INTERVIEW WITH DR. GEORGE SIMKINS

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Simkins, I'd like to welcome you to this interview taping for the Community Voices project. It's a great pleasure to meet you finally in person and to have an opportunity to ask you about your life in Greensboro.

DR. SIMKINS: Thank you.

INTERVIEWER: As a beginning point, would you please share some of your personal history: where you were born, your father's dental practice, your mother's work and volunteer work, and just in general the environment in Greensboro as you were coming of age.

DR. SIMKINS: Well, I was born in Greensboro at the house I live in now, August the 23rd, 1924. And my father practiced dentistry here for forty years. And my mother was a schoolteacher here. She taught at Washington Street School and taught the first grade. She also was the director of the choir at St. James Presbyterian Church. And this is my history of growing up here in Greensboro.

I went to Dudley High School. I finished there in 1940. I left there and went to Herzel Junior College in Chicago in 1941 and '42, and I finished there. I transferred to Talladega College in Talladega, Alabama, for two years and graduated from there and went to Mahari Dental School in Nashville, Tennessee, from 1944 to '48. I interned at Jersey City Medical Center, a rotating internship, and came back in '49. And I worked for the health department, the county health department, the dental program, for five years, and then I went into private practice.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. What specifically brought you back to Greensboro after you attended dental school?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, I'd gone around and thought about going out to Detroit and practicing in New Haven. And then I decided --after visiting these towns, I decided that Greensboro was—was my town and that I was coming back here where my folks were and where my father probably needed some help. You know, he had been practicing quite a few years. And that's what brought me back.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. A dentist is probably an unlikely candidate to spearhead social change, yet you had dedicated your practice to the poor. You're still employed. You're still operating a full-time practice. And yet you became very involved in civil rights well before the sit-ins. Can you talk about what motivated you to get involved in this area?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, in civil rights, we had been trying to get the City – we had a little segregated golf course called Nocho Park Golf Course. And we had been trying to get the City to fix it up and -- cut the -- cut the grass and fix the greens and everything and keep it up, and they would never do it.

And we had another course for whites called Gillespie Park Golf Course, and they were fixing that up but wouldn't fix the Nocho Park Golf Course up. So we asked that we be allowed to play at Gillespie Park Golf Course. And, of course, they -- they leased it for one dollar a private group to keep blacks from playing out there.

So one Wednesday afternoon, my half a day off, six of us, including myself, decided to go out and see if we couldn't play at Gillespie. So we went out and put our money on the counter and tried to sign the book. And when we were signing the book,

the caretaker snatched the book from us and said, "No, you can't sign this book. You can't play here."

So we said, "Well, we intend to play." And we put our money down. I think we put seventy-five cent down to play eighteen holes. That was the fee then. And we proceeded to tee off on Number 1 tee.

And about the fifth hole, the pro came out. And he wasn't there when we started. And he came out, and he started cursing us and going on and telling us that this was a private facility. And we said, "We know better, that the City owns this facility, and since we were taxpayers, we thought we had a right to play out here and enjoy the recreational facilities provided by the City."

Well, he cursed us and threatened us and called us everything under the sun. And so I told him, I said, "Well, we're out here for a cause."

He said, "What damn cause?"

I said, "The cause of democracy."

And, of course, he turned red and his lips got blue and everything. And I had to keep a club in my hand for protection, because I thought any minute that he would hit me. And I didn't intend to hit him, but I wanted to make him think I was going to do something anyway.

But he followed us around. And after nine holes -- I would try to hit the ball down the center, and I was so nervous I was hitting it to the right and -- and I just couldn't enjoy myself at all. So after nine holes I told the guys, I said, "Let's go." And so we all left. And that night the police came by the house and arrested all of us for playing -- for trespassing out at Gillespie Park Golf Course.

Well, we went into city court and we got us a lawyer. And the judge said, "Well, if you agree to plead guilty to trespassing, I will give you a light fine, and we'll forget it."

I said, "Oh, no, no. We're not going to do that. We're not guilty. And we're going to take this all the way to the Supreme Court if necessary, because we think the City is wrong."

Well, he fined us fifteen dollars and the cost of court, and we appealed it to the superior court. We got in superior court and the judge was from down east, and he said, "Well, if you'd come out on my place like you did," he said, "I think I would have gotten my" -- he was talking about getting his shotgun.

And he said, "You're guilty and" -- we had a jury trial, by the way. And two members of the jury -- they had -- they got rid of all the blacks on the jury. And they had two members of the jury, we found out, had played at Gillespie. So we took them off the jury stand and put them --got them to take the stand.

And they claimed that you had to be a member or the invited guest of a member to play at Gillespie. Well, we found out that these two members of the jury were -- had played out at Gillespie. They testified that they were not members, nor were they the invited guests of any member. All they did was pay a fee and play out there, fifty cents for nine holes and seventy-five cents for eighteen.

So they found us guilty of trespassing out there. Now, in the meantime, we --our lawyers go into federal court and get what we call a declaratory judgment. Judge Johnson J. Hayes said we had a right to play out there, we had a right to go out there, and the only reason they arrested us were because we were black. And anybody who has to defend this country in an act of war, has to pay taxes, ought to be able to enjoy the recreational

facilities provided by the City And as far as he was concerned, the City was still in the saddle. They had this course, and they couldn't even show where this group had paid one dollar for the lease of this course. And he agreed that this course must be integrated And he gave them a certain date to integrate.

Well, two weeks before integration was to take effect, the clubhouse mysteriously burns down. The fire marshals go out and condemn the whole course because the clubhouse had been burned down. It stayed condemned for seven years.

So we appealed it and – appealed the trespassing decision. Our lawyers, unfortunately, forgot and left the declaratory judgment out of the trespass case when we went to the state supreme court. And you have so many days when you make an appeal to get all your evidence in. They forgot and left that out, which was the most important thing on our -- on our case. And we were found guilty in the state supreme court.

We appealed it to the United States Supreme Court. And in the meantime, we went up to Thurgood Marshall, who was the head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund out of New York, and asked Thurgood for some help.

Thurgood look -- looked at the record, read the record, and he said -- he said, "Your lawyers ought to be the ones to go jail instead of you," because we had been given an active thirty-day jail sentence at that time. He said, "Your lawyers ought to be the ones to go to jail for messing this case up like they have."

So he said, "I am not going to ruin my W/L record, win/loss record, by taking this case," he said, "but I will help you all with your printing expenses," which were exorbitant when you go to the Supreme Court, because you have to have so many briefs printed and this type of thing.

And he said, "You're going to lose this case because the lawyers have messed it up." He said, "Tom Clark"--who was a member of the Supreme Court--"is going to vote against you."

Sure enough, we went to the Supreme Court. My father-in-law argued the case for us. And the first thing that Earl Warren, who was the chief justice, wanted to know, "How could the lawyer -- the lawyers leave something so important out of the case?" My father-in-law said, "I don't know, but it was left out. It was left out of the case."

And sure enough, Thurgood Marshall was right. We lost by a five-four decision. Tom Clark voted against us. And all the justices said if that declaratory judgment had been in the case, we would have won the case unanimously. And Thurgood Marshall -- I mean, Earl Warren – Judge Earl Warren, Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote a very strong dissenting opinion. And he said he doesn't understand why North Carolina would want its citizens arrested and thrown in jail for enjoying recreational facilities provided by the City.

And Governor Hodges was the governor at that time, and he commuted our sentences and gave us a fine so we wouldn't have to go to jail. And that -- that ended the golf course case.

Well, we decided that we needed to get political, because at that time we had only 5,500 blacks registered in the city. We found that there were -- were instructors at A&T, at Bennett, at Dudley, who had been here for years who were not registered voters.

I went over to Dr. Proctor. He was the president of A&T at that time. And told him, I said, "Dr. Proctor, look at all these people that you have on your -- on your faculty who are not even registered voters." And he was just amazed. He sat down -- and it made

him mad. He sat down and wrote each one of them a letter and told them if they stay here, they had to become a registered voter.

I went over to Bennett College. We found Ph.D.s teaching political science who were not registered voters. Dr. Player was amazed. She sat down and wrote them a letter.

I went to Dudley High School where Dr. Tarpley was the principal. And I said, "Look at all these teachers that we have on the faculty here that are not registered voters." And he was amazed. He sat down and wrote each one of them a letter and told them that they had to become a registered voter.

So we went from house to house. I became a registrar myself. We went from house to house in certain areas and got blacks who were never registered to vote. We increased it from about 5,500 to about over 12,000. And then we started writing letters, telling them who the best people to vote for. We made one of the campaign slogans was that "Do you intend to open up Gillespie Park so that everybody can play there? Otherwise we're not going to vote for you."

So we got rid of all the city councilmen who had voted to close down the recreational facilities. They not only voted to close Gillespie down, they closed Nocho down. They closed all the swimming pools down and everything. And they said they were going out of the recreation business rather than integrate, the city council did.

We were fortunate enough to get rid of every one of them that had that opinion and put a new city council in there. It took us seven years to reopen Gillespie Park. It reopened as a nine-hole course, because they had taken the other nine and built a city yard on it. And so it opened up as a nine-hole course seven years to the day after it was closed, December 7, 1955.

And that's how we got started. That's how I got started in civil rights.

And the experience I had in the courtroom where the judge -- in the -- in the state courts, rather, where the judge knew that these people were lying, and they were -- they were finding us guilty and indicting us on -- on lies, this type of thing, it just made me want to just --just devote my life to civil rights, because the solicitor -- they were laughing. The solicitor, the judge, and the pro out there, they were all in cahoots laughing, you know. And, yet, they – they found us guilty. And they got rid of all the blacks on the jury. We really didn't have a chance.

And so I said, "I'm going to devote my life to civil rights and see if I can improve --improve something in this city."

And, of course, Greensboro is a very strange city in that you have to fight for everything that you get here. I mean, they don't give one inch. And you have to picket, demonstrate, take them to the courts, or this type of thing, to get anything done.

Other cities right around Greensboro, they were opening up more of their recreational facilities. They were opening up their golf courses to people of color, the swimming pools, whereas Greensboro was closing down everything. I'm talking about cities like Durham, Raleigh, Charlotte, Winston-Salem, even High Point over there, you could go over there and play. And this was the type of thing back there that we were having. And we just have had to -- to do the best we could. And they would knock us down, and we'd get back up and continue to fight.

So we went from -- I said, "Well, if you're not going to let us play golf, maybe you'll let us swim." So we sent somebody out to Lindley Park swimming pool, and, of course, they immediately closed that down and decided to sell it. And the pool was just

two years old, and it cost two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to build. And they sold it for about sixty-some thousand. They sold it -- they had bids on it. They sold it to the wrong person from out of town. They told him that he would not be able - they were not going to zone it so he could make a profit. And so he said, "Well, I have no use for it then."

So then they--then they had another bid on it. And they sold it to some --Dr. Talafaro, who was chairman of the parks and rec. And he formed a little group, and he tried to operate it on--as a private structure. And it stayed in business for a couple of years. And then they decided to give it back to the City because they couldn't make it.

And then finally, after about seven years, the City decided that they would open it up for everybody. And that's how it started.

And, of course, we went to the school system and decided that the schools were segregated, and a lot of the blacks--black teachers didn't have anything to work with. And I remember one teacher telling me, she said, "I certainly hope some of my students are absent today." She taught typing at Dudley.

I said, "Why do you want them to be absent?"

She said, "Because I don't have enough typewriters to go around."

And other people--teachers would tell us that they don't even have crayon to put -- any chalk to put up on the board or anything like that.

So I got my daughter, and she was one of the plaintiffs along with some of the neighbors in the suit against Greensboro Public Schools to integrate the schools. And as soon as the judge ruled that they must be integrated, they start fixing up the black schools, painting them, building fences around them and everything.

And, of course, you would get--would get threatening messages over the phone, you know, that they're going to kill me if I - if anything happened to their child or this type of thing.

So after that, we--then the hospitals came along. And I had a patient in my office, the boy's jaw was way out here. He had a temperature of a hundred and three. And I called up L. Richardson, and they had no room over there. They had a waiting period of two to three weeks. People were all in the hallways. You--I mean, you had to walk--just a narrow hallway to--because there were beds on each side of the hallway, they were so crowded.

I called Cone. They had room but wouldn't take him, because he was black. I called Wesley Long. They wouldn't take him, because he was black. They had room, though, beds was available.

So I called Jack Greenberg, who was head of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund at this time. Jack--I said, "Jack, we've got to do something about these hospitals," I said, "because it's" --I said, "You could be dying and they wouldn't take you in."

So Jack said, "Well, George, if you can organize the doctors," he said, "1 will bring a case." He said, "Now, what you need to do is find out whether these hospitals have been built with Hill Burton or federal funds."

So I went around and found out that both hospitals, Wesley Long and Moses Cone, had been built partially with federal funds. I said, "We got a good case, Jack, because both of these hospitals have been built with federal funds."

I first got the young doctors to go along with me. I had a petition I wanted I wanted to collect fifty dollars from each one so we could pay the lawyer. I said, "Now, I want you to agree to be a plaintiff."

Well, the young ones went with me. Some of the old ones wouldn't go with me. And --but some of them saw the younger doctors' names down there, and a few of them did sign.

I got all the dentists to go along with me. And I got this boy who had come to my office with a swollen jaw and a temperature of a hundred and three to be a plaintiff in the case.

We went into Middle District Court and brought suit -- well, first of all, we had -- we had a lawyer who first took the case, and he just kept prolonging, prolonging, and prolonging. And finally I decided that maybe he was scared to take this case.

So I called Jack. I said, "Jack, I think we might have a scared lawyer on our hands."

And Jack said, "I understand." He called Conrad Pearson, who was a NAACP lawyer in Durham, and Conrad came over the next couple of days and filed the case for us.

And we lost it in Middle District Court. Edward Stanley ruled against us in Middle District Court. He said the hospitals were private, and they had a right to discriminate and decide who they wanted to take and this type of thing.

We appealed the case to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals, and the--Bobby Kennedy was the Attorney General at the time. He came in as a friend of the Court and wrote a brief in our behalf saying that the hospitals should be integrated, and they were

taxpayers that --taxpayer money that paid for these hospitals to be built, and they should be integrated.

Well, we won it on a three-to-two decision in the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals. And the hospitals appealed it to the United States Supreme Court. And -- the United States Supreme Court would not hear it. So it ended up as a landmark case in that any hospital in the South, or in the North, had to integrate their facilities as well as admit blacks, physicians and dentists, to their staff and take patients as – take black -- blacks as patients in the hospital.

So this is -- and -- I think this -- if I've done anything, this was probably the most important thing I've ever done in my life, because health means so much to everybody.

And -- so then we tried to get blacks on the boards and commissions. We found out that we had a district system here that -- I don't mean a district system here. We had an at-large system here, that whoever got the most votes got to be on the city council. We asked for a district system. We were denied getting a district system here.

So we put in a petition where you get so many voters to sign and you have to have an election. Well, we lost the election and – as soon as we'd lose one election, we'd get another petition going, get some more voters to sign. We'd have another election. We'd lose that one.

Then the third time we lost – we showed the whites in the city that there's nobody -- this is not a black/white thing. There's nobody on the city council but people who live in the northwest section of the city, the Irving Parks, the Starmounts. These are the people who are on the city council. Nobody else, black or white, has any representation on boards, nor on the city council.

Well, the whites in other sections of the city saw that we -- we had diagrammed it and put out a chart showing that this was a fact. Nobody else was on the board. No white person has ever been on the board in Southwest Greensboro, nor on the city council.

So the last time we voted, we lost by 312 votes. But the whites in other parts of the city voted with us for the first time.

Well, the City wanted to annex Guilford College. There were fifteen thousand families -- white families out in Guilford College that wanted to be annexed to the city. I called the Justice Department, since we were under the 1965 Voting Rights Act, and told the Justice Department in Washington that we don't have anybody on the city council now. Putting fifteen thousand more whites -- families on the city council would only dilute the black vote even more, and that I don't think that they should allow the City to do this until they get a district system or a ward system in place.

Well, they agreed with me. And they told the City that in order to get a district system, they would have to -- to -- in order to get this fifteen thousand whites -- white families annexed to the city, into the city, they would have to get a district system.

And so we got the five-three-one. Five at large, three -- no -- I'm sorry. Five from the districts, three at large, and one mayor elected by all the city. And the City was losing seventeen thousand dollars a month in tax revenue because they could not -- they did not -- I mean, they did not bring -- could not bring these white families in.

So after they got the district system, the Justice Department agreed to allow the families to be brought in. And this is how we got a district system. It took us about I think seventeen years to get a district system in here. And yet, just as I've said before, cities in -- in Winston-Salem they had a district system, had had one for years, had had blacks on

the city council. High Point even. Durham, Raleigh, Charlotte. And yet Greensboro was the last to come in. And we had to fight -- fight it to get it in.

And this is how I got involved in civil rights, and these are some of the things that we were able to -- to accomplish.

INTERVIEWER: It's remarkable to me as you were relating your experiences in these different areas, very distinctive, starting with recreational access, educational access, and health access, and then political access. What – what kept you going?

I mean, obviously, it took years and years to get some of these changes made. What -- to what do you attribute your perseverance and your dedication? Were there individuals in your life that you looked to as inspiration or --can you describe what kept you going?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, the way we were treated in the -- in the court -- courtroom, I just couldn't believe that they would treat people the way they did in this courtroom. And that just motivated me no end. I just said, "I'm just going to do what I can to do it."

And I never will forget. I would leave my office at five o'clock and I'd go -- I'd go down on Spencer Street. And I had a little old red convertible, and I'd go from house to house and get people registered.

And I never will forget. I would come back to my convertible and the top had been cut. And I said, "Oh, well, I'm going on to get some more registered now, because nothing else they can do."

I went on down the street and got a few more registered. And I went in one lady's house, and I never seen anything like it in my life. I went into her kitchen, and there were about five or six mice that were looking at me. They weren't running. They were just

standing there looking at me. I never seen anything like that. Because every time I'd see a mouse, he would just take off. And these were almost like pets. And I said, "Lord "-- I said, "Lady, sign this thing here so I" -- I told her to sign this form right quick so I could get out of this place, you know.

So I went back to my car, and they cut my top some more. So I said, "Well, I better get on out of this neighborhood." I said, "Here I am trying to do -- do these folks a favor and get them involved and everything and somebody's around here just cutting my car to pieces, you know." So I left there and went on back.

And -- but the one man who really, really motivated me was Martin Luther King. Oh, we had him here to speak, and he was such an orator. Oh, I'm telling you. And I just -- I'd follow him down to Durham and hear him give the same speech down to Durham, you know. And I would -- he would just motivate me. He -- I've never been motivated by any individual like Martin Luther King. I thought he was one of the greatest guys – the greatest leaders we've ever had.

INTERVIEWER: Thank you. You already actually incorporated a few of my next questions. So let me just ask you about the picketing of Greensboro Smith Homes. You were very actively involved in that in order to get it opened up for black residents. As a result, Greensboro became the second southern city to desegregate public housing. Can you talk a little bit about that experience?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, back then, we had redevelopment going. They were taking blacks out of their homes and had no place for them to go. And one of the stipulations was that you -- if you remove somebody from their house, you had to have some place for them to live.

Well, Greensboro Redevelopment was removing them from their homes and had no place for them to go, except the streets. So we looked into it and found out that Henry Lewis Smith Homes had a lot of vacancies over there. So we petitioned the Greensboro Housing Authority to open up Henry Lewis Smith Homes for these blacks who redevelopment was -- were taking their homes.

Well, they refused. So I said, "Well, we'll picket them."

So we started a picket line in front of Henry Lewis Smith homes. And the next day, they decided that they had enough of us, and that they opened up one wing just for blacks.

So we said that was not -- we were not standing for any segregation in a public housing project. You had to have it -- have blacks all over Henry Lewis Smith Homes to satisfy us, and that we were not going to allow them to be put in just one segment of Henry Lewis Smith Homes.

So they finally decided that they would open up the whole place. So we became the second city in the South to integrate public housing. I think Louisville, Kentucky, was the first.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Could you speak, please, to the big picture. As a prime figure involved with the Greensboro Chapter of the NAACP, the National Advancement -- Association for the Advancement of Colored People--since 1959, how has the goal and the mission of that organization changed over the past forty years, from your perspective?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, it hadn't changed that much. We still -- we're still fighting for things we fought for forty years ago. We're fighting for more political involvement.

We -- we're now registering voters. We did the same thing forty years ago -- registering people, trying to get more blacks involved in the political process.

Job opportunities. We were fighting for more job opportunities then. We're still fighting for more job opportunities now. We're fighting for -- for blacks to get on boards of these big -- large corporations, and some of them are on there. And -- so we're fighting for more integration in education and -- so these are -- these are things we fought for forty years ago, and we're -- we're right now fighting for the same thing.

There's still a lot of discrimination out here. The City of Greensboro is still discriminating in jobs. It's a type of thing where, you know, you just got to -- you got – you just have to stay on it. And it's a -- it's a 24-hour job to just keep putting pressure, pressure, pressure and make them do the right thing.

To give you an example, we're trying to -- it took us seven years to get the City to fix up the tennis courts at Memorial Stadium. And they finally decided that they would make four of them soft courts and four of them hard courts. They were going to build a house -- we didn't have any rest room facilities out there or anything.

So they finally decided that they were going to build a little house out there to --so you could have rest room facilities and this type of thing. But they left the shower out. There's no room -- but yet in these other facilities at Latham Park and at Spencer Love they have shower facilities. But now we're fighting right now, trying to get them to put a shower in the place that they're building out there for mostly blacks. It's in a black neighborhood, but it's integrated. You'll have plenty of whites playing out there too. But we certainly deserve a shower. But it's an ongoing fight all the way in this city.

INTERVIEWER: What goals did you personally set when you were president of NAACP

during your twenty-five years as president?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, I -- I don't know whether I had any goals. I'd just go from day to day. I knew that we had to get stronger politically. We had to get more people registered. We had to get more people involved in voting. I think that's one of our shortcomings. And we've got to get better organized.

We had to picket the banks to make them hire tellers here. I never will forget, I was on the Human Relations Commission, and we'd been trying to get Wachovia to hire black tellers. They had no blacks in the bank. And they refused. Said they couldn't find anybody qualified.

So I left the Human Relations Commission one day and I said -- got a few people that were on the Human Relations Commission, and I said, "Let's go out here and picket this bank."

So we went out and start picketing the bank. And the next day, they called somebody -- a bank in Durham -- the black bank in Durham and got them to send some tellers up here, black tellers. And then the other banks start following suit. They -- all of them start hiring black tellers and training black tellers.

And this is how the black – the banks got integrated. But this is the some of the things you have to do in Greensboro to get things done.

INTERVIEWER: Well, because of your dedication to making the change, to moving things forward in terms of human rights, I'm sure that you had to make a lot of personal sacrifices. Is there anything that you feel like all of this has actually cost you personally?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, it costs you a lot of sleepless nights and threats on your life.

Monetarily it costs you, you know, because I never will forget, one man who had a big .. a job with the City, he told his maid -- she told him she had a toothache, and he told his maid she could go anywhere else but not come to me to get that tooth out.

Well, the lady came to me anyway and told me what the man said, so -- you know, little things like that. But it matters not, you know, because the overall cause is the main thing. It's what you're trying to accomplish. And what it costs me -- you know, it cost Martin Luther King his life, you know, and this type of thing. So I think I'm getting out real cheap.

INTERVIEWER: What do you think, looking back -- I mean, you've already identified some of the success stories in terms of your involvement, taking -- going to the Supreme Court on two different cases. But are there any other areas of your involvement either in civil rights or professionally or personally that you would identify as successes in your life, that you can look at and say, "I felt really good about that"?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, the fact that I got my -- my kids through school and my daughter is a lawyer in Atlanta now and she has her own energy company, and my son is a reporter with VOA, Voice of America, and he covered the Republican Convention in Philadelphia and he's covering the Democratic Convention in LA, these are some of the things that make me proud.

I'm proud of what we have been able to accomplish. We still got a long way to go here. And we -- we need to do more education. We've got to get these young people involved more, because we still cannot get these young students to – to realize how important it is for them to vote.

We have students at A&T that will -- just will not vote. And you can have an election over there. You can have the--the--the election place right there at the dormitory, and all they got to do is go down to the basement and vote, and they still will not vote. And why, I don't know.

But there are a lot of young kids here, black and white, that don't vote. And we need to get them involved in the political process, because we--it's hard to make improvements when you got a big segment of your population that will not become involved.

INTERVIEWER: We've reached the 45-minute point. Do you want to take a short break or would you like to continue?

DR. SIMKINS: I'll take a break.

INTERVIEWER: Okay.

(BRIEF RECESS)

INTERVIEWER: Dr. Simkins, we're continuing with the second part of our interview today. And during the break, you remembered another part of the story about the integration of the local hospitals. Did you want to add that to the record?

DR. SIMKINS: Yes. A gentleman from Philadelphia came down -- I think he was from Temple University--came down and had a--had a grant to do a study on the integration of hospitals. And he got the minute book at the Moses Cone Hospital and found that there were a couple of members who were on the board at Moses Cone who wanted to give back the Hill Burton Grant that the hospitals had been built with rather than allow blacks to be a part of the hospital. And I thought that was significant. But the board did not go along with him -- with them, thank goodness.

INTERVIEWER: When we ended the first part of the interview, I had been asking you about those parts of your life that you would have considered successes. And you talked about the personal successes, your children and their accomplishments.

Are there any parts of your life that you think maybe you failed to accomplish what you wanted to do, and if so, what did you learn from those -- those failures?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, I probably --looking at it now, I probably would have taken a different approach at Gillespie. Rather than going out there and putting my money down, I probably would have gone into court and got an injunction against them. And then I would have avoided all this harassment and this type of thing that I've gone through in the court system. Now, that's one thing.

Another thing, I feel that we --our political action committee -- now, we've been organized since 1960. And we've been sending letters out to the registered voters since 1962 on every election. And I feel that we need to be better organized than we are. I feel that we need to probably have a block-to-block organization all over the city in the black community, so that we --we can get more people involved and get more of --get a greater percentage of the people involved voting. I feel like this is a failure that I admit to.

INTERVIEWER: Speaking of your political action committee, can you talk a little bit about the role that it's going to be playing in the upcoming national and local elections?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, we're nonpartisan, number one. And we try to get everybody who is running for office to come before us. And we have -- to find out what their platform

is We question them to -- to find out different things about them And after we have questioned all folks running, we have a closed meeting and decide who are the best people who support.

And during this election, we will do the same thing. And we don't care what party they belong to. If they're a good person in that party, we're going to support them. And this is how we -- we run our political action committee.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. This is sort of following up on your earlier discussion about your involvement in civil rights and your current involvement. What do you think have been the most effective approaches or maybe a singular approach to effect social change?

You -- you've already talked a little bit about going to Gillespie, about going the route of the courts, organizing, challenging the district system, picketing public housing. Which of those methods have you thought were the most successful?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, all of them you have to do sometimes to get things done. We call them the sit-ins, the wait-ins, the lie-ins, the petitions, and, finally, the legal system.

And I would say that probably the legal system has been the most effective, because you have to obey the law, and the City as well as the County has to obey the law. And once the law comes down, you know, if they're not going to obey it, then they're in -- they're in serious trouble. So I would say the legal system, you know, is the -- at the last -- the end result, has been the most effective.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. This is probably more of a personal question, but would you describe when you were honored by Mrs. Coretta Scott King, the widow of Martin Luther King, Jr., in Greensboro in 1982, what you were being honored for and what that experience was like for you?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, I guess I was being honored for all the years that I've been involved in civil rights, because I was president for the -- of the NAACP local chapter here for twenty-five years. And to have Mrs. King come here and speak and honor us was a -- was a great achievement because, as I told you previously, no one has inspired me like Dr. Martin Luther King has. I'm telling you, he was one great, great, great leader. And I don't think we have ever had anybody to stand up to him as a leader.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think race relations in Greensboro have changed dramatically from your earlier experiences with the Gillespie Park incident until today?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, back then --they have changed somewhat, but race relations are -- I think in this -- not only in Greensboro, but in this country, are horrible. I really do. And I think the fact that everything is -- has to be based on race, and this is wrong.

And I don't know how to -- how to eradicate it, but Greensboro has its problems just like all these other cities have their problems, you know. And it starts at the -- at the – starts in Congress and just goes on down. And it's --it's a -- it's a type of thing that -- disease that we need to cure, really, because we really need to improve race relations in this country.

INTERVIEWER: Do you think that Affirmative Action as a policy benefited, or do you think it's hindered minority inclusion in this society?

DR. SIMKINS: Oh, I -- no question in my mind. I think it has benefited minorities. And it's a -- it's a sad state when the Supreme Court would ban Affirmative Action. And, of course, it -- it goes back to the point that I made before, that if -- if you could get more people to vote, that Supreme Court wouldn't be like it is now, see.

And that's why it is so important to get more blacks and -- and right-thinking whites to form a coalition and vote. And you wouldn't have a Clarence Thomas on there and this type of thing. And if blacks had vote, Reagan never would have been elected.

So if it -- the political process is so important. Voting is so important. And we just got to educate our people and get -- get them more involved in it.

INTERVIEWER: I was thinking about the Civil Rights Movement and the fact that Greensboro is really perceived as one of the core places in the country because of the sit-in demonstrations at Woolworth's for having actually generated some -- for a momentum. What impact do you think the Civil Rights Movement has had on Greensboro and Guilford coming from that sit-in?

DR. SIMKINS: Oh, I think it's made Greensboro and Guilford County a better place to live because of the Civil Rights Movement. I only -- I hope that we will be able to get the sit-in museum going. It might be that we need to -- you know, to get Earl and Skip to sort of take a low-key position and -- so that we can get involved, because other cities around the country, like Savannah -- I went to the civil rights museum in Savannah, and that was a very fine museum. They got one in Memphis and Atlanta and these other cities, and there's no reason at all why Greensboro shouldn't have one. And if it takes, you know, that they have to take a low-key position, well, then so be it. But this thing will -- will get--move people to downtown Greensboro. It will help everybody. And this is the bottom line. And by all means it should -- should be a civil rights museum here in Greensboro.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any opinion about what's delayed the completion of the museum, because it's been in process for a number of years now?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, you know, to put it bluntly, you've got Earl and Skip fighting the whites with the right hand and begging with the left hand. And there's no question about it that the white corporations, the large corporations, which are predominantly white, have to give money to build the civil rights museum. The City and the County and the State and the Federal Government should contribute to it. And it's hard to fight somebody with the right hand and beg them with the left.

And that's why I say, we – we probably need to get some -- for them to take sort of a back seat. And they should be -- they've done a heck of a job in getting the civil rights --buying the building and everything. There's no question about it. It was their idea, and that was a great achievement on their part. But I think the reason why it hasn't been done is because the whites don't like the leadership of Earl and Skip. And to get it done, they might have to take a little back seat and let somebody else go forward and do it and get it done and -- so that we will have a nice civil rights museum here in Greensboro.

INTERVIEWER: Let me kind of jump ahead. In the interest of time, I'm going to skip a couple of the questions, but I want to make sure we get these last -- last few in.

Do you think Greensboro is a good barometer for race relations in general in the South? Do you think what's going on in Greensboro is representational of what's going on in other southern cities?

DR. SIMKINS: Oh, yeah, I think --I think Greensboro is a good barometer, because the problems we're having in Greensboro they're having everywhere else. Yeah, I think it is a good barometer.

INTERVIEWER: What might young people be most surprised to learn about social

change here in Greensboro? Anything that you have not already mentioned about the efforts on your --your part as well as the other members of the African-American community, things that they might not know about?

DR. SIMKINS: Well, I think young people should know that years ago, that you'd go into an -- into an apartment store – department store and could not try on a dress or a suit and --because you were black. You had to drink – they had a water fountain for blacks or colored and one for whites. You had to drink out of the colored water fountain. You had to sit in the back of the buses for transportation. You had a segregated car on the trains that you had to sit in that was usually right next to the engine where all the smoke would come in there.

You couldn't go to any white church. The churches were segregated. You didn't come in contact with any whites hardly, none. I know when I was a little kid, I didn't know any whites.

I'd go uptown with my mother, and she'd go in Meyer's Department Store. They had a little tea room up there, but she couldn't go there. And I never will forget, I told Mama, I said, "Mama, I can't -- I'll go with you uptown, but I'm not going into that store."

And, of course, the reason I didn't want to go in the store was because Mama was picking over everything, you know, how she's looking around at what she was going to buy. I said, "I'll just sit out here on the street and wait on you to come out." I was a little boy about four or five. And this is what happened.

But the movies were segregated. Some movies wouldn't even take you. And those that did take you, you had to walk up the back steps and sit in the balcony. And, of

course, no hospital -- none of the white hospitals would take you. You could be bleeding to death. They wouldn't take you in.

The jails were segregated. They didn't -- back then, years ago, they had no black policemen on the force. There were no black lawyers in town.

So these kids need to know this. And they need to know from where we have come.

INTERVIEWER: Well, how would you describe where you are at this stage of your life? Are you still fighting, still--

DR. SIMKINS: Oh, you got – you got to continue to fight. I mean, there's no other way. And you've got to get more -- these young people involved. This is the thing that disturbs me. It's hard to get these young people involved. And this is -- this is a failure. But we've got to educate these young people and get more of them involved, because we're not going to be here all the time. And you got to -- the fight has to continue.

We've got to make America a better place for everybody to live. And this is the only way you can do it, is to fight for it, because nobody is going to give you a thing.

INTERVIEWER: Well, thank you so much, Dr. Simkins. Is there anything else you'd like to say before you wrap up today?

DR. SIMKINS: Happy to be here.

INTERVIEWER: I'm happy you're here too, and thank you so much for being here.

DR. SIMKINS: You're welcome

George Simkins

Interviewed by Carol Keesee

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