

Bates College

SCARAB

Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Collection

Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library

6-21-2001

Knowles, Neville oral history interview

Jeremy Robitaille

Follow this and additional works at: https://scarab.bates.edu/muskie_oh

Recommended Citation

Robitaille, Jeremy, "Knowles, Neville oral history interview" (2001). *Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Collection*. 196.

https://scarab.bates.edu/muskie_oh/196

This Oral History is brought to you for free and open access by the Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library at SCARAB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Edmund S. Muskie Oral History Collection by an authorized administrator of SCARAB. For more information, please contact batesscarab@bates.edu.

Interview with Neville Knowles by Jeremy Robitaille

Summary Sheet and Transcript

Interviewee

Knowles, Neville

Interviewer

Robitaille, Jeremy

Date

June 21, 2001

Place

Lewiston, Maine

ID Number

MOH 292

Use Restrictions

© Bates College. This transcript is provided for individual **Research Purposes Only**; for all other uses, including publication, reproduction and quotation beyond fair use, permission must be obtained in writing from: The Edmund S. Muskie Archives and Special Collections Library, Bates College, 70 Campus Avenue, Lewiston, Maine 04240-6018.

Biographical Note

Neville Jerome Knowles was born April 23, 1929 in Exuma, a Bahamian Island, to Muriel Bullit and Joseph W. Knowles. He moved to Maine in 1952 where he worked as a gardener and chauffeur, at the Shapiro Brothers shoe store, as a truck driver, and then for the Maine Savings Bank. He has been deeply involved with the NAACP with a relationship with Thurgood Marshall, and at the time of this interview was president of the Portland, Maine branch of the NAACP. He has worked for Bates College since 1992.

Scope and Content Note

Interview includes discussions of: 1968 vice presidential campaign; Republican Party in Maine; Democratic Party in Maine; NAACP; Civil Rights; Bates College; and the Ku Klux Klan (KKK).

Indexed Names

Allen, Tom
Baldacci, John
Branham, F. Celeste

Burney, William
Curtis, Kenneth M., 1931-
Evers, Medgar Wiley, 1925-1963
Hathaway, Bill
Jackson, Jesse, 1941-
Jonitis, Elizabeth
Jonitis, Peter
King, Martin Luther, Jr., 1929-1968
Kirk, Geneva
Knowles, Neville
Lee, Shep
Marshall, Thurgood
Muskie, Edmund S., 1914-1996
Reynolds, Thomas Hedley
Scales, Damon
Scolnik, Louis
Smith, Margaret Chase, 1897-1995
Snowe, Olympia J. (Olympia Jean), 1947-
Stowe, Harriet Beecher, 1811-1896 Talbot, Gerald
Taylor, Jim
Truman, Harry S., 1884-1972
Tupper, Stanley
Webber, Curtis
Webber, Don

Transcript

Jeremy Robitaille: The date is June 21st, 2001. We are here at the Muskie Archives with Neville Knowles at 10:00 AM, and interviewing is Jeremy Robitaille. All right, Neville, for the record could you please state your name and spell it?

Neville Knowles: Okay, my name is Neville Jerome Knowles, and it's spelled N-E-V-I-L-L-E, J-E-R-O-M-E, K-N-O-W-L-E-S.

JR: Thank you. And what is your date and place of birth?

NK: I was born on one of the Bahamian islands, which was Exuma, spelled E-X-U-M-A, and it was April the 23rd, 1929.

JR: Okay. And what were your parents' names?

NK: My mother's name is Muriel Bullit, and my father's name was Joseph W. Knowles.

JR: And where, have they been, how long had your family been in the Bahamas?

NK: Well, they were born in the Bahamas, and they're both of them deceased now, so they're buried in the Bahamas. From birth, I should say, they were there.

JR: Okay. And how far back, then does your family history go back to the Bahamas?

NK: Oh definitely, yes, definitely.

JR: Okay. And what were their occupations?

NK: Well, my dad used to work as a truck driver or delivery, they used to call us porters in the Bahamas, for a hardware store. And my mother was, she was just, she used to just stay at home and (*unintelligible word*), she used to work in the, doing store basket, etcetera, etcetera, so when these excursion boats come in they had a market for the baskets in the port. They call it the straw market, that's where she worked.

JR: And did you have any brothers or sisters?

NK: Oh yes, definitely, I had five brothers beside myself. And out of the five I am the only one that's still alive.

JR: And where are you in the family? You were the youngest?

NK: No, I was the second.

JR: Second, okay.

NK: No, the youngest died first.

JR: Wow. Okay, and how long did you live in the Bahamas before coming here?

NK: I left Nassau the 14 of September, 1952 at 2:30 PM.

JR: Okay, and did you come to Maine right from Nassau?

NK: Yeah, my former wife and I were scheduled to work with a family who lives out in Turner, Maine, whose name was Don and Julie Biegg [sp?]. They were shoe manufacturers; they're both deceased now. So we spent two days in Florida, and on the, we got to Florida on the 14th, and the 16th we left and came to Maine. And I was in Maine ever since.

JR: Okay. I'm, actually I'm going to backtrack a little bit. Where did you attend school?

NK: In the Bahamas. And when I came to Maine, well you see, in the Bahamas we don't get, there's no such thing as a certificate. You just go to school until you get, you know, up to grade, I think around the grade fourteen. We start school when we are but four and half to five years old. Each year the (*unintelligible word*), you see, our educational system was entirely different from America, because we go to school the whole year round. And if you are a student there and

you are backwards in a subject, you have to go to school Saturday morning, make it up with that teacher.

JR: Okay, so what, before you came to the United States, and like after your schooling, what did you do in the Bahamas?

NK: Well, I worked same as my dad, I worked for a hardware store, as a porter, and then as a truck driver.

JR: So then, in 1952, you came to the United States?

NK: Yeah, came to the United States, right.

JR: And were your parents at all involved in the community down in the Bahamas as you were growing up?

NK: Well, my great-granddad was a minister. My granddad was a minister, and my dad was a minister, so we were very instrumental in the church.

JR: Okay, and what religion?

NK: Baptist.

JR: Great. All right, so you come to the United States and you're working up there in Turner.

NK: Yeah, we worked in Turner, that was the first job, as a gardener and chauffeur. You name it, my former wife and I, we did it. She was the cook and everything else.

JR: Okay, jack-of-all-trades. And how long did you work there, work with them?

NK: Well, we were scheduled to work with Don and Julie Biegg, we had a five year visa. But I think we stayed with them for about three years, then we decided to go on our own. You see, we weren't, we weren't raised in the Bahamas to be domestically all our lives. You know, we had that independent streak, so we struck out on our own and we did okay.

JR: What did you guys do when you left there?

NK: Well, after we left Don and Julie we moved into Lewiston, and I tried to get a job. Now this was in 1953, '55, I tried to get a job with the telephone company, which I could not, I tried the electrical company, which I could not. Because in the Bahamas I also had a part-time job, I was what we used to call a telecommunication, I worked there and I used to work in the electrical department, but couldn't get hired here. So what I did, I just kept looking around and I went back to Don and Julie, said, "I just can't find a job." So they say, well, they knew the Shapiro brothers who had a shoe shop over in Auburn, so I went over there, and the only thing that was open was a janitor. So, my family had to eat so I took it, and I did my, I was always told whatever job you do, do the best job you can, and that's what I did.

JR: Okay, and how long were you there?

NK: Well, I stayed on that job for about a year. And then I went into the office and I just told the Shapiro brothers, I say, look, I came here a year ago and I work as a janitor, I kept the toilet, but I did such a good job on the toilet there they didn't want to use it, you know what I mean, because it was sparkling clean. So they helped me get after that, because (*unintelligible phrase*), they said, "Keep it up," and after I told them that, then they gave me a job in the receiving and, in the receiving room. You see, there were a bunch of leather coming in all the time, so receiver rang it up. And that was what I did until 1968, I worked with Shapiro Brothers until then.

Then I left there and I went to Poland Spring, they had a job corps there for women, and I worked there until Nixon closed that. And after he closed that, then I went and worked for a trucking company, Hemingway in South Portland, as a (*unintelligible word*) clerk. And during '76, when they had the energy crunch, I got laid off from there. So I left there and I went and worked at Maine Savings Bank, and I stayed at Maine Savings Bank until about two years before they went under. And then I took, at sixty-two I took, I retired, traveled for a year, and then took another year, and I worked three months here and there pro bono for the NAACP. And I decided that retirement was not for me, so here I am.

I came to Bates College on the 5th of April, 1992 at 4:00 PM. (*Unintelligible phrase*).

JR: (*Unintelligible phrase*). Okay, when did you first get involved with the NAACP?

NK: Well, I got involved with the NAACP right here in Lewiston, Maine, believe it or not. Because, as I said, we had such a hard time after we left Don and Julie Bieggs, and we lived with them, so we had no problems. And I knew it existed because I used to follow the papers and know what's going on and so forth. And we moved to Lewiston, as a matter of fact. We move on, oh, what's the street, Holland Street, 174 ½ Holland Street we moved in, because there was a small house out there and the landlord said we fix it up and we can have it, and which we did. And we stayed there until 195-, almost 1955. Then we moved back to Turner because we bought a house out there, we got burned out. Then we moved back to Auburn, and we stayed in Auburn since, ever since, because all my kids went to high school in Auburn and so forth.

JR: All right, and so, about, when you first, what did you first do when you first got involved in the NAACP?

NK: Well the first thing I did, when I got involved with the NAACP, I was, everybody thought because it was the NAACP, that the president should be black. Well, you see, at that time I knew nothing about the NAACP, so it was quite a fight at that time. But I said, "No, I don't know if I want to be the president until I learn about the organization." So I think out first president here was Mrs., I don't know if you, Elizabeth Jonitis.

JR: Yes, actually we interviewed her.

NK: Oh, you did?

JR: Yeah, yeah. Well, I didn't personally, but I read the interview.

NK: Yeah, she was our first president for the central Maine branch of NAACP here in Lewiston-Auburn.

JR: Tell me about her.

NK: Oh, I think Elizabeth, she's terrific. I mean, it's amazing, here we are in the state of Maine, and the first president is white. And at that time the New England region consisted of from Connecticut right on up to the state of Maine. And I'll never forget the first time we went to the meeting and we walk in, everybody started looking and looking, you know. And naturally they thought that I was the president. I said, "No, Mrs. Elizabeth Jonitis is the president of the central Maine branch NAACP."

JR: And about what year was it that you started up the Lewiston NAACP?

NK: Well we, the branch started in April the 4th of 1964. No, I'm sorry, no, 1961.

JR: Nineteen sixty-one.

NK: Nineteen sixty-one was the fir-, when we started the branch around here.

JR: And what other people were part of that original branch?

NK: The original branch, we had, it was Mrs. Jonitis and her husband Peter. He was teaching here, and, because I spoke to his class a couple of times. And we had Mr. Bethale, I think was also associated with the college here. And we had Mr. and Mrs. Fleischer. And we had, oh what, her last name was Kirk, what the heck is her name?

JR: Oh, Geneva Kirk.

NK: Geneva Kirk. I was working for, I worked, the first fundraising we had, Geneva Kirk. She did the song, (*unintelligible phrase*). I'd never even heard it before. She did exactly, she played it and it was terrific. Okay, you had Mrs. Kirk, and we had a lot of people from Bates, from the Bates College area in central Maine. And Lou Scolnik, you know Lou? Yeah, Lou Scolnik was there, and I think that we also had Judge, I think he's a judge, Judge (*name*). We had Judge, he died but his son was still a member, over in Auburn. What the heck was his name, Judge, Judge, Judge, ah, I'm getting old. Webber, Webber.

JR: Oh, Curtis Webber.

NK: That's Curtis' father.

JR: Oh, okay, Donald.

NK: Donald Webber.

JR: Donald Webber, okay.

NK: Yeah, he's up on the hill, they used to call it then, in Auburn. So we had a lot of people. Well, I mean, we couldn't depend on black people. You see, we needed to have fifty people in order to open a branch, and out of the fifty there was only the ten of us that were black.

JR: I believe it, here. All right, and so, in those first few years, what were you learning about the NAACP, because you didn't want to be president.

NK: Right. You see, what I do, every weekend I used to drive to New York, and I got my training from Thurgood Marshall.

JR: Really?

NK: Oh yes. And, oh, who was the head of the NAACP at that time? Roy Lukins.

JR: Oh, okay, tell me about that, like what did that training involve?

NK: Well, it involved, first of all, how to deal with situations that arise when it comes to discrimination or etcetera. And I was told, they said, "You don't ever want to handle a situation," he said, "you deal with it to the best of your ability." For instance, like, I mean, all around us you have discrimination coming up, and how the (*unintelligible phrase*) an incident that you think is going to be (*unintelligible phrase*), how you would deal with the situation. Like, for instance, like let's say that in the primary point they start they said, "Now, you're a black man," they said, "you are from the Bahamas, you weren't brought up the way we were brought up here in America, you're outlook is different (*unintelligible word*)." Because I didn't have all that discrimination and segregation in Nassau, so I have a different concept of it, and as far as being called "nigger", no, never did until I came to the United States.

So they said, "Now I want you to, how would you deal with that issue if someone calls you a nigger? Or if someone calls you an Uncle Tom?" I said, "Well, let's deal with the Uncle Tom first." So I said, "If someone calls me an Uncle Tom, I will deem that on my side as being (*unintelligible word*)." Because the only Uncle Tom I knew or heard of was the one in Harriet Beecher Stowe's book, Uncle Tom's Cabin. And believe it or not we read that book about four times. That was a mainstay in the Bahamas for the, we had to read that book, we had to read that book. It was standard. It was not in the classroom, but it was always in the library for any student to read who wanted to. Because some of the things that were in it we could not, we just could not grasp the concept at that time precisely how the pendulum of slavery swung. But after reading Uncle Tom's Cabin I had a clear idea on it. Okay, now the part of calling me a nigger: I always have the concept well, if someone calls me nigger I just look around and say, "It takes one to know one," and just go from there.

JR: All right. So, what other people do you remember training with when you went down every weekend? Was it regionally, like people, a bunch of people from New England and New

York area?

NK: Well see, that was just a primary training for people who wants to be involved in the NAACP: precisely how to do, or how to carry yourself and how not to get yourself into a situation where you won't be able to get out of. That was the primary base, and it taught us how to work. If we go in the south, there the situation was entirely different.

I can remember my first trip to Mississippi, went down there, we went down there for- a national convention was happening, and the first one was held in Jackson, Mississippi. So I went down maybe four days before, I went down to Laurel. I'll never forget this. We went into this, it was not a Holiday Inn, it was a motel. And I went there, I was going to stay the night because the sign outside said, "Vacancy." I went in, and the young man behind the counter said, "Well, we have no vacancies." But, I said, "Well, your sign says vacancy," I said. "Now, I just want you to know that I am with the NAACP and I'm not leaving here unless I get a room." I said, "As a matter of fact, a law was just passed, what's called the Public Accommodation Law." And he said, "I don't know anything about any law." So he said, "Let me go get my dad."

So he went in, his dad came out and said, "What you all want?" And I told him and he sat down, and had a spittoon at the door, *pyoong*, he didn't miss it, right in there. I said, "We just want to have a room for tonight." And he said, "Where are you all from?" I said, "Well, frankly sir," I said, "we're with the NAACP." I said, "The convention from Jackson." "Oh, oh, we got lots of room, we got lots of room, you know." I said, "Well why did your son say you didn't." And he said, "Well, he didn't know." And I said, "Well thank you very much, but no, we live somewhere else, thank you." See, I never spend my money in places that don't appreciate my, I don't patronize it anyway.

Now, Governor Muskie, the first time I met Ed Muskie, see, I used to do a lot of bartending for the Jewish Community Center, when they had their Bar Mitzvah and their wedding and their Bat Mitzvah. I had a yarmulke for every occasion that I (*unintelligible word*) to, you know. And at that time the Jewish Community Center was right here on, what's the street that come up here, the college on, College Street, yeah. You know, that big building's now a day-care center or something.

JR: Okay, a little further down that way?

NK: Yes, just below Holland Street. Well that used to be the Jewish Community Center. Yeah, I spent many nights there bartending and so forth, and Mr. Muskie was governor at that time, I think, and he used to come to the Jewish Community Center a lot.

But how I know him specifically is that he used to also come to a lot of fundraising things and, or parties and so forth at Shep Lee and Shep Lee had a house out on, somewhere on (*name*). I don't know if he's still there, in Auburn. And at the time his, this was further up in Auburn there, right across from the bank on, when he had just Advanced Auto. And every time (*unintelligible phrase*) someone was running for office, it seems as though Shep Lee used to always be involved. And I remember (*unintelligible phrase*), he was involved, and he had a party and I was the bartender. So I got a good education in how, what not to do when it comes to these type

of incidents. And I also remember Muskie quite well when he was running with Hubert Humphrey, 1968. Right, they had a get-together at the Armory in Augusta, we sat down and we had a very good talk. And when the, as a matter of fact he was a member of the NAACP.

JR: Muskie was?

NK: Oh yeah, Governor Muskie was, and so was Governor Curtis was a member. I couldn't get Governor Reed to join, but he was very, I think, sympathetic to the cause. If I had a problem I could always go and sit down, you know, and talk with him. And I think, then Muskie became a senator. I was really, as a matter of fact, when he was elected governor I was very, very surprised, because Maine was specifically a Republican state. When I came here, I think all I would hear about was Senator Margaret Chase Smith, and I think Tupper?

JR: Stan Tupper?

NK: Stan Tupper. Those were the only two names that I ever heard of in the state of Maine, because it was predominantly Republican. Don and Julie Biegg, the people we came to work for, were Republicans. But, when I came over I had a button, 'I Like Ike.' You know, in '52 Ike was running for president, and I came with my button on and they were so amazed, coming from the Bahamas and with a button. But you see, I followed Ike all through the war, and my other favorite then was, what's the guy that Truman fired? MacArthur, John MacArthur. And when the Democrats finally started getting in, I, it was an eye opener. I think Muskie went in the right direction. He was someone that you could really, he was more or less what I would say a people governor for the state of Maine. He changed my concept, the way how I think and thought about politics and, because of his actions in that field.

JR: Okay, what specific actions are you referring to?

NK: Well, I'm referring specifically to so-called civil rights action. But sometime in my mind's eye I always think that is there such a thing as civil rights? And why do we have to have a special law for, I think because I am black, why do we have to have a special law specifically for me to exercise my rights? And I want to ask him, I want to say, "How come you don't need a law to exercise rights?" I said, "The only difference I can see between both of us is that I am black and you are white." He said, "No, you are a Negro." I said, "No way," I said, "I am black, B-L-A-C-K, specifically," I said. Because I do not subscribe to labels, you know, when I came to the United States I think they characterized all the black people as being Negro. That was my first fight I had with America, because you had Shamrock MacArthur, he was the counsel general in the Bahamas and he was the guy I had to go to to get my visa to come to the United States.

And I think Governor Muskie, I think he is a man that I don't think Maine will ever forget, because he did a lot for the state as a whole when he was governor. And especially when he went to Washington as a senator, too, I think Maine really, really, really stood in the limelight of the... and then, after Muskie left I also saw, I don't know, what's the guy from Auburn that was elected also to the, he was elected to the House of Representatives?

JR: From Auburn, was it Hathaway?

NK: Hathaway, Bill Hathaway, it was Bill Hathaway. I also had a very good rapport with him because he used to go to the same church I used to go to in Auburn, the Episcopal church. But- And then when I came to the Democratic side of the street, Senator Muskie, I always feel, was the trailblazer within the state. I think he made it a heck of a lot easier for Ken Curtis when Ken Curtis came in as governor, because that step was always there. And I think he, Ken just improved on what Muskie had done. I think, I was very surprised that Bates College have this archives for Muskie, but you never can tell. Because a man of his stature was, he was up there, but yeah, he was someone that was down to earth. He could sit down and have you talk to him over tea.

JR: How much do you think what Muskie and how he kind of led a Democratic resurgence in Maine when he became governor, how much do you think that had to do, or did that influence the NAACP coming up in Maine in the early sixties?

NK: Well no, you see, there was a, there was a the NAACP was here before I came here. There was a branch in Portland, (*unintelligible phrase*) the Portland branch. But, during the late sixties, I think, it went defunct. And then, when we started the branch here in Lewiston-Auburn, all the people that were members of the Portland branch joined the Lewiston branch. So they got enough to go back to Portland and reestablish the Portland branch. So under my leadership in the NAACP we had a branch in Bangor, and we also had a branch in Brunswick. And through that, then after the Portland branch came again, so we had central Maine, Bangor, Portland, and Brunswick (*unintelligible phrase*). So I think, my first (*unintelligible word*) in the NAACP, I think it probably came about because of conditions, because I look at the state of Maine and I don't see any difference. You see, the state of Maine is a state within America, and what can happen here, what can happen down south can also happen up north; it doesn't make any difference who you are or what it is.

I think, when you start looking at, for instance, today within the state of Maine I think things are much worse than it was in the fifties. Because 1950, you didn't see anyone attacking someone if they are gay, or killing them and throwing them off a bridge, which happened to a young man up in Bangor. You didn't have people going around, skinheads, threatening and beating up people, or the white supremacists. They were there, but they never start, I think, coming out bold or vocally until, I would say, recently. I mean, for years and years they were out there training themselves in these paramilitary and such situations. But I would tell you one thing in my mind's eye, that Maine is the only state that I'd live in. And when I'm away from Maine, or away from the United States, I don't care if I go back home in the Bahamas (*unintelligible word*), oh man, well this happened and that happened. I said, "Yeah, we have our problems, but there's no other country in the world like the United States." You know what I mean? We have our problems, but I deal with it, you know. And away from here I would not (*unintelligible phrase*), I hold it up as high as I can. And that's the same with Senator Muskie, or the late I should say, the late senator and governor, and Secretary of State.

JR: You said Muskie was a member of the NAACP in Maine. How did he, or like do you know how he was active at all in like the civil rights movement, like did he make any speeches

anywhere or anything like that?

NK: Well no, I don't recall him making any speeches. He was not as active as Ken Curtis, no. Ken Curtis, he was the one that put a commission, a committee together to study (*unintelligible word*). That's how come we have the Civil Rights Commission in the state of Maine. Because I was one of those that was on the committee that was appointed then for that, and then that came in through Ken Curtis, as I said. Muskie started it, and Ken Curtis finished it, took it to the maximum I think (*unintelligible phrase*). And Ken Curtis says, like when we have any situation we could always call him, he would come and be a speaker here. But you see, when Muskie was, well he just didn't have the time to do what I think what he, but he always supported the organization. But as far as speaking here and there, no, couldn't get him because he was too busy.

JR: Did, as being a member of the NAACP, did you follow the, not only Muskie but all Maine, like Maine senators and representatives, how they were involved with the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act. Like, did you, did the NAACP I mean, have a sense of how it was going down in Washington?

NK: Definitely. see, every year we have a report card (*unintelligible word*), we have a bureau, an office in D.C. which follows everything. I mean, whatever law is coming down, and who had voted this way and who voted that way, yes. Even right now we get a report card on Collins and Snowe, Olympia Snowe. Well, I think it's Baldacci now and Tom Allen. We always do. I mean, some of the things that I expected the representatives from Maine to vote for and they vote the other way. I mean, I don't know why, but it's their prerogative, you see, if that's the way they go, so that's the way they go. You know, I mean it's a, I don't agree but it's still just the same, I just say, "Well, they're elected to represent not only me but for the state of Maine." And I do not hear any outcry from the other side saying, "Well, they are this and that and the other." But when they come back to the state of Maine I sit down and talk with them and find out precisely what the situation is with them. Politics is a, what I would call a rather unusual (*unintelligible phrase*) because you don't know which way the wind's going to go. And that's just like anything else that you become involved with.

JR: Tell me a little more about your involvement in the community, like, in politics and the NAACP, like, you kind of started out kind of a little bit involved. What was the extent of your involvement over the years?

NK: Well, my extent, I was always deeply involved in the NAACP because of some of the things that I've seen that I didn't think was fair. For instance, like, when it came to jobs, when it came to housing. One of the points that I have watched, I think for a long time believe it or not, is Bates College. I was living right here in Auburn, as a matter of fact, when I started I was living in Lewiston, and I think every other day I would take a walk around the campus because I know Mr. Reynolds quite well, too, as a matter of fact, very well.

JR: Who?

NK: Reynolds, the first president before this (*unintelligible word*), and we were good friends,

we'd walk around. And I came in and I always walk around and I came in there, I saw one black face, and she was always in the hallway at Lane Hall. I don't know if you remember, how long are you here?

JR: I'm not a student. I'm from Lewiston but I've been here for this year and I remember I was involved with Bates a little bit like probably in '98, '99...

NK: Well, as I say, Lewiston and Auburn in my mind's eye, what really got us going in the NAACP is the Jewish sector, because I knew them quite well in those years. As I said, I spent more time in the synagogue with my yarmulke than I did anywhere else, so, I mean, I practically knew every Jewish family that was here, and they knew my family. So I mean if, since they, they were the bulk of our membership, and any problems, well I sit down and we'd talk here, and they had a lot of pull. And they have (*unintelligible phrase*), especially Lou Scolnik, you know, Lou was very, he was a tower, I think, these people that you could depend on. I remember that there was a bunch of migrant that was up north somewhere and they didn't have anywhere to stay. So they, I don't know whether they were here illegally, but they brought them back and put them on a bus and sent them down here to Lewiston to the NAACP. And they went to, I don't know, a particular motel and they wouldn't accept them so someone called me. I went and got them and I took them to the Miami Motel over here in Auburn, and no problem, (*unintelligible phrase*). And I think Lou was one that was instrumental, I remember when we had the Public Accommodation Law (*unintelligible word*) in the state of Maine, and we had other problems (*unintelligible word*).

But it isn't what you do, it's how you do it, you know. And see, we went about it in the right manner and it took a while for it to pass, but eventually it went through, the law came through. Same as with, when we put in for Martin Luther King. Now, that was fine, man, that was fine, I tell you, but it also was an eye opener, but it, if you work in the right channel I think you can accomplish, it takes a lo-, sometimes it takes too long, but the fruit of those things, I think, are coming into full swing and growing.

JR: Did you have many dealings with the Maine legislature, or any local governments?

NK: Well, I mean, we did take on the Democratic Party here in the state of Maine when Jesse Jackson was running for president. The convention was in, had it in Lewiston I think that year, and I don't know if you ever heard of Alan Sussman. Alan Sussman used to run (*name*), an organization which was opposed to South Africa and so forth, he was working for sanctions against them. Him and I were delegates for Jesse Jackson and we got here to Lewiston and his name wasn't on the ballot. So we asked the question why and they said, "Oh, well, they probably forgot." So just the two of us here, we just tell them, "Well, if his name is not on the ballot then it's not valid because if you got a candidate that's missing." And I said, "Until his name is on the ballot then we will vote to proceed." And they went out and printed up a new ballot. You know, it, it did not really serve the purpose because the purpose was, in the beginning they excluded him, so I mean even though they did that, it was just an appeasement, it was not real, you know, it was not a reality.

And that tells me that the state of Maine, even though they are Democrats, opened my eyes,

because I started going back to the capital, to D.C. and see, for years and years and years we had a Democratic Congress, we had a Democratic Senate, we had a Democratic president. And our peoples caught more hell on the Democrats than they did with the Republicans, because all these laws that came up, they were all in power. They had the authority or the power to change it right there and then, but they didn't do anything. You know what I mean? Until when the NAACP, when we had SNCC and what's the other one, (*unintelligible phrase*) a corps, (*unintelligible phrase*) and the southern Christian leadership and the NAACP, when we came together as one unit, when they started having- I don't know whether you remember the Freedom Fund Riders?

JR: The what?

NK: The Freedom Fund Riders.

JR: No.

NK: You remember? One of, they got on a bus and they went down to Anniston, Alabama. That was where their bus was set afire and there was and then they got beaten up. And they went in this restaurant and they refused to serve you. And I think the two that really for instance, the southern Christian leadership with Dr. Martin Luther King. I marched quite a few times with him also, but I think what brought that to the forefront again was the Montgomery bus boycott. Now, you see, every time Martin Luther King go to jail, the NAACP always bail him out. Not only him, but everybody else, you see, but he did the honor, he was the bulldozer, but we were paving the way. Organizations I think, such as the NAACP, I see them as a vehicle that's really kept the lid between confrontation and conflicts in this nation between black and white. Because we know what it is, we know what it is to be black, and we know what it is to be white. Because all you need to do is just look across the street and see what the situation is, especially when it comes to jobs, and when it comes to neighborhoods and every other nature. I think that, America is a nation of multi colors, all different colors you have mixed together. Otherwise we are, and America, I don't care where you're living, but you're in the same pot, but yet every time when it comes to spreading the broth, we going to get all the salt and somebody else gets none, or the pepper (*unintelligible phrase*). That's life.

JR: How many, you mentioned your trip down to Mississippi, how many trips did you take down. Because I remember, I talked to Gerry Talbot, he mentioned his trip down to Mississippi, I think in -

NK: Yeah, I think Jerry went down to, where did Dr. Murph live? Yeah, I remember Jerry was down.

JR: It wasn't, was it Laurel, Mississippi?

NK: That's it, yeah, Laurel, Mississippi, right. Well, you see, I went down to Laurel, too, well before I went to the convention, that's where I had the confrontation. Yeah, down to Laurel, and that's where the Gypsum Company is, their headquarters. And I walk in and I could see where they have this, their coloreds only and whites only, their fountains for drinking. They could go to work with a gun on their side and everything like that. I just this one trip I made to

Mississippi, that was when I went to the national convention, it was in Jackson, Mississippi. But why I went to Laurel because I think, maybe two weeks before that there they had an explosion, I think a couple, a few, a lot of, quite a few cars blew up on the railway with some type of chemicals I think.

I just wanted to see what it was like in Laurel, Mississippi. That was one of my worst experience I had, coming back from the elections, and when I was driving back up to the capital, there was a car following me with the lights out, I think coming through the bayou there or something. And I knew exactly what the heck was going on because my granddad said, "When you get yourself in a situation that you don't know what to do, just get out and act crazy," and that's what I did. I got to this narrow bridge, and I just stopped the car on the road. And I got out of the car and I took the tire, my, the tire iron for your tires, you know, and I start talking gibberish. I don't know what the heck it was, "Hallelujah," you know, and I started breaking these guy's headlights and everything, and so this guy, one of the guys said, "Let's get out of here, this nigger's crazy." So they did. Got up and gone.

JR: But it worked, right, your father's advice worked.

NK: And it worked, yeah. It worked. And as I said, we were brought up not to be afraid of anything. He said, "Do what you have to do the best you can do it. Just don't be afraid of anything," he said. Your life, you only have one life to live, and if you're going to die, you do your best. Don't be afraid to die. You were born to die. And that's a good one. But just don't let it take, don't let someone take it from you without putting up a fight." So that's what I did, I just act crazy, you know. Oh God.

JR: That's incredible. I'm going to flip the tape over here.

End of Side A

Side B

JR: This is Side B of the interview with Neville Knowles. And you were just talking about your time down in Mississippi back in the sixties. Do you have anything further to add about that?

NK: It just also taught me a lesson that different states and how the people react to certain situations. You see, it depends on the government. It was not the people; it was the government that was driving the people to think the way they think or to do what they do, because in the hotel that I lived in all the maids were white, everybody there was white. There was not one black face in the whole crowd, but they were very polite and very nice and we had very good conversations. I brought up their situation with Medgar Evers, he was the guy that got shot in Mississippi, he was an NAACP person. And we had a very good healthy conversation about that. And also (*unintelligible phrase*), and, the three that were murdered in Philadelphia, Mississippi, remember they find their body in shallow grave?

JR: Oh yeah, there was another one, like Goodman?

NK: Goodman, Cheney, and (*name*) I think, those three. And we'd talk about that, and I asked, I said, "How do you feel about, how do you feel about these people who was exercising their God given rights," I said, "the same as you or anybody else here." They said, "Yeah," but, they said, "We did not agree with it, but there was nothing we can do. Otherwise, if we come to help you people, then they say, well you're nigger lovers, (*unintelligible phrase*) find ourselves being shot, or our place burned down or something of that nature." See, so I think, as I say, it's, like someone asked me, I think it was last month, what do I think the greatest obstacle is to black men in this nation, and I said government. Take a look around. I call Augusta Jericho, I go into, every year when we get a new administration then I walk around in all the office, and I look and see. Same as I walk around here at Bates College and all the office, I look and see. I don't see, every face I see in these offices is likewise, no otherwise. The only place I saw another black face I think was in the equipment department, what's the young man's name, Jimmy, Jimmy Taylor, Jim Taylor?

JR: Oh yeah, yeah, he used to work at the high school when I was there I think, or junior high school.

NK: But otherwise, I walk in all the office around on campus and I just look. Like I said, we talk about the race of people, and what is it? Now, when I talked about that with Ken Curtis or Ed Muskie, they did something about it. We didn't just talk, we did something. And that's why I respect him a lot, both. And as I said, I was, I live in a house with Republicans and they said to me, "Whenever you become naturalized and a voting citizen of Maine, be sure you vote Republican." So I said, "Why?" They said, "Because you Republican is a ship, and everything else is the sea." But when I become naturalized, I registered in the, as an independent, because I wanted to see how the sea deals with the ship. And on certain incidents, they were both together, there was no difference between being a Republican or being, it depends on the situation, I did not see that much of a difference. And I was, I didn't intend to remain a independent until when it comes to primary, you can't vote. You couldn't vote, so I said, well, I will register as a Democrat but I vote according to the candidate. I listen to them, I sit down and talk with them, and I, I'm not a party man, I vote according to the candidate because sometime you got good people, the Democrats that are running, you got good people that are Republicans that are running. So I vote for the ones that I think will do the best for, not Neville Knowles but will be the best for the state, for everybody. So that's, I can't see the concept of like a government (*unintelligible word*) conservative. What the heck is a conservative? Are they not Americans? Are they not a party?

I mean, in 1991 I was down in D.C. for a week. That's when the civil rights bill was there, I was down there to testify for a whole week. And the things I hear really make me stop and think, and say, "Where am I? Is this a strange land? Or am I strange?" You know what I mean. So it's really, sometimes it's really a hard road to walk, and it takes education to enlighten everyone. But sometimes you have the education but you still can't get into the light, because it's strangled because of the color of your skin or the way your eyes are shaped, or your hair or something like that. But it's, but the mind, you know, as I said to (*unintelligible word*), if you cut me, I'm going to bleed. My blood is not black. It's the same as everybody else. And I remember the guy, he said, "Oh, I'm a blue-blooded Englishman." I said, "Oh really?" I said, "Okay, what color's your blood," I said, "Is it blue?" He said, "No, it's not." Then where does the blue come in? I said,

“Is that a superior (*unintelligible word*) mentality that you have?”

But I think a lot of our problems today is coming into when we deal with, we think that we are so superior to other people or to other things. We're not all on the same level, because I could not expect Neville Knowles to compete with someone who has a Ph.D. here and a Ph.D. there. But when it comes to common sense, that's my name, that's my name because you could be educated to the hilt, and yet you can be, sometimes somebody can be as stupid as whatever there is out there running around. It all depends on common sense and hindsight and how you deal, as I said, I don't handle things, I deal with it. And if I make a mistake I admit my mistake and I apologize, I carry a load, I leave it there. You see, but some people they are so engrossed that they cannot apologize, so they can't say, “Well, I admit that I made a mistake.” And I want you to know in my coming up in the NAACP I made many mistakes, but I learned, you know, I learned. I learned good from Thurgood Marshall and Roy Lukens, I learned, so it's.

I'm very fortunate, really fortunate because I can mix, mingle anywhere, anytime, because I am not afraid. And up here I can sit down and have a conversation with anyone, anywhere, king, queen, whatever you are, and I can feel just as good and just as happy and just as intelligent as anybody else because I know how to deal with myself with other people. As I told a guy one day, I said, “To you I might look stupid, but I'm not as stupid as I look, so be careful.”

JR: That's great. All right, tell me about Gerry Talbot.

NK: Oh, Gerald Talbot, oh yeah, Gerry and I used to run the road together. Jerry was the president of the Portland branch at the time when I was president of the Central Maine branch. And when we'd go places, for instance we'd go to a conference, for an NAACP conference, we used to always go together. Gerry was a guy that I could depend on, and Jerry could depend on me. Like, I recall one time there was, the city of South Portland, they were going to, they got some money from the arts committee I guess, and they was going to show a bunch of film, movies and so forth, and the one they chose to show first was called "The Birth of a Nation." I don't know if you ever heard of it.

JR: I have heard of it. Never seen it, but I've heard of it.

NK: Okay, so at that time I was working in South Portland for Hemingway Transportation and I heard that that's what they was going to show. So I called Jerry up, because he was the president of the Portland branch of NAACP. But, you see, I was also the vice president New England region NAACP, so I could end up being anywhere. So I went to Jerry, I said, “Gerald, did you know that South Portland is going to show ‘The Birth of a Nation’ and that's the movie they're going to start, to choose to show over there?” He said, “You're kidding.” I said, “No.” He said, “No, I didn't know that.” I said, “Well, I just wanted to let you know that that's what they have to start with.”

And on my way back to work I stopped in and I had a meeting with the city manager, and after talking with him he said, “Wait a minute, Mr. Knowles,” he called in the city lawyer, you know. He said, “Mr. Knowles has some objection to starting this show with ‘The Birth of a Nation’.” So he said, “Oh,” he said, “I don't see anything with it.” So I said to him, “What do you expect

to learn from that movie, what do you expect for the community to get from that movie?" something like that. I said, "Do you realize that that movie was made by....." what the heck was his name, oh shoot, I read the book twice, too, Black Like Me. Well, whoever he is, he made that movie to depict black people, and that's when he really show it to get the Ku Klux Klan going. Did you know that?

JR: That the -?

NK: "The Birth of a Nation".

JR: Right. That, (*unintelligible phrase*)?

NK: He was the one that was very instrumental in the Ku Klux Klan.

JR: Okay, the filmmaker, or the author of the book?

NK: No, the filmmaker of that movie. And that's what he depicted to America as what black people are like. And when they see that, of course they bought it hook, line, and sinker. So, I mean, he had no problems, that was one of his recruiting films for the Ku Klux Klan. Yeah. So when Gerry came over to talk with the city manager about that movie, they said, "Well, the city manager now is in a meeting." (*Unintelligible phrase*) and so when I come in he says, "Oh, Nevy." "Yeah," I said, "yeah," I said, "when I see something wrong I take care of it immediately," I said, "I deal with it immediately." He said, "Oh," he said, "I could always depend on you." I said, "In a sense, yeah, you know."

So Gerald, Gerald's a very good person for this time, for the NAACP, because we work together and we travel together. I think of, like when he ran for his seat here in Augusta, we were having our convention and we were in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. What's that, one stop away from New York City? And I got a call from the national convention saying, "Mr. Knowles," yes, he said, "Mr. Talbot is considering to run for a seat in the state of Maine." He said, "We're having elections and I see where you are from the state of Maine, you are here to be second vice president." I said, "Yes." So he said, "How would you like to give that position up and let Mr. Talbot have it so it would be a boost to him for his candidacy?" I said, "Of course, I have no quarrels for that." And I did.

JR: So that was in the regional NAACP?

NK: Yeah, that was the regional. And also the national called also, looking, questioning my support for Gerald, (*unintelligible phrase*). He went as long as a, well, he run at large, so when you run at large you don't have problems. But when you get down to the wards, now that's where the problem comes in, see, and that's what happened to Jerry when he went to, from at large to precinct and wards only, that tells a story right there.

JR: Okay. Were you at all involved in his campaigns for the Maine legislature?

NK: Behind the scenes.

JR: Behind the scenes, yeah.

NK: Yeah, because I mean, at that time I couldn't become too involved because I didn't live in Maine, you see? I was living in Auburn, which is (*unintelligible word*) behind the scenes, oh yes, definitely behind the scenes.

JR: Okay. You mentioned that the first time you retired you said you traveled for a year. Did, I thought you mentioned, did you do that for the NAACP, or (*unintelligible phrase*)?

NK: I just took a year and I, when I was sixty-two I traveled. I just wanted to see different places and whatnot, (*unintelligible phrase*) what the people was like. And after that, for another year, I worked three months in California, I worked three months in New York, I worked three months in Baltimore, and where else did I work? I did that for a year. California, Washington, D.C., Baltimore, and New York.

JR: Okay, and what did you do for that year?

NK: Well, I just worked in the office, (*unintelligible phrase*). And the, I was offered a job in D.C., but I don't like D.C. No, it's the nation's capital but it's an eyesore. I, first time I went to D.C. I, God, I came in through Dulles airport, and the other time I went to D.C. I came into Alexandria, Virginia. And then I, driving in I said to the cab driver, I said, "Where are we?" He said, "You are in D.C." I said, "You're kidding." You know? He said, "Yes, you are in D.C.," and I look and I said, "You mean this is the nation's capital and they're not doing anything about it?" Oh my, coming in, it looked all dilapidated, it looked like a war zone, because it had the rioting of years and years ago, and they never did anything about it. Same as they did in Watts, they didn't do anything about that really, the stigma is still there.

So I figured now at this point in time in my life, the NAACP is so imbedded in my mind's eye, I keep, every time I hear a situation I don't, I don't get (*unintelligible word*) anymore because I say, "Well, this is America, and those things are going to happen." And if, but it can be prevented, as I said, it all depends on the government, how the government, you see, the government tells you what to do, but they're not doing it, you see. One of the most segregated segments of this nation is the federal government itself. All, any government. As I said, every time I go to some place new, I always go down to the city hall, check it out. And that tells me precisely where they're coming from. Bring me right back in to where I am now, I check it out, every time I walk around this campus I check it out. Because, you see, we're not going to make the true progress in this nation until we really have an open mind. And I don't mean open at both ends, because someone said, "Well, I have an open mind," and I said, "Yes, so do I, but my mind isn't open on both ends." I think, things that should be in, I don't, I am not, for instance now this situation with affirmative action, what is it? I don't believe in it, because why do they have to have a law that says, well, if I am black I am entitled to this job or you, if you are white you can't have this job. Because I think affirmative action is, came into place, but who put it there? Black people didn't put it there. And for what reasons? And who was the first to try to turn it around and appeal it? I mean, I really watched it closely. Do you remember the Bakke case in California?

JR: Vaguely, tell me about it. I think I've heard of it, but-

NK: He was a student who wants to go into medical school, and they had this, they had so many slots open for blacks and he couldn't get in. He was well qualified, but he couldn't get in so he sued. And he won his case. And then all of America went crazy because they said, now, because of that, what are we supposed to do? I said, just do what you, do the right thing. Someone come in, regardless of whether they're black or white, I said, if there's an opening. They said, "Well what about his qualification?" I said, "Well I can tell you one thing, if black people have access same as white people have access," I said, "you don't need to worry about affirmative action," I said, even though we had all this, how a black doctor became black doctors, how do black people become, take for instance now when the war, what they had, one of the best squadrons that they had were black. They said, well let's put them out front to guard the white guys. I mean, I think they, they did a good job, you know, guarding all the guys, and you know, they were terrific. So I think all they need is a law that's fair, that's all. We don't need to have all these laws, they got affirmative action and EEOC and all those things, if the government itself would be fair and square with America.

I say, when I came here to Bates College, I had no intention to come back to work because I was retired. But they say that I'm, and lots of people here in Lewiston and Auburn made a complaint in the NAACP. Saying that Bates College won't hire you if you're black. And I told this to Dean Branham the other day when I met with her, I said, "I just came here to test the waters." And when I got hired, and when I came, they said to me, well, you know, I came because of a job that was opening on, I think it was for security, but it was taken. So they said to me, well, we have our um, we used to call those janitors at that time, those custodians, and a janitorial job was just coming open. So I just said, "I'll take it." Let's just try it, you know, "I'll take it." And she said, "Well, okay, I'll think about it and I'll give you a call." So when I got home there was a message on the phone saying that I got the job. And the black community was shocked. You know, they said, "Well, we tried and tried and we never got in." I said, "Well." He said, "You're different." I said, "No, I'm not different but it's just that I am a guy who goes somewhere and I know what I'm after and I know what I'm looking for, and I'm going to test the waters to the maximum. I don't care how hot it gets, I'm going to be there." And working here, being the only black custodian that's, for the first couple of months it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy at all. But I had the proper training so I know how to deal with it.

So I'm, which brings me right back again to government. And I told this to Senator Muskie when I met with him in Washington, that unless they do what they are supposed to do for the whole nation, I asked him, "Why do we need a civil rights law? Why do we need a voting rights law? Why is that?" I said, "You guys (*unintelligible phrase*), and I said, where's the law that gives you the authority that you can vote?" I said, "Do you have to fight for anything," I said, "you have to fight for nothing." I said, "Whatever you've got, you don't have to fight for it?" So every time a law comes by it's something that piecemeal, piecemeal, if you're this or if you're that, for instance.

I would tell you right now I'm quite sure that if Senator Muskie was still alive today and these bills come up, now they got to have a bill for justification for someone if they're gay, or someone

if they're lesbian. They're human beings. And the government here again is responsible, they're responsible for the people. Well, are they people? And I'm quite sure Muskie would be one in there, right in there fighting for them. Because he believed in equality for everyone, regardless to what you like or where you came from. And that's why I respect both him and Ken Curtis. There are other people, there are a government, other candidates that do the same thing, but it's the trailblazers and as I said, Muskie started blazing the trail for the Democrats in the state of Maine, and he did a good job. And Ken Curtis did a good job. And it kept going on.

See, because Maine was strictly Republican, a Republican state. And the Democrats, they got their foot in the door and they kept it ajar for quite some time. But it depends on their actions. The bills that they proceed to that would be compensatory, not just for the party but for the state and for the nation as a whole. It's like um, when I come to Bates College I'm, then the students, the education should be (*unintelligible word*) I think, not just to think of who you are or where you're coming from, but for the world. Because they are citizens of the whole; they don't know where they're going to (*unintelligible phrase*), so the education should be broad enough to encompass the whole because our neighbors isn't just next door, our neighbors is overseas. And we have to know how to deal with that. How would you deal with it?

JR: I don't know. Take a little training I think. That's great. Are you still involved with the NAACP?

NK: Yeah.

JR: Yeah?

NK: Right now I'm president again of the Portland branch.

JR: Oh really, okay. In your years in it, how have you seen it evolve, like the agenda of it, and what do you see it now as opposed to like when you first started?

NK: Well, when it first started I think things was a lot different than it is now. You see, a lot of people think because you get a job or you have a house, or you can live here, you can live there, that they have it made. But under the, there's an underlying current there, and it's like it's invisible and you don't know until you smack-dab in the middle of it. See, here in the state of Maine, as I said, discrimination and segregation, or whatever you want to call it, it is here, but you don't know until you walk into it. In the south, you know it's there because you can see it before you get into it, and you know it. So you're not surprised. But, that's my reason for saying that state of Maine is no different from any other state. We have the same situation, the same problems, but it's just how it's dealt with. Otherwise, here in the state of Maine, it is not as, well like I say, in the past it was not as violent as it was suddenly, but now, the violence now, it's all over.

And the NAACP, a lot of people, they don't think that we need the NAACP anymore now. They say, we got this and we got that, and what's the need. And I said, "Well anytime you look around," I said, "and you see, do you open your eyes and see precisely where you are and where you came from?" I said, "In the fifties and sixties, everybody was running to the NAACP

because the NAACP is the one that opened the door for them, to get in.” And once they got in there, they said, “Oh well, we don't need the NAACP any more, you know, we are where we are—stop in there and there and then think.” But the minute they lose their job, they run back to the NAACP. So we still have a lot of problems, but it is, in some sense it is better now than it was in some area. And it really came, I think (*unintelligible phrase*), mostly when we have a recession and jobs are, you know, that's one of the main sticking points, when it comes to jobs. So, I think now they've got a lot of people that are suing for what they call reverse discrimination. There's no such thing. But it only becomes that when the shoe is on the other foot. But you see, in the meantime (*unintelligible phrase*) and you can't get the shoes off, it makes a difference.

JR: Have you used your connections with the NAACP to get involved here at Bates at all? And?

NK: No, no, no. What I do, I do it on my own. I mean, not because, well, a lot of people know that I am involved with the NAACP but I do not use the NAACP to intimidate or to agitate or to promulgate or anything of that nature. I use it for somebody else, if somebody else come to me and say, okay, well Neville, I have a problem here and there, I'm on it immediately. But as far, like my kid said, “Dad, you're always fighting somebody else's battle and,” he said, “when we were growing up you were hardly here, you always go on here for someone and their someone.” They say it's time that I give it up now and let somebody else do the work. I'm thinking about it. Because, as I said, from '61, it's now what, 2001. Yeah, sometimes I feel like getting back in that mode, as I said, in the Bahamas. I go back home periodically and every time I get and see that blue, blue water I say to myself, “No problem, man.”

JR: That's great. All right, I guess maybe just a couple more questions. One, just working at Bates, what do you, how do you see the relationship between Bates and like Lewiston, what's your take on that, I guess?

NK: Well, I think Bates has a very good rapport with the twin cities, (*unintelligible phrase*), because, as I said, I get around a lot, but what I fault Bates for, they do not extend themselves enough when it comes to, I would say, other, let's see, how do I put this now, other segments, or other part of the country. Because I know when I was New England V.P., I would give or send a invitation to Bates College when we were having our convention, having what we would call, some people call them job fairs, but when we invite them to come down to talk to students about attending the school, I have yet to see, I have never seen anyone from Bates College at these. And I go back to the Bahamas, I got my shirt on, “Oh, you work at Bates College. How is it at Bates College? What (*unintelligible phrase*).” I never say anything bad about Bates College. Here I work on how I feel and what I see, but over there I'm going to praise them to the hilt, you know what I mean, because it's a darn good college. But we have, we still have a long, long way to go to bring it up to par, where it should be when it comes to, I'm not saying that you should have black students just to say we have black students, but I mean let's put our effort into it, let's make diversity diversity, not, just not talk about it. Do some concrete actions about it. I think there are less black students here than when I started. There is no question about, to me it looks that way. And not only black students, I mean, also employees. Now, I think where Bates College has made the most progress is in faculty. Now, I can't hate them for that because they got it, man, you know, they are here. But yet when you look, but still, the cupboards are bare.

What do I mean by that, when it comes to staff. I think, as I said, you can't get the shoes off when it's swollen, and that's what happens, I think they got to let that foot shrink a little, you know, so they can get that shoe to go on the other foot.

But as far as the college, it's a good college. Bates, Bowdoin, I dealt with Bowdoin, and also I dealt with Colby. My first job at Colby College was back in the sixties when about eight or ten black students took over the chapel. That's right, they were taking over buildings in the school. I was on my way back to the Bahamas, going on vacation, I got this emergency call. Got to come back up to Maine, and I dealt with that. Bates College, we still have problems here because, I don't know if you remember, when was it, about four years ago when the kids took over the admissions?

JR: Oh, I don't remember that.

NK: You don't remember that?

JR: No. I don't remember that.

NK: Or you weren't here then.

JR: Probably not, yeah.

NK: Yeah. Okay. and some of the things that they were saying, we were saying that back in the sixties, saying things about, you know, not enough black kids in classes, and not enough black faculty. You see, if we're going to pave the road, we need the proper machine to do it with. So they still have a little work to do. But I give them, I would say maybe a C+ for (*unintelligible phrase*), they're trying.

JR: They try.

NK: They're trying. One of these days they'll probably be there, but they have to speed it up a little, they have to speed it up a little. In my mind's eye, at least. And, I don't know, as I said, I am, what, seventy-three years old now. People are surprised that I'm still working. I may just say tomorrow, "This is it," and go home. Then our custodial department will be right back where it was before. No otherwise, all likewise. But, they've got some people I think on board now who are really, I think, dedicated. But their dedication needs to have the support. They can be dedicated, but the support is not there, and they still go around in circles. See, I was on practically, I was interested, whatever community they had, I was a part of, until I see for myself in my mind's eye how it works and what's going on. And my time, my time is too valuable to waste it when I do not see it's going to be recompensable for what I am there for, for how I feel about it. I don't care if it's King George. If it's not working, whether I think it's going to be beneficial for the college as a whole, I'm not just talking for Neville Knowles because Neville Knowles is black, I mean, I want to see the anchor drop so the boat can take on its passenger regardless to who or where successfully, and it should be compensatory to this college as a whole, not just to me, but for the college itself. Then they can say, "Eureka, they found it." You know what I mean? Okay.

JR: Okay, great. That's about all I have. Any last remarks about Muskie, Bates, Maine?

NK: Maine, as I said, I love it here in Maine. That's why I'm still here. It's the only state I've lived in since I came. By the way, when I retired and I went back home, I went for two weeks. I stayed one day.

JR: Down in the Bahamas? You stayed one day.

NK: One day, Nassau, and I came back to Maine.

JR: Really? Wow, so you must really love it, to say goodbye to that nice weather.

NK: Right. Because as I said, we have our problems, but I can deal with it and I'm, not that, a lot of people know me, they know my thinking, part of my mentality, and we kid each other. But, oh yeah, I love Maine, I love Maine. And I, my son is out at Poland Spring, I have a daughter in Old Orchard, so I have other family here. And they like Maine a lot also.

JR: All right.

NK: So, and as for Bates College, yeah, I like Bates College, too. They need some changes, but the reflection has started to show in Andrews Lake, you know, so one of these days it's gonna be lit up and you're going to see, the ripples is going to be compensatory to this college as a whole. And they're in the process now of getting a new president; I just hope that he would come with an open mind and his eyes won't be closed.

JR: All right. Can you think of anyone we might want to interview, either who would know something about Muskie or NAACP or anything like that?

NK: Oh, and there's a lot of people out there, like, oh, you said you already did Elizabeth, right?

JR: Yeah, we did.

NK: Elizabeth Jonitis?

JR: Elizabeth Jonitis, yeah.

NK: Well, Judge Scolnik, Lou.

JR: Louis Scolnik, yeah, he was probably, I think he's been, is he still here, or-?

NK: Oh yeah, he's right here on (*unintelligible word*) Avenue.

JR: Is he, okay. I think we have him, but I'll double check that. Yeah,. He's probably.

NK: Yeah, he knows a lot about the NAACP, he got us (*unintelligible phrase*), and also if not how, Damon Scales.

JR: Damon Scales, okay?

NK: He's a judge also.

JR: Right, I don't know if we've done him. Okay, how about William Burney, either one of them, are they?

NK: Oh, Bill Burney, yeah, Bill's, he's junior, yeah, he lives in Portland, sure.

JR: He lives in Portland, okay.

NK: He works for the housing authority, I think.

JR: Really? Okay. All right, yes, I think I'm all done. Thank you very much.

NK: Okay.

End of Interview
moh292.int.wpd