This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with Le’Roy C. Carney and is taking place on April 24, 2010. The interviewer is Louis Kyriakoudes.

**Kyriakoudes:** This is Louis Kyriakoudes with the Center for Oral History and Cultural Heritage at the University of Southern Mississippi. I’m here with Le’Roy Carney at the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer. We’re going to talk about Mr. Carney’s memories of the Biloxi beach wade-ins in 1960 and other events related to the history of the movement here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast. Good morning Mr. Carney. How are you today?

**Carney:** Fifty-nine, sixty, and sixty-three, there was three of them.

**Kyriakoudes:** Just kind of an introduction, to identify—

**Carney:** Right, I understand.

**Kyriakoudes:** Just for the record, if you could state your full name and give us the spelling—

**Carney:** My name is Le’Roy Carney. And that’s L-E-apostrophe-R-O-Y, C-A-R-N-E-Y. Initial C.

**Kyriakoudes:** Could you tell us just a little bit about where you were born and where you grew up?

**Carney:** I grew up in Biloxi, ex-military. I worked at Keesler Air Force Base. Had a bonding company here in Biloxi, business for a number of years. I still reside in Biloxi. I came back to make this my home.

**Kyriakoudes:** What year were you born?

**Carney:** Nineteen forty-nine.

**Kyriakoudes:** OK. And we’re here to commemorate the 1960 wade-in specifically. But if you could, just share with us your memories of Dr. Mason, and how you got involved with him, and any other organizations you were involved in, Boy Scouts or NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and just share with us that story.

**Carney:** Well, I met Dr. Mason shortly after he moved to Biloxi. As you know, Dr. Mason was a family practitioner for a lot of people in the city of Biloxi throughout his
career. Towards the end of his career he had a lot of clients of all creeds and colors. But when it started out it was just a, you know, it was black patients went to black doctors, white patients went to white doctors. So he had a doctor’s office down the street from my house, about four doors. McDaniel Funeral Home was on one side; Mason’s office was on the corner of Nixon and Division Street. And that’s how I become to know him. My mother chose him as our family practitioner.

Kyriakoudes: Were you involved in Boy Scouts?

Carney: Well, after I got to know him, as I knew him a number of years, as I got old enough to get into the Boy Scouts, he was also a Scoutmaster, at Troop 416. I joined his Boy Scout group. So we have a long history of friendship.

Kyriakoudes: Well, one of the things we’re trying to document in addition to the wade-in are things like organizations like the Boy Scouts and so on. Could you just share your memories of that?

Carney: I first became a youth member NAACP, and then after that I got into the Boy Scouts. He was a Boy Scoutmaster in addition to being president of the Biloxi Branch. So he had a dual role. I joined NAACP at a young age, and I was impressed with the attitude he had taken with coming to Mississippi, in particular Biloxi, and seeing a lot of needs that needed to be addressed. And he was always willing to step out there, put his foot out there, and address those issues. He impressed me, and I wanted to be a part of it. I used to—believe it or not, the way I ended up going to the beach that day? We were out playing in the yard, my brother and I. This was the day they had the bloody fight. We were playing out in the yard, and we could see the people gathering down near his office. There were people talking back and forth, and we were trying to find out what was going on. And the rumor was around town that we were going to the beach, that they had chosen a couple of places on the beach that we were going to go to the beach. And my mother got wind that my brother and I might sneak off and go. We didn’t let on to it, but we found out what was going on and said, “Hey, man, this is fun.” One of the reasons I was enthusiastic about it was a gentleman named John Love(?), mother was Perilee Love(?) and father was Sherman Love(?), military guy, they used to have a business on Main Street in Biloxi. We used to swim right here on the beach, in front of the Main Street pier right here. You can almost see that pier out there. We used to swim out there. And nobody never bothered us. There were a white gentleman; we called him Tarzan. That was his nickname. I don’t remember his real name to this day. Well, we called him Tarzan. He was real tall, lanky guy. And we’d swim with those guys down in front of the Back Bay Health Clinic. I mean, black or white, we swam with those guys. So it was just weird to me because we went down there in the name of the NAACP. How I always felt about it is that they attacked us for that reason. The old Biloxi Hospital used to be right here on highway 90, right from Main and between—actually, it was the corner of Elmer right there and Highway 90. And that was just weird to me that that happened. It was Belmer(?) Street; Belmer, Elmer(?). We never had a problem with them coming out there trying to run us off the beach. I guess we were just in smaller numbers. I just
never have figured that out. We used to fish off that pier, never had anybody call us any racial slurs. I never did understand it as a child. But as I got older, I simply understood that a lot of people, particularly white folks, felt the NAACP was a radical group. And you know, people are complacent and don’t want to change. And they felt the NAACP was the type of group that stood for changing things that they were so comfortable with and didn’t want to change. So that’s the way I began to feel about it as I started getting older. Personally, I had and still have a good rapport with the majority of the white families I know who live here that I know. I mean, we’re on a first name basis. We end up going to certain political functions, and we show up together. They always greet me and treat me like, you know, like I’m part of the gang. So it was just really weird to me when I look back at that, as when the NAACP decided to go down and group organize every person who had a car, truck or bicycle. It appears that they showed up on Highway 90, which was like two lanes at that time. And they just came from all directions, and they just came to a screeching halt. I mean, we were out on the beach. My brother and I was in the water. Some of the others was playing softball and just playing in the sand, having fun, a little volleyball, just playing. And when all these cars started converging and just stopping? I told my brother; I said, “Look, man!” He was a couple of years younger than me. I felt like I was responsible for him. So I said to him, “We need to get to the land. Something is fixing to happen here.” I mean, you could visually see them getting anything out of the back of their cars they could find, jack handles, the jack, the stick, baseball bat. Whatever they could find in their car, they got it out. Some of them had pieces of chain, and they got all of this stuff out of the car. And I said “Man, we got to get out of this water.” And we made a conscious decision to come out of the water. And by the time we got to land, our shorts that we had pulled off—we had on our swimwear under the shorts because we snuck down there so Mama didn’t know. We was too far away to get to our clothing because they were emerging on the beach. Now, to this day, I’ve tried to, maybe not as hard as I should have tried, but I’ve tried to find a single individual who I hold responsible for somewhat inciting that riot. And he was an officer. He had a—back in those days, they wore those ranger-like caps, like he could have been a highway patrolman or the sheriff department. I don’t know who he was. But he stood up on the seawall at the time with a bullhorn, and he shouted, “I can’t get them off this beach, but y’all can.” And when he said that, it was a stampede. And I don’t know why the media—because I’m sure they got pictures of this guy, and I’ve made this statement before. This guy was standing up on this bullhorn, and somebody knows who this guy is. He may be dead now, but if he’s still living, that’s somebody I would like to talk to, just to talk with him because I don’t know what was in his mind that day, to be a law enforcement officer. And he should be easy to find—I’d say—if he’s still living. But even if he’s not living there should be some type of record of who was there, what type of uniform they wore, how they looked. But I remember the old highway patrolmen used to wear those; the sheriff, even the chief of police used to wear those big hats a long time ago. So somebody knows who was out there, and probably knows who had the bullhorn and everything else, but that has never surfaced.

Kyriakoudes: That’s interesting. Have you brought this up with Pat Smith?
Carney: Well, I mentioned it to Pat, and I mention it any time I’ve ever spoke anywhere in reference to the beach riot. That was one of the things that I mentioned. So when he said that, they just started stampeding the beach. And as I said, we couldn’t get to our clothes. And I told my brother, I said, “Look, we’re going to pick the biggest guy running and stay behind him.” And I’ll never forget these guys, two of them. They’re both dead now. One guy’s name was Lonnie Charles(?). That was his first name. I don’t remember his last name; somebody told me it was Williams. It may not be Williams, but I remember his first name, Lonnie Charles. And Freddy Wright(?), Freddy Wright was a neighbor of mine, and they both were a lot bigger and taller than me. So we got behind Freddy Wright and Lonnie Charles, and we took off with them. Lonnie Charles a big, tall guy. He was almost seven feet. He reached down in the crowd and picked up one of those little, white kids and just threw him in the crowd and knocked him down, knocked a bunch of them down. And look here; we let the dogs out. We just run over, trampled them, headed to the cemetery. We came through the cemetery. See, we were closer to White Avenue at that time than when it happened because they keep talking about the lighthouse, but that was a different time. And I say that to say that the way I was running, backwards, trying to get back down towards Main Street. So we went through the cemetery, and we felt the safest place to be was on a railroad track because couldn’t no cars come up on the railroad track. We ran from that point through the graveyard, down the railroad track, headed east back to town, just as fast as we could go. And plus we had plenty of rocks up there, so we figured if we could get to the railroad track, we’d be pretty safe. You know? And we used to walk the track anyway, so that was something we did on a regular basis through the neighborhood. It was a little shorter than going from block to block. You knew just to get off the track or whenever if you hear the train. We used to fish out at the trains, out at the water out there. We used to get down on the side of the train. So we knew how to be safe when the train come. It was just really, really something, man. When we got downtown and told the people what had happened, it was just—everybody started getting in their cars, trying to go down there to see what happened. And I remember them. When it was just—Dr. Mason’s car was just sitting up on a curb, up on a median, and I could see them trying to turn his car over. We could see all of this; all that was going on. Mr. McDaniel(?) had the funeral home. They knocked him down and was beating him and Mr. Galloway(?). Both of these guys had a funeral home business. And they were beating them, and I mean, that afternoon, people went down to see what happened. But by then, the police were trying to keep them from going down there. I saw, as a kid, all of these people stand in front of Dr. Mason’s office with bloody noses. I saw one guy whose eyes were almost green from where they’d been kicking him in the face. I mean, he stands there—and in spite of all of this that went on, Dr. Mason went to his office that day and treated all those people after they was all broke up. And had he not had a baseball bat to fight them off with, he probably may not have made it. You know? He was fighting them off. We were just outnumbered; wasn’t no way there. What the police did, they let them beat on enough people to send a message. And then they tried to put it under control, but a lot of people really got beat up pretty bad. And of course, the next course of action was to boycott the stores of those individuals that we could identify that was down there. There was a Bond(?) grocery store, a Levine(?) grocery store. I mean, these were
people who we could identify who were involved, and we boycotted, not to buy anything. And they were neighborhood stores, and one store was right across the street from Dr. Mason. Can you imagine that? On the other side of the street, having participated in something like that? I mean, they were in the heart of the black community, and yet they participated in stuff like that. So we vowed to boycott those stores. And the youth department were more or less the soldiers out there. The older people organized it, and we boycotted those stores, the Dairy Queen where you had to get your ice cream cone on the side of the building; everybody going to the front. We decided to boycott those places, and also we had a march on the Biloxi Theater, that was an all-white theater. We had one theater on Main Street called the Harlem Theater, and we boycotted the Biloxi Theater, the Avenue Theater, [and] then later we boycotted the Saenger Theater. We had a sit-in at the Woolworth’s lunch counter; I’ll never forget that. They wouldn’t serve us nothing to eat. We had a group of us. Reverend Black(?) was the president of the Biloxi branch of the NAACP at that time. And we had a sit-in there at the counter, and we didn’t get any service so we boycotted Woolworth’s. And it was Crescents(?) next door, at that time, a store called Crescents. All the other businesses like J.C. Penney’s and Sears, they were I guess corporate companies. They were a lot different in their attitudes toward minorities.

**Kyriakoudes:** When you say they were different, which were the businesses that were fair?

**Carney:** Well, there were very few, believe it or not. I mean, even dentist and doctor’s offices here—I recall as a kid going to a dentist’s office to have a tooth extracted, and matter of fact, I paid for it, and this was in Junior High School and had to go to the side door. And this was a long time after the beach. There were still places; there was this one dentist. I think he’s dead now, Dr. Roberts. But that was one dentist that, he felt like the minorities still had to go to his side door; his white clientele went to the front. There were very few. Like I said, at that time Dr. Patablo(?), he was Catholic, so he was a lot different than most of them. When people learned about him, I think he got a lot of black business.

**Kyriakoudes:** So he was a little bit more fair?

**Carney:** Oh, yeah! He was patient with his patients. If you needed a dentist, he was in service; he was just that type of individual.

**Kyriakoudes:** Tell me about the boycotts. Did you picket in front of the stores to enforce the boycotts? How did you actually implement the boycott?

**Carney:** Well, what we did was we met in churches. We got the word out in churches, “Do not buy from these places.” We did have some organized demonstrations that were sanctioned by the branch. There were some organized demonstrations. For the most part, we just got the word out in the community not to buy at those places. And it worked.
Kyriakoudes: How did those businesses respond? I mean, did they—

Carney: Well, one closed down; he went to Ocean Springs. I guess some felt like, “Well, if I’ve got to deal with this, I can move.” Economically, they did suffer because like I said, they were in the heart of the black community at that time. Besides Bayview Homes or Eastview Homes, there weren’t any [whites] within five, six, eight blocks; I mean whites, rather. I’m sorry. There were some whites that lived at that time on Lee Street, on Keller (?) Street. Most of that was all white at that time. But then, coming from Bellman (?) Street back towards Magnolia, Fayard, Thomas Street, all back in there, east and west and north and south, Bradford Street closer to that, that’s where most of the black pockets were. Other than that, it was whites around. But these stores, even the Biloxi Theater, were in the heart of the black community.

Kyriakoudes: And was there segregated seating in the Biloxi theater, or just none at all?

Carney: You couldn’t even go in the Biloxi Theater, at one time. I mean, they were—at some point they were—like they were in North Mississippi where they would allow you to go sit upstairs, but you couldn’t sit downstairs.

Kyriakoudes: How did the boycotts come to a conclusion? Did you negotiate?

Carney: Well, the people who owned the Biloxi Theater, they closed it down. The Avenue Theater, they gave it up; they just give it to us. And a black gentleman who was retired out of the military—I’ll think of his name in a minute—he was retired out of the military, and he took over management of that theater. And that was the only place we could go to see black movies, black actors and stuff because none of the other theaters were promoting black actors in a motion picture. So we had the Harlem Theater on Main Street, which was black movies. We had that exposure there. But that was the only one. But after the Harlem gone away, then the Avenue was our theater. After it closed down we had the Avenue Theater.

Kyriakoudes: And about the grocery stores? You mentioned Levine’s and some of these other places?

Carney: Yeah. He moved; he went to Ocean Springs. He closed the store down. That store eventually became Brothers Grocery, which Brothers was a real good—he was a real good person in the community and in business. I mean, he had blacks who had credit with him. Brothers Store used to be on Main Street right there, where Richmond Funeral Home is, across from Richmond Funeral Home.

Kyriakoudes: And it had a white owner?

Carney: Yeah, it was a white owner. And he later moved to the spot where Levine was on Division and Nixon. Yeah. Mr. (inaudible) used to work at the Brothers Store,
so he—I remember him as a kid. He always was good to black folks, particular those who was less fortunate. He allowed them to have credit. And they paid him, and I guess were among some of his best customers.

**Kyriakoudes:** In terms of the impact of Dr. Mason, the NAACP wade-ins, and all of these things on your personal life, could you tell us a little about after this? Other things you got involved in, other movements activities? Or how you feel it affected your own personal—

**Carney:** Well, it affected my life tremendously because what happened is I found him a person of strength and courage. And my mother had always taught us to treat people the way you want to be treated, so I was never really afraid of color. And I figured they had to catch me to do something to me, so I wasn’t going to get close enough to them if I thought they were dangerous. I’d say that we had a long history in the political arena because oftentimes we supported candidates that would best represent our issues and the communities in which we lived. Those were some of our concerns. And we had a mutual ground on that, that we didn’t always agree on every candidate, but for the most part we did. I’ll say that he’d always call me, and I’d go by his office, and we’d sit and talk about this or that person, who’s running for office, who we think would make a good candidate. He was very politically active and very outspoken. And I’ll never forget; one year I had this dream that one day I was going to run for mayor of Biloxi. So I did. I qualified, and I put my name in the hat. And I was running against Gerald Blessey, when he ran his second term. And I had heard the rumor that he wasn’t real happy with me running. Him and Gerald was real good friends, but I had a personal issue at the time with Gerald because of some things that I felt he didn’t do that he could have done. And I campaigned for him, I think, his first term. And when people say things, and they don’t listen—I was basically sending a message. So I saw him at a fraternity party one night at the Royal D’Iberville on Highway 90. Mrs. Clara Roven(?) was there, and Mr. Roven, and a lot of the (inaudible) alumni association. I had got invited. I was always getting invited to some of the good things. And when I saw him, we were sitting on the sofa. And everybody was just eating and fraternizing. And he says, “Look, I got something I want to tell you.” I said, “What’s that, Doc?” “You should have come talk to me before you decided to run.” And for some reason, I knew this was coming, and I sparked off. I said, “Look, let me tell you something. I greatly respect you, but you’re not my daddy. You’re not my mother. This is something that I chose to do. It has nothing to do with you.” And Mrs. Roven, I’ll never forget. She knew we was always tight, so she and Mr. Roven kind of got me to hush down a little bit, which I just toned down, and it died. But out of that story, later on in life, because I had about thirty-something years of political action, helping candidates get elected to state, county, and local positions, supporting people that had good potential, and he decided to run for president of the state branch of the NAACP. And guess who he called to be his campaign manager? And that was just redemption all over. I thought that was so beautiful, that bygones had gone by, and he felt that I could do him some good. And we only lost because the state chapter of the NAACP, the youth chapter, was a strong group, and they beat us; the youth department beat us in the state. And I feel to this
day, and I still tell him; I say, "Doc, if you’d made that decision a lot sooner, I would’ve gone to Jackson, and I know some people on the campus up there. We might have been able to sway some of those votes," because we did pull some of them during that convention going on and talking to some of them in the hallways. I said, "We probably could have tilted the scale." He laughed; he said, "Well, I gave it a shot. That was just something I always wanted to do." I said, "Well, there it go."

**Kyriakoudes:** Do you remember what year this was roughly, or the exact year? Both parts.

**Carney:** Oh, man. I wasn’t prepared to give you a year, but I can tell you this. I’m not certain. There have been two other people who have been the state president since this happened, so I would say that this was before Hurricane Katrina, way before that. And I should know the exact date, but I don’t.

**Kyriakoudes:** And what year did you run for mayor of the city?

**Carney:** In the sixties, or no. I’m sorry. Nineteen eighty-four, it was 1984.

**Kyriakoudes:** You’ve had a long career in the bonding business. Can you tell me a little bit about that?

**Carney:** Well, backing up a second, I was also the first minority to run for congressman of the Fifth Congressional District. Gene Taylor and I was real good friends, and Gene went to Washington and started listening to everybody. But the people on the coast, at one point Democrats felt like he was straddling the fence. And Dennis Dollar ran as a Republican that year, and I ran as an independent. It was quite challenging.

**Kyriakoudes:** Did Taylor—how did he—

**Carney:** He won; he won reelection. It was kind of funny because Moss Point high school had a political forum over there, the history class? And was nice over there, but he didn’t show up. He showed up, but he didn’t debate us. I guess being the incumbent you just feel like, “Oh, it’s just publicity for them guys.” He gave us some kind of reason, but I get a Christmas card from him every year; we’re friends now. We’re real good friends now. We talk to each other from time to time, and I feel like he knew why I did what I did. So we’ve even talked about it.

**Kyriakoudes:** Can you speak a little bit about your career, and the businesses you’ve been involved in?

**Carney:** Well the bonding business was, of course—I mean, I always wanted to go to law school because I saw such injustice to minorities. And that never happened. And I felt that, being in the bonding business, I was able to help a lot of young kids, people who had gotten in trouble for the first time. I didn’t feel like it was all about any
I sit down and I talk to these kids, and I say, ‘Look. This is your first shot, the first time you’ve been in trouble. Think about what you’re going to do after this. Don’t be a repeat offender because somebody’s going to take your place.’ I said, ‘You concentrate on getting as far away from what got you here as you possibly can.’ And that’s the attitude I had. And the local judges will tell you: if I had a client—basically, if you get a guy out on bond, it’s like you’ve got him on probation, basically, because he’s got to report in every week; he’s got to let you know he didn’t move; he’s got to let you know if he goes out of town. So I had no problems with letting the courts know what type of individual that this person has been for the six months or year that he’s been on bond before he goes to trial. And most bonding companies never would do that. They’d just sit there in the courtroom and wouldn’t even say anything nice about them. So I kind of stood out, in a sense, because I had a good reputation, and I feel like any business, particularly that type of business, that’s how you ought to feel about your clients.

**Kyriakoudes:** Are you still active in the business now?

**Carney:** No, I’m not. My brother is. The name changed, but my brother is running it now.

**Kyriakoudes:** You mentioned Mayor Blessey. Would you care to share your thoughts on the direction he’s taken with all of this since the storm, and the way some of the storm issues were handled? Positive or negative?

**Carney:** Overall, I have to give Biloxi a B plus. I won’t give them an A. I think if you look along the Gulf Coast that this city has always had the personnel and people in position to rise to most crises that has ever hit Biloxi. The rest of the Gulf Coast area moves a little slower, and I think that’s because of the way we’ve operated in terms of—I think one of the best things that happened to this city: this city used to be run by a commission form of government, and when we went to the council form of government, I think that brought this city a lot closer together in terms of addressing the issues within those seven wards of the community because three commissioners were not enough. Biloxi had started growing, so that was one of the best things happened. Some of the other areas chose the alderman form of government, which I don’t think is the best form of government, but that was their choice. I also worked on Louis Jackson’s campaign. He was the first black mayor of Moss Point. He served two terms. So I can look back on—campaigned on Trent Lott’s campaign, had the opportunity to meet his mother in Jackson, and I’ll never forget that. She was one of the nicest ladies you could ever want to sit down and talk to. And I knew him way back because he started off in William Coleman’s office, over there in Jackson County, and a lot of folks don’t know or don’t remember that, but he was more or less a Democrat before he became a Republican. So his heart never changed. He has helped more people in this state than any elected official that I know. His office, he had a staff that would address almost every issue that came through that door if it was possible. I kind of hated to see him step down.
Kyriakoudes: Yeah, that’s interesting. I’m familiar with—I think it was [19]72, I believe, when he was elected into the House, and then the Senate in the [19]80s. But that’s interesting. So any final thoughts you want to share with us as we wrap up?

Carney: Well, one last thing I’d say is that you were talking about how things have improved or how they got better in this community in this storm, or not. I feel like I know there’s a flood elevation, in terms of how high some of these structures ought to be based on the area that they’re in, and I don’t know whether that’s all safe or not. And I say that in terms of: you got to build it up ten feet off the ground, or a floating barge, or another house float. It’s not going to stay there. Plus there are very few homogenous communities anymore. You ride down one place; you see a house up on stilts ten feet off the ground. You looking at a house down next to it. I mean, I told them one day; we was talking to the city counselors. One guy wanted to put a MEMA [Mississippi Emergency Management Agency] cottage in the neighborhood where they didn’t want it, and the neighbors didn’t want it, and I was on up there at the planning commission’s office. And I said to them; I said, “I don’t even know this man. Can I say something? Have you—all just took a ride through East Biloxi?” I said, “Biloxi is never, in a sense, going to ever be the same if you’re going to require new constructions to build houses that high off the ground. And if they put it on a slab and put dirt on it, then you’re going to have runoff of water, and other people neighbors just”—I don’t know. I wish FEMA would’ve decided to give everybody coverage that wanted to stay in this area because I just don’t agree with the height that they want to put some of these houses.

Kyriakoudes: Yeah, that’s a real problem.

Carney: Plus, when it’s happened as a result of that—new construction in houses in this area, with the exception of Habitat for Humanity and some of the other nonprofit organizations. I mean, nobody’s coming in who wants to build a house or build a subdivision in this area because of that elevation problem. And then finding somebody to buy them and move in them is another problem.

Kyriakoudes: Yeah, and then you get your wind pool bill.

Carney: See. That’s the next thing they don’t tell you. When you get these houses elevated up, and you go get insurance on it, you’re paying through the nose. You’re looking at, depending on where you go, you’re talking about—well, they’ve got special exceptions for some areas except for the Biloxi areas, the storm-hit areas or some of these policies for winds, which is good. But that’s something you don’t know until you decide to go up ten feet or whatever, and then you find out how much you’ve got to pay for insurance.

Kyriakoudes: Yeah, we’re all struggling with that. Well, Mr. Carney, thank you for your time.

Carney: You’re quite welcome! One last thing I want to add here. I went down two
occasions. Second occasion, they brought an eighteen-wheeler down to the beach, and they took us to the Biloxi jail, which was sitting by the old fire station where Paul Meyer's(?) office used to be? The Biloxi Police Department was in the middle of Main Street. You had to go around Main Street that, where the building was sitting in the middle of Main Street, and then Howard Avenue. And as a little kid, this was the second time, and they locked the doors on me, and this is after the riot—locked us up. We stayed down there in jail I guess about half a night before they finally released us all, but they put us in the back of an eighteen wheeler truck, one of the companies here. And they took us to the police station and locked us up. And at that time, wasn't anybody doing anything down on the beach but just swimming. Some of them was playing ball again, just recreational things, having fun. They come down, brought a truck up, loaded us all off and took us to jail.

**Kyriakoudes:** This was a later time?

**Carney:** Yes, this was the next time after the riot.

**Kyriakoudes:** And how did you feel about that? Were you scared?

**Carney:** Well, I was frightened, but as I said, I was kind of adventurous as a kid, and I just had hope at the time that we would be freed. I just felt like the national office would be involved in this with their lawyers, [and] we would be released at some point. And it was just kind of just—and plus, we knew the grownups were down there with us, so we wasn’t just down there by ourselves; we was down there in a group. And I think that gave us strength: the fact that we knew that if anything happened, there was enough witnesses to kind of witness it. And I can’t recall anybody getting beat up down there that day at the police station. They made it as uncomfortable for us as possible, but they released us at night. I was released, and that was I guess the—that was an experience for me, having gone through that twice, and before it got better. But I always believed—Dr. King said, “A change is going to come.” I just always felt like at some point they’d get tired. And all we had to do was keep pushing. Then of course, after the Civil Rights Act was signed into law in [19]64—last time we was down there was in [19]63. And when the Civil Rights law was signed, then things started to change. They could no longer arrest us for going down on the beach. And it seems like after that, things started changing. Take an example Gulfport; Dr. Phyllis Donnell(?) was the president over there. I used to go to Gulfport as a kid, a teenager, to the west side of Broad Avenue. All of that area, if you went up in that area—blacks used to swim in that area all the time, during that same period of time. And nobody ever bothered us.

**Kyriakoudes:** But in Biloxi—that’s interesting.

**Carney:** I swam right here, where those boats are. Never was attacked, and there never was more than two or three of us at a time.

**Kyriakoudes:** Now, you made the point earlier in the talk as to when the NAACP did
Carney: I found that during that period of time, whites hated the NAACP, the majority of them. I’m talking about they hated the NAACP for no apparent reason. If you mentioned NAACP, I mean, that’s something they just rebelled against. And they didn’t know a lot about the NAACP, nor did they really want to know what it stood for, the things that it stood for. I remember—you got a person on your list I believe, Ms. Myrtle Davis—had a sewing shop here in Biloxi. And we used to meet there, at her shop. Her husband named, the late Mr. Charles Davis, he’s dead now. And we had what you’d call an underground newspaper there. They had one of them old, crank presses, and they would let us print stuff. That’s how we would get our messages out because we couldn’t get anything in the local papers at that time. And the COFO [Council of Federated Organizations], SNCC [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee], SCLC [Southern Christian Leadership Conference], they came down to help us organize different events, and they were called “nigger lovers.” And I mean, it was just—but it’s a whole lot more we could talk about, but I know you’ve got some other things, but that’s a whole lot that I was involved in. I met the, like I say, COFO, the SNCC, SCLC. Reverend Joseph Lowery (?) was the president at that time of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

Kyriakoudes: Well, that’s part of how it affected your life, though. I mean, after the wade-in, did you get involved with these groups, or interact with them?

Carney: Yeah. I’m still, I’m a life member of the NAACP. I belong to the American Legion, the VFW [Veterans of Foreign Wars]. I was a legislative officer; the first time I joined the VFW, I became the legislative officer in a predominantly white VFW, so I think things have changed. I never forgot the guy retired from the Air Force out there Doctor—we called him Doc Blancher, L.C. Blancher(?). I don’t know if you’ve heard that name; he’s retired Air Force. He told me one day; he said, “Man, why don’t you come over and join this branch with the rednecks over here?” And he said it jokingly, because we used to campaign; we was campaigning, I think for Joe Price or somebody. And he said, “Man, why don’t you move? Come over here and join with us?” And he actually recruited me because we were politically active together, and he was a real nice person. And he talked me into going over there. A.J. Pinroll, who’s a council member in D’Iberville, he was a member at that branch as well. And a couple of other people, Clara Watts (?) and her husband was a member. And he got up after he got me in there, and he [said], “I want to nominate Brother Carney over there for legislative officer.” He was a commander too, at one time. Doc Blancher was something else. He was a character. I’ve had a great life, in terms of interracial relationships with whites. Everybody along the Gulf Coast, white or not, I don’t have a problem with. There are some who ain’t going to never change, and you can’t change them. You just have to—the only thing to change them is time. And some of them is—I will say the majority of them—time has took care of that. They say, “Twice a child, once a man,” but that happens with age. So a lot of us are just sitting on a porch now that could care less. So you don’t have any trouble out of anymore, but we had a lot of, during that time when we were going to the beach we had a lot of
threats. People would—Dr. Mason had guys who were assigned to night watch and body guard for him. And I remember the stories he would tell me about cars passing by and getting down on the floor of the house; think they going to throw a bomb or something into the house. I never had that problem. I was a little fish, but they probably even know where I live. It was just those kinds of stories as a kid, and he wasn’t the only one. There were others who felt threatened as well, so. We went through a lot in those years as a family, a community. But we made it.

**Kyriakoudes:** Well, I know Charles [Evers] and Medgar Evers were close.

**Carney:** Yeah, Charles. Matter of fact, I talked to Charles, and he said he wanted to appear at this program. I didn’t think that they had something set up for him to do, something by phone. Yeah, I asked him to attend this program. I go a long ways back with him as a friend and as a brother. Medgar Evers, as a friend.

**Kyriakoudes:** Do you have any memories of either of them from that time period that you want to share?

**Carney:** Well, I remember when his brother Medgar—some of the years of him being active in the NAACP, and field director for the state. I remember those as a kid because we would be informed at our meetings. And I remember Dr. Mason participating in several marches with him. And his brother, I followed him; he was a little different than Medgar, but everybody has their own way of doing things. I remember when he ran for mayor of Fayetteville, and I thought that was certainly a move in the right direction for him.

**Kyriakoudes:** Do you recall when he ran for the Senate?

**Carney:** Yeah, when he switched to the Republican Party. I knew that’s what you wanted to ask me. But he explained that to us, and I mean you look at the makeup in the area where he was trying to get, and he was well-liked on both sides of the house, so. I think had he got elected, it would not have changed who he was, so that was not really a concern for me or a lot of others because we understood the political reason behind it. We didn’t feel it would change his heart or who he was.

**Kyriakoudes:** You know, our first two black senators were both Republicans.

**Carney:** Right!

**Kyriakoudes:** (inaudible) so there’s some logic there. Maybe not so much today because of the turn the party has taken. But even then, there were still liberals on race in the Republican Party, not in the South, but in the Northeast. But I thank you for your time, and I really appreciate it.

(ending of interview)