend it where you want to. You can't get change, you're in trouble. I was in a place 'way down in East Africa, in (Tanzania), 'way down on the (Indian) Ocean. There was a place down there (Barcelona?). There was this big complex down there, the () Beach Hotel. We checked in there and (). We come from Italy, we stopped in Italy, so somebody had some Italian money. We couldn't do nothing with it. You can take money from anywhere, but don't take it from Italy. That was the first time I ever knew that. We couldn't spend nothing. All the Italian liras you had, they wouldn't take. I don't know what it is about the Italian money, but they don't want that and there, in Italy, the American money is very (). But you go to other countries, not now, of course, things have changed all over, you know. Years ago if you had American money you could buy a lot more with it, and stuff like that, and it was a big event. But that was years ago. That doesn't exist anymore. You go out with American money, wherever you go that American dollar will buy whatever that dollar is or can buy. What I'm saying is that the American dollar will buy more than a dollar for whatever the American dollar equals in that country. That's what the American dollar will buy; it won't buy any more. And you can't beat it because I tried to beat it in several countries and it doesn't work; I know. In 1942 I was in England. They had banks, oh, any number of banks right there in () () before they had all these banks there to cash your travelers' checks, or what have you. The German mark at that time, I think the average (3 marks?) to \$1.00. If you went to the bank you got () you'd change \$100 in travelers' checks. I think you got \$114 and if you changed into German marks, you got about \$214, not \$114, and, of course, the only way that you could realize anything through that if you and your friends were going there and you were gonna spend \$100 and you change your money and then you could get merchandise, you know, for that, but you had to spend all that money. If you didn't spend all that money, when you go to cash it back in, you lose what you got [Laughter]. So, you know, (). [Lost a lot of the discussion]. Money is the same everywhere you go now. I think it's nice for everybody to travel to see what the world is lived in, what the world is like. You can learn so much about (). When you stay home and they tell you what it's all about, that's all you know is what they said. They always mislead you.

[Side II of 1st Tape]:

.....George Wallace on "Face The Nation". I thought he was sensational. I don't like the man, George Wallace. I don't think he was the worst man in the world. I just like him for being so frank about what he believed in and back at the time that he kept the students out of Alabama University he made no bones about it, and that was what he believed and probably he wasn't by himself; I mean, that was the establishment. That was the establishment there and he was defending it and I didn't like it, so I didn't like what George Wallace was doing, what he said, Of course he don't talk that kind of stuff now. No, he don't act like that anymore. Of course he couldn't afford to because he wants to become president of the United States. But you know what impressed me about him? Well, I've been watching right along, his talks, you know. Of course I've been hearing politicians talk for so many years, but I was really impressed with him, not to the extent that I wanted to vote for him or anything like that, but he was telling the truth. You know, he said if you asked him what he would do to raise money to take care of a lot of the programs and what-have-you, get the economy back on the right track, etc., and so he told them what he'd do and they wanted to know how to get the money. I understand that

he told the Negroes that he would cut the bureaucracy in Washington. That's where he'd go looking for money. He said he'd cut the bureaucracy in Washington. He told about the Pentagon, that it was loaded there and the traffic was so heavy you could hardly move there and everybody there had a briefcase or clipboard or attaché case, you know. He went around trying to get through the traffic (to give an order to somebody), and all those people were making \$50,000 a year () and he said he'd weed those people out and then he would go to the welfare and weed them out of the welfare. He knew there were millions of people on welfare that shouldn't be on there and he said that you got to have welfare for the people on there that deserve to be on, that's all right, but he'd weed those others out. So he said that the government tells him that it would take 200,000 men and women to weed out these undesirables from the welfare, 200,000. But they don't have 200,000 people working in the Internal Revenue, and if you only (sell) \$25, \$75, \$100, \$500, or whatever, they find you. They get that money. Well, he couldn't understand. If you can find the individual out there who owes the government some money, why can't you find those on welfare that don't belong there? He brought up so many things that just really made sense and I thought his comments were the best that I had ever heard on "Face The Nation"; I mean being frank, telling the truth. What happened, you know, in this country the politicians have been so corrupt. They have been so successful in watching the people's minds, making believers out of the people. It's just gotten to a point now we're always () all the time. And I'm telling you, you're going to see something happening in this country very soon because you know what they start saying now, you know the people start saying it's everyday now there is somebody, some little (nothing?) somebody, (Latin?), you know. All of this came from the Watergate. Then, as I said, when the Watergate started, I told so many Negro people, "This is not our thing. It doesn't affect us in the least--no kind of way. It doesn't affect us". () in Washington, let them have it. I always felt that Watergate, whatever happened at Watergate, could have been explained in thirty minutes. I always felt that way. I'm not saying how you could explain what all these people have been through and what they've been doing, all the things they've been doing that didn't even apply to Watergate. These people been doing all kinds of corrupt things long before this Watergate came.

Q: It was just a matter of these people not being caught?

A: They didn't get caught () in this contract, it didn't involve all these things that they did. It didn't involve them at all, but what they was doing was party against party. The Democrats wanted to get back in the mainstream in a big way because of what had happened to the Democrats in 1968. They had a very good man, very likeable fellow, running, Hubert Humphrey, and they did everything that they knew how to elect him. They couldn't do it. And then by the time '72 rolled around, the man that had ambitions in 1968, he was up there for himself and he had undermined the Democratic party and they got control of the primaries, Mr. McGovern. The Democrats couldn't do nothing about it. They couldn't do nothing about it. He did just like Goldwater did to the Republicans. So now he gets up there, he ran against Nixon and the polls closed at 7:00 and at 7:15 the election was all over with McGovern. Well, the Democrats were getting jumpy so when they found something that they could use against the Republican party they went for it. They found a man in California, a man in Seattle, or wherever, in America and they found many reputable citizens that claimed that he knew something

about something, pretended that Watergate had come out of Washington. They () Governor Wallace. They paid him to come to Washington. (). They had them there by the thousands and thousands. They didn't know a damn thing about the Watergate situation. They came there to see (). And this thing went on and they spent all kinds of money and I would say now that you are a young man and you'll be around and some day you're gonna see what I'm telling you. It's coming to the surface. The Supreme Court had no more damn right to order Nixon to give up those tapes than you or I did. If there was ever the thing of a miscarriage of justice, that was it. And you'll see it's coming to the surface. You wait, it's coming to the surface. That was the biggest joke and miscarriage of justice, I would say, ever in the history of this country. The Supreme Court ordered Nixon to give up those tapes. All down through the years the president has had the privilege, that's not the word I want to use, but you know what I'm talking about, there's never been at any time in the history of this country that the Supreme Court or anybody could take those privileges away from the president. If you was taken to court for some crime and it wasn't a clear-cut thing, there was some question about it, () the Supreme Court couldn't () and you was sentenced to be hanged, gassed or whatever, shot, whatever, the Supreme Court couldn't free you. They couldn't do nothing, but the president could; he has the last word. So at this particular time the Supreme Court and (I) haven't been able to untangle it. And I'm telling you that was a farce () and I also think, and I've always said, that Nixon should have told the Supreme Court to go to Hell. He should have challenged them because they were out of order to do that, and he didn't say nothing. Now, you know, down through the years we've had presidents that were elected and didn't take office--never got to office. We've had that happen for years, not too many times, but a few times. One time we had a president elected by close to 300,000 votes and they didn't elect him. He was too young. They gave it to another, the guy that didn't get too many votes, they gave it to him. We had a presidential election one time that had a tremendous amount of electoral votes over the () but he didn't get the office. And they've always, at those particular times, they used, I guess it was the 5, 5 and 5 system from the Senate, House of Representatives and Supreme Court to resolve those cases, and there was nothing they could do about it. I think that the reason, the only reason, that Nixon didn't burn those tapes was that he knew that there was nobody who could come and say that you've got, Mr. President, you've got to give these tapes up, because nobody could come in and do that, he didn't think. But they did. And when the Supreme Court said, "You've got to give up those tapes", he was all done and he knew it. And then he said, "Well, there are some things I should have stated before that I didn't, etc.", you know. (). And that's what put him out of office. And I thought that thing was very poorly done.

Q: You think he should have been allowed to remain in office?

A: No, he did the right thing to get out of that because he'd been caught lying about the issues. I said this never should have been revealed, the conversations that he had. I mean, what they were doing in this case was going totally against common sense, that's what it did. It was totally against common sense. You know if you got some friends and something is going on, something happens, these are your friends; they might come and tell you about this. That doesn't mean that you've got to tell ME. So that's all that happened. Nixon was the president and when this Watergate thing broke it's only

common sense to think that these people would tell you what was developing; somebody would tell him. People start asking, "Did you know this?"; "Did you know that?"; "No, I didn't know that."; "I didn't know nothing about this." That's all that he was doing. But everybody with common sense was (). He had something going for him. He () the Supreme Court to give up no tapes. They hemmed and hawed and hemmed and hawed to give up the tapes. Nobody knew what there was on them. They said that there was some conversation held that wasn't taped. The Supreme Court didn't know whether there was anything on the tapes or not. But whatever tapes you got, give them to the crowd over there. That's what it amounts to and you give up the tapes and then they say, "That's a disgrace."; "That's a lie;" That man is living in disgrace."; Nixon is in disgrace. The government paid his way onto that plane and everything he had (). That cost a lot of money. He's getting a big, huge sum of money a year from the government right now. He got a staff of secret servicemen right now wherever he goes. Where's the disgrace? That's for the little people. They tell the little people and a lot of people were tickled to death to see this happen. It didn't phase me because I said, "Well, it's too bad they're only hurting themselves by doing this kind of thing", and since that time he found out what the CIA has been doing, what the FBI was doing and () couldn't do anything more. Nixon told the people in South America (Allende?) when they were having their problems down there in Chile, the Americans wanted to put the people in office where they wanted (). He didn't want to (). He wouldn't do that. () He didn't want to listen. He didn't want to give in because Nixon could have had him killed. I said, "You're crazy. He's gonna have them killed and, by golly, () were killed." This has been going on throughout the world, in Latin American running like Hell for his life. This should have been () right along and it wasn't because the people that elected him had a change of heart wasn't around. It was just the other group didn't want him in there. We had the same thing in South Vietnam. () () the people wanted him, they didn't want you (). Then there was no problem (). This has been going on all the time and you go into prisons, you know, and you see these guys looking out through the bars. Guys been there so many years, you go to the court and the guys get 15 years, 20 years, and all that. Those are not the bad people in (in those jails?). They're not the bad people--they're bad, but they're not the worst.

Q: Not on as grand a scale as the political crimes committed.

A: Oh, you see, you got this thing so that when you're on the outside you have no way of knowing any of the things going on the inside, and they keep you on the outside and keep you dumb and make you believe what they want you to believe, and that's about the size of it. You believe what they want you to believe. You hear so much about their beliefs, you () everybody else believes but me. There must be something wrong with me. Then you start believing, you know, these people are doing all kinds of things and they've been doing this all down through the years and I'll say that they will continue. I'd like to say this to you. Right here in the city I served six years as a commissioner on Redevelopment and when I started we reelected a mayor here. I'm a Republican, but I'm not one of those Republicans that says, "Oh, this is the party here and this is our salvation". I don't look at it like that. I've always been a Republican since I've been big enough to vote and understand. I knew that the party that would give our people the hardest time were the Democrats. They would give us the hardest time. My people were

put into slavery by the Democrats, was held in slavery by the Democrats and when they was free, the Democrats put them back in slavery again. And I know that the South was our main enemy, our biggest enemy, and when I came along the South was one solid block Democrat and black people could not vote under no circumstances and, not only that, prior to 1932 there wasn't a Negro Democrat in America, not one in America. Negro didn't know nothin' about the government then. All he knew besides the Gettysburg Address (). So then we had the Depression and in 1932 the Democrats had something to talk about and then they started letting more people vote. The engross started voting and they all turned Democrat, not all, but let's say between 85 to 88% turned Democrat. () talked to some of them and they've been Democrats ever since. Everywhere you go, they all Democrats. And I seen all these things happening but you know that sometimes a man's got a woman, she might not be no good but you love her so much you can't see nothing wrong with what she does, and this is what happened with the masses of the people. I'll give you an example: The Kennedy family, they're nice people as a whole. They loved those people so much it was pathetic. They had a family that never had nothing for black people to do. They had a total really white operation. [Lost a great deal of conversation on tape]. The black man, well, he's in trouble. Now they knew that this kind of thing existed, ought to be directed (). So when he decided to run for president, then you take all the schools up there, Harvard and Northeastern, MIT, Boston College and Boston University, a lot of schools. Most of the people had exchange students. (). They had to go to law. They hired groups and they got all these tapes from the campaign office. So every time, all through the day and all through the night (). They said they loved black people. That was the only excuse that they had. That's what they was doin'. So now if you work in an office too long a time () fight for years or be killed or, it was just one time he was in there, we had a march on Washington and he, John Kennedy, fought that to the very last--but all the odds was against him. He was the last one to give in to that. So they had to march. I marched up Constitution Plaza (Avenue?). I never had a feeling like that before or since in my life. I thought we hit on something. (). After this great spectacle, about a week and a half afterwards () on Capitol Hill () and as fast as they'd come up (). And you know the great extravaganza, the greatest in this history of our nation's capitol, the man from Hartford to speak all according to the Constitution (). I said this is a disgrace to the black race. I suggested to the big Democrat. They should sound off and all the black people should () Democrat because they told the black people to go to Hell. Martin Luther King on TV in Washington said "Well, () to support it and I would support it. He said, you know, he says, "They didn't give us anything and I'm disappointed". However, he did leave the door open. I didn't know what to say when he said that. It has been law ever since I came into the world. I couldn't go in so (). That was a highlight in my life. () the political party. They didn't give us nothin'. He was some kind of token or something. He said, "Well, you know these things you're going to discuss, we'll discuss this and we'll discuss that, etc." (). There is no political party in America that is ever going to do anything for the black people unless you got some kind of a plan for changes () because black people don't demand it. (). With that attitude, you don't talk about no political party.

Q: You were talking about the Redevelopment Commission. I was wondering if you could tell us about that?

A: Yes, Redevelopment. I served six years, or a little better, on the Commission on Redevelopment and when I went on there, I'm glad you called me back because I had wandered off from there, (). When I went on there I didn't know nothing about redevelopment. Of course I started researching because I wanted to get abreast of things, if possible, as soon as I could. I began to learn what it was all about. Then, of course, I got on this thing because I had a suspicion, you know, whom we elected, a Republican mayor, that we could just get ready to start to redevelop and, of course, the most of them going to be the black people who were to be involved, and I said the black people should have some kind of representation from that agency. So I got on that. They didn't want to give it to me but I didn't want anything else. Those people, there were two black people on this development. One was named John Davis, a friend of mine, and they were able to do something to him to get him on their side, and they started right off robbing the black people and they had utter disregard for the interest of the blacks. They had taken the black people's money. Oh, it was awful what they have done. They have taken, I couldn't say the amount of money that was taken because there is a lot of it that I don't even know about, but they have taken thousands and thousands of dollars in money from the black people and, you know total disregard. I have been trying to just find out now. They got rid of me, you know. I changed a lot of things. I made those people pay up more than one-half million dollars. () They have cut this thing off totally and everyone for themselves (). When they cut it off I had to go to Washington and a whole lot of things were too obvious. They think maybe we'd better not (). That's the only way I'd be able to stop them. So they didn't cut it off. () So they paid and paid. What they was doing, they didn't pay what you had coming, so if you had \$4000 coming, they'd give maybe \$2000 or \$1000, and in many cases nothing, so this is what has happened to our people. (). The chairman said, "You got a pretty good suggestion there". He said, "You can send the checks back and you have more credit". You know they pushed that thing right through? You got a black man there, a commissioner (). He said, "What are you hollering about, Bill?" He says, "These people are going to get their money. The checks are all made out. They waited all this time, a couple more days, what is that gonna hurt?" (). Next morning they hadn't got no checks and that's been over a year ago. They didn't get no checks but what they did do, one woman there, she went up to (). There were five other women with her and she raised so much Hell they gave her \$1,488.00 because she wanted to go down South. They gave her a check for \$1,488.00; so she went down South and that was it. There was another one, they gave her, I think, \$2,000.00 moving money. She had \$4,000.00 coming to her and there were other people thought this was a lie. They got that as hard (). You see in the paper every day where somebody got arrested for that, big people; but you don't get to know people because they're villains and you know it. They keep you on the outside. I've had all kinds of troubles. I got all the Press, the papers here about all these things, all this trouble. The Press has about all these things, having all this trouble. I have all these papers here. When they found him guilty. He was doing wrong things; I have all that--what happened. The reason they elected. He never called me again with no kind of discussion when I first started. He didn't even bother to call me. When he called me, what he had to say was about the serious charges that I had made. He was concerned

about those. "You're making serious charges." He was telling me, "You keep making those kind of charges and you're going to find yourself in jail". That was what he was trying to convey to me, but I made all kinds of charges. Well, even last week, or even before that, last week Tuesday, I think it was, last week Tuesday, I guess it was, we had a meeting at the City Hall, the City Council and Redevelopment. These people just had all this money from the government. They didn't have nothing when they started. When this Redevelopment () they wanted to get rid of the check (). So what they was doing was not building. They just, you know, passing the buck, passing the buck and prices are going up. We had a thirty-two million-plus budget when we started. They cut it back to twenty-six million-plus and, of course, it's been throwing in money since that to probably compensate for what they've taken out of there. They're not building and the people start hollering and they make so much fuss and got a couple of guys to replace me on the agency. He's one of the guys that's making all that fuss--him and another one came just before I left the agency. They got me out of there. They refused to reappoint me. So they accused them of stealing taxes and having a man there that the Development have () and there's no such thing as (). Course () be a big crime. He wanted cooperation himself. He wasn't violating any law. He didn't have no money to do nothin'. When you get down to the nitty-gritty you have to be bonded, you know. () so they brought that to the surface. (). It didn't amount to nothin'. So they got a woman (). I had quite a few blacks. () People that had money even couldn't do it. We had a little woman about so high, we called her Peg. She's been handicapped since birth. She was born, I think, with (a club) foot. She had \$4,000.00 coming and they faked her out and they didn't give her a dollar. They gave her moving money, that's all. They told her she didn't have nothing coming. So I had her up there. I had her come up front, let them have a look at her. She sat up there. () said, "You still ain't gonna get nothin', and you know something? A lot of people are not too overly concerned about these things. So that they're not too concerned. What I do, have been doing, in the past, you have these problems, you want to () you get punished, but when you burn those buildings, knock those windows out, that would teach them a lesson. And all they do is to put in a () and this has been very sad. I don't know what we gonna do. I'm going home tonight () and when we come back, when I come back, we're gonna have a little meeting with NAACP and we'll see what happens. But I want to tell you something. Things are not like they appear to you in this town. (). We're talking about city pressure, black people's troubles, real troubles. We got black people who seem to be on the side with these people that keep giving it to business and I don't know why that is. Somebody told me one time, you know, about eight out of ten black people that gets up on top, they move over to the other side as close as they can. Isn't there truth in that?

Q: Oh, yes.

A: I think so too. I've had a tough time here with these people, I'm telling you that. They haven't taken advantage of me; they tried to, but I wasn't too easy. So they don't take advantage of me. What they resented me trying (). I don't see what you hollering about. This doesn't concern you because this is about somebody else. Let them fight their own battle. Who are you to be fighting somebody else's battle? The other black commissioner, they blamed him () and that's the way he reacted. I'm having very, very sad cases here in Middletown. Of course a lot of people tell me it's always the same

way. The biggest program in America is Redevelopment--the biggest program. The best program in America, in the history of America for poor people, especially black people, is Redevelopment. The greatest program they ever had. You know, I got some books here on redevelopment from Day One, how to reorganize, and I'm going to get that book and I'd like you to know what it's all about and I'd like for you to read the manual. It's the greatest thing that ever happened for poor people. There are two things that are the greatest things that ever happened--that was redevelopment and the food stamp program. These are the most effective, most humanitarian that the government ever put forth for the black people, poor people. I think they're the greatest programs. They're not perfect, but I think this way: You go to these supermarkets, you know. You go in there and you see the women with baskets () and stuff is falling off. The kids picking it up and putting it back. You watch them when they go up to pay. They ain't got the kind of money you got to go out and get food stamps. They don't get off the stamps. An awful lot of them getting it, they're not entitled. What I'm trying to say is that the food stamp program made it so people did not have to go hungry. Now you can get the stamps and sell them and go hungry, you know. There might be a case where you didn't have enough money to buy as many stamps as you needed. The best thing they ever had for a lot of people--food stamps and redevelopment. Redevelopment, they put money (). If the implementation is right, it puts millions of dollars in the people's hands. () a lot of old people never had \$500.00. () they for () \$4,000 and \$500 of food stamps and I had a lot of () and charge a lot. (). You know what happened to that? I got a call one day, the gentleman says, "Do you ever get in trouble?" So I said, "action () on the commission. I said they even came down from the regional office. I said, "What's he talking about?" Two-thirds of the people (). I said, "You don't want no trouble like that!" And those people, as I said, got \$4,000.00, \$400.00 to some of them, () \$550.00 up to \$600.00. They didn't have that much (). This was tax-free money. () But the Redevelopment, believe me, the redevelopment was tremendous. So I guess that's about all I can tell you about this time. Oh, that's not a lot, there are so many things.

Q: One more question: Do you think the black people in America should celebrate () the Bicentennial?

A: Do you want a direct answer? A true answer?

Q: I want your opinion.

A: Well, my opinion (). Yes, I think they should celebrate the bicentennial, but I think they should do some thinking before they start making any move. I think that most of our churches, the church that I attend here, they had a little celebration gong on, bicentennial celebration, and they had, I don't know whether I'll say this right, but they was going to march on Washington. But I think we have a whole lot of black people that they should honor. But I don't think we should forget our people. We have a lot of people who have contributed so much to this country and I've seen in the paper and I've heard in churches () and one was Martha Washington and there was someone else () want to do something about the Kennedys, etc. It looked to me to be nonsense. Black people, we've got a lot of them has contributed an awful lot and didn't get anything in return for it. I'll tell you what I think. What do you think about this man, what's his

name there, the fella before the war there () what's his name? I can't think of his name now.

Q: I know, you told me he died?

A: He died because he couldn't get blood. People don't talk about that. They talk about the light. All you hear about is Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Franklin, that's his name?

Q: Thomas Edison.

A: Yes, Thomas Edison. That's all you hear, Thomas Edison. Thomas Edison did not give you the light. He didn't do it. He didn't give you the light. He did all he could. Now here again is a man that you'd have to go to the library to check this out about a black man. And after Thomas Edison did all that he could, he perfected the bulb, he had a bulb that was open on the end. It was (fusing) out. It wouldn't burn. So after Thomas Edison went home to go to bed, this black man closed that bulb up and made the experiment and we've had light ever since. Nobody talks about him. Nobody talks about him. Oh, I could tell you so many things about (). I think it's going to be on a limited basis anyway, you understand? But I have to make that correction. You got to take part in the other things, naturally, but I don't think we're going to pick out the Kennedys and Martha Washington or Lady Bird Johnson. That's nonsense. Be happy about it. Of course I know a lot of people myself and I've heard about the Kennedys and I heard about Lady Bird Johnson and Martha Washington and there must be many more and me, I just don't see that.

Q: O.K. Mr. Sneed. I've interviewed Mr. Sneed, William Sneed, of Middletown. I thank you very much.

t: 7/7/95

/msk

DK~