

## Lonnie King Oral History Transcript

Interviewer: Ashley Burke

Ashley: It is April 22<sup>nd</sup> at eleven AM, and we'll be conducting an oral history interview with Lonnie King. Could you please say and spell your name?

Lonnie: Lonnie King. L-o-n-n-i-e K-i-n-g.

Ashley: Thank you. Where did you grow up?

Lonnie: I was born in Southwest Georgia in a little town called Arlington, Georgia. On August the 30<sup>th</sup>, 1936. It's a little farm country down there.

Ashley: Hmm

Lonnie: About 27 miles southwest of Albany, Georgia.

Ashley: Okay. So when did you become aware of the inequality between races in America?

Lonnie: My grandparents. My grandfather had custody of me I guess from the time I was two and a half. My parents-- my mother and father--apparently had an acrimonious marriage, so um at some point when I was about two and a half there was a big breakup, and so my grandfather, as I understand it, gave my grandmother 5 dollars and said, "take this five dollars and go into Atlanta and get you a job, and I'm going to stay here and keep this boy here. I'll raise him until I die". So they began to teach me. My granddaddy and my grandmother--they taught me how to read before I went to school. I was out of the country, and you walked in these dirt roads from your school to your home. Eugene Talmadge [1] was running for governor at the time. 1942 roughly, and I saw my first piper cub [2] plane dropping leaflets down, so I picked up one of them. That was the TV at the time whatever you know, and I read the flyer, and I should

understand what was on the flyer, such as we got to keep the nigger in his place and those kind of things, but I had never even seen it, much less heard it, so when I got home I asked my granddaddy, and I showed it to him, and I said, "granddaddy what is an n-i-g-g-e-r? I've never heard of that before or seen it before", and he said, "Come on in sit down let me talk to you". So that was when I began in that conversation to realize that there were differences in people and, and slave owners people who owned slaves brought them in from Africa to work on farms and do the cotton they would have you. My grandfather made an interesting point at the end of his I guess you would say briefing, and he said--he nicknamed me Sunny--he said, "Sunny you know we are still in slavery. The only difference is we can go home at night", and I thought about that, and as I grew up I began to see a lot of what he was talking about as I got older. I saw the people mistreating black people, but I stayed out of their way, but I saw it growing up, so I became aware of this duality I guess in America where you practice one thing what you preach something else.

Ashley: Thank you. Did you ever travel out of the United States to an area where race was not a controversial issue?

Lonnie: I traveled...I traveled all over the Pacific. I've been to China, Japan, Korea, Philippines, you name it. I believe that the only place that I visited where race was not a real issue was probably in the Philippines. That's probably cause it probably had a lot of different colors around there who are all Filipinos. I saw a race problems in Japan. I saw them in China. Hong Kong, China is where I had gone, but yes I saw um, but I saw in this country though one city where I was stationed where you certainly had the semblance of uhh an open society, and that was San

Francisco. I was out there off and on for 3 years. My ship was stationed over across the bay in Alameda, so I hung out in San Francisco. San Francisco in my view at that time really should have had the caption of the City of Brotherly Love because you saw all kinds of people dealing with one another without there being a whole lot of rancor[3] from anybody. Philadelphia has a reputation for being the City of Brotherly Love, but it's really San Francisco in my opinion from what I saw firsthand.

Ashley: Very Interesting. Especially because Atlanta was always branded the city too busy to hate, and the one city that doesn't have a brand is the one city where there is no hate haha.

Lonnie: You have to understand that Atlanta being the city too busy to hate was really a marketing ploy dreamed up by uhh former mayor Hartsfield [4]--William B. Hartsfield--And it was designed to continue to attract more capitalists to Atlanta. Now he didn't begin it. He was the one who created that...that phrase. The idea that Atlanta being a city that was attractive for Northern industrialist begin in the 19th century with a man named Henry Grady who was the former editor and publisher of the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*. When the war was over the powers that be in this town said, "but how are we going to rebuild this time, we don't have any waterways, so we can't have ships coming here", and Grady took the position that we have the railroads that had to come through here through terminal, and so he...he went to New York and began to pitch to the capitalists up there to come invest in Atlanta. Now again, that was a Herculean job that they had to accomplish uhh, but the Chamber of Commerce and everyone got behind it. Then Ivan Allen's father, Ivan Allen Sr [5], became the chairman of the uhh of the Chamber of Commerce in the 20s-mid twenties, and he put together the first forward Atlanta

campaign, and it was designed to carry on Henry Grady's tradition encouraging Northern capitalists to come and invest in Atlanta. Um he talked about there being an educated workforce, and at the end of his um paper--and I'm paraphrasing--he said, "And we have some very hard-working orderly Negroes who can help you". Now you have to understand that Atlanta was always the city that could hate people now, all right. In 1915 Atlanta was the place for the rebirth of the clan--The Klu Klux Klan. They had their festivals up there in Stone Mountain uhh the cross burning. Atlanta is the city right, you had three different groups who kinda work independently but were developing at the same time. One was a Jewish community where, led by the rich family and others who came in from hungry, they came here as merchants, and they built a uh a Jewish enclave here separate from the whites because whites wouldn't accept them not as a coming together. Then you had landed gentry whites who owned Plantations who were descendants of folks who own plantations who literally put together the white power structure. Then you had blacks who oh under very difficult circumstances built Auburn Avenue out here as you see because it was considered to be the wealthiest uhm strip of African American people in the world. Uhm now that came about after the 1906 riot, where in uhh former editor of the Atlanta Constitution, Clark Howell, and another guy who is running--I forgot his name now. They were running for governor and they fanned the racial flames, and they were about 20-something blacks I think who got lynched or hurt up there on Peachtree Street, and they ran black folks off of Peachtree Street, off of Decatur Street, and they came down here to where they called nigger town, which is really where we are right now, and they were already trying to build some businesses down here, but they really flourished after that. Now the powers-that-be, the Ivan Allen Sr's uhm who were in charge at the time uhm followed a model that was put together by a man named James Henry Hammond who wrote a book on paternalism [6] on how you can

control African Americans, and the way you control them is you pick the people who want to be their leaders, and then the masses can never get to you unless they come through those people, so therefore they control the population by picking the spokespersons for the population. That paternalism attitude uhm prevailed uhm in Atlanta until the 1960s, and it did not go away voluntarily. We had to run it away.

Ashley: Hmm. Wow. So when you begin to get involved in the civil rights movement did you have a specific mentor that you looked up to?

Lonnie: I guess you'll have to say that the...there was more than one. The first one was Dr. Samuel W. Williams who was a philosopher professor at Morehouse--and religion--and also the president of the Atlanta branch NAACP [7], and also the pastor at the Baptist Church. In that same group you have Reverend Dr. William Holmes Borders who is the pastor of Peachtree Baptist Church at about 5000 members. The largest church in the south, and then you had a man named John Calhoun who was--who had been the head of the NAACP--who had been a real estate guy here on Auburn Avenue before Williams. Those three persons were my closest allies in the town. Now when you count the down people--that is the folks who own the factory over there--my closest allies were uhm Dr. M Calhoven at Clark College, uhm Dr. uhm Whitney Young who was the dean of the school of social work at Atlanta University uhm, and Dr. Benjamin E. Mays who was the president at Morehouse. When you got beyond those you know I didn't trust anybody else.

Ashley: Haha it's hard. So, what did you learn from them that you took and used as your own leadership style?

Lonnie: Well... what I learned from my professors over there -- that's one more we got to put it in there that's Dr. E.B. Williams who taught me economics. What I learned from them was that we were in a war. A racial war, and you could not win a war without plans. You gotta have a battle plan, and so I combined what I learned in economics with from Dr. Williams with what I learned from Dr. Sam Williams, who taught me philosophy, and from Dr. Mays. I combined all of those advice from these men into a coherent plan. Atlanta would never have, in my opinion, desegregated before the Civil Rights Act was passed were it not for our economic boycott that we put on downtown Atlanta, especially Rich's [8]. Now, the genesis of that came from what I learned from Dr. E.B Williams who taught me economics. Dr. Williams had us to go out and analyze the margin of profit for respective businesses uhm the uhm grocery stores uhm department stores you name it. What is the margin of profit for these people--these entities? He also said that if we could ever find a way to hone in the fast dime that most people have as opposed to the slow dollar that most folks don't have, he said you can do a whole lot economically to bring uhm a bad system to its knees, so with that kind of information, specifically with regard to Rich's department store, according to what I've learned to that time their margin of profit was between 8 and 10% per year, but when you factor in the overlay that Atlanta had a population of African-Americans that were steady at 33% and almost everybody in Atlanta --Black or White-- had a Rich's charge card, and that Rich's was the place that put honorary titles. Now you a young woman, so you don't know what I'm talking about, but there was a time where no correspondence came to a black person in this city that didn't have a John or Jane Brown or whatever on it. There were no courtesy titles at all, and then Rich's all the sudden in the forties started using courtesy titles, and they put on Mr. Jon Jones, Mr. black person, Mrs. black person, and it was good for business because you had a group of people who have been

marginalized in every part of the society, so everyone in the African American Community had a Rich's charge card. Now, they didn't do you right, but at least they called you Mr. and Mrs. Well it didn't take a rocket scientist from my perspective to figure that if we were 33% of the population, and almost every family had a Rich's card charge card, and the marginal profit was 8 - 10%, we could force them. We could put together a boycott to deal with our demands. We would have to wait for the law. If you take the money, they will change the law in order to get the money back, so having that in mind, I've put together some more plans, and the work plan was to have Atlantans down their account with segregation, open up their account with freedom. Don't shop downtown, and especially Rich's department store. That really got popular when we got Martin King to go to jail with us on October 19<sup>th</sup> to dramatize this thing all over the world. Rich's department store lost 10 million dollars that Christmas holiday season because the Federal Reserve used to report every Sunday the previous week's returns, and all we did was read the Federal Reserve reports, so we saw how well we were doing. We brought them to their knees, and they finally sat down to sign. The only time that the white power structure in the South has ever signed any agreement to desegregate anything. You usually had to win it in federal court, but because they lost all that money, they didn't want to lose it anymore. They signed the agreement with me to integrate. Yeah.

Ashley: That's incredible. So it sounds like you had a very economic influence with your game plans with Rich's department store.

Lonnie: It was tied in economics, yeah.

Ashley: What was the role in the rest of the Civil Rights Movement for you?

Lonnie: Well, I started out with um the--the employment in the lunch counters and the restaurant, but we fought on several fronts, and you've seen the *Appeal To Human Rights* [9]. That was our Manifesto. We follow that. We went to restaurants. We went to lunch counters. Uh we went to Grady hospital because we were segregated in the hospitals. We had all those folks and only had about four hundred beds um. We took on the housing discrimination, we took on voting. What that entire manifesto was our program of action, and we'd laid out so everyone would know this is where we're coming from. I also have to add to you though, if you're gonna hold together a movement though, you also not only need to have a plan, but you need to have a mechanism that carries forward the propaganda, but you got to carry forward to move your message forward, so we founded the Atlanta Inquirer newspaper. Our first issue was July 31st 1960. Mr. Casoot Hill, Whose office was just across the street here, it started right over there because he had a printing press, and um that document, that thing, that paper is still here it's still being printed, but it was started by the students.

Ashley: So you were a facilitator to the rest of the people in the city of Atlanta for what you were doing in the Civil Rights Movement?

Lonnie: Yeah um I was kinda like what you would say... I was kind of like a publisher. Although it was his stuff, he wanted me to get the students to write it. He would finance it, and we put together 10,000 copies per Sunday every week. And uh, and I started to call it Let Freedom Ring, and for about 18 months I was able to--on the front page--wright about what I thought we ought to do to Let Freedom Ring. It was nothing but flat-out naked propaganda trying to get the African-American Community, who have been marginalized, who really did not believe that this could be done. Because what had happened was mamas and daddies and their



grandparents--so why did we think we could make that happen? Uh Rich's department store--if I may just scroll up for a moment-- had a group of African Americans who worked there in the forties and fifties who still meet even to this day. They meet--I was shocked when I learned about it, so I went to one of their meetings. Most of them had died, but there must have been about six women and one man still alive, and so they were there when we were raising all that heck down there, so I started interviewing this person. I went to the man and uhm I said uhh I forgot his name, and I said "tell me something when you...you were there at the height of the movement what was your thinking? Did you think we were going to win the battle?" And he said no. And I said, "Okay". I thought you were crazy, and at the same time if you think about what he was saying, why do you think you can succeed as a college kid where all these other people were not able to succeed? How did you do that? And they didn't have any brain cells of recognition that it had never been done before, so therefore it was a safe bet. It cannot happen. For instance, Herbert uhm uhm Aptheker [10] did a survey on the number of slave revolts that were attempted in America especially after Toussaint Louverture[11] in Haiti over through Napoleon. There were 253 according to Dr. Aptheker--attempted-- not one succeeded...not one. Because the plantation system was so ironclad through paternalism, and through informants, 5 million slaves they could not get through because the system was geared to keep them in prison.

Ashley: Wow that's crazy.

Lonnie: It's hard to...it's hard to even fathom how that must have worked, but everyone who is not black was working together to maintain the system.

Ashley: Haha that's dedication.

Lonnie: Generation after generation.

Ashley: So you talked about Rich's department store. Could you tell me a little bit about your experiences with the Civil Rights sit-ins?

Lonnie: Well we begin the sit-ins on March 1960 after the publish of the appeal [9] on the 9th of March. We laid out to Atlanta: here's where we're coming from, here are our grievances, and here's what we're going to do about it, so we began with about 200 people on the 15th of March, and about seven of us were put in jail uhm, and we were bonded out by local citizens uhm. It was shocking. You see this city got two shocks. The first shock was on the 9th of March, and we had this full page ad in the newspaper coming from these college kids demanding justice. That was a shock. But before we can get over that shock, on the 15th here's some 200 more simultaneously going to 11 different places all over town, sitting in, and getting arrested, and going to jail, and seeing their freedom songs. That was so strange. "What has happened to those colored people over there? They're off the plantation."

Ashley: So what were your thoughts going into these peaceful protests?

Lonnie: Let me be candid with you. I did not expect to live to see the movement end. Uhm there were hits on my life. I got acid thrown on me trying to blind me. I was pummeled by a southern bell telephone operator when I was on a picket line. Four gentlemen came to kill me one night, but uhm I did not know was that Korean War veterans had formed a little posse vigilante thing, so I happen to be speaking in Cleveland that night, so I didn't come home. These four guys were out there under my apartment building-- I was in an apartment building. They were there with their guns waiting to shoot me when I came in. What I didn't know was some of the Korean War

veterans figured that my life was at stake cause they had seen in the newspapers where I had acid thrown on me--all that kinda stuff, so they had formed like I guess you could say a little posse. So the guy's name was Charles Johnson who was the head of the snake, so when the white guys showed up they put their plan in place, and when they approached the car at four different directions with their guns, and according to Mr. Johnson he said he put his shotgun into the side of the car--cause it was in the summertime. Everything was down. We were in a convertible. He said "what are you boys doing here?" Well they said "we were just waiting for the old boy up stairs", and so I understand that he...they all clicked their guns."You better wait someplace else or we gonna bury you right here". They got out and nobody ever came back cause there were people protecting me I didn't even know we're protecting me okay. So um... It was no crystal stair uhm, but let me say this to you: there comes a time in some people's life--not everybody's life--when whether or not you live or die on an issue becomes unimportant, and um I was--I guess you would say I was a little crazed for freedom. I was a little crazy for justice, and I think I was crazy because I had gone through the United States Navy for three years, and I learned a lot about how to fight the wars of civil rights in there, and I fought my way, so I guess you could say the top in there, so when I came back to Atlanta I was already prepared to fight the racial War because I had fought it for 3 years and won in the Navy.

Ashley: Interesting. So the military helps you employ different tactics toward the movement?

Lonnie: Yeah I learned that even when you...okay, when I went in the Navy they took me down to Atlanta down to Macon Georgia back up to Great Lakes Illinois, and my company had 83 people in it. The recruit who has the highest general classification test scores like aptitude test becomes the education pay office for the company automatically, but I had the highest

apitude test of the 83 people, and so I was the education pay officer, and my job was to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic to the other 82 people who needed it. So that's what I did primarily for those 11 weeks. When it was over and we were coming home we were on the train through Great Lakes, and we went through Cincinnati, and there were about 7 white guys with me, and only about three black guys were in my company out of the 83, so I was going back, and these other white guys--we were coming back through Kentucky and whatever down here--so when we got to the river going across the river from Cincinnati into Kentucky the white conductor came to me and said, "You gotta move up front when we go across this river because you'll be in Kentucky". And uhm black people had to sit in the front. Before I could say anything the white guys who were with me got up and said, "Well if he's going to go up there then we're going up there". The guy...ah hell he just walked off haha. Those white guys for 11 weeks had the chance see me as a human being knowing that I helped them graduate and teach them reading, writing, arithmetic, but they saw I was a human being, and they knew what he was trying to do, and what they said was, "if you're gonna make him go up there were gonna go up there too". And so that would have just messed up the whole scheme, and he said "ah hell", and he walked off. When I got to my ship, CVA 34, I walked on with about 30 young men with me, and I was in charge of all of them. I passed out the orders to the officer of the day, and then they put us all in something called the indoctrination division for 2 weeks while they studied on what jobs they were going to put us in, so when it was over they called off the names, and I got assigned to the deck floors--that's chipping paint, and the guy with the lowest aptitude test, a guy named Lamb from Kentucky, also got put in the deck for us, so the guy with the highest test score who was black was put in the deck board with the white guy who had the lowest test score, and all the other white guys who were with me, who were under my command for two weeks, they

were put into air control, flight control, personnel unit, you name it. My job was to chip paint along with Mr. Lamb, but that wasn't good enough. I guess I was chipping paint for I guess about a month, and all the sudden I was told I had to go and clean up the head. Well the head is the restroom. There were two hundred men in this department where it was, and I was the only black person in there, so I don't know how they selected me okay, but they did haha, so I went in there. I'm cleaning up the head. I was upset to no end.

Ashley: Of course haha

Lonnie: Being made the janitor. So I said, "Well you know Dr. Mays wants me"--this is the speech if I remember it correctly—he said, "You're a Morehouse man, and if it's your goal to be a doctor, be the best doctor God ever made. Be the best dentist, the best lawyer, teacher, and if this befalls you where you have become a ditch digger, be the best ditch digger God ever made, and I said, "well I'm not a ditch digger but I am cleaning up a head so I'm going to be the best head cleaner." I went out and got paint, and brass polish, and all that. I turned a job that was messy to say the least into a gravy job because once I learned--once you clean up a place then all you gotta do is keep it going. You don't have to scuffle as much, so I ended up working about a half hour in the morning and a half hour in the afternoon after they went to lunch. The rest of the time I was reading books getting myself together because I was coming back to college. I guess this must have happened--I guess I must have been there for about 2-3 months doing this. All of a sudden the officer in charge--commissioning officer in charge told me that I have been knocked out of my job. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well we have to put you back on the deck floors because a third class officer has put in a ballot to put you back on the deck floor so he could take your job." And I said, "What?" And I said, "Boy if a black person takes that job

and put the gravy in it, they going to kick you out of it to put another black person in.” That's the kind of stuff that I ran into. Finally, I went back to the deck floor chipping paint, and I saw an announcement in the plan of the day--that's the daily bulletin--for a dispersing clerk at practice, so I went down there to apply for the job. J.C Claren who was the officer in charge said, “We don't want any Negroes down here.”, and I said, “Well wait a minute now. My mother files her taxes just like theirs.” Yeah, but they're all from the South. They don't want any Negroes down here, so I went to the chaplain [12] of the ship, and his only comment to me was, “they didn't say that did they?” That was all he said, so I'm upset. I go back to chipping paint, and then something said why don't I ask my division officer, so I went to see my division officer who was in charge of all of us. He said Lieutenant JG horn--H-O-R-N from Louisiana-- now I told him what happened and he said, “Mr. King--first white man to ever call me mister--come with me.” He took me down to the disbursing officers. He said, “Clarence I heard Mr. King said that you told him that you didn't want him down here. Let me hear what you have to say about that.” And so through the man's credit he said, “Well we don't want him down here, and we don't want black folks down here. It just won't work.” Lieutenant JG horn said this, “If his name is not in the plan tomorrow I'm gonna get the chief and he's going to put you out of here.” And he said, “Come on Mr. King let's go.” The next day I was in the plan of the day, and I went down there nobody spoke to me. I'm down there for two or three weeks. Nobody would tell me a thing just sitting there, so finally a guy named Mr. Wolf from Seattle Washington--I guess he felt sorry for me--he came over and spoke to me and he said he told me his name, and he said, “Look I'm just in here for a 4-year trip that's going around the world. My daddy's rich, and I don't have to work. I'm going to go back and run his business, but I wanted to take this four years of ships.” He said, “But if you're willing learn I'll teach you.” I said, “Okay, thank you.” He said, “Now you gotta

type 30 words a minute. Can you type?" I said, "No I can't.", and he said, "We're going to teach you how to type you show me all the books.", so we started studying, and he said, "You can't go on leave because the third class exam is about three months from now. You have a lot to learn to pass that.", so I started studying, and after about a week a man named John Bluhm from Tempe, Arizona--who was also in there was a second class. One of the hierarchy-- he came over and started trying to help me, so when we took the examination in November of that year about five of us--the four white guys and me--I was the only one who passed the national exam, so all of a sudden now I'm coming from the black man who is sitting by the door to being one of the bosses, and it's amazing how things change when I had to make the decision. I was like so relieved. It's amazing when you get power in your hand as I look at that whole situation in retrospect. I made E5 [13]. I could have become an E6, but I turned it down, but I was on the fast track. I become an E5 in no time, but I got out. I was being prepared in my opinion unconsciously for what I was going to do later. I was on the forward part of the ship of the aircraft carrier in Hong Kong, China--1956--with an old friend of mine named Eric Brendan, and I said, "Eric I'm going to go back to Atlanta and go back to Morehouse." I had a boxing scholarship to go to USF, but I turned it down to go back to Atlanta. I said, "One of these days we're going to throw off the segregation down there, and I want to be there to help out.", and that's why I came back home and instead of going to San Francisco to stay out of the box and get my education out there. Now when you think about it, it was something out here compelling me to go in that direction, and I think that you go back to when I picked up that leaflet about keeping the niggers in their place sitting down with my granddaddy. He was a Baptist preacher, and watching what was going on as a kid realizing that there is something wrong with this picture, and we read about how we hold

these truths to be self-evident, but then you learned that's self-evident is really something else, so I think I was unconsciously being prepared for what I did in 1960.

Ashley: That is really cool how it all comes together. So after the Navy in order to accomplish this mission of throwing off segregation were you involved in any other groups that worked towards creating equal rights besides the NAACP?

Lonnie: Uhm, well we did the greatest thing with the movement, but then I came back to town for being away for a while, and so they asked me to come because of NAACP in Atlanta, and so I was uhm elected to that position. Now, before I was elected though, Dr. Sam Williams, one of my advisors, had asked me to come and debate Dr. John Batson, who was the then the superintendent of schools in '68 after I had just come back, and I debated him on educational issues at uhm Clark College. It's Clark AU now is Clark college. The place was packed with students over there trying to get their education, about 400 of them. So I made my presentation. Dr. Letson made his. A young man got up during the question and answer period, and he asked Dr. Letson, "Why is it that we don't have any African Americans who are assistant superintendents of schools. The school system is 93% African American. Why can't we at least have somebody up there out of the 27 people who run this school system, who's African American?" Dr. Letson said with a straight face toll, "(not audible) 400 kids who were trying to get their education, I haven't found anyone who was qualified." The kids said "oooooh". The folks teaching over there had PhDs from all these great schools cause they couldn't teach at the other places, and I said, "Dr. Williams I want to appoint a person." He was the moderator in charge. He says okay. I said "let me tell you Dr. Letson for you to tell that young man in this audience that you cannot find a qualified African American to be an assistant superintendent of



schools in your cabinet is very disturbing, and if I ever get a chance to fire you, I will." The place erupted. He turned red as a beat, so when they came to me and asked me to be head of the NAACP, I agreed, and later on Judge Griffin Bail was one of the federal judges here and came to an action forum meeting--that's a group of blacks and whites who were kinda like movers and shakers in town--and he said, "We've spent a million dollars fighting this school case on our side, the segregationists side, and the blacks were spending a million dollars on their side." 2 million dollars were being spent, and their school system was 93% black. There is something wrong with this picture. He said "Lonnie do you think we can settle this case?" I said "I'll think about it", and he said "yeah think about it", well I said, "okay I'll think about it." I said "I'll tell you what here's what I'm gonna do. I'm going to work to settle this on one condition.", and he said "what was it?" I said, "Letson has to be fired. Yup if you fire Letson, I'll sit down and talk to you". They said, "we're not gonna fire Letson.", and I said, "That's fine." About 5 or 6 days later I got a call from William Van Landingham and a guy named Jerry Luxemburger. They were both on the school board and also VanLandingham was the vice president of the CNS Bank under Neal's Lane. He asked me to come to lunch, so I met him down at the Commerce Club. I said, "What's up gentlemen?" and he says, "Well, we are going to find out soon.", and I said, "Oh okay. Now are you ready to sit and re-settle this case?" And I said sure, and so we began negotiating, and we brought in the first black superintendent schools in the history of the south without any fights, just negotiating. He was not my candidate, but they brought him in. I thought another guy was better qualified, but I would have to fight Dr. Mays, and I didn't want to get into all of that, but we got half the jobs, and I think we started out okay now the federal courts left me in as a monitor over them for about five years after that, and things were going okay, but then I left town to go back to take a job with the Interior Department, and I think that when the cat's

away, the mice will play, and so there are a lot of things that did not get done after I left, and we now have a situation where blacks have been in charge of the school system in Atlanta, Georgia, but they have not done what they should have done to try and educate the young blacks who were coming through the system, you follow me?

Ashley: Yes

Lonnie: The education was not good. You can't have an education system where you're going to teach on cruise control. These kids have to be taught, first of all, seven out of ten of them today are being born out of wedlock. There's no daddy around except for at conception, and the poor little mothers out there hustling trying to raise their children with subpar jobs, often times subpar education. We've got to have a community effort to try and begin to help the underclass get hooked in. The greatest mistake that we made in the 1960s was that we believed that the folks that we were battling in time would begin to accept the notion that we hold these truths to be self-evident, that is not true. They've taught their children and their grandchildren to carry forward some of the same kind of racism that had been going on since 1619, but they had a free ride, a free ride. Nobody was bothering them, but they moved over and took over the Republican Party, and the irony of it all is that it was the Republican Party, led by all white people who brought forth the 13th Amendment which got African-Americans to be viewed not as property but as a human being, the 14th Amendment to give them due process in the courts and what-have-you, the 15th Amendment to give black men the right to vote, those were white Republicans who did that. There's not another instance I can--and I don't think you can successfully contradict me--I don't think there's another instance wherein white America voluntarily did anything to try and overcome some of the evils of slavery, nothing. All the rest of

the laws have come because somebody pressed in the courts or somebody raised holy heck, had boycotts, you name it, and so the country does not have a history of its practices being in line with what it has preached. But let me say this to you. Maybe we haven't had enough time to pass because when you start talking about changing people's attitudes, their tastes, their needs, their desires, you're talking about something that ends up being monumental because if you came into a community and all you saw were white people, were your relatives and your friends, went to White schools, went to White churches, you were in a white community, it's almost impossible to not act on what you were brought up in. But I gotta tell you I've watched this Donald Trump situation here, and when he announced for president that's when I realized what he was doing when he was pushing the birther thing on Obama that was a trial balloon for him to see what would support be for him if he ran a racist campaign, and he figured out that between 30 to 40% of the voters would vote for him, and that's exactly what's happening right now in the Republican Party. He's about to destroy that party, the party of Lincoln, the party of a lot of people who freed African-Americans. They've turned that whole thing on its head. Now Trump is just the latest incarnation of people. It really started with Strom Thurmond [14] the (inaudible) of Georgia, the Billboards in Mississippi, you see before you were born every elected official in the South was a Democrat, everyone. Now after you've been born they're all Republicans primarily because the white South and the Southwest never accepted the premise of "we hold these truths to be self-evident". They wanted to keep the two-tiered society going whites on the top, blacks and others on the bottom, but young people like you are basically saying, "I'm not sure I'm on that page". That's a part of what's troubling people because of all the proselytization and proselytizing that they did. There are people that are being born today who have bought into that concept. You haven't lost anything by being fair, and a lot of people are thinking of Armageddon when they

see that, and that's why Bernie Sanders is getting such support. How do you explain a 74 year old man having millions of people under 30 supporting him? It's his message America's best days are not behind us but ahead of us because we're going to make this pluralistic society work, and it's going to be a multi-racial society. People are saying well we're going to get rid of Obamacare, which means we're going to get rid of Obama, we're going to get Hillary Clinton in there as the president. She's going to win that campaign, and you don't know what you're going to get in the next 20-30 years. That's part of the reason why so many white men in the South are upset because they think they might be a vanishing breed, but the world's not going to come to an end. We'll still be living some of us, and we're going to still be able to do what we've been doing, but this hate thing has been taught, and it's going to take a little time to non-violently change it. Now I'm not in favor of anybody going and getting any guns or going to shoot anybody, I'm not in favor of that. That's just not the way you solve it. I would not be a Christian if I believe in that, I am a Christian.

Ashley: So with that in mind what goals do you see for civil rights in the future?

Lonnie: Well I think it's going to be a hard struggle. I don't think I'm going to live long enough to see the blessings of liberty carried out in a fair way. I think we're going to have to agitate, agitate, agitate.

Ashley: Do you think the current progress of civil and human rights is moving in the right direction?

Lonnie: The Civil Rights and human rights movement has been drawn, has come to a halt in my opinion. the Republicans are nothing but the old Dixiecrats, have effectively thwarted most of

the bills and rights that had been put on the books, but the most damaging one that they've done is they have gutted the Voting Rights Act, to make it almost null and void, where they can deny millions of people the opportunity to vote, and concurrent with that they're being helped by so many people who have the right to vote but who won't register, therefore they're feeding into the same (inaudible) that the folks have created. For example, Georgia has 700,000 African Americans who have not gone to jail, most of whom are men who are not registered but could register. There are 600,000 Hispanics who are legal but are not registered at all. You're winning the governorship with less than half of a million votes, you follow me? So in a way the salvation is in the hands of the people who are asleep at the switch. It's as simple as that.

Ashley: What do you think it will take to reinvigorate that group people?

Lonnie: I think you need more young people of all persuasions: Hispanics, blacks, women, men who are willing to try to make this thing work. We've got to get involved, and we've got to educate people. I've been thinking here recently, why did they take civics out of the classroom? The teaching of civics, and so I called a person who was a powerful person in education here for years. I said, "Tell me something. Why was civics taken out of the classroom in Atlanta or in Georgia?" She said, "Well the state officials came to us about twenty years ago and said we need to take out civics and another course. I forgot what the other course was, and they wanted to put more enrichment programs with regard to the sciences." I said "Well, where do you learn about how government works? In the civics class." I said, "Therefore, if they took it out several years ago that was a deliberate plan to not let the underclass of people understand how the government works.", so then when you talk to these young folks about voting, or what have you, they have no basis or recognition of how that relates to their lives. People who decide on whether or not

you get a driver's license, and how much it costs, how much the minimum wage is, they're all elected people at some point or appointed by somebody, but a lot of people in the underclass do not understand how they fit into this that we call society and how society works. There's a reason why people fight like heck to deny people the right to vote. It's because voting will bring forward a more perfect union if you get the maximum number of people to do it, but if you keep it set up in such a way that it's skewed against certain people, then those people that it's skewed for will continue to go on ad infinitum.

Ashley: Wow. Education is really key

Lonnie: It is, it is

Ashley: Are you currently involved in any projects related to Civil Rights or working with anyone in the community?

Lonnie: Well to answer the question directly, the answer is I'm theoretically dealing with it. I'm trying to finish up this dissertation, therefore I'm not going to put anything in front of that anymore except for this little accident that happened to me, but I formed a group called the National Organization of Americans for Human Rights, the acronym of NOAH. When you think of Noah, you think of save humanity, save all species. We've got to save the underclass in this state from themselves, and you have to explain to them that you've got the future, your future, in your hands. And that means then that you have to have an organization of people who are honest brokers. I was reading about a lady who tried to register some voters and she paid \$774,000 for 20 hours' worth of work per week, state legislature. That's ridiculous. First of all, we ought to be doing this for a dollar, if we get paid anything because it needs to be done. I think one of the

problems that we're faced with is that everyone wants to get a pay day. When do you pay your dues for living during the time you're coming through here. For living in such a way you can help your children and grandchildren and great grandchildren to have a better life. Do you have to get paid to do that? You should not. The psychic satisfaction oughta be enough pay, knowing that when it was your time, based on circumstances, to run the leg of freedom as all people in America ought to be running. You did the right thing and you didn't go out here and try to get paid for it. The pay is in creating the kind of community and society that you'd like to leave your offspring and the friends of your offspring in.

Ashley: That's so true. So, as a last piece of advice, you've mentioned education and voting rights, what would you like to pass on to younger generations in order to advance and continually reinvigorate the civil rights movement?

Lonnie: What they have to do in my opinion is organize, plan, and put together an agenda. Put together a war plan. You cannot win a battle without a plan. I was talking to some of the Black Lives Matter people about five or six different groups here, and I said, "Why do you have so many different groups? Why not just come together and have one concerted force to work on the problems you're concerned about?" You would think I was speaking Greek because I think we have too many people with the drum major instinct, I wanna be out front, I want the baton in my hand, and therefore you don't get anywhere because you have (inaudible) your forces. Whenever they ask me to sit down and talk with them I give them the truth. They're not going to do it because I'm just an old folk. I don't know what I'm talking about.

Ashley: Well they could educate themselves on your history and learn when you guys consolidated is when things really started happening

Lonnie: Can you imagine what would have happened if the six colleges and universities out there where there were 5000 plus African Americans going to school, if we didn't have any organization and we just kinda came down here (inaudible) one day, (inaudible) another day, marched on another day, sometimes on the same day, no organization. It would have been laughable. You wouldn't have had to do anything other than sit back and see us destroy one another, so we were lucky enough, and God had given me, I guess, the skill to be able to get these divergent people to work under one umbrella. We couldn't have done it otherwise. It wouldn't have happened. Especially in Atlanta

Ashley: Well thank you so much for coming today and answering all of our questions and best of luck in your endeavors from here.

Lonnie: Okay, alright, okay you take care. Alright okay now.



1. The 67<sup>th</sup> governor of Georgia from 1933 to 1937.
2. An American aircraft produced from 1937 to 1947 that was used for general aviation due to its relatively low price.
3. Rancor (n.) Bitterness or resentfulness, especially when long-standing.
4. The 49<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> mayor of Atlanta, and the longest serving mayor. He was in office from 1937 to 1941 and again from 1942 to 1962.
5. A civil rights activist and 52<sup>nd</sup> mayor of Atlanta from 1962 to 1970.
6. Henry Hammond's book *The Pro-Slavery Argument* where he went into great detail explaining how to control slaves and why slavery was beneficial to the nation.
7. National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Founded in 1909.
8. The precursor to Macy's whose headquarters was in Atlanta, Georgia. It was in operation from 1867 to 2005.
9. The famous document published by Rosalyn Pope and several other students of Atlanta University that was sent to congress as an appeal to change the Jim Crow South with the theme being about human rights.
10. A Marxist activist who wrote *American Negro Slave Revolts* in 1943, which cataloged all the known slave revolts in the world.
11. Leader of the Haitian revolution from 1791 to 1804, which lead to the creation of the Haitian country.
12. Chaplain (n.) A member of the clergy attached to a private chapel, institution, ship, branch of the armed forces, etc.
13. A navy ranking of Petty Officer Second Class. The highest E classification is E9.
14. The South Carolina senator from 1954 to 2003.