
Shared Reminiscence

Brazil Nuts

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My forty-year-old daughter recently watched a movie set in Alabama in the 1930s and afterward had many questions for me about race relations in my Georgia childhood. Mainly she seemed interested to know how the grandson of a chain gang warden could evolve into a one-time activist for racial justice.

I didn't have many answers for her, but the questions caused me to review every memory I could recall having to do with race in my childhood. I was surprised at how few there were, but then I had to remind myself how truly separated the races were for most southerners of my generation.

My earliest memory of any blacks is on the buses of Rome, Georgia. Prior to 1948 (when my father bought a new Plymouth) we rode the Georgia Power buses almost daily. When we got on a bus heading toward downtown from the textile village we lived in (a five cent ride), there would almost never be any blacks on it. But by the time it made a few stops in north Rome some would usually get on. And, of course, they would sit at the back. There was a bench at the very back that went all the way across the bus. If there was a vacant seat there, a black passenger had to take it no matter how empty the rest of the bus was. If the back seats were full they were allowed to come forward a seat or two, but no more. It was not unusual to see a black man standing at the back rather than taking a seat that someone might think inappropriate. I never witnessed any incidents about the seating arrangements, and I don't remember thinking about it very much. It was simply the way things were.

I do remember that my friends and I secretly wanted to sit on the forbidden bench. And we did. On the way home from a movie, after the last stop in north Rome heading toward the village and if there was no else on the bus, we would race back and sit in the middle of it for the last mile or so just for the novelty of it. But always in fear that we'd be chastised by the bus driver.

The n word was never used in my house. Well, almost never. There was one exception and it occurred only at Christmas. One of the standard treats in our Christmas morning stockings – along with tangerines, apples, and walnuts – was Brazil nuts. Except they were not called Brazil nuts because we didn't know such a term even existed. They were universally, at least to my experience, called “n ___ ___ ___ toes”, even by my racially moderate parents. Even by my grandmother Conway, who seemed to have the highest level of disdain for the use of any derogatory terms (“there are trashy white people, too” was her standard response to use of the n word in her presence). It was simply what they were called. I must have been ten or so before I even understood the connection. To me the phrase was simply three syllables strung together to name something I loved to eat. A story was told often about my older brother, who at some tender age, heard my grandmother say “n ___ ___ ___ toes” and promptly told her she was being rude and should say “colored people toes.” Everyone thought that was hilarious. To me this anecdote is ironic on many levels, but mainly because it was she who had recently lectured him about saying “colored people” instead of that impolite term he may have heard from his warden grandfather.

My earliest connection to a black person was with Flora. Flora was a young black woman with whom I interacted occasionally in my early years. For one thing, she was Bubba's mother's maid. Maid service was not just a privilege of the wealthy in my youth. The very few working mothers I knew (Bubba's was one of them) used maids regularly and even my mother had Flora in to iron occasionally. Flora was like a surrogate parent to Bubba. I remember that if we wanted to come inside and have Graham crackers and milk, or anything for that matter, Flora had to approve. And she didn't always. If we wanted to build a fire in Bubba's driveway and toast marshmallows, we needed Flora's permission. If we wanted to cross the road and play on the school's playground (instead of the one in Bubba's yard) we had to have Flora's

permission. A few years later my grandmother began hiring Flora to come help her cook the enormous Christmas eve dinner for her five sons and their families. I often went along with the driver to either pick her up at her house or take her home after the cooking was completed. Her home was a shack on a steep hill in east Rome and even at that early age I was struck by the poverty she lived in. But how could it have been any different? The going wages for maids at the time was two dollars a day. If she had worked five days a week all year her annual income would have been about one tenth of my father's, and we were not considered well off by anyone – anyone white that is.

In 1947, when I started first grade, another black person came into my life. He was “Mitch”, the near ubiquitous janitor who seemed to always be sweeping the halls of the school. He would sprinkle something that smelled good and looked like green sawdust down one side of the hallway and would then sweep it up with a push broom. If anyone from a first grader to the principal spoke to him it was always “Mitch”, never “sir” or “Mr. Mitchell”, which I assume was his real name but can't be certain because for all intents and purposes, blacks of that era were absent surnames. Either “sir” or “Mr.” would have been highly inappropriate and probably would have earned me a stern correction. There were no other adults whom we could call by a first name, so this one unexplained exception was notable to my six-year-old brain. Although we often talked to him, he rarely had anything to say to us more than “yassuh,” “nossuh,” or “we'll see about that.” The only specific conversation I ever remember having with him was when several of us boys asked if we could use his push broom. It actually seemed like fun, especially with all that green waxy stuff to push around, but he politely declined our generous offer to do his work for him. At some point in my college years I learned from my dad that “Mitch” and his wife had put five children through college and that two of them were medical doctors. Turns out the school job was in addition to Mitch's regular janitorial job at the plant where my dad worked. He was doing two eight hour shifts, five days a week (and who knows what else) for all those years.

Between the ages of five and twelve I spent a lot of time at “the camp,” a euphemism used regularly in my family when referring to the county prison run by my grandfather, known as Daddy Bunk to us, but as “Cap'n Conway” to most others. His actual name was Pinckney Bun, an obscure (to us anyway) connection to his South Carolina roots. The prison was within walking distance of my grandparents' house (the house was a “perk” of the job, as were the car, unlimited free gas and a full time “house man”) and I spent many, many hours there up until age twelve when Daddy Bunk retired and built a new house not far away. Everyone knew who I was and everyone treated me like young royalty. I had cordial relations with all the guards and many of the prisoners, including an uncle by marriage (from my mother's side) who was serving time for small crimes connected to his alcoholism. Among my acquaintances there were several black prisoners, one of whom was Smoky, the cook. Just as with Flora, I never knew (or even thought about) his last name, or for that matter, his real first name. He liked the fact that I liked his cooking and that I made a special effort to be there on Fridays when he made his world beater salmon croquettes. To this day I never tasted any better.

I can't claim to have thought about it consciously at the time but at some level I knew even then that conversations I had with blacks were noticeably different from conversations with whites, regardless of whether they were prisoners or not. Blacks would never kid or joke with me like the whites would. There were never any references to girls. There were almost no questions, just responses to comments or questions from me. Even so, it never seemed strained to me, and it never occurred to me that we were all following a well understood set of rules governing our behavior with each other.

There was a brief racial incident in my family when I was about ten that I have never forgotten. Like all my friends, I was a voracious reader of all kinds of comic books, from horror stories to Archie. Occasionally I would obtain (mostly by swaps because I almost never had a dime for a new one) a comic about baseball, which I loved as only a ten-year-old boy can. I was especially excited about one that was a biography of sorts about Jackie Robinson, who had been playing for Brooklyn for 3 or 4 seasons at this point. I was surprised to learn that black players had ever been barred from the majors and even more surprised that some players and teammates had treated him rather shabbily. I wanted to talk to my dad about all my righteous indignation, but it was clear that he didn't want to discuss it. Finally, I said something like “well, don't you think Jackie Robinson is a great player?”, and he replied “He probably is but he needs to learn his place.” It was clear to me that I better not say any more about it. And I didn't.

And yet, a few years later, this incident occurred: We were driving home from a week in Daytona

Beach in 1953 and got behind a pickup truck that wasn't going very fast. We were on a two lane road (there were hardly ever more than two in those days) and so were stuck behind it for what seemed like a long time. There were two black men in front and two boys about the ages of my brother and me (15 and 12) sitting on the tailgate with their legs hanging off the back of it. After a few minutes my dad commented on the apparent similarity of the ages of those boys and us. After a few more minutes he said "Imagine what kind of future those boys can expect. The front of the truck – that's about all they can aspire to." Kids are always trying to figure out how they should think about things and experiences like this taught me I didn't have to think about things the way my friends did. I was always aware that my parents were unusual in several important ways, mostly in that they seemed to see a larger perspective than any other adults I came into contact with. I have always been grateful for their influence in that regard.

From about age 9 to 14 I spent a lot of time in the summer playing baseball at a field near the school. We'd play nearly every day from after lunch until the 3:45 whistle blew at the plant. The whistle meant one thing to workers in that vast complex but to us it meant that if we ran home, changed into swim suits, pedaled fiercely for about a mile on our bikes, we could be at the village's huge swimming pool when they unlocked the gate at four o'clock. But until that whistle blew our minds were on nothing but baseball. Occasionally one or two of the older boys would come by and want to play. We didn't particularly like it but there wasn't much we could do about it. We especially didn't like it when that older boy was Frank. Frank was bossy, volatile, unpredictable and sometimes violent (he would suffer from mental illness his entire adult life and die young, but we didn't know that then). One day when he was pitching (boys his own age wouldn't let him pitch in their games) a surprising thing happened. Three black boys came riding into the village from the direction of north Rome (the field was on the edge of the village) with ball gloves hanging off their handlebars. We must have looked at them like they were invaders from outer space. They stopped their bikes but remained on them and asked if they could join our game. I was actually going to say yes because we were always short of players, but before anyone could say anything Frank started shouting the vilest profanities imaginable and ran to the plate to get a bat to chase them away with. Fortunately for them the road was about eight feet above the field, and before he could get up to them they had turned their bikes around and easily outdistanced the red-faced, apoplectic Frank. No one was injured physically but for all these years I have wondered what that incident must have meant to those three boys. What courage it took for them to even venture into the village, and then to be chased by Frank the nut trying to crack their heads with a bat! Imagine how their perceptions of white people were influenced that day. Not long after that event, at the age of 12 or 13, it occurred to me that only one thing could fuel that kind of blind hatred that Frank exhibited that day: fear. If you have deprived someone of basic rights, access to education and jobs, given them your cast off clothes and schoolbooks, put their fathers and mothers in situations where they cannot maintain a shred of dignity and self-respect – you had better fear that person. I think that the situations in the American south and in South Africa were very similar in that regard. After so many years of unspeakable abuse, the whites were afraid, even if it was not conscious, of what freedom for the oppressed might bring. And in both places those fears were certainly understandable.

Like my daughter, I have puzzled over the years about not just my own evolution in regard to racial matters but about how so many of my current friends, born between 1938 and 1944, came to be at least moderate, if not outright liberal, in our racial views. One of my theories, never before discussed with anyone, is that a lot of it had to do with Nat "King" Cole. My family got a television set in 1951, the first in our entire neighborhood. Like all early TV owners, we never turned it off if anything at all was being telecast. Even when nothing was on we would sometimes turn on the set and look at the "test pattern" for a while before a program would appear. Picture in a box – what a concept. The point is, we watched everything and "everything" in the early and mid-fifties included a lot of hours of the Nat King Cole show. Mr. Cole, who was as black as a person can possibly be, appeared to be a genuinely gentle soul, in addition to being one of the smoothest crooners who ever sang a song. How could anyone believe anything negative about the black race in general when several times a week we were watching and listening to this suave, kind, urbane, beautifully dressed man sing all our favorite songs? In real life he may not have been any of those things, but you would have had a hard time convincing anyone of my generation that any of the negative stereotypes we southerners were expected to believe could possibly be applied to this man. And if he was an exception, maybe there were lots of other exceptions. Nat Cole was a frequent

reminder that maybe, just maybe, not everything we had been told was completely accurate. One has to remember that at that time there were no black people in the public eye outside of entertainment. Yes, Jackie Robinson had been playing for the Dodgers for a few years by then, but there were very few other blacks in pro baseball, and besides, Jackie Robinson wasn't coming into my living room several times a week and revealing his personality and charming us into submission with his broad smile and sweet voice. The point is we didn't have any black newscasters, comedians, politicians, actors, etc., to help us figure out what we thought about black people. None. They were not there. I'm not saying that Nat Cole helped foment the civil rights revolution that would begin in earnest a few years later in Montgomery, but maybe he helped, at least a little.

When I was 15, I went to work in the Big Apple grocery store. A black man, who seemed very old to me, was the janitor there and came in just before quitting time every day to start the clean-up in which all of us participated. His first name was Solomon and he was, like Mitch, very meek and quiet. However, he had a teen-aged son named Theodore who was none of those things. Theodore was the kind of young black man who could get into serious trouble. He was very talkative and full of himself. I have wondered in the years since how that kind of confidence could spring forth in that environment. This was 1956-58 and not much had changed for blacks in the 20th century, but Theodore didn't seem aware of that. While his words were not overtly threatening or hostile, there was an undertone of resentment in everything he said. It was clear that he didn't think we were better than him, which was a new experience for us. He was very strong and often showed off his strength, lifting things with ease (like a hundred pound sack of potatoes) that most of us could hardly budge. My thought then, and now, is that he wanted us to know that if he had to, he could whip any of us – or maybe all of us- and I never doubted it. Theodore was important to me because he caused me to acknowledge to myself for the first time that we really weren't that different. He could do anything I could do (and lots of things I couldn't) and yet he was assigned by society to a future much like his father's – menial, degrading work for sub-poverty wages – while I could at least envision a much grander future for myself. I have often wondered what happened to Theodore from Rome, Georgia after 1958.

There were two other experiences at the Big Apple that influenced my thinking. After I'd been there about a year a new assistant store manager was hired. Ed was about 24, wiry, intense and potentially violent. I have no idea what happened to Ed after 1958 either, but it would not surprise me to learn that he had spent some time in jail. Such was his nature. One Saturday when I was running a register, Ed brought another employee up to take over my spot and asked me to come to the backroom with him. As soon as both of us had gotten through the door he wheeled around at me with fire in his eyes and began a tirade about what he was going to do to me if I didn't stop saying "sir" and "ma'am" to our black customers. I don't remember what I said to him at that moment (probably nothing), but I remember telling my parents about it at dinner that night. My dad, who had known Ed briefly before he got fired from the rayon plant my dad worked in, told me to change nothing and to let him know if Ed ever threatened me again. I continued my mannerly habits (they were so well drilled in I didn't have much choice) and had no further trouble with Ed. To this day I don't know if my dad acted on what I told him or if Ed chose not to harass me further for some other reason. What I do know is that Ed definitely didn't change his attitude about black people.

Just before I graduated from high school an interesting new development occurred at the Big Apple. A campaign to unionize us was launched and suddenly we lowly employees were being courted to sign cards for an election. I went to a meeting with union officials at the Greystone Hotel and was shocked that the entire meeting was a vitriolic rant about getting back at the Jewish owners, the Alterman brothers. I had never heard Jews discussed before and had no idea that people had such strong feelings about them. I didn't understand it then and frankly still don't. There was only a little said about wages and working conditions, even though we were making just 65 cents an hour and were being forced to work unpaid overtime for the cleanup after the store closed. (I was "honored" to be one of two high schoolers chosen for full time work in the summers. I put in 64 hours every week and was paid a "salary" of \$42.) The contrast with what a union contract would provide was stark, almost unbelievable at the time. The hourly rate would double plus time and a half for overtime. In rebuttal, the store manager emphasized that we high school kids would be terminated because the store could hire adults at the union rate. Ed, of course,

took every opportunity to talk about the “n----- union members” and the fact that they would be paid the same as white workers in a union store. The anti-Semitism of the union guys apparently worked a lot better than the racism of the store managers because there was only one vote against the union – mine. I was deeply offended by the anti-Jewish comments of the union officials and not much affected by the economic promises because I had already taken a job as lifeguard at the Coosa Country Club for the summer and was about to depart for Georgia Tech anyway.

In my five years (1958-63) of working and going to Tech I had virtually no contact with black people in any part of my life except on the golf course. In 1960, my dad and I took up golf at a new blue-collar goat track of a daily greens fee course called Mountain View. It was one of the few courses outside of Atlanta that was not a private club because at the first talk of forced integration in the mid-50s almost every southern city (except Atlanta) sold off their public courses to avoid having to allow blacks to play. After about a year at Mountain View we upgraded to a small, nine-hole blue collar private club, Callier Springs, owned by two brothers whom my dad had known as a child. Unlike our previous course, this one had a number of caddies (\$2 a round) all of whom were, of course, black. The caddies were mostly teenagers but a few were grown men. The better players, who were also serious gamblers, used the older caddies and at tournament time competed to see who would get one in particular – Eagle Eye. I'm sure Eagle Eye had a real name but no one at Callier Springs knew what it was or cared. EE was a legendary figure of sorts. I would guess he was in his early thirties but that estimate could have been off a decade or more in either direction for all we knew. He was thin and missing a few teeth but somehow managed to have an air of mystery and charm about him. The thing was, EE knew golf and all the top players wanted him on their bag when the stakes got high. There were rumors about EE that bordered on the mythological. Occasionally you would hear about him playing a high stakes game with some Rome gamblers at a public course in Atlanta and winning huge sums of money. Other stories involved him getting white players to front for him so that he could bet in the Calcuttas that always accompanied local tournaments. Again, he was reputed to always pick winners. These stories probably got exaggerated a bit in the telling but I know for a fact that some of them were true. My scratch handicap, serious gambling Uncle Buford told me once that EE might be the best player in Floyd County, and that he himself had placed some Calcutta bets for EE that paid off handsomely. Even then, at age 20-21, I was struck by the irony that all these skilled players had such respect for someone who was not allowed to play on any course within 70 miles. I left Rome a few years later and never heard another word about Eagle Eye.

In December of 1963, I graduated from Tech, was commissioned in the Army, and took an engineering job with Southern Railway. In March of 1964 I left the railroad to begin my obligatory two years of active duty in the Army.

A few months after I was assigned to Ft. Bliss, Texas I was made executive officer of a company of 350 enlisted men who were attending various technical schools on the base (Ft. Bliss was HQ for everything having to do with shooting down low flying aircraft with missiles). My commanding officer was Captain C., an ambitious career officer from a land rich family in Montana.

A few months after joining Capt. C., he and I learned that a second executive officer was being assigned to us. He was newly minted Second Lieutenant John David Jones from East St. Louis, Illinois, a 20-year-old black man with two years of experience as an enlisted man. He was just out of Ft. Sill OCS with everything spit shined, creased and polished. He was also uncommonly handsome, though no one would have commented on that in those days. John intended to make a career out of the Army and took his rather trivial responsibilities very seriously. What neither he nor I could have anticipated was how offended Captain C. would be at having a black executive officer. From him I learned about new racial epithets that I never heard growing up in the south. His favorite was “jungle bunny” and he used it often when John was not around. I often wondered how someone who grew up and went to college in Montana could be so prejudiced. He probably never saw any black people until he went in the Army, but he definitely had strong opinions on the matter. I later concluded that his problem may have been more about class than race because I saw similar hostility toward some of our enlisted staff whom he considered beneath him. I never once thought of confronting him in any way, and wouldn't have even if I had thought of it. I just took his intolerance as an uncomfortable but unavoidable fact of life. I have to admit that more

than once I wondered if the older and otherwise admirable people I knew who held racist/anti-Semitic views might know something about blacks and Jews that I didn't know. Could they be right? Would I become one of them when I gained experience in the world? I didn't think so, but I wasn't absolutely certain until John David Jones came into my life.

Just a couple of months after John was assigned to the Third Enlisted Student Battery, Captain C.'s contacts in Washington got him a wonderful promotion to become a general's aide in Europe. As a result, I was made battery commander even though lieutenants were only rarely put in such jobs. That meant John moved up too, becoming my executive officer instead of the flunky role he had been in earlier. Over the months we became good friends and eventually I was "admitted" to an informal group of about a half dozen young black officers. Most officers socialize at the officers' club where drinks are cheap and the atmosphere convivial, but these officers didn't feel that comfortable there. Consequently, they gathered in each others' homes about once a week to shoot the breeze and have a few drinks after work. I suppose that "separateness" was similar to what occurs in most high schools and colleges now – that is, that most socializing is done in segregated groups. These gatherings were the beginning of my education in "race." I learned how easy it is to find racist nuance in casual conversation if one is constantly looking for them. I learned that blacks of all economic levels (and these were certainly the first middle class, college educated blacks I had ever been around) never stop thinking about being black – that every experience is viewed differently through the lens of blackness. I learned that being black doesn't mean you aren't sexist. I learned a whole new definition of the term "black humor." I learned not to flinch upon hearing a twelve letter profanity that was not part of my growing up. And I learned about Moms Mabley and Redd Foxx. We listened to their comedy records frequently and while I thought they were funny (and unbelievably risqué, which did not occur on "white" comedy records of that day), I realized that the others were hearing things that I couldn't appreciate. Sometimes they would try to explain things to me and mostly I got it but not always. There were plenty of jokes made about me being an "honorary n-----" and needing to learn to appreciate malt liquor (which was ironic because they drank nothing but the most expensive Scotch), but mostly I was an observer, not a participant. I made jokes about teaching John to play golf so he could be whiter, which was funny to them because John was coal black, whereas most of the others were quite light skinned, as were all their wives.

In March 1966 I was discharged and went to work for the Chamber of Commerce in Jacksonville, Florida, arriving just in time for my 25th birthday. If I had thought about it at all, I would have assumed that my newly developed comfort with black friends would be totally irrelevant to the new career that I was just beginning. How wrong I would have been.

Being an "associate manager" of the Jacksonville Area Chamber of Commerce was a lot like being an executive officer in the Army. That is, you get assigned to a lot of small jobs that no one more senior wants to do. One of my larger "small" jobs was to administer an association of local manufacturers, which, just prior to my arrival, had decided to launch an "apprenticeship" program of sorts in cooperation with the largest black high school in Duval County (Jacksonville and Duval County had not yet merged but that was about to happen). The deal was that the students (all male) would take a curriculum chosen by the manufacturing group, would be given part-time and summer jobs in the plants, and then would be guaranteed an entry level job upon graduation. This was no small deal for the kids and the families involved, since at that time blacks seldom got into any skilled or even semi-skilled jobs, which paid relatively well. The program was a modest but admirable response to black unrest that was surfacing all over the country.

Anyone born much after 1950 would have a hard time today imagining the turmoil that prevailed in U.S. society from 1965 until 1970 or so. There was significant bad news almost daily it seems. Riots of unprecedented magnitude and duration were breaking out or threatening to break out in most major cities. Riots seemed particularly likely to occur when either of two young leaders, Stokely Carmichael or Rap Brown, came into a city to speak to a demonstration. One June morning in 1967, Jacksonville woke up to the news that Rap Brown was coming to speak to a black rights rally in just a few weeks. This was serious news, especially for those charged with responsibility for the area's economy, like the staff of the Chamber.

A special meeting was called of the leaders of all the organizations that had anything to do with jobs

because the primary grievance in all the major riots was jobs for blacks, especially black men. Our leader, Dave Cooley, was out of town on vacation with his family when all this occurred. Our senior staff member, Jim M., was the de facto leader and the logical one to attend. At the last minute he insisted I go with him because I was the only one who had any slight connection to the black community through the apprentice program I managed. I could never have foreseen how radically my life would change because of that last minute request.

Most of the meeting, after all the hand wringing was over, was taken up by the director of the state employment office (which all blacks referred to as the UNemployment office) explaining that someone needed to become the new face of minority job finding because his agency was not trusted. Unbeknownst to poor Jim, my Dale Carnegie course had recently been touting the value of "bold decisions," and I was looking for an opportunity to make one. Well, here it was. I spoke up without consulting with Jim (who was a timid soul anyway) and said that if the state office would supply some staff the Chamber would become the new front for a public job finding effort. The group was elated (but not Jim) and the planning began immediately for a press conference (after all, the whole point was publicity) and a big start the following Monday. Dave would be home on Saturday.

By the time reality set in I was convinced Dave would fire me when he realized what I had done to his serene organization. Unemployed black citizens were going to be coming into the whitest of white bastions. This was unprecedented in the entire country. In fact, we would learn a few months later that not one Chamber in the U.S. had a black employee in anything other than a janitorial job at that time.

By Friday afternoon, we had a plan in place and it had been well publicized as Jobs for Jacksonville. The state office would furnish an experienced professional staff person and a secretary. They would work in my office and I would do what I could to secure job opening commitments from Chamber members, particularly the active members of the manufacturers' association that I managed. Before the week was over every media outlet had given it major play, including two TV interviews with me. No one wanted Rap Brown to get Jacksonville burned and pillaged.

On Saturday night I had to make the dreaded call to Dave Cooley. To my surprise, he seemed pleased with this strange turn of events and quickly became convinced that this would turn out to be a good thing for the Chamber. I was not as sanguine as he and after a near sleepless Sunday night went into the office at 7 am to get ready for whatever would happen at 8. Too late – it was already happening. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw a line of people extending from the Chamber's front door all the way around the corner of Hogan St. Newspaper and TV people were already there too. As was the state office on-loan staff, John Demps and Frances, our new secretary.

John looked like a five foot eight weightlifter with a good tailor and as black as black can be (one of our problems as John began to get publicity too, was that newspaper photographers had not learned to open their lenses to account for differences in skin color. The result was pictures with white dignitaries in which John all but disappeared into the background). As it turned out, we were a good team. John, every inch the professional employment counselor, would take all the applications and conduct all the interviews; Frances organized all the files and data; and I got publicity and job pledges from employers. It all fell together so well (Rap Brown came and went without incident) that the success of the program became well-known in surrounding cities and states. I was asked to speak to regional and national Chamber organizations as well as civic groups in Tampa and Orlando (minutes before my Orlando speech to the Rotary Club, the Chamber manager announced to the group that Disney had decided to build a giant replica of Disneyland there. Imagine how interested they were in my remarks after that).

Because of what we were doing, the Jacksonville chamber got the reputation of being proactive and progressive. Not words that heretofore had been associated with the phrase "Chamber of Commerce." Not everyone was happy with this direction, but Dave had the support of the power structure, so he was steadfast. Some board members complained indirectly by saying that they didn't understand how there could be a jobs problem when so many "service jobs" were going begging for applicants. After being initially confused, I came to understand that what they meant was that their wives could no longer hire maids and yard men for a few dollars a day. The "good old days" of nearly free domestic labor were apparently gone and were being grieved for by the upper class.

Near the end of 1967 the new mayor of the newly consolidated government asked a small group of civic leaders to go to Washington with him to plead the case that Jacksonville was not getting its fair

share of War on Poverty funds. Dave Cooley went to represent the Chamber and ended up talking to some Labor Dept. officials about Jobs for Jacksonville. They were interested and pretty soon we submitted a proposal for a \$40,000 annual grant. Even then that figure was peanuts, and it was quickly approved.

John then left the employment commission, became an official employee of the Chamber and got a nice raise, as did I. In that transition John became the first black Chamber professional in the country. While Dave and I would depart for Memphis eight months later, John stayed on at the Chamber for about seven years, and then had a very successful career, first working for a large bank and then starting his own company which sets up credit card systems for retailers all over the country.

After a few years of exchanging Christmas cards in the 70s I lost touch with John for nearly forty years. In 2007 I found him on the internet and we visited with John and his wife Barbara while we were staying at Fernandina Beach. In 2009, John came here and we had a great reunion with Dave Cooley. Only then did Dave and I learn that during the entire time that he and I were working with John, John was working two other jobs so that his wife could get her degree and become a public school teacher. Starting at 6pm, he would drive his father's cab, running people back and forth to the airport for a few hours. Then he would work from 9 till midnight cleaning offices, all the while praying that no one from his day job would see him doing these menial chores.

When MLK was killed in April of 1968, the leadership in Memphis raised an unprecedented \$4 million dollars to try to change Memphis and its image. To everyone's surprise they decided the recipient of this money, and the guiding force for its expenditure, would be the Memphis Chamber. It was clear from the beginning that the Chamber would have to have bold new leadership for this challenge. Not only was Dave Cooley the brightest young star in the Chamber profession, but he now had a reputation as a racial conciliator. The result was that no one else was ever really considered for the job, so, in July he moved to Memphis and in September I joined him.

Part of the deal was that Dave would keep the old chamber manager on the payroll for a few months until he could retire with some shred of dignity. Dave treated him well and pretended that Percy had some kind of role in the new organization. On my first day at work, Dave buzzed me and asked me to come into his office to meet Percy. When I walked in Percy stood up, put out his hand, and said "I understand you're going to put us in the n----- business." I kept that comment in mind all during my three years there because it well represented the attitudes of most Memphis businessmen, who made the Jacksonville group seem like a bunch of activist liberals. There were some grand exceptions though who made it possible for us to have at least a small positive impact on race relations in that extremely troubled city.

My first priority was to put together a staff for my new and unusually well-financed department, called Human Resources. This was 1968 and that term had not yet come to replace the word "personnel" in corporate America the way it would in the 1970s. I hired two assistant directors and three secretaries, all black except for one secretary. The chamber staff had a lot of adjusting to do very quickly, which they did very well. I was never aware of any kind of unpleasant incident involving my new employees and the old staff. One thing that may have helped was that our activities were clearly the highest priority of the chamber, and everyone may have realized that Dave would allow no acts of overt racism in our "family" of about 45 people.

We did dodge a bullet though. Earlier in the year, before Dave or I had arrived, an office had been established of the Memphis chapter of The National Alliance of Businessmen – a Labor Department-funded minority jobs program, modeled to some extent on the work we had done in Jacksonville. A woman who had been recently widowed via the death of one of Memphis' top bankers was hired to run the small office which did nothing but call employers and report how many "minorities" (there was only one minority in Memphis so this euphemism seemed a bit strained at times) had been hired. Mrs. H. had been inflating the numbers shamelessly with the result being that Memphis was recognized as the leading hirer of minorities in the entire country all during the summer of 1968 – a "fact" for which it received awards and considerable favorable publicity both locally and nationally. Part of Dave Cooley's deal was that the chamber, through its new HR department, would take over management of the NAB and that Mrs. H. would keep her job. The trouble was that Mrs. H. was an out and out racist of the old school. She found many different ways to resist as I tried to make arrangements to move her from her bank-donated office into our suite at the Peabody Hotel (the chamber didn't have room for us until it could completely remodel and create new space). After several incidents and some considerable tension between us, I went

to her office and told her she had run out of options and needed to move immediately. She broke down and began sobbing that she just couldn't "go work in a room full of n-----s." I was not at all sympathetic as this 65-year-old woman sat there crying her eyes out. I should have been, perhaps, but I was so angered by all the lies she had told and the messes she had made that I would have to clean up that it just wasn't in me to feel anything positive toward her. Plus, I was so relieved that she wanted to quit that I was incapable of trying to get her to change her mind.

At the same time that I was trying to launch a number of initiatives to "help bring about the reconciliation of the races" (my job description, as stated by Rev. Jim Lawson), my wife Mary Lynn and I were part of a group of ten couples, half black and half white, that met in each others' homes once a month. Our facilitator was a de-frocked Episcopal priest who had become such an activist during the sanitation strike that he had been fired as minister of a large church in a Memphis suburb (appropriately named White Station). The monthly meetings were very successful in terms of getting us to think of black people as people first and blacks second. These meetings were low intensity "sensitivity training sessions" that discussed some edgy issues and always came back to what we were feeling. After a year or so they came to feel like get-togethers with friends and we found that structure and exercises were no longer needed.

The strongest memory I have from that experience was what happened after the first time we hosted the group. Our neighbors were an older, childless couple from north Alabama. He worked for Sears, she (Katie) was a stay at home wife. We were on fairly friendly terms with them, but Katie's friendliness always seemed a little strained. It broke down completely when she saw several carloads of black couples parked in front of her house and walk up to our house one night. The next day she called my boss at the Chamber and wanted to know if he knew that I was inviting "n-----s" into my home and demanded that he put a stop to it. She had said nothing to us, of course. Dave tried to placate her, but she would not be calmed. By coincidence, the head Sears guy was the volunteer chairman of one of my initiatives and was also on the Chamber board. Dave called him and told him what had happened. I don't know what Sears guy did but the neighbors never spoke to us again beyond a silent wave from the driveway.

My most significant achievement in Memphis was acquiring one million dollars in OEO (Office of Economic Opportunity, otherwise known as the war on poverty agency) funds for the Greater Memphis Urban Development Corporation – or as one of my associates called it, "gumduck" (a slight perversion of the acronym GMUDC). Gumduck's role was to create a community-controlled economic development corporation that would fund black owned start-ups. We got the grant because we had already set up the first one, Memphis Tubing Corporation. MTC had a contract with Chrysler to bend the pipes that would end up as tailpipes on Chrysler-made cars. We recruited a very competent black manager from the International Harvester plant in Memphis and put together a board of directors. That board was comprised of a who's who of black Memphis and included the Rev. Jim Lawson who organized the sanitation strike that had fatefully brought MLK to Memphis the previous year ("The Children", a history of the civil rights movement written by David Halberstam was mainly about Lawson and his work in training non-violent volunteers); Maxine Smith, the long time director of the Memphis NAACP; Rev. Billy Kyle, a frequent advisor to MLK who was to host a dinner for King the night he was shot; Rev. Ben Hooks, who would later go on the FCC and then become head of the NAACP nationally for many years; plus some very savvy young white businessmen who had been recruited by John T. Fisher.

John T. was well known locally because just days after the assassination he had organized a big rally at the football stadium, called Memphis Cares. Thousands of people, mostly white, attended. His purpose was to show that many whites were greatly disturbed by what had happened to MLK and would participate in a tribute ceremony. What John T. didn't realize was that the black leaders he had recruited to speak to a mostly white audience were too angry to be civil so soon after the murder. The result was a series of highly emotional rants from black speakers which shocked the audience who had come to help begin the reconciliation process, not to be blamed for the death of MLK. Reconciliation would have to wait a while, but John T.'s reputation as a competent, fair minded bridge between black leaders and the white establishment would be my main asset for the entire time I worked in Memphis.

Those were heady days and I felt privileged to get to know personally some of the best minds of the

civil rights movement. They all were highly intelligent and asked a lot of insightful questions that caused me to prepare well for every board meeting. As required by OEO regulations we had to have a majority of board members elected from "the community" within 12 months of receiving the grant. Unfortunately, some community organizers took the initiative to actively campaign for the slots and were successful in getting control of the board. The result was that they hired a permanent director (I was the temporary director) who was flamboyant, articulate, and well-intentioned but who knew very little about business. He was not a person to forge partnerships like the one we had established with Chrysler and so the first success (pipe bending for Chrysler) turned out to be the only success. Once the initial enabling grant from OEO had been exhausted (on salaries and bad investments) GMUDC spiraled into meaninglessness and disbanded.

But by then I was long gone, in more ways than one. In late 1970 the Chamber reorganized into two divisions, one that raised money and worked on the image of the Chamber and the community; and one that focused on all the Chamber "programs." I was named VP of the latter so had turned over all my previous duties to my deputy, Cliff Stockton, who I had hired two years earlier. At first I was happy with the increase in status and pay and especially enjoyed having a luxurious office. But fairly soon I realized that it was not going to be fun supervising a bunch of old department managers who should have been fired long ago and who now resented being told to report to a 28-year-old suspected of being a radical liberal, leftist trouble maker. I also realized that I was no longer the "doer" of the stuff I thought was important (race relations in the most racially troubled city in America), I was just an observer and occasional commentator, as Cliff's supervisor.

The result was that I was unhappy, and most of the people who worked for me were unhappy too. They all felt demoted in that they no longer reported to the "real boss", Dave. After a few months of mutual unhappiness, I was called by Bill Haddad in 1971 and offered a job with USR&D Corporation out of New York. They were an interesting group that contracted with various agencies to manage "great society" programs in communities around the country. The funds for these programs came either from OEO or the Labor Department. I had known them first in Jacksonville where they had taken over the War on Poverty program after some scandalous mismanagement by local people. This offer, however, was to run a Labor Department funded research project in California that was being mismanaged by an R&D employee. Without much thought I agreed to take the job and within weeks had moved to California, and into what I might now think of as my "post racial" life.

My first boss there was black (the director I was sent to replace), about half the staff were black, and consequently a good many friends were; but in California that was not so unusual. There was no sense of breaking new ground, it was just the way things were. Plus, unlike most USR&D projects, the work of the center had no racial purpose.

A few years later I would start up a new project, managed by my own company, whose main purpose was to help the northern California food processing industry respond positively to a discrimination lawsuit filed against it by the Mexican-American Legal Defense and Education Fund in San Francisco. The suit alleged widespread discrimination against Latino workers and women. We were able to prove the former to be wrong but the latter was so blatant that it could not be denied. Consequently, we spent the next seven years structuring programs to enable hourly paid women (mostly Latino and Asian) to move into higher paying and less seasonal jobs. That effort was successful enough that by 1979 the industry and union (who had jointly paid for all this out of a negotiated fund) had effectively eliminated their EEO liability, which was our objective all along. The termination of the contract meant we didn't have enough revenue to hold the company together and it folded in late 1979. The next year I accepted a job in Spartanburg, SC and moved back east.

It didn't occur to me at that time but the transition from California to South Carolina marked the end of a thirteen year run of a professional "do-gooder", but it did. From that point on I was focused on making a living, paying the bills, and finishing the job of raising a family. No longer could I tell myself that my work served a larger social purpose, a feeling that I was to miss, at times quite sharply. Even so, I have been grateful the last thirty years that I was fortunate enough to have participated in a small way in some of the important changes that my generation witnessed and experienced in those turbulent decades.

