

Transcript of Reverend James. B. Tabb taken Thursday  
Sept. 28, 1995 at Caroline and Robert Jordan's House.

Grass Roots Theater: James Richardson and Brian Boyd

Rev. James B. Tabb enters the room with two canes . He is an elderly man with a very nice energy about him. He makes his way to his seat slowly but surely. He expresses his thanks for allowing the interview and tells the students that he is happy to be here.

Rev. Tabb: I just wanted to express a little bit of my knowledge of the area. I was born in York county down near Camp Perry. We moved there in 1943, after the war. The Government moved people down there and it is now called camp Perry. Some stayed in Grove, some in Macgruder, and some in other places. Some went to the CC camps which were the Barracks for the CC camp. I lived in Williamsburg for a while with my brother, who was in school and college there. He married and then moved.

I came out of the college (Not William and Mary) in 1950 and started to work with the NAACP. Doctor Luther Porter Jackson was around and urge blacks to vote. He said a voteless people is a useless people. He really wanted people to join NAACP as well. I left and then came back to Williamsburg as a waiter and then hurt my back and went to a clerking position. I came out in 1961 and then had a Business. Pastor of two churches. Now the voting or civil rights movement. Or I should say after 1954 brown vs. Edu., from the school point of view there was a resistance. There

was a great resistance. In Prince Gorge County in 1961 the school closed for three years because they did not want to non-segregated. The fourteenth amendment only stayed it not forced it. Most of our movements stemmed from the national NAACP who would send people out to fight the all white schools.

I was the president at that time. I was pres. for 12 years and I also had other position. That put a lot of pressure on me because I put my own daughter in the Williamsburg all white school under the freedom of choice act. I enrolled her as the first black in the school. After the freedom of choice act they assigned a number of criteria that the schools had to meet and they would change bus plans.

I remember I lived four blocks from the all white school. Only those who could offered busses would take them. So We had to walk three miles to school in front of white boys but the whites who couldn't offered the busses would also walk past us. Keep in mind this was in a time of separate but equal, so this was really not bad. We would stare and they would stare.

They had other forms of distributed education where people would go and learn vocational. But the blacks would

learn electric and waiting while the whites would learn Banking. Then this changed with desegregation.

We also had the blank sheet and the poll tax. The district was a combination of Charles city, new Kent county, York county, and Williamsburg. We would have drives with the NAACP to try to get those to register. I got a prize for getting the most to register. That was hard because they register was odd. You had to call and they were not always home. We also had a grandfather clause meaning no blacks could ever really vote. For these type of reasons in the south it was so important to get the 65 voter registration act.

We have also had to fight against status quote, but the situation here in Williamsburg was not like it was in Mississippi or Georgia. Blacks were not threatened in Williamsburg if they voted. But there was no transpiration or desegregated restaurants. Often time you had to buy your food and leave.

One day Sid Turner, a white man I worked with, and I decided to go out to eat. We went down to the store to get some lunch. We sat together and then the women took our order and as she was walking away she put on the slip. "To Go". I told her I didn't want it to go I wanted to eat it her. She said I couldn't do that so I went out to the car

and sat there until Sid came out. He said, "You did the right thing, not taking it to go." The manager regretted the whole thing, but he said that there was a law in Virginia that did not allow the blacks to eat with the whites.

The college of William and Mary or the CW could really not allow anything of violent nature because it would destroy the tourist industry. Therefore the blacks really didn't need to rock the boat so much. So we pretty much got a good bit of what we wanted. Not all we wanted but a little. There were times we talked about rioting or marching or protesting, but we got what we wanted.

Rev. Tabb then allowed the people to ask some questions:

James: What was the purpose of the Church during the Civil Rights movement?

Well, the Church stood for much of a meeting place. During the time of the slaves the church leaders were often looked upon as being the leaders of the group. People would come to them with there problems and he helped everyone together in a community. If there was something to be told he would be the best one to do it. This has followed since the time of slavery to today. The church is still viewed by many as the a very strong central point in our community.

People still come to church to hear the news. It is unfortunate how little people think about God now a days. I don't see why they say you can't have a moment of silence in school. It is not as if people are being forced to pray.

Mr. Robert Leonard:

Could you explain this idea of the blank sheet?

There were ten things on this sheet that had really nothing to do with applying to vote. It was never really a way to stop people from voting but it hindered them. Many times, however, I have heard, that a minority would walk into the voter registration office and would be asked to recite the preamble of the constitution. Basically it was a way to discourage voting.

Reverend Tabb is also looking in his Attic for old NAACP brochures that we could use.

Williamsburg Grassroots Theatre Project

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Rev. James P. Tobin, Sr.