

*transcribed by  
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INTERVIEW WITH PHIL COOK

interviewed by James Richardson

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...let's see, when did , when did the schools integrate? I don't remember the year they integrated. 1966? ... It may be that's in the ballpark...I have a brother-in-law that was one of the first black students that, uh, went to James Blair and graduated from there ...when they went into interaction, it wasn't that bad, we had some problems...we had problems at James Blair when there was a difference of, you know, white and black students. It seemed like things were not moving as, they weren't moving smoothly. There was some hostility. Quite a bit of it. I was one of the persons who went up there to try to quiet it down. Rev. Tabb, I think was one. Rev. Moody was a person, was a minister well thought of. Well, we had conferences with a lot of the white and black students. There were two black students that really stood out in the conferences. Nobody could deny these two anything, because, I mean, they were smart, and they were well spoken. They were well spoken, and they impressed me...We talked with groups of 'em. That thing went on for two days, and we talked to different integrated groups, to try to get them to see that they're all there for the same purpose. It worked out pretty well...CW had told their employees that if a black come in and they want a room or they want to eat, and you don't serve them, you won't have no job. But, it wasn't written, it wasn't broadcasted in this place. What used to happen before that, it wasn't, it used to be a black chauffeur used to bring some rich man and he used to stay at the Inn, and this man used to go out,

and have to find a place to stay. So he stayed at a friend's house a lot, and that went on for quite a few years...We were about to sit in at Woolworths. Woolworths was a store at a shopping center that denied blacks the privilege of eating. In that store, you could pick up something but you had to take it out. We were in the process of sitting in on that thing on one Saturday and we had alerted the treasurer of our branch not to use any of our branches money, cause it was felt that some of us might go to jail...About a half an hour before we was supposed to do this, CW representative Rev. Collins. and, maybe some more, had gotten to the Woolworths company, and says comeback and told us it won't be necessary to sit here, and you can go in he said...That's one of the incidents that I remember very vividly...I used to work for a man called (???), and he had a restaurant up on Richmond Rd. ...I used to wait tables there. One evening he told me that was a restaurant service station, he told me to go down and pick up some beer for him. I was supposed to get some beer for that man, so I went. I walked in the front door, he looked at me and the man said, "What do you want?" do I said," I came down to pick up some beer for Mr. (???)" "I can't bring you no beer her. You're gonna have to go to the back door and pick it up." But the beer was for my employer. So I went around back and picked it up because I was supposed to pick it up for him and I knew it resulted in business even for me because I was a waiter. I went back and I told Mr. (???), "I don't want to go back down to that place anymore," and he says "Why?" I said because that man says that I could not come in the front to pick up that. I had to go to the back door, and that no black people could come in the front place.. He said. "That's O.K., you won't have to go back there no more. I won't send back anybody back there anymore.

I'll get my beer from someplace else."...I was never taught by my parents that there were any differences between white and black. I was never taught that... We walked to school, and my father told me, told us because I have two brothers, "If you are going or coming from school and the rain come up, you go on anybody's porch that's between here and there." Well, everybody between here and there were mostly white. The rain caught us a few times, and we went on porches. Nobody ever said a thing. They came out and said, "Hi, I can see why you're here.. You're here cause it's raining, no problem." And we'd wait till the rain was over....It was more or less, partly accepted thing to integrate. 75% recognized that it was law, it was the right thing to do. 25% I would think that were not for, or they were waivers one way or another. I would say that 75% of the whites and most of the blacks, because it was something they had never had before, and it was true that we extended from pass off books from the white schools. And that's true. I received books with their names in it. We were using books...and we always stayed behind...I never felt personally harmed by what was going on in Williamsburg. To us at that time it was a way of life. It wasn't a thing of I'm against you and your against me...We thought at that time that we was getting the same type of education they was getting at the white schools, but we weren't. There were a lot of things created in this thing of integration...A man would go fight in a war and come back, and be segregated against. It was hard to take that you would fight for a country and you couldn't do what you wanted to do in that country...I had so much respect for my father. Whatever he told me I felt like he knew what he was talking about. He was always telling me, you know, "Just be quiet." and I believed in him, so I never made any problems...I came into the NAACP because I liked

what they stood for and what they were doing. What they're doing is the right thing. They never taught violence. Never. If something happened and you didn't like what was going on, you didn't resolve to violence to clear it up. You would instead, went to courts. Nine times out of ten, the courts would make a decision that you could live with...To me, I don't care what color you are. I judge you by your character. I got some black folks I don't want to be in no damn room with them. And some whites I don't particularly care for. I imagine you have the same thing...I don't think about segregation. The white man to me is just another man. We can communicate and I have no feelings at all because your white and I'm black. It don't, it doesn't bother me at all. The only thing that bothers me is your character is the thing that's going to keep me away from you...I feel now that I was pretty well sheltered when I was a youngster. My parents were so direct. And the teachers were so much different from a lot of kids. And because I listened to my parents more than the other kids did, and I thought my father was a Houdini, he could pull rabbits out of hats, he predict things that happen. I made up my mind then that whatever they said, I do. I never in my young life, I never did fell the type of segregation they felt in the deep south. I never experienced anything other than there were places we couldn't go. There were things we couldn't do. I lived here on ?Scotland St., whites lived on Richmond ?Rd. My front yard was the back yard of some whites across the street. There's a young boy over there by the name of Joe Wilford, a white boy. He and I were the best of friends. Back then when I was a kid, we ate in each other's houses. We fell out because he called me a nigger. We fell out from that point. (J.R.- That was your friend?) I thought he was. As he got a little age on him, he came up with that word, and

we broke up...I never feared race. I wasn't taught that way. Right now, when I look back, I don't know of anything I could have done any different to make it any better for me than what I did...I was going to Georgia, and stopped by a service station. Some of these places got a service station restaurant hooked on. So I walked in and saw this guy sitting out there, this white guy, sitting out there. Apparently, he owned the building, cause he was dressed that way. I asked him, "Is that restaurant there (???)?"

And he said, "Yeah, go on in." So I went in, went to the counter. I told the lady and said I'd like a cup of coffee to go. She looked at me and said, "We don't serve colored people in here." I said, "I'm not asking you to serve me in here, I'm asking you for a cup of coffee to take out." She said, "Didn't you hear me? We don't serve colored people in here." I looked around and saw a couple of blacks in the kitchen and came close to saying, "Well, then what the hell are you doing in here." But, I didn't. That particular time, because I hadn't been to Georgia before, I had a .22 with me, in my pocket in that time. Got a little upset, and I came out, I didn't say anything. That man was still sitting out there on that barrel smirking. First thought that came to my mind was, "I ought to shoot him, for putting me through that type of thing." I don't know what the hell, I went on to my car...But, when you get to Williamsburg, I don't feel like I was heavily segregated against...We had some problems. We had some, but it's only natural anytime changes are made, any kind of change, there's gonna be some people who disagree with it. But when you start making a change as big as integration, that's a big change. That's a real big change. That's telling whites and blacks should be treated the same way, and that's a big change. Williamsburg and James City accepted better than some cities did...Williamsburg took integration very well. Very well...I remember one time, (???)

and his wife, (???) was a German, she was a, I don't know, she was a Jew, whatever she was, she was white. So, we was going up to Williamsburg Lodge to eat, and (???) says, "I'll tell you what to do, I'm going to let my wife sit in the back with your wife, and you sit up front with me." We drove up to the Lodge, and the bellman came out and looked and said "What the hell is this?" you know. The four of us got out of the car, and went in. We were the center of the attraction the whole time we were there. "What in the hell are those people doing in here like this?" They didn't know I worked for the man, but the funnest thing was that we were friends...(tape cut off)

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