RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH SIMEON F. MOSS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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Kurt Piehler: This begins an interview with Mr. Simeon F. Moss on May 2, 1997 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler and …

Melanie Cooper: Melanie Cooper …

Sandra Stewart Holyoak: Sandra Stewart Holyoak.

KP: And I guess I'd like to begin by asking you a few questions about your parents, both were born in Georgia, and they grew up in Georgia.

Simeon F. Moss: That's correct. I can't tell you very much about their early life or their parents. I don't know very much about it at all. In fact, my mother ... mentioned her family very vaguely at times, but never in terms of the family participation that most people have when they're children.

KP: So you never went to Georgia as a ...

SFM: I never went to Georgia ...

KP: ... As a child growing up?

SFM: No, I didn't. Never.

SSH: Do you have any ideas of why they never discussed their family, their grandparents or your grandparents, much?

SFM: I think that my mother was adopted, and that she was not raised by her own family. That's what I think just from … my discussions with her in later life. My father, he had a standard family, and he owned a bake shop in Augusta, Georgia. I've never seen the bake shop. I heard a lot about how good the bread was. [Laughter]

MC: Do you know how they met?

SFM: No, I don't.

KP: … Very few women went to college before, really, World War II. Your mother was really remarkable in being a college … graduate.

SFM: Well, it was a college a lot like the two-year colleges that we had in ... the United States when most teachers got their degrees back in the '20s. It really was, it was a junior-type college, but any college was more than most people got in ... Georgia at that time.

KP: Do you know when your parents moved North?

SFM: My father moved first. This was before they were ... married, my mother and father were married, and he settled in Princeton. Then, years later, she came up to Peekskill, New York, and

he married her, and they moved to Princeton together before he was living in Princeton.

SSH: Did they know each other in Georgia?

SFM: They knew each other in Georgia, right. They had been childhood sweethearts.

KP: … Did they move up North before or after World War I?

SFM: It was after World War I. After World War I; about 1917 or '18, one of the two.

SSH: Do you know why your mother went to Poughkeepsie? Peekskill?

SFM: Yes, Peekskill, yes, Peekskill. That's perfectly all right.

SSH: [Laughter] I knew it wasn't the right name ...

SFM: No, I don't. I can tell you very little about my mother's life. She was very close-mouthed with reference to her life. She ... seems to have enjoyed it, but didn't know too much about her family.

KP: … She never really, sort of, sat you down and told you stories about what life was like in Georgia?

SFM: No, she didn't.

SSH: Did she have any siblings?

SFM: No.

SSH: And your father? Did he have any siblings?

SFM: My father had a ... brother who had children whom I knew. They were older than me. There were two, three of them that I knew: Louis, Robert and Willie.

SSH: What did your dad do in Princeton?

SFM: He worked for Professor Abbott and ... Professor Corwin, the one that wrote The Constitution: What It Means Today. I don't remember his name, but it's on the book, anyway. He worked for those two people, and his son was very instrumental in getting me in Princeton University when I applied to go to get my advanced degree. He did domestic-type work for the most part: waiter, yard boy. He was not educated like my mother.

SSH: Did your mother work in Princeton then? Did she teach?

SFM: Yes, she worked for the Princeton nursery school. She had charge of the baby, I guess you call it "baby-keep-well unit" nowadays, but there were "x" number of children whose parents worked, and ... this nursery school was founded by one of the philanthropic people in the

community during the Depression for mothers who had to go out and work.

KP: In terms of the babies she took care of, were they from the black community or …

SFM: They were ... primarily black. They were not all, they were ... from poor families.

KP: Poor families ...

SFM: Poor families ...

KP: So, what would now, I guess, be a day care center was integrated. It wasn't just ...

SFM: It was integrated from the very beginning. There was a nursery school with a baby unit and then older, older grades in it, and all of them were integrated from the very beginning with poor people.

SSH: … How many brothers and sisters do you have?

SFM: I have one sister living now. That's my sister who went to Douglass, NJC, parenthesis. [Laughter] And, my brother and sister are deceased. They would have been in their seventies now if they were living.

KP: You mentioned your mother working … . Did she always work while you were growing up or was there a stage where she stayed at home and, in a sense, worked in the house?

SFM: She worked up until the time she retired.

KP: So there was never a time when she stayed at home? You were always used to your mother having a job?

SFM: Right. It was an eight to five job. It was a long day. I can recall it was a long day for her, and she began working when I was about six years old, six or seven years old.

SSH: ... Did you go to the same school, did you go with her to work?

SFM: No, I didn't go with her to the nursery. The school that I went to was right around ... When I was six I went to public school, and that's when she went to work, when I went to public school. And I was old enough by the time the other children were born to at least take care of them until my mother came home in the afternoon. Because we only lived maybe a block and a half from the school anyway.

KP: How did the Great Depression affect your family?

SFM: Minimally, because we were poor anyway, first. So that means that there was very little downgrading. The fact that the people whom she worked for were very philanthropic, they always provided. Well, they provided enough money for me to go to Rutgers. My sister won a state scholarship, so she had no problem there. But, I'm talking about the later years of the

Depression. The early years of the Depression, Princeton was a lot like New Brunswick, the town I'm speaking of now, was a lot like New Brunswick. They made sure that their poor people were taken care of. And domestic work was never lacking in that town because of the University and the ... student population, and so forth. Laundry had to be done and there weren't any large laundries like they have today. Women took in laundry as extras if they wanted. And generally speaking, and of course, most of the people worked in service, and they made sure that their children were fed from the food that was available to them at the person's house that they worked at. Some of them worked at eating clubs, you know, like our fraternities here. They had eating clubs, fancy, much fancier, of course, and they ... took care of everything that was needed, generally, ... in terms of food and clothing. If a student didn't want a jacket, the guy brought it home for his kid or something like that and the same thing with food. The food that wasn't eaten was disposed of, so that there wasn't a real heavy impact on that community [in] general and on our family, in particular.

SSH: What was the neighborhood like that you grew up in … Princeton?

SFM: The neighborhood that I grew up in was a fully integrated neighborhood. And most of the people were working, were lower class working people. The middle class people among blacks and I didn't know them better, ... were professional people, teachers and a few lower ... university people. Teachers ... at universities. ... Most of the people were domestic-type workers, for the most part though.

SSH: ... I notice that your religion was Presbyterian. Was there any influence because of the seminary there ...

SFM: Yes, the seminary always had an influence, just like Holy Hill has here in Rutgers. [Laughter] The ... fact that ... there was one women, I don't recall her name now. Yes, her name was Betsy Stockton. She's a black girl, a black woman, and they published a history of her in some of the books and things that come out. And they claimed that she was the daughter of (Ashfell Green?), ... an illegitimate daughter, I don't like that word "illegitimate" because nobody is illegitimate, really. [Laughs] She ... started a school in Princeton, and she was a member of Witherspoon Presbyterian Church, and Witherspoon broke off from the First Presbyterian Church in Princeton during the time when the slavery issue began to eat on people's hearts. You know all about that. You can tell anybody.

KP: Well, just to digress for a second, Sandra's Henry Rutgers thesis was on Commodore Stockton.

SFM: It was?

KP: So, she knows the Stockton family.

SFM: So you know the Stockton family. Well, I know ... the Stockton family because of Betsy, and I know it because the library used to be in his house. You know that. … When I was a kid, that was a library.

SSH: Really?

SFM: Yes.

KP: When you say that the Great Depression really didn't affect you because you really didn't have very much money, how tight were the family finances when you were growing up?

SFM: They were tight. They were tight. I once broke a man's window, and ... it wasn't as large as the window we're looking out of now. And I had to go to beg fifteen cents from my father and I had to wait two days to get that money from him because he didn't have it at that particular time. That's an exaggerated example, let's put it that way, but ... there was a lot of barter, a lot of barter in poor communities. There still is. You know that, you folks know that, it's historic. ... There were people, ... I don't think you should put this in the ... recording, but I had a ... nephew who lived with us who ran numbers. At that time the lottery was illegal, and I ... recall going in his room, and he always had a box full of pennies, and I asked him what the pennies were for, and I found out that most of the people played two cents on a number or three cents or five cents, so he kept the pennies in the box. And that was his way of making a living, besides being a waiter, that was his side deal. [Laughter]

KP: You went to the Princeton schools. How good was your education? I guess one way is to start asking you about Witherspoon.

SFM: Witherspoon School was a good school. They had good teachers even though they were all, all teachers, not only black but white, ... came from two-year schools. Later, all of these people later went and got their degrees. They went mostly to ... the state colleges, like Trenton State, which is now the College of New Jersey. That's the silliest thing in the world, wasn't it? [Laughter] Trenton State, Montclair State, all of these, they were state colleges all over the state and the teacher could go for two years. Newark State was in Newark at that time, it's Kean now. But, most of them, they were concerned about the kids, they lived in the community, most of them were from, not from Princeton, most of the black teachers. There were both black and white teachers teaching …

KP: Teaching in the same class?

SFM: … Teaching in Witherspoon School. But in the other schools in Princeton there were no black teachers, only ... in Witherspoon School. That was a kindergarten through eighth school for black kids, although some white children did go to it if they wanted to.

KP: So in many ways it was the neighborhood school, so it was predominantly black.

SFM: It was a predominantly black neighborhood, yes.

MC: The other neighborhoods were not as integrated, is that why they didn't have ...

SFM: No, if they lived in another neighborhood, they came to that school. In other words, if you lived on Morrell Street and the school was here, and there's a school closer, there's a school closer ... than that over there ... near Morrell Street, the white kids would go to the white school and the black kids would walk across to the black school. But the walking wasn't bad because

you're only talking about an eight-block area, eight to ten-block area. So it wasn't a long walk for any kid to go. And it developed a kind of, a sense of community continuity because everything was done around that school. All the activities focused on the school, the literacy training, PTA meetings, cake/bake sales. You know, the black folks are great cooks, so those bake sales went over. Everybody came to the bake sale. It was integrated! [Laughter]

KP: What other community activities were there?

SFM: In?

KP: Centered around the school. What else was there?

SFM: Well, actually the fraternal ... things, like the Masons and the Eastern Stars, the Elks, all of them were organizations that were spin-offs from the school because the men who taught were usually the officers in these organizations, and the women who taught, of course, were the highest regarded people in the community. The women … teachers were more highly regarded than the men teachers.

SSH: Were they administrators in the school at all?

SFM: ... When I was in school, and thereafter, as long as Witherspoon School was black, was predominantly black, they had a black administrator, and they didn't have an assistant at that time. They had an administrator who was a teacher and an administrator both, you know, like some of the rural schools are today even. But, she was very strict, very forward, and she made the parents know who was running that school and getting those kids a good education. And they did get a good education, even in those days when I was a child. black, I just make this as an aside, black people in Princeton have not been in the habit of sending a lot of their sons and daughters to college, even in the later years. The percentage is very small because the number of kids that graduate, of minority kids that graduate from Princeton High School, which is the prominent feeding high school, don't have many black students who graduate from high school. So, you know, if you don't have many graduates, you're not going to have many going to college. And this is one of the big enigmas, so far as I'm concerned. I think when I went to, when I was graduated in 1937, that was long before the dinosaurs erupted. [Laughter] I think eleven kids, we had about sixteen or seventeen in our graduating class, and eleven of them went on to post-secondary education. I'm not going to say that all of them went to college or anything like that. But nowadays, if they get five minorities, they're doing well, and feel well. So, you know there's been a decline in the education curve, in my opinion, or it's gone down and then flattened down. How you flatten down, I don't know.

SSH: So, coming out of the Witherspoon School to Princeton High School …

SFM: Yes.

SSH: You feel you were right on a par with the other, the white students coming out of the other schools?

SFM: Yes, I don't think there was any difference, not much difference. Maybe in the, you know,

I'd say more in the average to poor than in the average to good.

SSH: Did you participate in extra-curricular activities at Princeton High School?

SFM: Yes.

SSH: Was it encouraged and what did you participate in?

SFM: It was encouraged, it was encouraged. I played on the football team and then came to Rutgers and played here for a year. I was small so I played on the 150 pound team here. But, at Princeton, I played, I was an end, and I played for three years. That's about the most you do in all. I played soccer when I was in junior high school. We had a junior high school soccer team that played the other 7th and 8th-grade schools in Princeton and around: Princeton Township, Lawrenceville, and so forth. And, that school, the minority school, had all the athletics and all the things, like nature study, music, some of the things that you wouldn't normally think were, you'd have in a minority school, they had … . The thing that I remember most about it was that they even separated it so that they could have Black History in the school, even back, and I'm talking about the '30s, now.

KP: That was very unusual.

SFM: When Carter Woodson wrote a book, you know, he wrote a book, I'm sure you're familiar with it, ... The History of the Negro in America, and we had that book. You know, when we'd draw Lincoln faces to put on the board, we'd draw Booker T. Washington faces.

KP: Looking back at it, when did you realize that in many ways this was very exceptional, to have Black History in the public school?

SFM: Yes.

KP: When did you realize how exceptional it was? Because you were school administrator and teacher?

SFM: Yes.

KP: I mean, you did realize …

SFM: ... When they integrated the schools in New Jersey, Black History went by the boards for a while until the whole passion came back, you know.

SSH: When did they integrate the schools in New Jersey? Do you know that maybe?

SFM: '49, '49. Before that they were integrated. Like, the black kids in New Brunswick never were in segregated schools, even when I was a kid, here. I stayed at a lady's house one year, and she had a kid who went to school up here. But, in South Jersey, the Constitution changed it all. Said, "This is it!" You know, "You won't have it anymore."

KP: What did you do for fun? You mentioned breaking a window one time. Was it in a baseball game?

SFM: Well, we, Witherspoon School had two big yards. They were enormous yards, you know, you could put a football field in the two yards. I'm fooling you? You know. And, what did I, oh, they had two big yards and they were about ten feet. There was a lower lot and an upper lot. In the lower lot you played football, in the upper lot you played basketball. So when there were enough people, and baseball, ... softball, not baseball. So, on the days that they had an after-school program, this is something they have today, they had an after-school program and they finally started a lunch program in that school, long before these things were conceived because of the parents. And most of the kids stayed around in the afternoon or worked. You know, those were the days when you didn't have strict child labor laws, and a kid could go out and cut grass or work in a person's house on their lawn, and something else. Many of them did.

KP: Did you work? When did you start working? Did you have any jobs growing up?

SFM: Yes, I used to work on, most of the time, on Saturdays, most of the time on Saturdays, I worked … If they had a party at the club, I'd work at the club, maybe I did. I never did much. They looked on me because I was in college and they kind of gave me easy jobs to do. [Laughter] Because I was in college, you know? [Laughter]

SSH: How did your siblings take that?

SFM: Yes, well, you know, the thing about it was, when I worked in these places where they kind of looked down on me, it was where there were no siblings around. ... Most people were poorly educated and they looked on the educated person as somebody who was a little better than they were, really.

KP: Did you go to the movies very much when you were growing up?

SFM: Quite a bit, quite a bit. I remember when Al Jolson sang his first song in talkies. "The Jazz Singer," or whatever it was. I remember going to that first movie. There were two movies in Princeton. One was called, there're still two, I think, but they're in different places. There was one right on the corner of one of the streets, I don't remember the name. The other was farther up the street. There's a bowling alley in there now. But, anyway, they had, because ... just like Rutgers here, you get first-run pictures all the time in this area because you have to appeal to the intelligence of the electorate. [Laughter] But, I went to movies, I say, at that time, I went on the average of three or four times a month. It was inexpensive, and they were interesting. The movies were interesting because ... they were fantasy most of the time, and I think a lot of people went to the movies in those days because they could kind of act out their fantasy on the movie.

KP: Was there any segregation in the movie theaters?

SFM: Only the segregation that the black folks would impose. What I mean by that, there were some black folks who sat in, I didn't sit in any particular place, but, in fact, very early in my life I said to myself, "I'm not going to sit over there with those folks, anyway." So, I didn't. They would sit about midway in the orchestra, which wasn't a bad seat, wasn't a bad seat.

KP: But there was no sit …

SFM: No, there was no colored and white, no signs or anything like that. There was nothing to direct 'em and there was nobody in the theater who would say, "You have to sit there."

KP: You mentioned that you liked a lot of fantasy movies like, did you for example watch, "Buck Rogers," or cowboy westerns?

SFM: No, most of them were the Bing Crosby type. [Laughter] The Bing Crosby type, you know, "The Road to here and there." … I've always liked movies that had a comic element in it.

SSH: I thought you were going to tell us you were a budding musician or … [Laughter]

SFM: No.

KP: When did you think you'd … like to go to college?

SFM: I started thinking about it about tenth grade. Tenth, eleventh grade. And my father's employer wanted me to go to Lincoln because his brother was a professor at Lincoln. This was a fella named Fine, Harry Fine, who was a, he ran the old Princeton Prep School. Nobody knows anything about Princeton Prep School except me because it's been defunct, it's been defunct for at least forty, at least fifty years. And it was, you know, it's like Lawrenceville School only it was much smaller and the Depression killed it. That's the easiest way to end this whole, clean cut.

KP: No, no, no. Is there more to this story?

SFM: [Laughs] Well, what I was gonna say was that Fine's brother was a professor in Lincoln University. So he said, "If you want your son to go to Lincoln, I can get him in Lincoln." Well, I didn't particularly want to go to Lincoln, and I, you know, I made so … in no uncertain terms I told … my mother that. And she agreed with me. She said, "Well, I'll see what I can do with my benefactors." So she went to the benefactors, and they said if I did well at Rutgers they'd pay for the first two years and, if I did well then, ... they would pay for the next two. Well, at the end of two years, I got a state scholarship, so there was no problem there, and I did, I did well. I did well. I could have done a lot better, I'll tell you that in view of that. Don't you say that to yourselves? All right. [Laughter]

MC: How much interaction, other than working for professors or at clubs, did you have with the University?

SFM: The sons and daughters of the professors who went to public school.

MC: Did you go to football games or other activities, events there?

SFM: ... I seldom, if ever, went to a Princeton football game. If I went to a Princeton football game I was going there to sell something. You know how they have, how you sell banners and

all this kind of stuff? I was only interested in the Princeton football team one year when they were almost the national champions or something. This was back in the '30s, I think. But, I didn't ... go to a football game until my daughter got into Princeton.

SSH: What did you think … about not wanting to go to Lincoln? What was it about Rutgers that made you want to come here?

SFM: I wanted to go to Dartmouth. [Laughter] I really wanted to go to Dartmouth.

KP: What, why Dartmouth?

SFM: I don't know. I just liked Dartmouth. I just liked Dartmouth. I think it had something to do with the Indian background that they had, or something like that, if I recall. But, I don't remember a specific thing, but, I wanted to go to Dartmouth. And I applied, and I was accepted. Of course, in those days, you had to come up with the cash. There was no cash forthcoming from Dartmouth, and then I applied to Rutgers and the principal of Witherspoon School was a Rutgers graduate, the black principal. Now, at this time, I'm talking about 1937, '38. His name was Waxwood, Howard Waxwood. He died about four or five years ago. And, he encouraged me to talk to, I don't remember the name of the guy now. There was somebody at Rutgers I talked to.

KP: Luther Martin. The registrar?

SFM: No.

KP: Dean Metzgar?

SFM: I talked to Metzgar. I talked to Metzgar, and he wasn't very encouraging. [Laughter] He wasn't very encouraging. He was very …

KP: Very aloof.

SFM: Yes, very, very aloof. I said, "Well, maybe you have a Paul Robeson scholarship?" Well, at that time Paul Robeson was persona non grata. [Laughter] You know all about that, so that kind of fell through. So finally she [my mother] went back to the benefactor and said, "He needs … " It didn't cost $1,000 to go to Rutgers for a year then. So, she was the [wife] ... of the Episcopal bishop of New Jersey, and she was in her own right, you don't have to put this in, in her own right she was a millionaire because her father was the "Proctor" of Proctor & Gamble. So, there was no problem there. So, then when the money came I said, "That's me! Rutgers for me!" [Laughter]

SSH: Did you know what you wanted to study when you came to Rutgers? Had there been a mentor in high school that had focused you in a certain direction?

SFM: … There wasn't much you could do. That a black man could do.

KP: You hadn't really had a sense that you would …

SFM: I felt that the best thing I could do was get a job teaching, or go in the post office or become a policeman, or something like that. So, I said, "I'll go to Rutgers," and I went into the Education Department because there was a glimmering hope that something might happen there in terms of, you know, schools.

KP: Before leaving Princeton totally, … one of the questions I wanted to ask: your parents, did they belong to the NAACP or any other organization interested in civil rights representation?

SFM: Not that I know of. I don't think they were very active either religiously, politically, or community wise. They were to the extent that, in terms of social, he was a Mason. My mother was an Eastern Star. She was a deaconess, or whatever you call them, in the church, and he was an elder in the church. But, when it came to militancy in pushing race relations they just didn't do it.

KP: Do you know how they felt, for example, about Garvey and DuBois? You know probably even better than I do, there was a real split between them, which maybe historians have made it … more of a split for them, between the Garvey and the De Bois movement. Growing up did you ever have discussions about either Garvey or De Bois, different views? Do you remember anything?

SFM: No, neither one. The discussion was always about Booker T. Washington, who's the third element in this whole early 20th Century era.

KP: So, your parents really were, in a sense, firm believers in Washington's philosophy?

SFM: … Well, my father felt that, "There was not much more I could do with my education." Okay? That's the way he felt. "But, I'm gonna get out there and get as many jobs as I can." My mother said, "Okay, I've made it this far, and I'm gonna see that I do better for my kids than was done for me." And that was about it, really. There wasn't a lot of philosophical talking about Booker T. Washington, you know, and the veil that falls over his head and all that kind of stuff. The veil of knowledge and all that. [Laughter]

KP: … You listed your father's political affiliation as Republican.

SFM: Republican, that's right.

KP: So, he was a loyal party …

SFM: He was a Republican from Lincoln on. [Laughter] That's right.

KP: So … in '32 he voted for Hoover or did he, in the '30s did he switch at some point to Democratic?

SFM: When I went into the service he was still living, and he switched on Roosevelt because I tried to explain to him what Roosevelt was doing to make the nation a little more equal. In fact, I

got a lot of my stuff from Peter Charanis. Okay, do you know Peter Charanis?

SSH: No. Explain.

SFM: You'll find out one day who Peter Charanis was. He was a professor here at Rutgers. When he came to Rutgers he could hardly speak English, and he was one of my first professors. But he was a Jeffersonian, and I learned a lot about Jefferson and a lot about life from Peter Charanis, professor of history at Rutgers University. Sorry. [Laughter]

KP: No, no. That's okay.

SSH: That leads me to my next question. Are we leaving Princeton now?

KP: It's actually Rutgers related. … Paul Robeson, obviously when you went to Dean Metzgar to ask about the scholarship, how much of a, he's probably one of the most illustrious figures to come out of Princeton. Was he inspirational at all to you when you were growing up, particularly going to Rutgers, I mean, you were following, in a sense, Paul Robeson?

SFM: The only thing I knew about Paul Robeson when I was young was that he was a great artist. A great black artist, let's put it that way. That he could sing, that he could act, but nobody every mentioned his social or political affiliations. In fact, they knew the whole family, most of the people in Princeton knew the whole family from the father on up, and he, those people who knew him never talked negatively about him. And there wasn't anything negative to talk about except the fact that he was accused of these Communist leanings. In fact, I talked to Paul Robeson Jr. about the same thing, about two or three years ago, and he said he felt that they had given his father a bad rap. One of those things.

KP: It's interesting to hear of Dean Metzgar's cool reception 'cause one of the things I've been struck with when I've interviewed people for this Oral History project, I've often wondered how much of this is selective memory or people tell me what they think I want to hear. But a lot of people really have very memorable, it's a big memory for them when Paul Robeson used to come back to campus. And even people who had been more conservative really have expressed admiration for him. And I'm curious, when you were going here, what do you think most students at Rutgers felt about him? What was your sense of it?

SFM: When I was going here, Paul Robeson was played down. Discussed very little. He was a legend, of course, so far as his football prowess was concerned, and things like that. But, generally, those people with whom I talked, and I only talked to Metzgar twice, to my knowledge, in a personal conversation like I'm having with you now. It was my opinion that most of the people said, "What are they knocking on him for?" That's the way most of the undergraduates and people I talked with felt. What the heck, you know, it was a ... crazy time. I'm talking about '37 to '41. You know what was happening. I mean in Europe.

KP: Yes, oh, no ...

SSH: Much to tell.

KP: Yes.

SFM: Right.

KP: Since you brought it up, we can, I mean, you were here in this period that Melanie and Sandra and all my students taking the course have to read the *Targum*.

SFM: Yes.

KP: They read the *Targums* of the '20s, the '30s, and '40s, and there was a lot of discussion after the fraternities and the football stories, about the approaching war, the coming of war. How did most students feel about the coming of World War II, both before 1939 and then after 1939?

SSH: How aware of this craziness in Europe were you?

SFM: I think that we were mildly aware, but not heavily aware. I don't think … the real awareness came until, until the, it was after, until just before Pearl Harbor. Just before Pearl Harbor when they changed their concentration from the eastern powers to Japan, when the United States did. That's when the newspapers got it, and in those days most of us only read the front page, anyway. [Laughs] … I think they got, and of course you could see it, the difference in, the change in the ROTC setup at Rutgers. All of a sudden it became the thing to be a, what do they call it? Advance course first, okay, rather than just, we all had to go because we were required as a land grant college to take two years of ROTC. And I fought the whole thing.

KP: You did not want to do the mandatory …

SFM: If they said, "Column left," I turned right. [Laughter]

MC: So I guess you didn't last very long then in ROTC?

SFM: I lasted. I lasted because of Matt. The captain of the unit was the manager of the football team. So he kinda treated me with kid gloves. [Laughter]

KP: How well prepared were you for Rutgers? How well did Princeton prepare you?

SFM: I did well in French, I remember. I recall that I did very well in French. Like I said I got Peter Charanis very early and I enjoyed the way he did things. So, what happened was I broke my wrist, my right wrist and I'm right handed, so I had to do everything with my left hand, and you know, when it came to exams you ... have to write a lot. And he said "Well, try to," he said, "What you've got to do is you've got to condense these things, because I don't expect you to write six pages when you can do it in three." And that made me think about a lot of things that I wasn't thinking about before. And from then on, like I said, Hamilton, Jefferson, I liked Jefferson anyway ...

---------- END TAPE 1 SIDE 1 ----------

SFM: ... Do things with ... your peers. And somebody said, "Isn't there a Paul Robeson

scholarship here at Rutgers?" And I said, "I don't know." And he said, "Why don't you go up and see Dean Metzger?" [Laughter] And those days you'd go right up to the dean, you know what I mean. I went in, "I'd like to see Dean Metzger." "What do you want to see him about?" "I want to see him about the Paul Robeson scholarship." And the lady who worked there looked shocked and went in and told the dean, the dean came out and he had my name on a sheet of paper. We sat down and talked but he was very negative about the whole thing, very negative.

KP: You mentioned you had another meeting with him, do you remember the second meeting you had with Dean Metzger?

SFM: I don't remember anything about the second.

KP: Yes.

SFM: I just remember talking to him in terms of something that had to do with a class or something like that.

SSH: When you asked about the Paul Robeson scholarship and you said he was very negative, do you think you were set up to go ask this question or ... ?

SFM: Oh, no. Oh, no.

SSH: ... Did he feel you were coming at him or being facetious or ...

SFM: No, I don't think so. I don't think he did. I think he, he was just brusque, at that time. That's the way he was. He could of, it could have been caused by something else. I don't know what. But, you know, you give a person the benefit of the doubt when you're talking with them, because you don't know what they were doing just before they started talking to you.

SSH: That's good advice.

SFM: Yes.

KP: … Did you like going to chapel or what do you remember of chapel? Because everyone had to go, how did you feel about chapel?

SFM: Well, the last two years I commuted from Princeton. So I got out of chapel. You mean the Sunday chapel or do you mean ...

KP: Oh, both actually, 'cause if you lived here you had to go to Sunday chapel.

SFM: Well, I got out of that, you know, I signed a statement. On the chapel that we had, I'd go and go half to asleep in the thing. [Laughter] I don't remember much about it, if that's what you're asking me. They'd make announcements ...

SSH: Who sat on either side of you? Someone said that made a big difference in chapel … .

SFM: I don't remember who sat beside me. I know they assigned seats or something in there. It was in the chapel at that time. No, I don't ... remember much about chapel.

KP: Where did you live when you were attending? You mentioned the last two years you commuted from Princeton, but the first two years you were living here. Where did you live?

SFM: I lived on Morrell Street, right behind the gym. At a lady's house. She had about four students in there.

KP: Had you tried to live on campus? Did you want to live in a dorm?

SFM: Well, there was only one dorm. It was that one.

KP: Ford Hall.

SFM: Ford, yes, Ford and Winants. Yes, that was all the ... If you didn't, they were building the one, the Quad up here when, I think it was finished maybe the year I graduated or the year before I graduated. But there wasn't much to select from at that time. The women had better facilities than the men did, for more women. My sister lived over there for a couple years. But I just preferred it, I mean, I could get right here and get on the train and get back to Princeton in fifteen minutes. It wasn't a big deal. I had always dreamed of going to a college, that's why maybe one of the reasons why I ... picked Dartmouth, I wanted to go up into the bucolic hills, you know? [Laughter]

MC: And you were a student in New Brunswick.

SFM: That's right. That's right. And I'd look over the mud flat. [Laughter]

MC: Do you remember how much you paid per month for rent and was that a problem to cover?

SFM: No, it wasn't a problem. I'd say the rent was less than, less than twenty dollars a month, less than twenty dollars a month. And I ... can tell you one thing about rent, I have a good friend named, Barclay Malsbury, he's in our class, and he wanted to rent a house. It was up, I don't know when Livingston Avenue, not Livingston … Anyway. And he wanted me to go in with it. They had, I think they had, three bedrooms and we were gonna put about eight people in it. And the lady just wanted to charge us sixty-five dollars a month for the whole house. So I, what I'm trying to compare is what I paid and what the going rate was about that time. Now I'm talkin' about 1938. [Laughter]

SSH: What other activities besides football were you involved in here on campus? Anything at all? Did you write for the newspapers or, I know Professor Charanis was very instrumental in your history?

SFM: I played lacrosse, too. I was on the lacrosse team. And those two sports kinda consumed most of my time here at Rutgers.

KP: Did you work at all when you were going to Rutgers?

SFM: I worked for that NYA.

KP: Oh, National Youth Association.

SFM: Yes, NYA. They had jobs that they gave. … Didn't pay much.

KP: What did you do for your NYA job?

SFM: I compiled a list of professors for Oscar Buros. He was a statistics man. And what I did was, went through all of the catalogs, college catalogs, and picked out all of the people who had some bent toward statistics. He was making a yearbook, a statistics yearbook. In fact, it became ... one of the outstanding yearbooks in that area. And I did that and I'd make changes in it and send out letters, which were already typed to the different people, and catalog the responses. That was about it. It took a, yes, yes, it took a while to do that.

SSH: What did you do during the summers then?

SFM: … Two summers I worked in a camp up there on Lake George. That's where I found out what an Indian kettle was. [Laughter] … I'm not gonna elaborate on that story today. [Laughter]

SSH: Oh, darn.

SFM: And for two years I worked up there, and one year I worked for the Pennsylvania Railroad, on the tracks.

KP: Oh, yes.

SFM: "Candydancer" they called it.

MC: What is that? What did you do?

SFM: You put the ties in and you'd take the ties out of the main line. We would work on the main line between New Brunswick and Stelton.

KP: How'd you get the job with the railroad?

SFM: Went down and applied for it. They hired people in the summer, hired a big, big staff in the summertime. Younger fellas. But it was hard work. It was hard work. I remember many a day I'd get off that train. Well, you'd get free rides … on the train … and I'd get off the train and get on my bicycle and had to walk my bike home I was so tired. [Laughs]

KP: … From the *Targum*, there was a very rich social life at Rutgers, fraternity life. Did you take part in any of the social activities like dances or balls or … fraternity parties?

SFM: I would say I went to an average number. An average number. Maybe the class, the class,

I think I went to all the class dances. … I escorted someone of course. Not a girl from NJC, no. And I went to Buck Hill Falls once. You know the winter thing they have at Buck Hill Falls? I went there.

KP: Actually we don't know about the winter. You're the first to mention … Buck Hill Falls.

SFM: I was in ... the chorus for a while. I don't know what they called it, call it now. But every winter they'd have a concert at Buck Hill Falls and at the same time they had a Rutgers weekend at Buck Hill Falls. In other words, the cost was minimal for you to go up and spend a weekend at the ... Rutgers. It was like going to Saint-Moritz in Switzerland, or something like that. That's the way we felt, even though Buck Hill Falls was small compared to Saint-Moritz. [Laughter]

KP: I guess on that line, how much traveling had you done before the war? Had you traveled north, south, west?

SFM: Before the war I hadn't traveled. I had gone to Chicago once, to the World's Fair in 1933.

SSH: Your whole family went?

SFM: My sister and I went. We went all the way to Chicago and back on the bus.

SSH: Oh, really?

SFM: Yes. The Greyhound bus.

MC: Did you have family there?

SFM: Yes. … She was about twelve and I was about fourteen I guess.

SSH: My gosh.

SFM: Yes. We went all the way out to ... And that's the farthest I ever went until I got into the service. … I had gone to Lincoln University once to see one of my classmates there, but so far as anywhere else I had never been ... more than a hundred miles from here.

SSH: Were these cousins that you stayed with in Chicago, or, I mean, what do you remember about the World's Fair?

SFM: Not much now. Not much at all. Not much at all. I don't remember very much about it.

KP: … You mentioned Dr. Charanis, who … didn't retire until the late '70s. I never knew him personally, but … a lot of people tell me about Dr. Charanis.

SFM: Yes.

KP: But you mentioned your favorite professor as Dr. Raddin.

SFM: Raddin, yes. John [George].

KP: Could you tell us a little about him?

SFM: He was an English professor. And he was a person who tried to get you to become interested in, he was particularly interested in Old English and the Chaucer area and things back there. And it was hard to get ... sophomores in college interested in Chaucer. [Laughter] But he did. He did. He'd wake us up. We'd be all sitting there and he'd, you know he would, he was very active in the way he quizzed people about things. He didn't try to quiz you, he tried to motivate you, not try to embarrass you, you know how some professor can say, "Well, who discovered America in 1492?" [Laughter] But, what I'm tryin' to say is that he left. He became dissatisfied with Rutgers and left and went to Cooper Union College. I don't know where Cooper Union is but I remember he was going to Cooper Union. Because at that time Fred Lacey, who's one of the classmates of mine, he's a retired judge, a Federal judge whose, and he and I used to sit next to each other and we had a long friendship in that class and we've still been friends. I talk to him maybe two or three times a year even now.

KP: … One of my first interviews made a point that, very directly he said how few, as he remembered it, generally Rutgers would take one black student, one Hispanic student, and one handicapped student. The way he put it … that was the quota. There were very few black students at Rutgers.

SFM: Right.

KP: How did you feel having so few? … We could look at it in retrospect and say you must have felt very isolated.

SFM: Yes, it was, it was ... I think this is one of the reasons why I stayed at home. Because I felt, you know, at least at five or six o'clock in the afternoon I could change my whole perspective on life. I was the only black student in my class. Two years after, I think the next year I don't remember anyone, that would have been juniors when I was senior, sophomore Harry Hazelwood, the judge up in Newark is and Walter Alexander, a dentist up in Newark. They were the two blacks in the class after that. Now I can't tell you anymore because I, because of the war situation things kinda changed. There were a lot of things that were done around here that, courses were cut, requirements were lowered, you'd get credit for things that you didn't even do. It was typical. … But I, the only person that I remember, the only persons that I remember, are the people who helped me at Rutgers who came before me. There was a fella named Howard Waxwood, whose name I gave you, who was black. There was another fella' named, John Morrow, M-O-R-R-O-W, who was black, and these guys graduated '20, '20s, '30s, late '20s, '30s, I'd say. And I don't recall any, I used to go and look at that, they had a, they had pictures of every graduate by class in the library at one time. You could file through the thing and look at the pictures of the people. And I used to do that when I was an undergraduate here. And I never, except for those guys and one more fella, who was a professor down at, at Virginia, Virginia University, that I recall who were black. There were the two. What were their names? I'll remember. Baxter, two Baxter brothers, who were in a class before me. One was in the military

service with me, Ernie. And the other one had owned a restaurant up in Flemington for years. The last time I looked him up, it was maybe about five years ago, when I was inviting people to our fiftieth reunion and he was still there. I don't remember what his name was. Now those are the only, I'm givin' you, in a nutshell, Paul Robeson, of course. I talked to him once after a concert. … He invited all the Rutgers graduates to come and say "hello" to him. He always did that, in this area anyway.

KP: I got the impression that students really loved concerts. His concerts were really well-liked.

SFM: Right, oh, yes, oh, yes. You'd get … the people from the community, too.

KP: Yes. …

SFM: You know, [who] came [to the concerts]. I remember the lady whose house I stayed at, she, when he had that concert here, I think she bought a gang of tickets. You know, to take her friends to it. The people, the administration, had a different concept of Paul Robeson than the students and the community had of him. That was my opinion at that time.

KP: Yes. The students loved him, but the administrators were more cruel towards him.

SFM: Right. Right. Right.

KP: … There was a controversy that we saw surface in the *Targum* over one of the honorary societies, I think in the agricultural school, that had in its constitution an explicit color bar. Do you remember that dispute at all? It really dominated some of the *Targums*. I can't remember the honorary fraternity's name but …

SFM: I don't know. Baxter was an Ag. Baxter was an Ag and he lived in one of the barns over there ... Somebody had to take care of the animals, okay? And some of the student who were Ags got scholarships … to live in the apartments. They're beautiful. It was beautiful apartments, you know, three bedroom apartment with two people in it. [Laughter] Gettin' jealous? [Laughter] And if you opened the door you could smell the horses, though. [Laughter] But anyway, he was very active with agriculture and I don't know, that might have been when he was there. I don't know. … But the only thing that I know about anything that had to do with discrimination was when I was on the lacrosse team, we went to play Maryland and they wouldn't let me play. Now this was, I'm talkin' 1939, 1940, one of those years. But, and there was a guy named, Ed Isaacs, at that time, who was, who wrote articles for both the *Targum* and, the *Home News* is it? And he wrote an article about that in one of the two papers. And the coach of the lacrosse team was also the superintendent of the reformatory at Jamesburg at that time, and they jumped on him about it, about not lettin' me in the game, but …

KP: Did you travel with the team?

SFM: I traveled. That's the only game I never played in.

SSH: Where did you go that you couldn't play? To Maryland …

SFM: Well, it's up to the, to the coach to put who he wants out on the field. Now he ... didn't play me. And that was it, yes. Not that it would have made any difference because Maryland had a beautiful team. [Laughter]

KP: Did you travel with the team overnight? The lacrosse team or the football team?

SFM: Oh, yes.

KP: Did you ever have any problems?

SFM: No, oh, no. We never had any problems.

KP: Yes.

SFM: In fact, ... one of the trips that I remember most is the one that we took to Ithaca to play Cornell. And we went up on the train, believe it or not. You can't get to Ithaca on the train nowadays. [Laughs] You can hardly get to Ithaca on anything. [Laughter]

MC: Before the interview you mentioned that you found Rutgers University sort of snobbish while you were here because of this …

SFM: I think that they felt that they were, and ... that they were part of the second Ivy League. That's the way most of the students felt.

KP: … I've often been surprised. The image of reading the *Targum* is, in many ways, of a poor boys' Princeton.

SFM: Yes.

KP: But when interviewing a lot of students you find out, I found out, that many were barely … In Princeton most of the students came from real wealth, whereas at Rutgers, … many of them come from nothing. I mean, there're often desperate circumstances to try to get through school.

SFM: Yes, we had a fella in our class who's parents owned a pottery in Trenton. I can't recall his name now. (Chester Wenczel)

SSH: Roy Brown?

SFM: No. I don't remember now what his name was. But generally speaking, you could tell that we weren't of the same crust as the Princeton guys were. [Laughs] … We were just as intelligent, but when it came to other things we were have-nots.

KP: 'Cause you could probably tell a difference. You got to know, indirectly, the Princeton social world … fairly well.

SFM: Yes, yes, yes. Well, … you assume things about people because you read about 'em or you hear about 'em. It's like, like I talk about Madonna a lot, because I think she's the epitome of whatever you want her to be. And I think that many of the guys that went to Princeton, their parents or somebody told them, "You're in Princeton now, you gotta act like Princeton, and you do it." I don't think they were bad people. I don't think that Rutgers people are bad people who did some of the things they had to do. I just think they had to do 'em because of necessity.

KP: Had you thought of ever trying to join a regular fraternity on fraternity row here?

SFM: No, I hadn't. I had ... decided that I was going to join a black fraternity when I ... was in high school. The reason why was, because the fraternity that I'm a member of, my uncle was one of the founders of the fraternity. So there wasn't much ... anywhere I wanted to go other than that. And it was founded at Cornell University in 1908 and I've done a couple of articles on that for the Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity news-letter. I don't know where it is now. That was done years ago. But I was approached, if that's what you mean. There was no …

SSH: Exclusion.

SFM: … No exclusion on my part.

KP: So some fraternities … urged you to rush with them?

SFM: Chi Psi was, I remember Chi Psi. Is it Chi Psi up the street here? Chi Psi. Yes, I think Chi Psi was one of the fraternities that approached me. But there were three or four of 'em. So there was no ... I mean so far as I'm concerned, I chose the one I chose because I wanted that one. I never found any ... You were gonna ask this question sooner or later.

KP: Yes. I was just curious about it. …

SFM: I never found any evidences … of discrimination at Rutgers University. I have never found any. I've found people who were as redneck as redneck could be. There's no question about that. I've, you know, people who are anti-everybody. Back in the '30s you know, people, you had a German-American Bund right up here in Irvington, New Jersey. And some of their kids went to Rutgers at that time. But what I'm tryin' to tell you is I had friends here, I still have some. ... Guys who are still very good, like Fred Lacey's a very good friend of mine, Harry Hazelwood, Walt Alexander, the two black fellows …, the Baxters were. … The one that died was a friend of mine. The Peterson family up on, on Morrell Street, whose son went to Rutgers. ... The only negative thing that I ever, that I ever got mad about, the only thing I ever got angry about at Rutgers was, one day we were playing NYU in lacrosse. And we were, I had played earlier in the game and I got hit in the eye and they put a patch over it and I wanted to go back in but the captain of the team refused to accept me back in the game, you know. And I said to the coach, I said, "Coach, if you want … to put me back in the game, you put me in the game." And the coach said, "Well, if the captain said that I'll accept what he says." I quit the team after that. But that was the only negative thing because I thought that this guy didn't like me, the …

KP: The captain of the team.

SFM: The captain of the team. Yes. It was a personal thing, but again you remember things, you remember things that kinda stab you a little bit. But other than that in Rutgers, I can think of nothing, nothing. Oh, yes, I did work one summer for the banking institute, you know the bankers?

KP: Yes.

SFM: The bankers. They have a thing here every summer, yes, I worked for that.

KP: What did you do for that?

SFM: … We ran one of the houses. You know, we ... ordered the whiskey for them, this was late in, you know, my life, so I was over twenty-one. [Laughter] And, we ordered the whiskey for them, we made sure that the person who cleaned, it was one of the fraternity houses they stayed in, and made sure the place was clean. We didn't do the cleaning or anything like that. They had somebody to do the cleaning. And made sure that the food was prepared for them, and that their car was put where it had to be put. Things like that. It was kinda like being house-man for a, for a manor. [Laughs] But they had those in the summer, that job lasted 'bout a month I think.

KP: You mentioned that you did not like ROTC very much, but you did apply for advanced training but was not accepted. You listed that on the survey.

SFM: Yes.

KP: What made you, what made someone not very enthusiastic for advanced training, decide for ROTC at all, to decide that, "Maybe I should apply for advanced?" [Laughter]

SFM: I just did it for spite, I think. … I said, "They're not going to accept me anyway, so I'm gonna apply." You know, you know how you do things sometimes just to provoke a person.

KP: Yes, we were contemplating that.

SFM: Yes. [Laughter]

KP: You mentioned earlier talking your father into voting for Franklin Roosevelt. … You were a Democrat when you came here, what were your thoughts about the Roosevelts and Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal? Did you …

SFM: … At that time Rutgers … was heavily, heavily Republican.

KP: Yes.

SFM: Heavily Republican. In fact, I remember the Wendell Willkie campaign.

KP: He came to Rutgers?

SFM: He came here. That's right, he came here. And everybody was ecstatic about the thing. And the only reason I liked him was because they called the class off. [Laughter] No, most of the students were, at that time, ... leaning toward Republicanism. And the faculty, you never know what they were gonna do because you weren't very close to them. There wasn't a close faculty at that time, there were a few people that … you can point to, but generally speaking, they went over to their little houses in Highland Park and settled down for the winter.

KP: They still do. [Laughter]

SSH: I was going to say that. …

SFM: Do you live in Highland Park?

KP: No, I don't. But there's still a large number of faculty who live there and they still … follow that pattern. Even those that are only part-time. But going back, … did you think the Roosevelt administration would advance the cause of civil rights? What were your thoughts at the time?

SFM: No. At some times, when I was a kid, after you get to a certain stage in your life you forget that you're black. You almost forget it. ... You know it's there, you know what's gonna happen, you just block that out. And I was interested in what he was doing in the area of ... social reform because it was helpin' everybody. You could see it help people. And, you know, like, what's the professor's name from Harvard who wrote the ... story about Roosevelt?

KP: Arthur Schlesinger.

SFM: Yes, Schlesinger. You know like Schlesinger says, if he had just kept goin' we'd a' had everything that we needed.

SSH: Today's the day they're dedicating the memorial to him down in D.C.

SFM: It is? Yes? Today. Yes, I was going to Atlantic City to dedicate the … new arena. [Laughter] Miss America, you know, and all that. [Laughter]

KP: … Your class was the last to graduate before the United States entered the war, and you mentioned you got the education. What was you first job after graduating? …

SFM: In Trenton. In Trenton … The schools were segregated in Trenton, too, up to the eighth grade. Although, if a kid lived too far away from that segregated school he could go to the school right there. I mean, it wasn't one of these things where … you had to, if you lived way out ... by Bordentown, you had to come all the way over to the other side of Trenton, by the State House, to go to school. No. ... Well, anyway, I was at, it was called New Lincoln School then. You'll find out that you look at most of the schools that are named after people and they're named because of the fact that that person purportedly did something for minority people. And I ... taught there for "x" number of months and they called me into the service. And I never even thought about education any more, until I got out and I applied, I had to have my certificate

reinstated. So in '46, I applied for the certificate and I found out that I had pension rights all the way back to the day I went into the military service. So I said, "Well, I'm going to college." I went to Princeton then, under the GI Bill. There's one of the things that I think was most important to the military. ... To the young military person ... who had no career, the GI Bill, I think, was one of the most important things that ever happened to America. And the fact that he could get a four and a half percent mortgage. Find one of those for me. [Laughter]

KP: You mentioned that you were drafted into the Army.

SFM: Right, right. I only took two years of ROTC and I told you the reasons. [Laughs]

KP: When were you drafted? Do you remember how soon after Pearl Harbor?

SFM: Yes, yes. I remember that very vividly. On the day Pearl Harbor was bombed, I was living in Chicago then, and I was at the football game and they announced it. Chicago, one of the Chicago teams, the Chicago Cardinals they were at that time. And so I went right back home and wrote 'em a letter and told 'em to draft me. About a month later I got the letter, transferring me to the headquarters in Chicago and I was drafted from Chicago.

SSH: Now … just to back up for a minute, you were teaching in Trenton?

SFM: Yes.

SSH: How did you wind up in Chicago?

SFM: I just decided to leave. I don't know. I don't know. You know, at that time, the war was weighing heavily on my mind. In fact, at one time I went down to the headquarters to enlist and they wouldn't take me because they had had their black quota for that month and they said, "Maybe next month."

KP: … In many ways you grew up in an integrated world, but the Army was very segregated. And that really emerged when you were in …

SFM: Right. The South.

KP: … Even when you tried to enlist you encountered this?

SFM: Sure.

KP: Had you thought of other branches of the service, the Navy or the Air Corps?

SFM: When I got into the service I thought about the Air Corps. The Air Corps, of course, was the Army Air Corps then, so I just had to transfer from one … branch of the Army to another. And I did at one time, when they had this Tuskeegee thing, where they were recruiting black recruits for the Air Force, I signed up for it, but I failed the test. I was in the military at that time, but it had something to do with peripheral vision, okay? ... You know how you have something

that you don't know anything about and if they want to flunk you on something, that's what they flunk you on. So it was peripheral vision. So anyway, I just went back to my unit. Kept being a good soldier, that's all. [Laughs]

KP: You were drafted as a private. When did you report? Do you remember what month and year that you actually reported for induction?

SFM: It was in the spring.

KP: The spring of '42?

SFM: Yes, spring of ['42]. It was cold. I remember it was cold in Chicago. Then I went to Battle Creek, Michigan and Fort Custer, and there was still snow on the ground. That's all I remember. What I did between the time I went to Fort Custer and the time I was transferred to, back to, I had to go ... OCS to get my commission. I don't remember much about my … military life. That was about, I'm talkin' about six or seven, I remember going on maneuvers, they had what they call "maneuvers" then. And you probably read about 'em a little bit where, Army maneuvers, where they send you down South, and you'd build a bridge. I was in an engineering outfit so we built a bridge across the river. And I remember that. But other than that I remember going to Fort Benning, to school. I don't remember much about it. Only thing I remember about Fort Benning is Eisenhower was down there at the time I was there.

KP: … You enlisted as a private, and privates in the Army are on the low end of the totem pole.

SFM: Right. Right.

KP: Do you remember anything about your drill instructor and basic training? You hadn't particularly liked ROTC, and ROTC was only a few hours a week whereas when you're in basic training it's on twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

SFM: Well … what happened was I got transferred out to Fort Custer, Michigan. That was a reception center. You know what a reception center is? Where they process you. And then they transferred me with a number of other fellows to Fort, oh, it's in Massachusetts, Camp Edwards, it was Camp Edwards at that time, now (Otis?) Air Force Base, okay? Camp Edwards, Massachusetts, and I went there and I … went into training. And because I had been in ROTC I knew something about close order drill, so actually they picked me out to be one of the acting sergeants. [Laughs] And they gave me one stripe, like Gomer Pyle. [Laughter] And I learned very quick, I got the manual and I learned very quickly and I took a test to go to OCS. Another test. You take a test in the Army all the time. And then I went from there, in the summer that year I was still up on Cape Cod, and just beginning to enjoy it with all the women around and everything, and they sent me to Fort Benning, Georgia. [Laughs]

SSH: Did you see Eisenhower at all at Fort Benning?

SFM: I saw him in a car, but I don't remember anything about him. He was just a general, a little general then. One star at that time.

KP: You were in an engineering battalion. … It was a segregated battalion.

SFM: Right.

KP: How well were you treated, do you think, by the Army? In terms of, I guess, basic things like food, clothing, supplies, responsibilities? Did you have any sense of that, or, I guess, any grumblings, either you or your comrades had?

SFM: The whole thing was new, what I'm talkin' about. They ... it was the 385th Engineer Battalion, then on the end it had SEP: separate. That meant it wasn't a part of any larger unit, you know what I mean. There's gotta be a regiment. There had to be a regiment but it was black so it was separate. And ... the equipment that we had, the bridge construction equipment, was brand new. It had never been used. It'd never been used. That's how new it was. They probably had that stuff stacked up somewhere gettin' ready to move it. So we had to learn from scratch how to do it. And they sent some engineering lieutenants in there that were pretty good, and we all learned together. It was like learning your ABCs, almost.

KP: In your unit how many black officers did you have and how many white officers.

SFM: There were no [black] officers. … Everybody above the rank of master sergeant was white.

KP: And were they predominantly white Southerners or Northerners?

SFM: They were Northerners. All that I knew were Northerners. See, I was only in the unit for about six, seven months. Seven or eight months, maybe. Not very … long in terms of military life.

KP: … Was OCS something you wanted to do or were you sort of prodded by your commander?

SFM: Well, I said to myself, "I'm in this Army now, I'm gonna try to make as much out of it as I can." And then I went down to OCS and it was a ... pleasurable experience. They had, we were the 31st Company. All black. All black. There were three barracks in the 31st Company. There were two white barracks and one black. The guys mingled. I mean, it was no problem. We ate in the unit's, every unit had a mess, so we had our own mess. And the food was good and most of the servants, or most of the military who did the menial work were black anyway, so we kind of got the best, because they wanted to make sure that we got it right, did everything right, you know. They'd clean our rifles for us, everything. You know, these, the guys who were barracks orderlies would clean everything. I got sick of that stuff after a while.

KP: So they were very proud.

SFM: They were very proud. That's right. And, of course, the post exchanges were not segregated, but the post exchange that they had in the area where most of the blacks were, were personneled by black people and all, you know, from the community. And they were very proud

of the unit, you know, and everything else. And when we had our graduation, they showed up, you know, people came and showed up. But Fort Benning had a kind of a tradition of liberalism anyway, because most of the black units were infantry units and had been trained there. Like the 24th Infantry Division that went out West with the pioneers.

SSH: Buffalo Soldiers.

SFM: Yes, Buffalo Soldiers and everybody else. Well, nobody else wanted to go on those assignments so they sent the poor blacks. [Laughs] I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, Professor. [Laughter]

KP: No.

---------- END OF TAPE 1, SIDE 2 ----------

KP: This continues an interview with Simeon Moss on May 2, 1997 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler, and

SSH: Sandra Stewart Holyoak

MC: And Melanie Cooper.

KP: And you were talking about Fort Benning being a more liberal place. It was also in Georgia, which, the South in the 1930s and '40s was a rough place. … I've heard of a number of incidents that black servicemen had real problems in the South. Do you remember any incidents off base or that happened to you and not to your comrades?

SFM: Not at Fort Benning, but in Atlanta. Just once, and this was untoward because of the person that did it, not because, well, it was an invective leveled on a group of soldiers, a group of black soldiers. What happened was, we were, our class had graduated from Fort Benning as second lieutenants and we were all waiting in the Atlanta station to go to our assignments. Most of them which were … in the northeastern part of the United States. So, we were standing there in the waiting room and there was a boy who looked at us and said, "Look at all those niggers." The boy happened to be retarded. You could see that the boy was retarded and, of course, the average person would not have paid any attention to him, but one ... of the lieutenants was also, black lieutenants, was also very hot-headed. So he grabbed the kid. At the same time the black MPs and the white MPs came in to deal with the situation and about the same time that the situation was becoming very, very ticklish, one of the trainmen came up and said, "I have a son," a white trainmen came and said, "I have a son that's in the military and I'll take these fellas and put them in their car. Just leave them alone." So the MPs agreed that they would not push the situation and the MPs' sergeant came up to one of the fellas, to one of the lieutenants and said, "I'm sorry that this happened," and the parents of the child said that they were sorry that it happened, but you know how these kids are. That was about the only big incident … that really ... became something that might have burst out into a real cause celebre or something like that, but it didn't.

KP: You never had a problem, for example, white enlisted personnel refusing to salute you at

Fort Benning once you had your bars? Do you remember any?

SFM: No, I don't. I don't. I have never seen any disrespect on the part of any military soldier where a person acted like … There are times when people don't salute you because they don't see you. There are a lot of times, and ... you have to remember if you're a minority, that sometimes you don't even exist to the people around you. I hate to say this, but it's true. You ask a person, "Did you see John Jones go down the street?" John Jones might have walked right by him, and they were not thinking, and they didn't see John Jones. So … what I'm saying is I have never, a blatant disrespect, no, no. Not at any time when I was in the service.

SSH: Where did you go then, from Fort Benning?

KP: Before we go from there.

SSH: Oh, sorry.

KP: A lot of people, I don't know if you know Cranden Clark, but he's in the Class of '44, but he talks at length in his interview about Fort Benning and the rigors of the training. Do you remember anything about your training at Fort Benning in terms of, particularly the long marches I've been told? …

SFM: No.

KP: No. You don't.

SFM: I think it was a snap. I think Fort Benning was a snap. [Laughter]

KP: Interesting.

SFM: And this was in the middle of, you know, I'm talking about the fall of 1942 now when everybody was uptight. Very uptight. The training was rigorous, but we expected it. ... We didn't do too much hiking. We did a lot of exercising and ... conditioning exercises, but not a lot of hiking. We knew that when we got to our units we were gonna walk. We were infantry. I really, personally, didn't see the need for hikes. You got enough of everything else, you know, with the bullets whizzing over your head that high. You don't care anything about walking. You get down, down. [Laughter]

KP: … In training, especially in infantry, what did you think would be the hardest part of being an infantry leader?

SFM: I think the hardest thing is making your unit a fighting unit. What I mean by that is "organization." It's hard when you're out there with the unit and you don't know the nature of your enemy, and they come from all angles, and you really have to ... do a lot of "teaching." When I say "teaching" I mean that everybody's got to know what they're supposed to do at a certain time. And it takes a lot of training. A lot of training. People think you see 'em running across the field, and the thing bombs here and they drop down. I've seen it happen and it's not

that way. It scares you to death. That's what it does. I remember hearing shells go over my head, and I thought sure they were coming down on me. [Laughter]

KP: … What is your most difficult memory of combat? Do you have any particular incident?

SFM: That night that … we were, maybe, a hundred yards from them, and I don't know who that was 'cause I never saw them, … and we had a British unit behind us and we were giving 'em fire instructions, and the guys fired the thing almost in the middle of our unit. That scared me to death. I didn't know what to do: tell them to stop firing, to raise it fifty feet, or what. It was just one of these things. The first thing I wanted to do was to see if anybody was hurt. … You have vivid memories, but they go away pretty fast. It's just like pregnancy, you know? [Laughter] Isn't that right? [Laughter]

SSH: I win on that one. [Laughter]

SFM: Okay.

KP: After Benning where were you assigned to? Where else were you stationed?

SFM: All right. From Benning I came to New York City. I looked at the *Queen Mary* sink. Remember when the *Queen Mary* sank?

SSH: I saw pictures of it.

SFM: I didn't see it. I saw it lying on its side, though. We were a unit. You see, there was still this black phenomenon … and we were the guard unit for all of the military units in the New York area. Staten Island, all the big guys were out on Staten Island, and then at 90 Church Street, most of the other big guys were in this immediate area. And we had the bridges, the tunnels, the radio transmitters out on Long Island, and our home base was Fort Dix. But we'd ... change battalions about every six months, and I was there for about two years. Then, all of a sudden, they finally decided that they were gonna put one of the black units into combat, so … I went from there to Fort Huachuca for a couple of months of training. It wasn't much. They put the unit together, then they shipped us to Newport News, Virginia, and overseas to Italy.

KP: How long did you stay in the New York, New York area?

SFM: I'd say two years. Two, two and a half years.

KP: … That's a long time.

SFM: It is. It was a long time.

KP: And where were you based, specifically? Was it on Staten Island where you made your quarters?

SFM: Well, we changed. We were right in the city at one time there. We were at the edge of

Central Park at one time, at 110th Street. There was a large building. I don't know what the building was, but we were there. I was never at that. That was a headquarters building. I was in a, what they … The reason why I saw the *Queen Mary* was, I was down near the docks. It was an old warehouse that they redid for the military, and they had a company in that. It wasn't bad … not being in New York anymore. [Laughter]

SSH: In Fort Huachuca, what was your training there?

SFM: That was desert, mostly desert, desert. I don't know whether we …

SSH: So it was desert training in case you went to northern Africa?

SFM: Went to North Africa, went through Sicily, and over. Yes.

SSH: So you did go to northern Africa?

SFM: No, I didn't.

SSH: Oh, that was just in case? Oh, okay.

SFM: Yes.

KP: Your duties in New York, I mean, … how many men did you have under you and what kind of assignments would you get to go on? You mentioned that you guarded a number of things, but what would be a given day like, or a given week, or a given month? What kind of …

SFM: Well, most of it was patrol, to make sure the traffic moved through the tunnels. If there were any ... incidents, there was somebody there to help solve, you know, help solve the problems. There were "ready" groups that were ready to go anywhere, do anything, in case something came up. Say a guy dropped a bomb in one of the towers, or the Twin Towers, or something like that. And, up on Long Island was mostly patrol around those, you know, those antennae. At that time, we're not talking about, we're [not] talking about post-war. We don't have all this fancy electronics stuff. … Everything was sent by telegraph, and these ... a whole cluster, I guess, about two hundred or so large antennae. They had to make sure that nobody got to [them]. You know somebody landed on Long Island once? I think it was by mistake they landed. But, we had to patrol … that area, usually by vehicle.

KP: So you were looking for possible sabotage or …

SFM: Right. That's right.

KP: 'Cause the Germans did, in fact, a submarine did, on two occasions, land … saboteurs.

SFM: Yes, yes. There was an atomic energy facility up there that we had to … patrol. Manhattan Project, you know.

SSH: Were you aware of what it was when you were there?

SFM: No. We didn't know what it was. We had all kinds of rumors, like the public did. There are a lot of things that we think we know something about now, after the war, that we really don't know anything about. They told us a lie. [Laughter]

KP: How did you like this duty in New York? Did you feel that they were, that your talents were being used, or did you want to get overseas?

SFM: I just felt that, "Well, what do you expect?" [Laughs] That was about it. "What do you expect?" It's been two years now, and they haven't made any effort to do anything about putting these minority units into combat, and maybe they'll never do it. I'll sit here and enjoy it.

SSH: So was it a shock that you got the orders to Huachuca and then on to Europe?

SFM: It was a shock in that … the unit had been together so long, you know, you talk about over a year, over a period of a couple of years, I guess. You get to know people, and you do have friendships and other things like that, but then, I guess, we all realize that this is what you're in here for. I'll tell you when we really knew that … something was going to happen when they invaded, on D-Day, when they invaded Normandy. I can remember, I was out on the range at … Fort Breckeridge, Kentucky. Now, what I'm trying to say is, I have to think twice about some of the military places I have been to because they move you around so much.

KP: Yes. Yes.

SFM: They move you around so much, and this was when they invaded the Continent and, when we found that out, we kind of suspected that things were going because the units began to be shuffled very quickly after that.

KP: … You were assigned individually, not to a unit. Did your unit stay in New York, or did your unit get transferred?

SFM: … The units ... actually they assigned officers first. In other words, they filled up all the vacancies of 372nd Infantry regiment I was a part of, I think, at one time. When I first went into my military career as an officer, okay? When they needed officers in other units, they began to assign. So they assigned about sixty of us out of the 372nd Infantry regiment to the 92nd Division, and they transferred us, on orders, over a period of about four or five weeks from … Where was I? I was at Fort Breckeridge, then. They gave me fourteen days leave, and then I had to report to Fort Huachuca, Arizona. I went by myself. I remember going by myself. And when I got out there most of the fellas, who were assigned, were there. So we were assigned to different units.

KP: So you lost your old unit? Was your old unit broken up or was it transferred en masse? …

SFM: I don't know. It … was integrated into another black regiment. The 94th. Okay, you know the 94th? That's the one that has the French helmet on it, okay? The 94th. So they took

what was left of black infantry regiments and put them together in the 94th. … I don't know anything about it because it was done after I'd left.

KP: The 92nd, I mean, historians who have written about the black military experience in World War II, was led by General Almond?

SFM: Almond, yes.

KP: It … evoked a lot of controversy at the time among historians about his effect to this, as a division commander, in terms the circumstances he faced.

SFM: Sure.

KP: What are your memories of him? Not that you would have directly known him?

SFM: Yes. No. I didn't know him directly. I only knew him by rumor. [Laughter]

KP: Yes. … And there were, apparently, a lot of them.

SFM: And there are a lot of things we learn by rumor. [Laughs] We used to call him "The Big A." [Laughter] "The Big A," you know? … This was before they called Aquaduct, "The Big A." "The Big A." I remember, "'The Big A'll be here next week," or something like that. He … had some experience with black troops before, I think, if I'm not mistaken. They take out of a resume what they want to take out. But anyway, … he seemed to lean toward conservatism in that he … I don't think he had a full confidence in the effectiveness of black troops. I think he wanted to hold them out and hope that the war would end before he had to use them. That's my big opinion. I can't tell you anything about "The Big A" because I didn't know him. I just heard people talk about him.

KP: Was that the general consensus among the black officers, or even white officers that you knew: that he really didn't have a lot of faith in his, in a sense, in his unit, in his division? Was that a common opinion?

SFM: Yes, that he was very aloof from the whole situation. Yes.

KP: How well …

SFM: I don't know. You know, like I said, he was like a ghost to me and to many of the soldiers. "The Big A." You know, that's all I know.

KP: How well did the white officers and the black officers get along in the division? Did they work well together, or were there problems? Maybe not in your individual case, but in general, did you see that there was tension there?

SFM: I never saw any real tension, you know, … anything … that promoted flashes of anger, or fighting or anything like that. I've never heard … one time of anybody pulling out a gun and

shooting someone else, when it could have well been done in some of the situations we were in. The only thing I knew, again, by the time … you got into combat, all the companies were commanded by blacks, captains. The rest of the officers were black lieutenants, lower officers. All the enlisted men were black. Usually the battalion commander, a lieutenant colonel, was … white. The ... regimental commander was white and, of course, the general. … The only ranking black officers I saw were medical, dental, religious, while I, you know, during the time that that unit was in combat. I had heard that, oh, yes, I had seen General B.O. Davis once, a couple weeks after he got promoted to brigadier general. But, most of the people didn't look, most of the military didn't look … down, on a brigadier general because he didn't have enough rank to … [Laughter]

KP: To really matter?

SFM: Right, right.

KP: What about … your colonel, … Colonel Kimpton?

SFM: Kimpton, yes.

KP: Yes. What do you remember about him? What was his background? Do you …

SFM: I don't remember anything about him except that he was a scaredy baby. [Laughter] That's … what the people told me. They said that … every time something came up that needed a decision, he was gone. [Laughter]

KP: This was in the …

SFM: I, you know, he was not very effective. Let me, that's about … all I can say. He was not very effective.

KP: Do you know anything about his background?

SFM: No, I didn't. I didn't know anything about any of these. I knew very little about the black officers, about their background. Many of them had had a college education, many of the black officers, because they had come out of ROTC. But, by the time we got, oh, get to '44, '45, you get a lot of black officers who've come up through the ranks, too, and go into OCS. But Kimpton, I, the only thing that I can remember about him is that everybody talked negatively of him, which is a heck of a thing to say.

KP: … How much dealings did you have with him?

SFM: Not much. Not much.

KP: It sounds like you didn't see your higher-up officers on the battle line too often.

SFM: No, you didn't. You didn't.

SSH: … They didn't mess together? There were no meetings or ...

SFM: They'd have a meeting every once in a while, but most of the time the stuff was passed up by radio, or liaison people. It's like, how many times do you see, what's the president's name?

KP: Lawrence.

SFM: Well? Well? [Laughter]

SSH: Not that often.

SFM: I was sitting on a dais with him one day … and about two weeks later I had to go down to see him about a, something about the 50th Reunion. He didn't know me. He didn't know me. I sat on the dais and talked to him for fifteen minutes, and, but that's the way … What I'm trying to say is that … when you get up there, you have to forgive these people, too.

SSH: Demographically, the other officers that were serving with you, the other captains and lieutenants, were they mostly from the East, Northeast, or were they from all over the country?

SFM: Most of the college guys were from … black universities or colleges, okay? From Howard, Wilberforce, Morgan State, Atlanta University, and all of those. What happened was … and most of them were with … state units before. … Like New Jersey … had a … regiment. No, had a battalion of a regiment. The 372nd, I think they had. Yes, and they were stationed in Camden and Newark and Trenton. Three units. And then Massachusetts had a battalion, and Ohio had a battalion. Now, these were the only … before the war, these were the only units that had officers in them above the rank of captain, black, because there was a colonel named (Gordine?) who was the Colonel for this regiment, through the state, the combined regiment. He was from Harvard, but, you know? And most of the guys who were colonels and everything were ROTC people from the colleges. But, you didn't get much other than … Most of them were college guys, most of them were college guys that I knew. Not all of them.

KP: A number of people comment in the military that you have a lot of people of very different backgrounds, and one of the things a number of people I've interviewed noticed, for example, particularly in the Army, they would have people in their unit who … didn't know how to read.

SFM: Right.

KP: … They've often describe the "hillbilly" they had in their units who hadn't been used to wearing shoes until they joined the army. Could you tell us some stories in terms of the units you had, particularly your, in the 92nd, about the backgrounds of your fellow soldiers?

SFM: Well, the unit, one time, I'd say this is 1943, '43, early '43, they sent maybe two hundred troops to the unit that I was in, and none of them could read and write. So we had to teach them to read and write. So I went back to … the school, not the Witherspoon School this time, but the school in Trenton. And it happened that one of the guys … who was teaching in the school had

been in the, was in, the New Jersey National Guard. So I got … some stuff from him, and we taught 'em … how to read. If a person wants to learn how to read it doesn't take him long, and these kids wanted to learn how to read. But, in terms of their washing, we had to take them in and shower them, show them how to shower. Clothes, we had to teach them how to separate their clothes, so that when they went to the laundry you had whites with whites and blues with blues and so forth. And, of course, I learned a lot myself. [Laughter] But, what I'm trying to say is, yes, there were. Especially from mountainous areas, both white and black. I only saw the black ones.

KP: Yes.

SFM: But I'm sure that what I'm saying about these guys are the same as some of the guys that came from West Virginia, Kentucky.

KP: Oh, no. That's partly why I'm asking. Because I know a number of people have described, particularly from Kentucky …

SFM: Yes.

KP: … And most of the lower parts of the South.

SFM: They're illiterate, but they could count money. That's one thing that I found out about them. They could count money. You'd say, "Give me $42.30," and that guy would get you that $42.30 out of that money real fast. [Laughter] So you didn't have to worry about math. So you told them instead of, you know, all the markers you have on the rifle sites, you just tell them to put it where you want to put it, you know. If you're five thousand yards, you put it on the 5; six thousand, you put it on the 6. You don't go through a lot of explaining and telling them, "Now the flight of the bullet is different, you know, for five than it is six."

SSH: The training that you went from the United States with, to combat, did you feel that it was adequate? Did you feel prepared from the top to the bottom? I mean, we talked about "The Big A," now, from your level …

SFM: Yes. … I think that the experience that I got with units was good 'cause I learned how to control things. So far as the training is concerned … I think we were rushed. And I think the whole military situation was rushed in World War II. If you look at it. I'm sure that the professor knows that, too. You look back on it now, you find out we lucked into a good one, and it was a good one that we lucked into.

KP: When did you leave for Italy? When did your unit depart? Do you remember?

SFM: It was in the fall. Or was it in the spring? I don't know. … All I remember is that we got on these ships, you know, they were … troop transports, little ones, and we were out on the ocean for a long time, and I was seasick half the time. [In a whisper] "God, this is a terrible feeling …" [Laughter]

SSH: … Did you travel by convoy or were you pretty much alone?

SFM: When we got to Italy we went to a staging area right outside of, it was about, it was between Florence and Livorno, okay? Up near Florence, Livorno and Pisa. If you take that triangle in there, we were about in the middle of it. 'Cause I could, … a couple of days I'd go by the Leaning Tower. [Laughter] But anyway, … we were put there. … A black trucking company came when we unloaded from the ship. Getting on the ship it was very formal. They had to check everything, and everything on you and everything out. Getting off the ship, you just took it off with you. [Laughs] And we got on the trucks, went into this beautiful wooded area. We were maybe thirty, thirty, forty miles from the front lines at this time, so there wasn't any problem of concealing anything, and we stayed there until the units … we relieved the units up on the front lines.

SSH: The Atlantic crossing to the Mediterranean, was there any concern about submarines or …

SFM: Oh, yes. … You could see the convoy and everything else, and every morning they'd fire their anti-aircraft guns, you know, to test them and things like that. They took all the precautions it looked like, but for the soldiers, what could you do? Just sit and wait.

KP: How cramped were your soldiers?

SFM: Oh, they were cramped! Eight bunks up. Eight, not three. [Laughter] Eight. And the air in those holes were … It stunk in there!

KP: Did you have it better as an officer?

SFM: I think we had four bunks. [Laughs]

SSH: Twice as good.

SFM: Right.

KP: … During the crossing, but in general I mean, how much gambling went on among the men?

SFM: Oh, there was a lot of gambling. There's always gambling going in the military. If the military stops for fifteen minutes, there's gambling. You know that. [Laughter] No, I don't say that much, but it's generally from the time I saw, you know, from the time I saw the first recruits at … Fort Custer, Michigan, until, I guess, the day I got off the boat coming back from my tour of duty, there was gambling. Some kind of gambling.

KP: Yes, yes. What about religious services? How often did the men go to chapel?

SFM: I think the chaplain's role is one of counseling and other things like that, and I think that they perform best in that role. So far as the religious services were concerned, I personally think that, at times, the chaplains were very disappointed because they didn't get the turnout that they

should have gotten. In other words, people weren't very religious when they're on a boat going overseas or going anywhere. Also, on Sunday … when they're in combat.

SSH: What did your parents think, and your younger siblings; were they really proud of you, were they ... ?

SFM: Oh, yes, everybody was proud. [Laughs] … No. They were proud of everybody. The first thing that, many black people were proud that they had a son or daughter in the military service, and that they were functioning. I think that if I had gotten killed in action, my mother and father would have said, "He did it for his country." Very patriotic, very patriotic. Poor: and when I say this, I'm talking about poor people generally at that time. It's like the one day I was on a funeral service. I had to go to a funeral service. I had to go to talk to the mother and father of one of the persons that got killed. … And the mother said to me, "Why was it him? Why wasn't it you? Why wasn't it you?" And, of course, we had gotten all the counseling to know what to do, and the thing you do there is you just say, "I'm sorry," and walk away. But a little later she came along and said, "Son," she said, "Son," she said "Son," and I didn't say anything. She said, "I'm sorry. I guess God was, God was good to, was good to me because, at least, He let me see my son the whole time he was young." Something like that, you know what I'm trying to say. And those aren't the exact words, or anything like that, but what I'm trying to say is that most people felt … that you performed your duty, and if you died in the performance of your duty it was all right.

KP: How well did your men do in combat?

SFM: Combat is a funny thing, in that sometimes you never see your enemy. What happened to us was, we, the unit that I was with when I got wounded, somebody said there were some enemy out in this area, and I asked some fellas, I told them we're going out and get this enemy, and when the enemy saw us coming, they ran. They ... just ran. Now you're talking about infantry troops now. Which we all are. And the guy said to me, "Shall I get 'em?" and I said, "Let 'em go. Let 'em go." And finally, when they turned around and shot at us, then we shot at them. But what I'm trying to say is before the whole thing ended, everything was all over because they ducked somewhere and we didn't go after them. It was getting dark. The next morning Franklin Roosevelt died and they said, "Don't do anything more." And two days later, all the troops had withdrawn. Because they had conceded that, you know, that was that. Another time, the guys were shooting, and I asked what they were shooting at, and they didn't know what they were shooting at. And this gets to be, you know, something that … you have to recognize because you got to find out what they're shooting at. They might be shooting at you. I've heard situations where people in combat have gotten killed just because they were in the wrong place at the wrong time.

SSH: Yes.

SFM: What I'm trying to say is it doesn't look like … If you want me to tell you a story like you see in the movies, I can't tell you a story like that. I don't have any to tell you, really. [Laughter]

KP: How many casualties did you suffer? How many in your company did you lose?

SFM: I would say, in the time I was with the unit that was in the combat, about eight or nine. Which isn't many, but it's too many when you think of war.

SSH: Where did you go from the Tuscan area, or did you stay right in that area? … Where did you go from Florence, Pisa, the triangle where you first landed?

SFM: Okay. … That was the encampment here, and the unit was up here. They moved this unit back and moved us up into their place. See, they relieve units every once in a while. I don't know what the schedule is on it or anything like that, but they do relieve units from time to time. And this was a relief. I don't know what the unit looked like, or what the name of the unit was we relieved or anything else. That's how secretive these things are in the military. There's so much that I don't know. I'm telling you a little bit of what I know. There's so much that I don't know that … if I knew everything I might not have told you what I told you.

MC: How did you receive your Purple Heart?

SFM: What happened was a shellburst got me. That's all, and they took me to the hospital and took the stuff [out]. I'm not going to be like Lyndon Johnson and show it to you. [Laughter] But it's in my back. There're marks in my back and …

KP: Does it cause you any problems?

SFM: No, it doesn't. It's never caused me any. Every once in a while my back feels a little weak, but that can happen from, a weakness in the back can happen from anything. I'm not too ... I go to Veterans Hospital to get an examination about once every three or four years. I go to Veterans Hospital, my doctor looks at it, too, but I go to Veterans Hospital to make sure that if any benefits are going to come to my family that I've proved that I've been there.

KP: … How long were you in the hospital for?

SFM: Quite a while. I'm talkin' about, I'd say, eight to ten weeks. At least, two months.

SSH: Whereabouts were you in the hospital?

SFM: The 10th. That's all I remember was the 10th. The 1st or the 10th U.S. Army hospital, I guess. And it was in Livorno ... Right on the beach. [Laughter]

KP: Did you get to rejoin your unit after getting out of the hospital?

SFM: Yes, yes I did.

KP: Were they still in combat?

SFM: They were in Genoa then. Doing occupation duty in Genoa.

KP: So the war ended while you were in the hospital?

SFM: I think it did.

KP: You also won the Bronze Star and Silver Star. How did you win the Silver Star?

SFM: Well, the Silver Star was a … You know, you don't know how you get awarded an award. [Laughter] You look at these things. … I went to the hospital. When I came back they had a ceremony and they awarded me the … Silver Star. It was on the same day that the guy who recently got the Congressional Medal of Honor got awarded. At that time he got a, not a Silver Star, a [Distinguished Service Medal]. … And then about two months later they sent me a letter telling me that, because I was awarded the Silver Star, I was eligible for the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart. Because I was awarded the Silver Star. [Laughter] That's all I know. That's right. That's right. It's just a pamphlet. I have the paper, home. So, you know, you try to be a hero. [Laughter] Naw, it's a funny thing, but I've seen a lot of people who deserved more than they got in the military, and some who got a lot more than should've been.

SSH: Were you familiar with the person who got the Distinguished Service Medal?

SFM: I knew Baker. ... I wasn't in the same unit with him, but I got to know him and he really deserved it.

SSH: Were you serving in the same area?

SFM: From what I heard. Right in the same general area. I'd say within ten miles of each other

SSH: So what did a kid from Princeton think of Italy?

SFM: Who, me? I didn't mind it. … I took a course in the Florentine art after the war ended. They had, you know, how they're trying to keep the military from falling apart, and they had different programs for them, and they had a course called "Florentine Art and Monuments." And you went to Florence everyday, it was about ten miles from it, and you got together with this professor, and he'd take you around to different places and show you the stuff.

---------- END TAPE TWO, SIDE ONE ----------

SFM: ... You were [in Florence] that I was talking about?

SSH: Yes.

SFM: … No. It wasn't. The things that we saw were not protected at the time. They were protected, but this was when the war was over. So I don't think there's anybody around stealing them at that time. I don't remember too much about that either now. Long time ago.

KP: Did you ever go back to Florence afterwards?

SFM: Yes, I've been back.

KP: What had changed? I mean, you'd gotten to see all this art work and …

SFM: Right, sure. Well, you can't get into any of it now. That's the biggest thing about it. People just horde all this stuff, wherever you go when it comes to art, even in the Smithsonian, and some of that isn't art. You know, wherever you go you have to pay so much to get in, even the Prado. I was in the Prado twice. Beautiful museum. They're more open than any other museum I've seen now. Well, I'm not here to talk about museums. [Laughter]

KP: … What did you think of the Italian people?

SFM: They seemed to be about their business. Even during the war, they seemed to be about their business. I talked with a stone mason one day. … I was near Carrara. You know, where Carrara marble comes from? And … he was asking me about jobs in the United States in stone quarries, and I told him that ... I didn't know anything about stone quarries. And I don't know anything about stone quarries. But he said that they're still mining the stuff, … but they don't have anywhere to sell it during the war. There are a lot of people who are just out of work because they didn't have the means to work. And it made me feel bad because I can't imagine millions of people who are just existing for a few years while a war is on. I had a lot of contact with the people who serviced the military and, you know how the military is. They've got so much … money that they always get somebody to take care of their menial tasks for them. Buggy luggers. [Laughs]

SSH: Did they treat Americans well? I mean, how did …

SFM: … The funny thing about it was when we came into one area, the enemy had moved out. And I think most of the enemy at that time were Nazis, German troops, and they had cut all the girls' hair, you know? … They did it for spite more than anything else because they said that these people, they had cut the girls' hair, because they had … consorted with the enemy. Well, we were the enemy and we hadn't even been there, so I don't know why they cut their hair. But anyway, … you go into certain areas like that and they welcomed you right away because they said, "You don't treat us bad like they do." And apparently that's what people want: good treatment more than anything else; not a lot of … adornment or things like that. They just want you to treat them like people. And that's how, you know, the people that I associated with were. There are some Americans, of course, who are ugly, and you always find them there. Especially if they have a little whiskey in them, and American soldiers are the worst people in the world with whiskey in 'em. [Laughter]

KP: You had some trouble with your men in town having had too much to drink?

SFM: Their attitudes change. Yes. Yes. You don't have too much trouble with them. You can straighten them out real fast in the military. You don't have to explain how you treat 'em, what you do, what you have to do, but what I'm saying is that there are some that seem to have stimuli that make them do things that they shouldn't be doing.

SSH: At this time, when you first got into Italy … were there white units stationed at the same place you were, or what kind of interaction did you have?

SFM: Yes, there was. By the time … of the invasion of Europe. Well, things changed as soon as they got out of the United States. I mean, there was no prejudice, discrimination, in the other armies. Even the Germans had black units. You don't see them. You see very little of them. There were black units from Africa in the German army, and, of course, the Belgians, French. The English had units at that time and everything else, … and, of course, the Italian army had conquered Ethiopia just a few years before the war, so they had some relationship with black soldiers and black people both, too. So, it was, the hybrid was Indians, you know, you saw all kinds of troops there, Australians, Indians, everything. In fact, we had, we even had a 442nd group there with us, you know, the Japanese-American group. So, you saw a lot of different people. But … to some of the inhabitants of the area, when you brought the 92nd Division, and you saw all these blacks, a lot of people thought that most of the people in the United States were black. [Laughter] You can imagine with the Army, you know, you're talking about forty thousand people.

KP: Yes. How much fraternization went on between the men in your unit and Italians?

SFM: As much as would be in any other country. … I suppose there were. You know, I was watching this Japanese picture, was it "Sayonara," the other night. Just happened to see it, you know, where the guy wants to marry a Japanese girl and the prejudice that the military has for it. Well, there was the same type of prejudice in the … American army. Some guys got a hard time. I talked to one fella who said he was trying to get his wife to the United States and they were giving him all kinds, his Italian wife to the United States, and they were giving him all kinds of run arounds. Then, this'll get you, then one of the guys married an Eritrean, she's a black Italian, and they let her go right away. Sent her to the States right away.

KP: This was during World War II?

SFM: This was during World War II, yes.

SSH: Interesting.

SFM: So you run into all kinds of crazy stuff, you know. What is bias? [Laughter]

KP: Did you ever come in contact with any of the men from the 442nd on your side of the regiment?

SFM: Only talked with one of the captains. One of the Japanese guys who was a captain. I did talk with one guy, but it was after the war.

KP: Did you think you would be going in to take part in the invasion of Japan? Did you think your division would … be part of that?

SFM: They talked about it, but I never heard any more about it. It was a rumor.

KP: Yes. When did you hear about the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki?

SFM: I'd say the next day. The next day. They had fairly good news. Well, the newspapers. They were biased, but they printed stuff that … they wanted people to hear.

SSH: Were you able to get mail service with any regularity at all?

SFM: Mail was good. Mail was good, yes.

KP: In the field how often did you get a hot meal when you were in combat? How often did you get a hot meal and how often did you have to rely on K rations and the others who turned to rations?

SFM: Most of the time what they did was, almost all this area is populated by houses. The houses are there, you know, with kitchens and stoves, and what they usually would do was commandeer a kitchen and cook the food. You know, take the K rations out and heat them up and do whatever you had to do with them. I seldom, if ever, ate any right out of the can. Coffee. We had coffee all the time.

KP: What about the shower? Did you ever get any?

SFM: They had shower units. We'd go back once a week to the shower unit. [Laughter] Yes, big, just, if you put ten of those … showers together in a cluster, that's about what it was.

KP: Right.

SFM: Then they'd issue you clean clothes. If you wanted to take the ones back that you got, you could put them in a dryer, a washer and dryer. Then you had to iron them yourself, but if you sent them back to the clothing unit, they'd press 'em for you.

SSH: ... Were you treated any differently by the people in Italy after the war ended and you were just an occupational force? Did you notice any change in attitude at all or, like you say, they were just still trying to get on with their lives?

SFM: Yes, they were out about their business as fast as they could be. They were interested in getting the country back in shape and on its feet. … There was no effort on their part to do anything to impede the peace process once the war was over.

SSH: So all the people, your unit, stayed right in the northern part of Italy, then? Did you go any place else?

SFM: Once the war ended everything moved very rapidly, down and out. People were transferred to different units, units were deactivated, more ships were put into overseas transportation, so forth, so that, you know, you take two months after the war, half the troops that were in Italy were gone.

SSH: Were any of your troops sent to the integrated forces that Truman ordered?

SFM: Well, … actually … the 92nd Division was almost deactivated, so, they had to go to some integrated force if there weren't any more black ones. That's all I can say. Then, that's one of the ways they integrated real fast. Then Harry Truman stepped in and … he just ended the whole thing in one order.

KP: … When did you finally get to leave Italy? 'Cause you wouldn't be discharged until April of 1946.

SFM: Right. What happened was … When'd the war end? You know?

KP: In Europe it was May of '45, Japan, September, '45.

SFM: Yes. I was just thinking. … I don't know. I don't know what happened. It's a blank part of my life. [Laughter] No, I'm only kidding about that, but what I'm saying, they moved slowly on some days. I guess, I was just being shifted from unit to unit. Walking into … the room to see how much money … they had in the crap game ... and out again. [Laughter] Once the war ended things were very leisurely. In fact, you almost wondered what was happening. Yes, people looked at a military thing and, you … know this as well as I do, that … I can't tell you exactly what I did on … in any given unit … at given time right now. Unless they've got it in the records, and I doubt if they got the records very well.

KP: Okay.

SSH: So where were you discharged then? I mean, you were sent back …

SFM: … I came back over on one of the ships and went into New York harbor, and they sent [me] down to Camp Kilmer, and I was discharged. No. … Then they sent me from Kilmer down to Monmouth, and I finally was discharged from Fort Monmouth, I think.

SSH: Did you go right home?

SFM: Yes.

KP: You stayed in the reserves?

SFM: Then I stayed in the reserves, right.

KP: For how long?

SFM: Well, what happened was I signed up for the reserves, okay? … They wanted people so bad that they signed you up and then they gave you "x" number of points for signing up for the reserve, okay? Most of the people signed up for the reserve was because they wanted to earn a pension. I have a pension, and the pension was contingent on the number of points you would accrue over a twenty-year period. Well, I didn't have a twenty-year period then. Then, they

finally, about three or four years later, they formed a reserve, some reserve units, … and they were nothing. They were nothing, really. … They had a number and a name and you met once a week. Or maybe twice a month or something like that. They'd give you information and you'd go home, eight o'clock to ten o'clock or something like that. Everybody wanted to get home before the "Tuesday Night Fights" or whatever, even the Colonel. So, it wasn't very active. It wasn't very active. Then I said, "Well, I'd like to get into … some active status, so I changed from the Reserve to the National Guard, and I stayed in there about eight years, and I helped write manuals. Yes. Training manuals and things like that. Correct them. Things like that. And I'd go to Sea Girt every summer and write on the beach. [Laughter] And, I did that until I got the number points that I needed. Then I resigned and waited till they sent me the letter telling me that they were giving me a pension. That ends my military career.

KP: You joined the American Legion and the DAV. When did you join the American Legion?

SFM: I joined the American Legion about twenty years ago.

KP: Are you active in any post?

SFM: I'm not. I've never been active in any post. I've always paid my dues. I don't wish to be active in any post, and now I don't have to pay my dues because I'm over … sixty-five.

KP: And what about the DAV?

SFM: I joined that because a guy asked me to join. [Laughter] That's all.

KP: You were called up. You have on your survey Korean service: Army 1960 - 1962.

SFM: That's right.

KP: You were called up … in the early '60s?

SFM: Right.

KP: Not in the early '50s?

SFM: Yes, '50. That should be '50. Yes. That should be '50.

KP: Where did you serve during the Korean War?

SFM: They called me up and I went to Fort Dix, to a training unit. And I stayed there for just, Fort Dix and Fort Kilmer, for about the whole time.

KP: And so were you involved with processing soldiers into the military and out?

SFM: Yes. Out. … They were coming back from Europe then. There was a heavy group of soldiers they were bringing back. And the only thing I did was to, the unit did their personnel

records and paid them, and that ended their military career if they wanted to end it. If they didn't we sent it next door to a place where they could re-up. [Laughter]

SSH: Any bonuses?

SFM: Yes.

KP: You stayed in the reserves, but had you thought of staying in the regular army?

SFM: I had thought of it once, but I never pursued it. I never pursued it.

SSH: When you came back from Italy, and from Fort Monmouth, did you have a plan? Did you know right then that you wanted to go on …

SFM: At that time I didn't have a plan. I didn't have anything. I was like most militaries that came out after the war was over. You didn't know what the hell you were going to do. … You didn't care. You knew that you'd get employment, unemployment for ... what, twenty-six years old was I? Twenty-seven? Get unemployment for another six months, you worry about it in six months. Think about it tomorrow. … You know, I used to go into those lines where you go, all you had to do was go sign a slip and get your twenty-five dollars a week. Which was a lot of money then, by the way.

KP: … When you were overseas did your mother, or did your parents, get an allotment from you?

SFM: My mother. My mother, yes. After my father died she got an allotment, yes. He passed away … while I was in the service during the war.

KP: Did you get to go to the funeral?

SFM: Yes, I did.

MC: Were you still in Europe or stateside at this time?

SFM: I was in the States at the time, yes.

KP: When did you first learn about the GI Bill? Do you remember?

SFM: I think I read it in the Army newspaper or something. I think I got it out of the Army paper.

KP: And when did you think you'd take advantage of it? Did you say "One day I think I'm gonna use this to go to graduate school?"

SFM: Yes. What happened, I just one day … at that time Princeton wasn't too good about admitting blacks, either at the graduate level or at the undergraduate level, so I said, "I'm gonna

try 'em out." I called 'em, I sent the stuff in and the dean called me up a couple days later and said, "When do you want to start?" So then I had to, you know. Then I went to the VA up in ... Newark and they put the thing together. They gave me a test. I took the test here at Rutgers, in one of these houses.

KP: It was a VA test that you took?

SFM: Yes, for the qualification test. It wasn't much. If it had been anything, I'd have flunked it. [Laughter]

KP: … Princeton didn't take black students until World War II, which is a point I … very constantly tell my Rutgers students. That we have Paul Robeson, partly, … Princeton's loss is Rutger's gain. You were among the first black students to ever attend Princeton. Did you know of any other black students while you were there?

SFM: There were ... black students in the military program.

KP: Yes.

SFM: In the naval program. And they got legitimate diplomas from Princeton when they graduated in engineering.

KP: But … you're one of the first civilian, admittedly a veteran student, but one of the first civilian students to go.

SFM: Yes. There were, yes, I didn't know of any that had been there before me. But I didn't have any trouble there. … Most of the guys that I was with were … former military.

SSH: … You pursued a career in American history, or colonial history?

SFM: Right. I had to select a field after. You know, you had history, then you'd select a field. I was offered a job while I was there by Mrs. Spellman, the one who the college was named after, her mother's college was named after. But I didn't take the job because I had the phobia of the South at the time.

KP: You didn't want to live in the deep South.

SFM: I didn't want to live in Atlanta, no.

SSH: So from your studies at Princeton, you got your masters or your Ph.D.?

SFM: I got my masters at Princeton.

SSH: And … when did you meet Mrs. Moss.

SFM: I married her, it was a couple of months after I got back from Europe.

SSH: … Obviously you had known her.

SFM: I'd known her, yes. I had met her when I was stationed at Fort Lee, Virginia. She was going to Virginia State College, it's now called Virginia State University. You know how they upgrade all the colleges. Rutgers College was a college, now it's Rutgers University. Yes, she lived here in New Jersey. She lived in New Jersey first. But, it wasn't a very romantic thing, you know, because … most of my courting was done by letter. You know, it was because I hadn't seen her in two years after I went over. [Laughs]

SSH: Had she written to you while you were overseas?

SFM: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That's the thing that I would like to know something about, and you could probably ... Correspondence in the military, between families in the military: did they correspond regularly?

KP: … I've had several people, who ... One case recently, C. Harrison Hill in the Class of '40 had. His wife had saved all his letters.

SFM: Oh, I see. Well, that's good. I was just wondering about that, because I never saw anybody write a letter.

KP & SSH: Really?

SFM: You know, when I think of it, I have never seen anybody. I've heard 'em talk about letters, "I gotta write my sister or my girlfriend," but I've never seen anybody sit down and write the letter.

KP: How often did you write?

SFM: I wrote about, to somebody, about once a week.

KP: Oh.

SFM: Sometimes more often.

SSH: Wasn't there someone, whether it was the chaplain or the Red Cross, wasn't there somebody always encouraging you to write home?

SFM: Yes, yes. There was always somebody encouraging you to write home. But sometimes these people, chaplains, commanding officers and other people, didn't get around very much to check whether you're doing it or not.

SSH: Keep the Colonel quiet? [Laughs]

SFM: That's right. That's right.

KP: Going back to Princeton. Where did you live while you were going to Princeton?

SFM: I lived on Witherspoon Street. Witherspoon Street right where the entrance, the big gate entrance to Princeton University is, that's Witherspoon Street. If you go straight down that street, I lived one, two, three, four blocks from the university. Yes.

KP: With your wife?

SFM: Right. Oh, no. … I thought you meant when I was in college.

KP: No, when you were in graduate school at Princeton.

SFM: Okay, when I was in graduate school, I lived on Alexander Street. That's near the railroad station. McCarter Theater, in fact, part of McCarter Theater's on the … the house is on the side.

KP: You had … experienced Princeton … that you'd worked at Princeton. I mean you must have felt very proud to now be … a student. I mean …

SFM: It didn't bother me. It didn't bother me, really. I, you know.

SSH: He said he was going to give it a try and he did.

SFM: I used to try, you know, you have battles to fight that you win and you forget about 'em. Then you have battles that you fight and you win and you crow about 'em. [Laughter] And, I don't know, there are a lot of people in Princeton that I know today and there are a lot of people who helped me when I was in Princeton. In fact, more people helped me than hindered me, either in my education life or anything like that. … I have never put the kind of value on … book learning as some people do. I think that we live in a mediocre world and we're going to have to exist in it for a long time if we keep acting like we do. The biggest thing is what you're looking into now, wars. Why do we need wars? Do we need 'em to solve … Do we have to kill two million people to solve a problem?

MC: We shouldn't.

KP: You mentioned a lot of people helped you, particularly in graduate school. Who did you study under? Do you remember your advisor and was he a help or a hindrance.

SFM: Yes … His name was Strayer, Joseph Strayer. He was the head of the department and one of the nicest persons I've ever met, and the frankest persons I've ever met. First question he asked me, "You've got so many other things going for you, what're you coming here for?" Then he said, "When you enrolled you had a degree." That's the kind of a man he was, you know? "When you enrolled you had a degree." I didn't want to say, "What do you mean?" because I knew what he meant. But he was very frank about everything and, "What are you gonna use it for?" It's just like I said something about writing a dissertation on Kawme and Nkruma. You know Nkruma?

KP: Ah, yes.

SFM: I was thinking about doing that fifty, sixty years ago. And he said, "You don't want to confine yourself to black people. … If you're gonna do a biography, do it on somebody else. Do it on Jefferson." But, you know, I never thought about that, but he was thinking frankly about things.

KP: Did he, since he was very frank, did he talk about the possibilities of you getting a teaching job, and how much of an option that was? Because obviously he was saying …

SFM: Well, he got this guy. What happened was this guy, at the Institute for Advanced Study, called me in one day and he asked me, he said, "Would you consider some jobs?" And I said, "Yes, I'd consider them if they were the right location and other things." And he called me in and offered me a couple of good jobs. There was none at Rutgers, of course, Rutgers never hires good people. [Laughter] I'm only kiddin' ya there. … But what I'm saying is that at two or three fairly [decent schools]. Columbia was one of them, 'cause one of my graduate, one of my students, I mean, one of my military people who was in the service with me, was in the same class with me. He became the president of Columbia University, very quickly. I don't remember his name now.

KP: Michael (Sovlin?)? Of course, that would be before …

SFM: He would be my [age]. He would be a little younger than me. He'd probably be retired now. I'll remember the name, but I'll have to look in the book again. That's why I have the book. But, no, the only thing I'm saying is that he referred me to this guy when I started doing some writing. He said, "I want you to, if you're into Colonial, I want you to take a couple of courses with ... Dr. Morris." You know, Richard B. Morris.

KP: Oh, yes.

SFM: American history man. So Richard B. Morris was at the Institute, so I took a course with him. And what I'm trying to say is that when I had a chance to get some of these fancy jobs, I didn't take 'em.

KP: … Why didn't you take them?

SFM: I don't know. Well, one thing, couple of 'em, my wife didn't want to go. And then I was thinking more about … public education, because I was offered a job as an administrator in the public schools at about $5,000 more than they wanted to offer me as a university professor. So I said, "Why should I take that job?" 'Course you get the money, you know? "The root of all evil." [Laughter]

SSH: What was your wife doing while you were going to graduate school at Princeton?

SFM: She was teaching in the Princeton school system, yes.

KP: … I've interviewed a lot of people who came to Rutgers on the GI Bill and it was a very exciting time. A lot of them really remember it very fondly, because a lot of them were older students.

SFM: Right.

KP: And a lot of them were married and a lot of them never expected to go to college.

SFM: Yes.

KP: What was the atmosphere like at Princeton?

SFM: … There was a lot of camaraderie between the guys, because they could compare something that wasn't academic. In other words, they could talk, most of them had just married, they could talk about a family, if they had a little bit of a family. They could talk about military combat units and things like that. And most of 'em liked to have a drink or two once in a while. That's about it. [Laughter] That's about it, really.

KP: In terms of the graduate students in history, how many were GI Bill people, roughly? What percentage were GI Bill: were three-quarters; were under half? Do you have any sense of that?

SFM: No, I don't. No, I don't have any idea. The only thing I know about them, is that they were all pretty sharp guys. But again, the thing that baffled me about it is how … some of 'em didn't get along with the professors. You know what I mean? I mean, it looked like one guy that I thought was good, professor ate him up every time he could. Every time he could, he ate him up, you know? The guy could do nothing right and he finally dropped out of the program. But that was the only thing, I could see this in a couple of the ... And one guy was a snot. He was a real snot. He knew more about Woodrow Wilson. His name was Thomas Link. You probably know the name. You probably know the name.

KP: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Arthur Link.

SFM: Arthur Link, right. Arthur T. Link, I guess. Well, anyway, he and I got into it when he was writing. … He wrote about Woodrow Wilson, didn't he?

KP: Yes.

SFM: Yes. And I made this statement about Woodrow Wilson's biases, and he didn't like that. And he didn't like that one bit, you know? And he said ... something about, "You'd better do your research," and this kind of stuff, so … I gave him some remark and we didn't see each other for a long time. The next time he was the head ... elder, president of the session in his church. First Presbyterian, right next to the university. And my church was Witherspoon, down the street, and they wanted us to merger with 'em. And he came to a meeting about ... , you know, about the merger and I got him this time. [Laughter]

SSH: Is it safe to say that Witherspoon is still independent?

SFM: That's right. Sure it is.

KP: No, Arthur Link is legendary for being an apologist … in many ways, of Woodrow Wilson. And, I mean, he even tried to defend Wilson on race, which is really weak if you read the documents. One thing I'll say to Link's credit, he puts this very incriminatory document into the papers he edited for Wilson.

SFM: Well, that's the way it is.

KP: … What other professors did you have at Princeton that you remember? Or graduate students that you remember who went on to bigger and better … things?

SFM: Well, Bob Goheen was a good friend of mine. He became the president of Princeton University in the … '60s. And a fella named Shain, an English professor, Charles Shain, he became a president of Connecticut College. General, God, what was his name? He was a colonel when I knew him in ... He was a … Commander-in-Chief of NATO. Don't remember his name now. But, he was in the graduate class with me, too. There was another colonel who preached preventative war and they kicked him out. [Laughs]

KP: They kicked him out of the program?

SFM: Yes, they kicked him out of the program.

SSH: And the military?

SFM: That was about it. You know, I have to go back. I have to look at somethin' to … even remember the people's names.

KP: Yes.

SFM: When you get back, you're talking about fifty [years].

KP: Yes, no. It's a while.

SFM: Almost fifty years. It's a long time. Wait 'til you get to be fifty. [Laughter]

KP: … It sounds like you were very proud to send your daughter to Princeton as an undergraduate. … Did you want her to go to Princeton? How much did she want to go to Princeton?

SFM: Well, she had her choice. She really had her choice. She could have gone just about anywhere. But … there's a guy at Harvard named Neil Rudenstein.

KP: Oh, yes.

SFM: Okay? When I was … working in public schools I, no, it wasn't me, it was my wife. My wife taught his kids. So he made the offer when he was the Dean of Students at Princeton at that time. The only thing he didn't offer was the money. [Laughter] I was working then and it was no problem. But what I'm saying is that I was proud that she went to Princeton because my brother had gone to Princeton years ago, too. And he always talked about her succeeding him.

KP: When did your brother graduate from Princeton?

SFM: 1950 something, '51 maybe, '46 to '51, something like that.

KP: Yes.

SSH: That sort of puts him on the spot.

KP: Your first job would be at the Bordentown School when you decided that they paid more. Which is very true that ... you can make more as an administrator. Well, you can make almost more in almost any major field than university teaching.

SFM: They had a job out there called "a field representative," which was the, sort of the, assistant principle of the school. This was an all black school. I started there before they integrated the schools. And the superintendent of the school was getting old and they offered me a good salary, so I took it. I taught one class and the rest of it had to do with administrative duties.

SSH: Did you do any writing at this time? Did you continue with your writing?

SFM: … I've written a lot of articles, but I've never kept 'em. That's the big trouble with education, especially. In fact, I was trying to get together two chapters on Witherspoon Church, which I found out that I threw out now.

KP: So you're not a pack-rat.

SFM: No. No, I'm not. And what I tried to do there was, we had a hundred ... Witherspoon Church is an old church, it's over a hundred and seventy years old. So you know it started early in the Civil War, I mean before the Civil War, sorry. And I was doing some work on the '20s, when it was in bad shape. Small church, went down to less than two hundred members, and became a mission. … A mission is when you can't support yourself, you become a mission and the big guys support you. And I don't know, I'm gonna try and get back on that. … I write a lot of little blurbs for educational things. Somebody'll ask me to write something about my career in education or something like that. But with this volunteerism, I might get together with somebody and start some more writing. I want to do something on my uncle, who lived to be a hundred and one. Lived almost into two centuries.

SSH: Was this you father's brother?

SFM: No, this was my wife's uncle.

SSH: I have one other question. I know you were involved in the New Jersey Historical Society?

SFM: Yes.

KP: The historical society?

SFM: The one in Newark?

KP: Yes.

SFM: What's my friend's name? The historian.

KP: Richard McCormick.

SFM: Dick McCormick, yes. Dick got me, he called, this happened about thirty, forty years ago, when I wrote that blurb for the Journal of Negro History. And he asked me, would I come to some of the meetings and participate? And I did. For a long time we worked together on it. And then you get away from people. You know how you do. And I haven't seen Dick in about, I haven't seen him since our fiftieth reunion, which was three years ago, four years ago. But he was very interested in New Jersey history, and I was, too … at that particular time. And maybe … if I can find the right type of volunteerism, I'll get back into it. But the only thing I don't want to do in volunteerism is go too far away. I don't want to go more than ten miles. I have to do what I want to do. [Laughter]

KP: … You left Bordentown to return to Princeton to teach.

SFM: Well, what happened was … I got called back into the service. I don't have that in there. It's during the Korean service, okay?

KP: Yes.

SFM: And I was in there for two and a half or three years. Then, by that time Bordentown had gone.

KP: Yes.

SFM: Because the state had integrated the schools, so I had to find a job. It wasn't hard at that time because at that time, educators were in great demand, especially public. And I went into the Princeton system and I stayed in there for eight years.

SSH: And your wife was still …

SFM: I was the head of the history department. Princeton was ... not regional at that time. There were two schools: Princeton Township and Princeton Borough School. She taught in the

Princeton Township and I taught in Princeton Borough.

KP: … I know someone who works in Princeton and there's a great rivalry between the borough and township.

SFM: Yes, that's a lot of crap, too. [Laughter]

KP: No. She works in a hospital. It's probably somewhat impossible but some people will want to be born in one wing of the hospital, or one part of the clinic, so you're born in the borough instead of the township. … Besides teaching, you were very active in the Princeton community at that time. In the '50s. You were active with the Y …

---------- END OF TAPE 2, SIDE 2 ----------

KP: … This continues an interview with Mr. Simeon Moss on May 2, 1997 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey with Kurt Piehler …

SSH: Sandra Stewart Holyoak …

MC: And Melanie Cooper.

KP: Before the tape cut off, you ran unsuccessfully for elected office for the township …

SFM: In Princeton Township, that's correct.

KP: What prompted you to run for office? Was there a particular issue …

SFM: Well, I was a member of the local Democratic club and had been very active and they asked me to run. They, I don't know who "they" are. [Laughter]

KP: And how close did you come, or how badly did you do?

SFM: I lost by the amount of votes that the Democrats usually lost by at that time in the township. Now it's different. It's vice versa now.

KP: So then Princeton was very much pro-Republican, back then?

SFM: Very, yes. Both township and borough.

KP: You had mentioned in the '20s and '30s, I mean, that in many ways the black community really [were] the servants for the white community. Had any of that changed in the '50s? … Were there more opportunities for blacks that lived in Princeton in terms of the occupations and jobs they did?

SFM: There are more opportunities for blacks now.

KP: Yes.

SFM: But certain areas still show … a dearth of black personnel, like the public schools for instance. … There are many black aides, para-professionals in the schools, but very few professional teachers and administrators. I think that's the biggest difference. You see, now there're more opportunities for jobs but they don't seem to be being taken by the minorities. I don't know why.

KP: You left teaching to work … in Trenton, to work as assistant commissioner of labor. How did that come about?

SFM: Well, the mayor of … Princeton at that time was the commissioner of labor. He had two positions. And I had helped him in his campaign for mayor and I was a little dissatisfied with my lot in the public schools at that time so I decided I'd like to make a change under circumstances that I thought would be a benefit to me. How's that? [Laughter] It was a nice experience and it led me back into education again, really. So it was no loss, really.

KP: I read in one of the press clippings that you helped create a program in Newark in the early '60s to aid high school drop-outs.

SFM: That was an employment program and it … was a program where we tried to get people who were interested in working a job in the lower skills, but possibly as a ladder-type situation where they could move from one job on the lower rung to jobs on the higher rung. It was a good idea, but the education component was sorely needed to … make it work.

KP: … There was also a press clipping about, you worked for a time in the Newark school system as a senior administrator.

SFM: Right.

KP: … One of the articles I read was your resignation. And you were very tight-lipped about why you'd left the Newark school system.

SFM: Well, if you recall two years before that they had the riots at Newark, if you remember. And that left a lasting impression on me and I didn't want to say anything about anything that had to do with that whole situation, and use it as an excuse for my … resignation. So I thought the best thing to do was to … resign. After all, I got a better job. What do you do? Do you have to be tight-lipped because a person asks you to explain why you did a thing? I don't know. Especially if you're moving on to something that you think is better.

KP: Yes. No, 'cause I read the next article and … you became the first black superintendent of schools for a county.

SFM: That's right.

KP: For West Essex. What was your reaction to the Newark riots? I mean Newark wasn't the

only city, but then you were working there as an administrator.

SFM: Yes. It was something that had to come. All the circumstances were there to create such a thing, and all they needed was something to kindle it, like other riots, which really kindled the Newark riots. It was an unfortunate thing. It, in retrospect, in my opinion, it didn't accomplish as much as it ... should have accomplished. Let me put it that way. As much as it should have accomplished. 'Cause … everybody talked about it, even today they talk about that, but what do they try to do to alleviate the situation? Not much.

KP: Were you frustrated at how little it changed?

SFM: Every time I go down into Newark I'm frustrated at ... the condition of the city. And it's changed a lot. Some for the better, some for the worse.

KP: … I've interviewed several people who either went to the Newark school system or teacher/principal, and they speak of the Newark school system as really … a great school system, particularly in the '30s and '40s and '50s, and even into the early '60s. What was your sense of the Newark school system? Was its reputation deserved, as being a premier school system? Did you see problems … with it?

SFM: I came to Newark in '65. And I could see that it was in flux. I could see that it was in flux, but I really didn't realize how far down the system had gone until … the results of the riots in 1967 were revealed, really. … I know that it was a good system, previously good system. There's no question about that. It was one of the finest in the United States. What caused it to do what it did, you'll have to get the sociologists up to interpret it.

KP: I guess, one question when I saw your resignation is that I interviewed someone who had been a principal and he said, and also his father had been the number two person on the board for years, that the Newark system … politics [were] really at a distance. … That the school system had run very professionally, but that someone who stayed with the system to the '60s said that politics became more important. They got pressured to hire people.

SFM: Sure.

KP: You know … I remember his father had once been told the mayor had said, "I'm gonna send you letters. You're to throw those into the garbage. I'm just sending those to recommend people. You are to ignore those letters. If I really think someone should get a job, I might call you up. But even then the person only gets a job for merit."

SFM: Right.

KP: Did you have a sense that there were any political, in terms of the relationship between education and politicians?

SFM: When I got there I sensed that there was a political involvement in almost everything that was done in the education area, especially in, when it came to personnel problems. … That was

my opinion. … It seemed that politics were dictating who was hired and who was fired.

KP: Not merit or teaching ability or …

SFM: Yes, yes.

SSH: During the riots, as an administrator what, specifically, could you do or did you do?

SFM: … You know, I looked at that from the point of view of an educator, and what we could have done was to have shored up some of the … practices that were going on in the school that would have made it a better system. Which they didn't do. They let everything go with the … aftermath of the riots and the deterioration went so fast that it almost precluded your doing anything. … It was an appalling situation.

SSH: How was this?

SFM: You know, almost hopelessness.

KP: Your next job was as superintendent of schools. How did you enjoy that job?

SFM: I enjoyed the job. This was primarily an administrative job. … And an oversee job where you oversee school districts and things like this. And you go in to help when they have a problem, but as long as there's no problem you do nothing. … Sometimes it means that you go … in too late because you've done nothing for so long. ... I personally think that if the State Department ran the way it should, you wouldn't need county superintendents. By the same token, it points, the township's superintendent's office points out one fact: and that is that some school districts are too large. It's my opinion that a school district like New York City or Newark or even Jersey City, to a certain extent, are not manageable by educational administrators. Whether you need another type of administrator for those school districts I don't know, but certainly the educators trained as a teacher and some of the administrative assets that he should have, he never gets.

KP: As a successful administrator, how did you acquire the skills and when did you realize ... Because having seen professors here become administrators, department chairs, deans and such, they can sometimes be not very effective administrators and leaders.

SFM: That's right. Right.

KP: And they may be excellent teachers and superb researchers, but you sometimes think they can't make the most basic decisions that are almost common sense. And I'm sure you've had your share of those experiences of supervising people.

SFM: When you get to a certain point in education you should be able to assess yourself a little better than most educators do, and take the action that is dictated at that time. The only problem there is that we never want to admit defeat. Nobody does. If you're not a good administrator there are many people … I had an administrator who said, "I'd like to go back to teaching math."

And he was a good math teacher and we put him back in the classroom. And six months later he says, "I gotta make more money. I can't teach math. I want to go back to administration." I just say that to say that, we said to him, "Well, you stay where you are because you have proved that you weren't a very good administrator." But how can you do that? How can you do that when you have other … aspects of education surrounding you that you have to take care of and then the politicians looking over your shoulder at the same time? … When I look back on my own personal career I don't feel that I've been the success that I felt that I should have been. I feel that I can't look back, sit down right now and say to myself, or say to educators, "There's something that he did that was really significant, that made a mark on education and society." I just can't find it. I just can't find it. You know, and I think that every person ought to be proud of what they did to help the next generation come along, do a better job. That's it.

SSH: We'll have to read some of your articles and help you out here.

SFM: Okay.

SSH: We'll find something.

SFM: Yes, yes. What time is it?

SSH: Ten to five.

SFM: Wow.

KP: You didn't think you'd had that much to say.

SFM: That's right.

KP: In retirement, what do you miss the most? Although it sounds like you lead a pretty active retirement. Do you miss the classroom? Do you miss the routine?

SFM: I miss the routine more than anything else. Getting up, going somewhere, doing something, evaluating it. Getting prepared to do the same thing or something different the next day.

SSH: I think we've left out you have two children, right?

SFM: Yes.

SSH: We need to talk about the other one, because when they read this they're going to feel really badly. They're never mentioned.

KP: Yes, yes. Simeon Jr., who went to Cornell.

SFM: Right, he is the director of publications for Cornell University. He's a former newspaper editor of the *Ithica Journal*. That's the paper in Ithaca, where he lives. And he has one child. Married. His wife is a school teacher.

SSH: Anything else?

SFM: That's about it, really. I don't know what I can say except that he, he's very steady, very steady, very steady person.

SSH: What does your daughter do? We talked about her education at Princeton.

SFM: Yes, she's the one that counsels for, not Detroit, Michigan Power and Light Company.

KP: So she's a lawyer.

SFM: Yes, she's one of the, I guess, lobbies, I guess it is. They have sixteen lawyers down there in Washington.

KP: So she's based in Washington, not …

SFM: Right. Well, she goes there about twice a month. But she, she likes what she's doing, I guess. It's hard to talk, sometimes it's hard to talk to your kids about what they do. You really, you ask 'em what they do and they give you the song and dance. [Laughter]

SSH: So what hobbies do you and your wife do? I mean, what hobbies do you have now in your retirement?

SFM: Well, you know, the things that old people do. Gardening. [Laughter] We play golf maybe twice a year, and she reads a lot. I read a lot of magazines and things. I don't read books much. The last book I read was the book that, and it wasn't very good, that Jocelyn Elders [surgeon-general] wrote about her career in the White House.

SSH: Do you still live down in Princeton then?

SFM: Beg pardon?

SSH: Do you still live down in the Princeton area?

SFM: No, I live in South Orange, 140 Page Terrace, South Orange. Oh, you mean, does my daughter live in …

SSH: No, no, I was asking you.

SFM: I see. Okay. I'm sorry.

KP: But, it still sounds like you stay in touch with your … old church.

SFM: Yes, well, we, you know, I do what I can. I actually keep in touch with the old church because my father was an elder before me in the church and we've been attached to it I'd say for the last hundred years anyway. Not that long.

SSH: Well, are there any questions that we should have asked, that we should pursue, or have we covered all the bases?

SFM: No, I don't have anything right now. If you have anything to ask, you know, anything, I would be glad to come down again if you want me to.

KP: Yes, or we can come up to South Orange one day.

SFM: Sure.

MC: We like road trips.

SFM: You can come. It'd only take you forty minutes to get up there.

MC: I only have one question. Were you involved at all in any of the civil rights legislation or any of the movements at all?

SFM: I went on the … Million Man March and I went on the march on Washington, but that's about it really. ... I knew Martin Luther King very well because he was in the same fraternity with me. And that's one thing about that fraternity that I'm in, the black fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, most of the outstanding black men are in that fraternity. That's another reason why I got in. [Laughter] No.

KP: What year did you meet Martin Luther King?

SFM: When he ... stopped, he talked at the chapel, the university chapel when I was down there. You know, this was quite a while ago. And we invited him, … the fraternity invited him, over to my house for tea and coffee so people could meet him. Fraternity brothers in that area. Other than that, I have never, I've seen his wife on television but I don't know the rest of the family at all. But if you need me, just call me and I'll be glad to talk to you.

SSH: So when you edit your transcript, please add anything we may have left out.

KP: Yes. Well, thank you very much. We really appreciate …

---------- END OF INTERVIEW ----------

Andrew Noyes - (7/24/98)
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