

# Dixon 5.13.13 Complete

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First Transcribers: Jessica Norment & Amanda Ellis – June 2020

Second Transcriber: Wesleigh Wright – October 2020

Karen Boyd

00:07

This is St. John Dixon-

Gloria Dixon

00:07

You moved it, honey.

Karen Boyd

00:08

... And his wife, Gloria.

Gloria Dixon

00:09

It was in your room.

Karen Boyd

00:12

I'm gonna start that one over. Well, thank you. Oh my...

St. John Dixon

00:17

That's for your laptop really.

Karen Boyd

00:19

Yeah, I'm not sure if I can- if that'll work. Let's- it'll do this. Let's see if that worked. That might actually be exactly what I need though for it. Perfect. That's perfect. Okay, so what I'll do is... I'll do this and get that one started over. It's okay for the rest to be capturing because they're keeping up for me. And that's ready and this is ready. This is May the 13th with St. John Dixon and Karen Boyd in his home. Thank you, Mr. Dixon for meeting with me.

St. John Dixon

00:54

You're very welcome. It's been a pleasure for you coming out.

Karen Boyd

00:58

I'm very excited to be able to hear your thoughts on this. So to not waste any time, how about sharing with me your recollection of the events surrounding the sit-ins, the demonstrations, the mass meetings and the lawsuit?

St. John Dixon

01:12

Well, what happened is I was very vocal even in my high school days, I always wanted to protest an injustice that was happening to people all around me and I feel that carried over to Alabama State U. And when I got there, we were always talking about what we could do to make a change in terms of how people were being mistreated and so forth. And, you know, we were studying one thing but they didn't seem to be following protocol in terms of how things were going. I was there right after the Montgomery Bus Boycott and during that time they took on the city – Montgomery, state of Alabama – and saw that, you know, it was an injustice for people paying their fees and getting on the bus and having to go behind the Colored line. And when Rosa Parks decided to sit-in and say that she wasn't going to move, then that was one of the things that really touched me and I felt that she could do that, then we could do something to make a change, a difference in terms of how students were being treated and their right to protests and get together and see if we could make a change. And, you know, they always said that, you know, "We treat you the same as others" and, you know, "We want to separate you, but we want to have equal schooling and so forth." And it was always for our understandings that nothing that is separated can be equal. And as a result of that we talked about it numerous times and then the- across the country, things was happening.

3:13

And down in North Carolina and Tennessee when their students were actually unwilling to actually discontinue their protest and so forth. Then it was a mass thing; it just spread over the country. And we said, we wanted to be a part of history, not just their history but our history in terms of what was really happening because they were telling us one thing, but they were preaching something altogether different. And that is one of the motivating factors for me. And I happened to have been the Vice President of our little church group there – called Vesper at the time – and we would talk about things that were actually happening and going on in the community and we decided that if anybody else could do it, we could do it. And I had met Dr. Martin Luther King prior to this because I attended a couple of church sessions at his church. Just to hear his sermon was really motivating to me that this is a person that is really on the ball and willing to take a chance on his life to see that there were changes made. And then I started getting involved in reading more about the Montgomery County Bus Boycott, and how he could really relate to people and the charisma that he had with the people and so forth. And, hey listen, I said, "This is a guy I can associate with and I'd follow this guy." And that's when we decided that we were gonna make a change. We decided that, hey, one way we can do it is through protest, peaceful protest. And, like, we were taught to be nonviolent. And my- one of my main jobs during the time was to try to make sure that those people who had not reached that plateau, that could be nonviolent in situations, that they not attend demonstrations of that type with us because we were stressing that the policeman had the guns and had the right to use them. And we figured that if someone would come down and start a ruckus or something with the crowd, then we would all be wiped out. So we try- I was one of the main ones in terms of talking to people who was really a little- hadn't really gotten the nonviolence thing down to tact. I said, "Well, you can't go because, see, I don't

want to lose my life based on stupidity.” And this is what happened’ this is the way it is in the South. And you just have to face it; you have to be willing to actually get beat or go through turmoil and tribulations in order to get to a certain point. And if you're not willing to do that, then you're gonna hinder the progress that we could make, if you would be/could be nonviolent. And we did have kids there that we're not really ready to do that. They said, well, if somebody spit on them or slap them, or whatever they do, then they want to retaliate. So, we didn't need that type of thing. You know, I wasn't as nonviolent when I first got there but when I started studying what nonviolence was all about, and how Mahatma Gandhi had done it in India, I said, “Hey, listen, it's gonna take a lot but once you get set in your mind... the mind is a key thing in terms of actually getting involved with something like that and willing to withstand it. Once you get to that point, then you do it.”

07:04

And that's what happened with us. And when I got to Alabama State College, I was very poor; I didn't have any money. So I had to work part time, sometimes full time, in order to pay tuition. But, you know, I decided that I would do it. And my parents was not educated; they didn't push us to actually go to college. They figured if you got a high school education you were over. But I said, “No, that's- it's not like that; that's only the beginning.” And what can you do with a high school education in Alabama? Get a job as a dishwasher or janitor or whatever? And I'm not knocking those jobs: whatever jobs that I had in Alabama, I gave it my all. And I remember working in some of the oppressor's homes for like, hey, 25 cents an hour. And you worked all day. And the one thing that really bothered me about the South is that if a white person was talking to you, you wasn't supposed to look in their eyes. And that was something that really was disturbing to me. And anytime, you know, during those years if you tried to stand up or whatever, then hey, you were in trouble. And once you get in trouble with the law in Alabama, it's no joke. I mean, you get the books thrown at you. So I'm saying that, but my involvement, and the whole thing at Alabama State was the fact that I met people who was genuine people who were willing to actually help you; people who are willing to be friends to you. And therefore, I said, “Well, hey, listen I'm gonna do it; whatever happens, happens.” And you know, I remember- yeah, I can go into many things that happened to me during this period. You know, I was hit by- with billy clubs; I could hardly see out of one eye for a couple of months just because of the fact that I refused to give an officer my name when I wasn't even under arrest. I indicated that I would rather remain anonymous and that was the wrong thing to say to an Alabama cop. And-

Karen Boyd

09:27

When was this?

St John Dixon

09:28

This was one of the demonstrations prior- before the courthouse thing. You know, we were doing little minor demonstrations. I remember going to the movie where, you know, we have to sit upstairs and as a result of that there- and, you know, the white people sit downstairs, but little did I know over the years we had the best seats. But anyway, it was a lot of fun to be to in a lot of ways, but I always knew that anytime that we would go out is a possibility of you not coming back.

Karen Boyd

10:11

So let's back up for a second.

St. John Dixon

10:12

Sure.

Karen Boyd

10:13

You were talking about the incident with the billy club-

St. John Dixon

10:15

Yeah.

Karen Boyd

10:16

With the police officer and that that had been when you were doing demonstrations.

St. John Dixon

10:20

Yeah.

Karen Boyd

10:21

So had you been engaged in anti-segregation demonstrations before y'all went down to the court?

St. John Dixon

10:25

Yeah, we had. We had.

Karen Boyd

10:26

Okay, so this is a longer stream.

St. John Dixon

10:27

Yeah, that's a- just a longer stream. It wasn't a major thing like the courthouse, of course, because we were going in and, well, no Blacks had ever treaded that area in terms of doing what we did-

Karen Boyd

10:42

In the courthouse, you mean?

St. John Dixon

10:42

In the courthouse. And we discussed that at length in terms of how we were going to get in, what was going to happen once we got there, and how we was going to act once we encountered them. And...

Karen Boyd

10:58

Can you talk a little about that conversation when you say you had discussed it at length? When was that and...?

St. John Dixon

11:02

That was at a meeting we had called at one of the... liquor store joints or something, where they had a big room and we went in and we talked about it and we stressed. See, we wouldn't do it on campus because we had heard what would happen if you did this type of a meeting on campus so we met not too far from one of the major hotels on South Jackson Street, Jefferson Davis Hotel, and we discussed it. And I said, "Well, listen"- now about 30 of us or so were supposed to go on the first March, but I told them, I said, "Some people are afraid and we not going to look down on you because you're afraid, but we just want those that are willing to actually go on their own accord and we're not going to, you know, castigate anybody that feels that they afraid and they don't wanna go. So out of the, I don't know, 35/40 people of us, it was maybe 25 or so went.

Karen Boyd

12:12

So the night before or weeks before or..?

St. John Dixon

12:15

This was maybe a couple of days before we were to really go down and, you know, test it out.

Karen Boyd

12:22

Okay.

St. John Dixon

12:23

And we had already sent someone down to figure out how to get into that place prior to going so that it wouldn't take us a lot of time to get in. And we had everything so that- timed: when we were going to do it and how we were going to do it. But because before, they knew – although we feel that it had been telegraphed that we were going to do it – they didn't know exactly what time or what day. So what happened when we got down there, we all got in, yeah, within less than two minutes. And when we walked into the snack bar- the eating place there the white people jumped up and ran out and said, "The n\*ggers are here! The n\*ggers are here!" [Phone ringing] Just cut it off. I'll cut it off. And said, "The n\*ggers are here!" and they all ran out. So, what happened is we was in there for maybe 10 minutes or so and then. within a little to no time, hey, it must have been 15/20 policemen there and we were wondering how they got there so fast so we figured somebody must have tipped them off. But anyway we were in there then and they said, "Well, we want you to leave. And we said, "Well, yeah, we're not gonna leave." And as I recall he lined us all up in the hallway. And we said, "Well, we gone stay here 'til we either arrested or... get served." So I guess we was in there for maybe 15/20 minutes or so and, I don't know whose decision it was to finally leave, but we finally left. But we all left in different directions from what I can gather, because instead of me going the regular route, I took a longer way around. Now, I don't know whether- this was 50 some years ago, I don't know who was arrested or whatnot, but I was not 'cause I had taken the- another route. But- and then it was all over the place then once we had done that. And so as a result of that, that's what took place. But a lot of things was happening in Montgomery that was never... televised or was never reported and the one reason for that is that the officers or whoever was in charge would tear up the cameras of those reporters and all that was actually trying to get snapshots of it. And at that time, I didn't even own a camera so, you know, that I couldn't get any pictures. But I do remember them pulling the film out of the old 35 millimeter cameras, and then trashing the cameras and all. And when it would come out in the paper the next day, it was like we instigated the whole thing and that it was our fault that they had to do what they had to do and it was a different story from the real thing that happened. [Clears throat] Excuse me. Many things were never reported. I mean, we didn't think to report small stuff.

Karen Boyd

15:45

Can you give me an example of when you say small?

St. John Dixon

15:46

Small stuff is like if you were someplace and someone told you you had to leave or whatever, we didn't really make that big of an issue about it; we'd stay around for a while and then we'll leave. But, you know, we're just letting them know that we were around and we would be there. And the thing that really got me first was when they start talking and naming people and so forth and said, "Well, we want you to deal with the leaders." I didn't consider myself a leader at the time. Alright, I said, "Well, hey, I go to all the functions and get involved, but I'm not trying to lead anybody else." But they always looked at me like I was one of the leaders for some reason. And as a result-

Karen Boyd

16:30

When you say they, who are you meaning?

St. John Dixon

16:32

I mean, the oppressors: white people, the people in politics; I mean, the governor or the mayor or whoever, you know; police department and all. And they pointed out – because they had pictures of everybody – and they circled the picture of the people that they said were leaders and I just happened to be one of those that were circled. But even today, you know, I'm not a... violent person. I don't want to hurt anyone; I don't want anyone to get hurt because of my actions. Bu and I don't hate the people that did it. I don't hate the people. I said, "They felt that they were right in terms of what they did." But I hate what they did to me. And that's just one of the things that will go with me, but I don't hate them.

Karen Boyd

17:28

Well, leading up to it, you mentioned that you guys were in a group and had been talking about the ways to do this and you wanted to do it the right way and – whatever that meant – and you thought out how to get it accomplished. And this was a few days before you actually went down there. Was there an organized group of people who were doing that or how did that group...?

St. John Dixon

17:48

It wasn't a real organized group, I would say. It was just a group of students who were- you know, wanted action. I mean, they wanted to do something; they wanted to say, "Well, Alabama State, we gone put you on the map, too. Hey, we're not going to sit here idle by." It was no big organizer meetings or whatever. But it was usually with people that sort of hung around with us on the campus or people that we were very- you know, pretty close to.

Karen Boyd

18:16

And were the people eventually suspended or expelled; were there the same people who were in that group, typically?

St. John Dixon

18:21

Some of the same people that were expelled was people that was in that group. Now, I pledged Phi Beta Sigma and that's a fraternity on the campus there and like 4 or 5 of the guys that pledged with me, pledged Phi Beta Sigma so we had that connection and we had ways and means to get directly to them whenever we wanted to. Some of them were not Sigma people, back to my recollection, but the majority of the little mainstream group was people who had joined that particular organization.

Karen Boyd

19:05

Was your president one of the people that were involved? The president of your- of the Phi Beta Sigma group?

St. John Dixon

19:15

.... No, I don't think the president was the one- he could have been but, you know, we were getting feedback from a number of people. You know, we had talked to- I hadn't personally talked to Dr. King but some of them had talked to Dr. King and, you know, we knew that he was in the background so if anything went down, I mean, he would be there for us and that was a no-brainer.

Karen Boyd

19:43

So tell me some more about what you were engaged in in the process of getting where this happened. So y'all left that morning – and I've got other conversations with you where you've described it – but described for the purposes of posterity pretty much what your morning was like and then after you got back to campus.

St. John Dixon

20:02

Okay, first of all the night leading up to it, we stayed up maybe 'til three or four o'clock in the morning. I mean, we wanted to be impeccable dressed; that was number one. Everybody had to have their shoes- we call it spit shined then. And we were saying, "Okay, what we gonna do in case this happen, and we're gonna make sure that everybody's nonviolent, and everybody's gonna be in place when we get ready to go; this ain't gone be one staggering here, no, we go as a group and that's the way we gonna do it." And that's what we talked about leading up to the thing. And I know I didn't get over a couple hours sleep that night because, you know, you wonder what's going to happen, how it's gonna happen, how it's gonna go and so forth. And I'm pretty sure that most of the other guys was going through the same anxiety. You know, that, hey, this could be big. I mean- we had no idea that we would be expelled from school for it, that's one thing. We had no idea whatsoever.

Karen Boyd

21:06

And why not?

St. John Dixon

21:07

The reason I didn't think we would be expelled from school: first of all it was a predominantly Black college and the president of the college was Black. H. Council Trenholm. And we'd say, "He wouldn't do that to the students unless we were actually breaking a real law. I mean, hey, this may be a bad day to them. But hey, listen, we don't think we gone be expelled from school." It didn't even cross our mind, or mine... until it happened. And I was really shocked when it happened. I couldn't believe it; I said, "Not him." 'cause he was he was a good guy. You know, I didn't have a lot of contact with him

personally as a student but when he expelled me, you better believe I had some contact. So I go straight to his office- I said, "Now I ain't going around the bush; I'm going straight to his office." And I'll go to my grave with this statement... And exactly what he told me, and I quote him again: "Due to the circumstances that you are not obeying the rules and the rights of the state of Alabama, I have no other alternative but to comply with the governor." Period. That was his statement. And I said, "Well." and I turned around and walked out. But that was it. And it was a sad day. It was a sad day because I had gone through a lot even to get there, and I was still going through a lot in terms of trying to stay in school. And as a result of my actions, things was happening in my hometown, Jackson, Alabama. They let my father go from his job. And they were putting pressure..... on... other siblings that were still home. They would stop my father late at night and check the car when the other kids may be sleeping – he would be coming from, you know, seeing relatives and so forth – and check the car to see if I was in the car. But one thing I can really say about my old man, my father, he never told me, never told me not to do it. Or I was wrong in terms of what I was doing. So, he started getting little menial jobs- there are people that were willing to actually look beyond what was going on with me and all. But he never really got the type of job that he probably would have had if I didn't do that... And he died in '71.... It wasn't easy.

Karen Boyd

24:25

What kinds of post-event activities did you engage in?

St John Dixon

24:36

Well, after that, you know, I tried not to get involved with a lot of issues and I would always say, "Well, you know, I paid my dues." I said, "It's time for somebody else to step up." But I realized you never finish paying your dues.... And right now, you know, I go to a lot of functions that are they having in terms of mostly Martin Luther King stuff. I didn't get involved with the Occupy Movement or anything like that, because somehow I didn't see those people being as serious as the whole thing were put out there to be. And I'm not saying that all of them, but there's a lot of violence going on, there's a lot of vandalism and stuff like this and, see, I'm not gonna be a part of that. And when it comes to, like, in the community now, you know, everybody sort of look up to me; say, "Hey, man, like, you know, this has happened or whatever, if you want to go down to city council and – you know most of the guys down there – and you gonna be my mediator, a liaison between what I have to deal with and them." And, you know, occasionally I go to city council meetings and I know a few of the city councilmen but I say, "Well, you know, I'm a senior citizen now: hey, listen, let me go out peacefully and put me out to pasture." You know, like= but anytime something goes on if I'm around, somebody wanna come to me and feel that, you know, I'm a martyr, I can do this, I can do that. But That's not it. And like right today, my brothers will go home- now my brother has a doctorate in engineering and all that stuff. He lives in North Carolina too, by the way. Got this big ole house, big ole spread, 9 and a half acres. But when he goes home, he says, "Well, why does everybody talk about you when I go home? I've given out scholarships to students here. I've come home twice as often as you have. Why don't they generate to me like they do you?" I say, "Well, you probably didn't have the rapport with a lot of those elderly people there as I did and, therefore, it's a carryover. They just feel 'well, you know, we'd rather talk to him than you.'" I say, "Well, don't feel bad." I say, "You've done your share."

27:39

But right now, I got people calling me and I've said, "I'm no psychiatrist; hey, listen, I don't I don't have a panacea for all you talking about." And, like, one of my wife's cousins – he's an ex-marine – and his mother didn't tell him who his biological father was. And he was like 49 at the time, and he's still going through that. And his mother still won't admit that the father that he was reared up under is not his biological father. Well, he had DNA done and found out that the other guy was his father, it was not his-



and he never will forget. He's still going through it now. Now he's an ex-marine and he can be dangerous. He said, "Well, you know, I can go over there and kill them all and don't even have a weapon." Well, I take that seriously. So I've talked to him constantly; he calls me when anything goes down, he'll call me. And Gloria said, "I can't deal with him 'cause the guy's crazy." Well maybe he is but I can deal with it. And she says, "Everybody call you, everybody call you. Why do they call you like that?" I say, "Well, hey listen, I'll listen." And the greatest thing about a person is that person able to listen. You will find out all kinds of things about people if you listen.

Karen Boyd

29:20

Speaking of which, I'd like to hear just a little bit about some of the things that you did after these events to bring you to this place where now you're in that space in the community.

St. John Dixon

29:34

Okay. What I did was, first of all, I never really looked down on people who were less fortunate. I know people now that I've known for 35/40/50 years. Most people wouldn't even be bothered with those people. But I still visit them; I still talk to them. And I hear other people saying, "Well, why would you go and deal with these people and you know that they're at the bottom of the rung?" I said, "Yeah, but I'm no better than they are, I just don't do the same things they do." [Phone rings] We not gone worry 'bout this. So a-

Karen Boyd

30:14

Let me be a little bit clearer.

St. John Dixon

30:15

Okay.

Karen Boyd

30:17

What kinda similar civic activities have you been involved with is more what I'm asking?

St. John Dixon

30:20

Okay. Civic activities?

Karen Boyd

30:23

Yeah.

St. John Dixon

30:26

I've been involved with the... been involved with the, you know, NAACP. I have been involved with groups that are trying to curtail violence in the city. I've gone to seminars where different groups get together to see what to be done about the situation in these deprived areas. But I try to be as lowkey as I possibly can but, you know, there comes a time when you just can't be that way. You've got to actually take part in whatever is going on around you, or it would never stop. And I'm not saying that I can curtail everything that's going on but at least people will know how I feel about certain situations. Like

the kids in the neighborhood. They come playing the loud music from time to time, and pants hanging all off of them now, but I talk to them. I said, "Now listen, do you want to actually have a decent life? Do you want to get a job do you want to get in school and all? You can't do this." "Well, I'm not gonna lose my identity and blah, blah, blah." I say, "Do you want your identity to be like that? No. I say you go to get a job and the first thing they gone tell you: they gone take your application. But the moment you walk out, they gone put it in the garbage can. I wouldn't hire you if you were coming to a job for me and your pants hanging and you got rings all in your nose and dreadlocks and all. I wouldn't hire you. I'ma just be up front."

Karen Boyd

32:14

So when you were working-

St. John Dixon

32:16

Yeah.

Karen Boyd

32:17

What were you doing?

St. John Dixon

32:19

My job when I was working- now that was a job and a half. I was a field representative for Service Employees International Union. I was the second Black that was hired during that time, in that particular local. And the way I got the job, I knew a lot of people. That's a major thing when you actually, you know, trying to get a job or whatever. And the secretary of treasury of that local was up for an election. And I got involved – I was working part time at the hospital then – and they selected me on the negotiating team. And I went to a couple of negotiations and we negotiated the highest paying hospital contract in the nation, in San Francisco. And I said, "Well, you know, I'm doing a lot of the work." You know, they come and ask me, "Hey, what what's happening in this case?" the business rep that was at the facility would come to me and get all the information and then he put it together, and he go back and got his case. So I decided, I said, "Something ain't gelling here?" So I met with the secretary of treasury of that local at one of the restaurants – a little coffee shop up the street – and I said, "Well, you know what? I'm doing a lot of work for your union and so forth and all." And I said, "I think I should be on the payroll." I said, "You got an election coming up pretty soon and I know four or five thousand people that I could get to. And when they drop their ballot, if everything is on the up and up, your name is gonna be on there." He said, "Well, I can't do that now I don't have a position and blah, blah, blah." That was like on a Friday. Monday morning I get the call: "So, Mr. Dixon, how soon can you come to work?" [Laughs]

34:29

I said, "Well, let me think about it." So I wouldn't go to work right then; I'd say, "Well, okay, I'll wait a couple days and then call him back and tell him that, okay." And that's how I got on the payroll. Well, I had one of the longest routes, any of the other 25/30 reps that we had in the area. That was when I was really getting ready to get out. I said, "Now listen, I'm not gonna do any more suicide cases or things for the union. Period." For us, you know, we did crazy things, crazy stuff; you know, some of the stuff I couldn't even tell my wife. But anyway, when I got ready to leave after 19 and a half years, I fought for the people; I fought for so many people that didn't deserve the job, but I so fit that I was able to have them keep their jobs when they were dead wrong. And after a while – after I sorta got in church a little bit and start reading the Word and all this – I said, "Now this is- I'm going to against what I've being

taught here.” Now I had- I was teaching a Sunday school class and so forth. And I said, “Well, I can't do this no more.” And I came home and I told my wife; I said, “Gloria” I said, “I'm leaving this job and, you know, I'm quitting.” She said, “You done lost your mind?” I said, “No, I just gained one.” And I took them my resignation and he said- he tore it up. He said, “We can't let you go now.” I said, “Well, I don't have to work, you know. You can say whatever you want; I don't need the resignation. I mean, I've already given it to you.” And three weeks later I was gone. But some of the things that I was doing while I was on that job was really crazy stuff. You know, like we would block highways and keep people from going to work who wanted to cross the picket line and so forth and-

Karen Boyd

36:36

You were doing activism.

St. John Dixon

36:37

Yeah. So, you know, there was times I had pictures when I was in the cuffs, you know, and all. But what happened? All of that was expunged off my record for- we had six attorneys in Sacramento and I remember I having six moving violations. And they're supposed to take your license and do all that. And they called me in and said, “Well, John, we gone have this cleared up because we got somebody” – Big C – and they expunged every one of those six traffic tickets, and any other thing that I had on my record. I'm, you know, I'm just as clean as the board of health after I left there. But I became an international rep. That was the greatest thing that happened as far as financially for me, 'cause international was paying part of my salary and the local was paying the other part. But what happened- I was able to get on the international retirement plan. So that meant, hey, many more lucrative dollars than if I had been on the- their plan.

Karen Boyd

37:45

Well, tell me: were there some- were there any other activities you got involved with that were civil rights oriented after this?

St. John Dixon

37:53

I really – other than actually participate- going to all of their different rallies and so forth – I never really went on any demonstrations other than the time that I went down to Forsyth County, Georgia. I go down and we tried to get a Martin Luther King Day down in Cumming, Georgia.

Karen Boyd

38:16

Why were you in Georgia?

St. John Dixon

38:18

Because they didn't have a Martin Luther King Day in Cummins, Georgia. That's about 30 or 40 miles out of Atlanta. So, I heard they were going. So, hey listen, I-

Karen Boyd

38:35

Who was they?

St. John Dixon

38:37

Cecil Williams and God Memorial Church there and all. He was getting a community of people together.

Karen Boyd

38:43

From- were they in- out in Atlanta?

St. John Dixon

38:45

From San Francisco.

Karen Boyd

38:46

Oh, in San Francisco. You went with a group from here?

St. John Dixon

38:46

Yeah. From here, yeah. And the union paid my way. They said, "Oh, yeah, we know that you were involved in the Civil Rights Movement back in Montgomery. So, yeah, we gone pay your way and then you can bring the information back to us and all." That was some trip. When I got- we all left San Francisco Airport. And when we got to- we flew into Atlanta. We had buses from the Martin Luther King Center to take us down into Cummins, Georgia. And we were all singing the rally songs and just so happy and everything until we passed under this freeway, and they had a Black man hanging in an effigy. And the song stopped. Up on the wall up- on the mountain area there they had in big, boldfaced black painting: "Kill all n\*ggers." So, we regrouped then; said, "Now listen, we gone get down here, there's no transportation in and out, you know, public transportation. At 4:30 we all gonna come back and get on this bus 'cause, you know, we got a flight out of here." So we marched down into Cummins; this is like going downhill more or less. And it must have been 20,000 people. And we were marching four abreast. And some white girl from Los Angeles had locked in this arm and I said, "Now when you get up there close to that guy with that tall pointed hat" – Grand Wizard – I said, "You let my arm go 'cause I ain't here to excite nothing." And she thought it was the funniest thing that she'd ever heard. I said, "But I'm serious." And when I pass by that dude, I could see the hate in his eyes. And he spit tobacco juice on my white jacket and I knew then – this was in '88 – I knew then that I wasn't as nonviolent as I was when I was in Montgomery.

St. John Dixon

41:04

I said, "Now that's wrong." I said, "Now if he was in a different area, he would have to answer to this." But anyway. And- some of the people didn't get back on the bus at 4:30. And they live around here in Richmond, so you know, I was gone deal with that. And they were walking up the freeway, trying to get out of Cummins, Georgia and it was just about getting dark. And, well, when I saw they wasn't on the bus, I just called the Martin Luther King Center and I was trying to talk to Dexter or Martin(???) or whoever was there. And the little lady that answered the phone, sent another bus or something down to pick them up and bring them back to the airport. But they were riding the trucks with the gun racks in the back, you know, and pickup trucks and they was just- Confederate flags and all and they was coming up and back- up and down the freeway. So I was happy that the people got out of there but I talked to them when we got back to Richmond; I said, "Now listen, you guys know that you should have been on that bus." But they said, "We just lost time; we was in little shops and- you know, like gift shops and so forth down in Cummins." But anyway, I haven't really been as active as I probably could have

because of the fact that when I retired, I said, “Well, you know, I’m just gonna ride out the sunset, just like a John Wayne movie.”

Karen Boyd

42:40

Sounds like you've been fairly active, though.

St. John Dixon

42:43

... Yeah.

Karen Boyd

42:45

So, the events surrounding the sit-in demonstrations, the mass meetings, the lawsuit etc. They provided opportunities for civic action and ethical action, okay? So, I’m wondering – and if so, in what ways – were your actions in your mind personally, socially responsible?

St. John Dixon

43:05

I don't think that I was responsible. I think that there- they had done nuclear(???) that could actually deal with stuff like that. My main thing was to get out of Montgomery at the time.

Karen Boyd

43:18

No, no, no, no. I’m- Help me-

St. John Dixon

43:18

Okay.

Karen Boyd

43:18

I'm sorry, say what you were saying again.

St. John Dixon

43:20

You was asking me what actions did I get in after-?

Karen Boyd

43:24

Well, no, this is just period. What – during the events – what actions did you take that you think were personally responsible and also socially responsible?

St. John Dixon

43:32

Well, I thought the actions that I took was more social than personal. ‘Cause I wasn't looking for anything out of the deal. You know, I was saying, “Hey, listen, there’s an injustice here, let's deal with it.” And that was a perspective that I took. I said, “Now-“ and... It wasn't all bad when I really look back. I mean, we had some fun days, I mean, even during this- during this time. But the one reason I wanted to get out of there during this time because, first of all, I didn't have any money. Okay. Secondly, I had

to eat. And there was a lady that lived in the neighborhood, close to the college. Her name was Mrs. Gilmore. She used to fix food. And you could at least get one meal a day at her place. Now, it wasn't the greatest food. I mean, she would have leftovers and boil overs and everything else, but it was good then. And that's what- you know, that's the way I survived other than, you know, time that I was working. Now I was living on South Jackson Street down the street from Dr. King. I had moved out of the dorm and all of that and I worked at the St. Margaret's Hospital, which is a few blocks out from his house. By the way, I went back there and there's no hospital at all there now; they redid about that whole area. And I said, "My main thing is to, you know, get out of here" because somehow I just felt that I had done my job. I really do. And I know that's not the way it is but, you know, I just felt that hey, listen, I don't want to really get involved with there too much now. I just want to, you know... chill out.

Karen Boyd

45:33

When you say you got involved- you'd done your job, do you mean-?

St. John Dixon

45:36

Yeah. Yeah.

Karen Boyd

45:36

By the work you'd done at the time? 'Kay. Now thinking back, how do you think that others' behaviors and actions were personally, socially responsible?

St. John Dixon

45:46

Well, other people were- we were involved in the movement because Montgomery was the type of town that, you know- I think the Bus Boycott had a lot to do with the effect of the others in terms of, you know, taking a part because they saw that that was an effective tool in order to make a difference, although it took almost a year or whatever; a couple of days, less or more than a year. And they felt that Dr. King was an instrumental part of all that because, I mean, when I look at Dr. King and I used to go by his house many times and, you know, I'd bring ice and – you know, it was during the summer and it was hot and all – you know, I'd holler at the kids and this kind of stuff. But the charisma that he had with people was something that I have not seen before or after. I remember when they bombed his home and there were hundreds of people around that house at five o'clock in the morning and this one lady was saying, "They did it!" – talking about the police – and she wouldn't stop. And they- when the- and when the cops decided they were gonna put her in the car and take her down. Well, the people there got in front of the car and in back of the car and all and said, "So, yeah, well hold all of us. And if you take us- you take her, you got to take us all." And the cops were saying, "Disperse! Get out of here! Leave!" and so forth and nobody would leave. And Dr. King came – he wasn't there that night – he came, talked to those people for less than five minutes and said, "Go home." and every one of them left.

47:50

Now that's the charisma and power that he had, over the people. And they wasn't all just illiterate type people. I mean, they were alcoholics- they had all kinds of people out there. But when I saw that I said, "Now this guy has something different than anybody that I have been involved with" and I have really rubbed elbows with some dignitaries, okay? I helped sing the National Anthem- the Black National Anthem at the Coliseum when Mandela came, we were all on stage together. I took sacrament from Bishop Tutu, okay? And the cream of the crop was Dr. King. And, you know, I just wish that I – when I look back – if I had stayed in that area, I probably would have been involved with a lot of other stuff.

Like I didn't walk across the Pettus Bridge in Selma. Probably if I had had the funding at the time to do it I probably would have been- got back down there for numerous things. That's where, you know, McFadden has an upper hand there because, first of all, financially, I guess he could do it and he's back and forth all the time. I would like to get more involved with the college. But living out here is- makes it tough.

Karen Boyd

49:30

What about- when you think about the other students that were involved, the students that participated-

St. John Dixon

49:39

Right.

Karen Boyd

49:40

in the event. What kind of things do you think they did that were socially, personally responsible?

St. John Dixon

49:45

Well, they were willing, I mean, they had a willing mind. I mean, they were willing to actually be nonviolent and....

[Part 2]

00:04

I remember Black kids not being able to go to the library, but only on certain days. And this is in Montgomery. I never really thought about it too much until afterwards. I said, "Well, that's a shame. I mean, hey, they gotta pick out days for them to go to the library." But the others there- a lot of them I guess was sort of followers, but they wanted to make a change and they wanted to be a part of it. But I don't know of anyone that was really so in tune with making- being a leader for, you know, social injustice and all. Now a couple of the guys wanted to seem like to be the big players of the group.

Karen Boyd

01:06

What do you mean?

St. John Dixon

01:07

You know, like "if anything go down, they gotta come by me and blah, blah, blah." And I said, "Hey, I ain't have no problem with that." And-

Karen Boyd

01:14

Who might that have been?

St. John Dixon

01:15

Bernard Lee, one. And- because he was older, he had been in service and he had a way with words, I mean, too, you know. And I guess he wanted to be the liaison between the group and King, 'cause he stuck very close to Dr. King at the time. And if there was anybody that was going to speak on something, he would normally be sort of the sportsman of the group. You know, it's- hey, man, he's one of our leaders and so- and I had no problem with that 'cause I didn't really want to be in that role in the first place. But that was one thing that I noticed...

Karen Boyd

02:01

So, speaking more on this theme of personal, social responsibility: when you watched Dr. Trenholm's actions, did you have any perception about whether your feelings on ways that he might have been acting personally?

St. John Dixon

02:14

Well, I personally thought that it was his decision rather than the board, because I hadn't gone through a lot of the stuff that I've gone through since. And that bothered me because I said, "Here is a Black man sitting across the desk with 25 or so years here, with his way already made and he's gonna make a decision like this." I said, "I can't see that." And I was quite upset because of the way that he came down because I didn't stay there long enough for him to, you know, get into any dialogue in terms of why he was doing it other than what he told me. I guess if I had sit around he may have gone into more reasons why he was making the decision than what he just told me. But I guess I was sort of hot headed when he told me that; I said, "I'm out of here."

Karen Boyd

03:07

How did- were there other feelings or interactions you'd had with Dr. Trenholm along the way that fit into that for you?

St. John Dixon

03:13

None whatsoever, none whatsoever.

Karen Boyd

03:14

How about other faculty that you were with-?

St. John Dixon

03:17

Well, I was the around other faculty members like Dr. Kohn Hardy. I mean, he used one of the big guys and everybody had to take a class for him. And he said, like, "If you don't get it this semester, that same train comes by next semester and it will have the same conductor." [Laughs] He was that type of a guy, you know, but-



Karen Boyd

03:44

So, as far the events that were happening with the sit-ins and all, did- do you have any recollection of him or other faculty?

03:51

Nah. Other faculty seem to be that involved. If they were, I didn't know it. You know, I was just sort of, you know, this little guy out there..... Just sort of, you know, trying to make it.

Karen Boyd

04:09

And as far as any of the alumni like Dr.- Mr. Gray or Attorney Gray or Fred Shuttlesworth or Abernathy?

St. John Dixon

04:16

Abernathy, I guess I was closer to than the others because I had access to his church, I mean, I knew where he was and he was always with King every time I saw him. So, like, he was sort of like the John the Baptist for Martin in terms of paving the way because he was one that would always go into an area and tell Martin whether he think he should go there. And I remember....

[Part 3]

00:01

I used to be trying to talk to her And Abernathy would come and say, "Get away! Get out of there, little ole boy; get out of there." But, you know, I was really concerned when he put out the book about Dr. King. Now he was right there; he was King's right hand man. But I never knew Dr. King to be anything like the book sort of portrayed him. But all I figured was that Abernathy got a little older and, you know, I still give him the benefit of the doubt. But I... just didn't see it-

Karen Boyd

00:48

But during those events, were there things that Dr. Abernathy- I mean, Reverend Abernathy or Gray or Shuttlesworth for that matter or any other alumni that you knew were involved with, that you felt were particularly important as personally and socially responsible?

St. John Dixon

01:01

Well, I figure that Dr. King had her – and I haven't heard her name mentioned anyplace since – and I'm trying to think whether she was his secretary or somebody else's, her name was Miss Gregory. But she had all kinds of information and inside contact on just about anything that you wanted to know. And therefore- and there was another person by the name- I think it was Richard Nixon. I was informed that he was supposed to have been the one to lead that sit-in movement and the whole thing. But because

of the fact that Dr. King was so good with words and so forth and articulate and all, that they then chose him over Dr. Nixon.

Karen Boyd

01:55

Are you talking about Ed Nixon?

St. John Dixon

01:58

I think it was Ed Nixon. I don't know that much about the guy; I've only seen him a few times and all. But, yeah, that was sort of interesting to me that there, you know, they- he thought, I guess, he was going to be in my position and there, it wasn't he.

Karen Boyd

02:17

The- help me with this: from your experiences in college, what, if anything, did they do to contribute to your leadership during these events?

St. John Dixon

02:30

Well, the college really probably was trying to get us not to rock the boat or whatever, you know, this is just my take on it. So they weren't encouraging me one way or the other, whether I should do it or not do it. So I sort of x-ed them out in a sense when it came to something like this. I said, "Hey, man, you know, we gone do this and, yeah, they not gone be enough to report on what actual part of what we're doing at this point. And that's the way I took it.

Karen Boyd

03:05

One of the things you said, though, when we were talking earlier at the beginning was you said that what you were taught was different than what was done?

St. John Dixon

03:11

Yeah, because, see, what they were doing- you know, they constantly in your history classes or whatever, social classes and all saying that "Hey, listen, you know, this is the greatest place in the world: I mean, and, you know, we got a democracy here and this and that." And I'm saying, "Hey, that ain't the way I see it." And that's what I meant when I saying that they're- you know, what they were teaching you, it's not really the way things were. And I- they were doing their job, I guess; I mean, that's what they were expected to do.

Karen Boyd

03:41

So what I think I'm hearing you say is, is that they were setting up this perception of what we were supposed to be-

St. John Dixon

03:50

Yes.

Karen Boyd

03:51

and when you were seeing something different then-

St. John Dixon

03:52

Something different.

Karen Boyd

03:53

you moved in to do something-

St. John Dixon

03:57

Right.

Karen Boyd

03:47

to make it more closely aligned with what you were being taught?

St. John Dixon

4:00

Sure, sure. The same- well, okay. And I guess I was always one to be willing to take a chance in terms of protesting against an injustice. I remember in high school, we didn't have a cafeteria. And I said, "Oh no." And we went on a real binge in all, you know, in terms of getting one. And it happened; we got one. So all of this, I guess, was molding me into the person that I am so that I could- I would go out and be willing to do something like that.

Karen Boyd

4:35

Now, you mentioned Dr. Hardy. What classes was- were he teaching- was he teaching..?

St. John Dixon

4:38

Seemed like to me he was teaching either biology or chemistry or one of those heavy science courses and all. Yeah, that's- vividly, yeah, that's the way I remember.

Karen Boyd

4:54

And that's the course that you had to work through..?

St. John Dixon

4:56

Yeah. Yeah, well, we have to take all bonehead subjects. Like when you go in, you take all of the – if you going for general education or secondary ed – you had to take, you know, English or history, math, literature, this. Yeah, yeah, you had to get all of that behind you; get that under you. And, you know, that's what I was- I was going for secondary ed so I had to do that.

Karen Boyd

5:25

Was there any curriculum or any classroom that they did that brought you in on a regular basis to talk about how to be a person?

St. John Dixon

05:30

Mm mmm. Nah. I don't remember any classes like that.

Karen Boyd

05:35

'Kay. It's my understanding that that they taught a class the first semester you were on campus for the first year on campus about acclimating to being at campus. Do you remember anything like that?

St. John Dixon

05:46

I don't remember a class about that. I mean, we may have heard it through some like little ole seminar or something that they came and acclimated you to the campus and what was expected and so forth, but it had nothing to do with outside activity like demonstrations and so forth-

Karen Boyd

06:01

Well, clearly not. No, no. I'm not asking about that...

St. John Dixon

06:04

Yeah. No, I'm just saying that they- that's what- I guess they would do that at most colleges in terms of getting you acclimated.

Karen Boyd

06:10

Did you have any chapel or anything like that where they talked about philosophy and things?

St. John Dixon

06:15

Well, no, the only thing that we were really involved with was the- at three o'clock on Sunday you had to be at Vesper. That's just like, you know, Bible study class or whatever. And we would get together and, you know, stuff may have come up in terms of how to deal with social issues and all, but it was not like that it was set up directly for that and it was only about an hour.

Karen Boyd

06:46

So about it- you did- you were required to go Vespers?

St. John Dixon

06:48

Oh, yeah. Yeah, you had to go to Vespers.

Karen Boyd

06:51

And is that the thing you were the vice president of? Do I remember you- hearing you saying that?

St. John Dixon

06:54

Yea- I was- no, I was vice president of the- yeah, that was it. That was it, yeah.

Karen Boys

07:01

So what would happen at Vespers?

St. John Dixon

07:05

Oh, you know, you'd have some guy get up and, you know, with a little outline in terms of what we're going to talk about or something like that. And in the event that he was not there, you know, he would get me the notes and so forth and we just go through it like that.

Karen Boyd

07:21

So, when you're thinking about your institution, and you were talking about how you were being told one thing and the world was something different: were there other instances where the institution would – as a whole – were sending messages to you that you felt either were consistent or not consistent?

St. John Dixon

07:37

Well, I felt like there's something.... that the institution was like a social thing; it was like, they were going to go with the norm. I mean, they weren't gonna do anything to jeopardize their jobs and stuff like that. And they probably was doing what they were told. They weren't gonna get involved with outside activities and so forth. I didn't think so anyway and I didn't see it when I was there.

Karen Boyd

08:07

So when you were expelled, you felt like they weren't..?

St. John Dixon

08:13

I really felt that they were not backing us as much as they could have. Now, they may have been doing it on a silent way or whatever but, you know, I never really looked at it from that standpoint.

Karen Boyd

08:26

How did that impact you?

St. John Dixon

08:28

That affected me a great deal. Strictly the reason it affected me more, I guess, because it was a predominantly Black school. You know, how a Black gone do this to another Black? Now, that's the way I felt at that time. Now I can look at it a little different from that and say, "Well, hey, they made a decision based on somebody else." You know, I don't think they would have done that if they hadn't been pressured to do it. Now I can see that but I didn't see it then.

Karen Boyd

08:56

And how do you think that impacted some of your behaviors going forward?

St. John Dixon

08:58

Well, it affected me to the point where, you know, I say, "Is it really worth it? Is it really worth it to actually, you know, try to make a change and so forth? And, you know, you just make it here; you get no respect. Like Dangerfield, you just don't give me no respect, okay." But, you know, I felt that way because I was much younger then and I was just- I- its so many things that I can see different now than I saw then. As you mature then you realize that, you know, everything is not black and white. You know, it's a gray in there. You know, like somethings you may be looking at is a little blurry so, you know, I could see that now. And, you know, I felt that hey, listen, I was out there and I was very popular with the young ladies right away. And hey, listen, once I got out, man, I was a wild man, okay? And I remember when I met my wife. I only knew her four months before we were married. And she came to a party with someone else. And I danced with her once and I whispered to her in her ear, I said, "I'm gonna marry you." She thought I was the craziest thing that she'd ever met. [Laughs] But anyway-

Karen Boyd

10:27

You may have been.

St. John Dixon

10:29

I could've been. Hey, listen, let me tell you.

Karen Boyd

10:32

Okay, just to continue to work through to help you think about some things-

St. John Dixon

10:36

Okay.

Karen Boyd

10:38

When you were at Alabama State-

St. John Dixon

10:40

Okay.

Karen Boyd

10:42

What would- how would you describe the quality of your life there while you were student?

St. John Dixon

10:47

Well, I don't think it was a, you know, my life was the greatest. I mean, I think I was a poor guy out there trying to make it and, you know, life hadn't dealt me a very good hand. But I had to play the hand that I was dealt. And that's the way I looked at it, you know. I was, you know, uptight from time to time because of the fact that I didn't have what I needed, and trying to get it was a real chore in terms of trying to stay in school and do what I had to do. And I probably – ain't no probably in it – I would have been a super student, if I had been given the opportunity to do like some students were able to do.

Karen Boyd

11:36

Meaning?

St. John Dixon

11:37

I mean, if I had been able to actually go to the library, if I had been able to study more because I had a fantastic memory. But I was not able to do the things that I would have done if I had been in a different position. And that's what I say even when I went to San Jose State,

Karen Boyd

11:58

Meaning?

St. John Dixon

11:59

I didn't have the time to actually spend in terms of studying like I should. And a lot of times I say, "Now, you know, if I had done that... there's no borders that I couldn't go. And right now, I don't think that I'm the most articulate person that you talk to. I mean, they are things, you know- but I just feel that, you know, I could be better at.

Karen Boyd

12:27

Well, with that said, though, what I'm hearing you say to me is the quality of your life: it was challenging to be able to be there-

St. John Dixon

12:34

Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Karen Boyd

12:35

That that impacted you your success.

St. John Dixon

12:38

Sure.

Karen Boyd

12:40

From your perspective, what about the quality of that life- how – other than the challenge of the financial piece – what can you share with me more about your perspective of the quality of life while you were on campus and..?

St. John Dixon

12:56

Yeah, well, I figured that, you know, it could have been a lot better if I was able to do the things that I really wanted to do. You know, I'm not saying that that would have changed my view in terms of what I was thinking as far as, you know, trying to... right a wrong that was being done. I just felt that there comes a time you have to take a stand. And if you don't take a stand, you ain't got no argument.

Karen Boyd

13:32

Well, thinking about that from the quality of your experience at Alabama state as a whole: how do you- how did that maybe contribute to you participating in these activities?



St. John Dixon

13:44

Well... it was a factor, but I probably – with the way that I live my life – I probably would have done it anyway. But it was a factor in terms of me doing it because of what I had endured.

Karen Boyd

14:00

Well, speak to some of that; help me understand what some of those things would be?

St. John Dixon

14:01

Okay.... I remember when I had to go to school in the winter with no shoes. And they'd talk about "You know, you gotta pull up your boot straps" and all of this stuff and I didn't have that to pull up. And I just felt that I was dealt a bad hand. Why should I have been in that position? I mean, I went through a lot..

[Part 4]

Karen Boyd

00:06

So, speaking to the point where the question, I believe, that we were talking about is given the quality of your experience and the things that you experienced at Alabama State, how do you think that impacted your- and contributed to your participation as a student leader during these events?

St. John Dixon

00:30

Well, it contributed a great deal because of the fact that coming from the situation that I was in- I mean, I was already at the bottom. The only way I could go was up. And as a result of that, if I could do just one thing to change one thing that was not Kosher with what it should be, then, you know, my life would not be in vain. I said, "Well, I am willing to actually take a chance on my life that maybe somebody else can be able to benefit."

Karen Boyd

01:13

Can you be specific when you said you felt like you were already at the bottom? What about the institutional quality?

St. John Dixon

01:17

Yeah, well, see... Okay, the institutional quality was- it wasn't that bad. I mean, they worked hard at what they were trying to do; they worked very hard. But somehow some people fall through the cracks. I mean, they did whatever they could do at a time and I think it's a great institution. And like I tell people now, "If you want to go to school: hey listen, once they did what they did for me, I was sold." I say, "Hey,

I was sold on Alabama State U.” And I’m- right now, I’m campaigning to have kids go there, especially my relatives.

Karen Boyd

02:06

And you mean at the 50th anniversary?

St. John Dixon

02:12

Yeah, yeah. So I say, “Well, hey listen, you know, they weren't all bad. I mean, hey listen, I think they did what they had to do in order to deal with the problems they have.

Karen Boyd

02:22

But let's talk about what happened before they suspended and expelled you, though, and how that may or may not have impacted you participating in those activities.

St. John Dixon

02:32

Well, I guess maybe it was because I was not as close to the faculty as I probably could have been. So I didn't have no real allegiance to the people that I didn't hang or didn't know or only just went to class. And as a result of that, I- they were not that much of a factor one way or the other in terms of what I was going to do; I was trying to get in there and get out. And- so they didn't have a major factor in terms of pushing me to do-

Karen Boyd

03:06

One way or to-

St. John Dixon

03:07

one way or the other. I mean, they were great as far as, you know, jobs that they were doing and, I mean, they helped a lot of people.

Karen Boyd

03:18

How about the educational services? Was there anything within the university educationally that was set up that made it more likely that you can- that contributed to you participating in this?

St. John Dixon

03:29

Well, somehow now I feel that they probably could have been more in tune with the students that were under-privileged or whatever, to sort of give them more directions in terms of what help they could

actually give to those students. But I won't knock them for it at this point because I think they did, yeah, the best that they could with what they had to work with.

Karen Boyd

04:00

So, then to ask another question from another angle:

St. John Dixon

04:03

Okay.

Karen Boyd

04:04

The nature and the quality of the students and the faculty and staff relationships?

St. John Dixon

04:09

Well, I guess some of the students had it. Others didn't. But, you know, it was a great school, I mean, hey listen, I had a good time at Alabama State U.

Karen Boyd

04:20

Di- But you had relationships with students?

St. John Dixon

04:24

Yes. Now that was my key. I had relationships with students; students that had come from my hometown and went to school there. Some of them, you know, graduated from there. I have a very close friend from my hometown, is a professor at Michigan State U in the mathematics department. There was others who came and went to state and did well, okay. So that's why they worked so hard to see that I could get there or whatever because they wanted to do the same for me.

Karen Boyd

05:03

So from those relationships, how might those have impacted your engagement in the sit-ins?

St. John Dixon

05:10

Well, not a whole lot because of the fact they were not involved. And the reason- I don't know why they were not involved; I don't know whether it was because they were afraid, or they were so in tune with doing other stuff and, you know, sticking with their classes and all, and they didn't do it. But they always allotted me for doing it. And, you know, when I go around them, you know, hey, you know, I can't do no wrong. And they, you know, they are real proud of the fact that I really went through and did what I did,

Karen Boyd

05:46

How 'bout the fraternity men that you were friends with? How would the quality of your relationship with them and the nature that....

St. John Dixon

05:52

Well, we were very close as fraternal brothers, you know. And when I look back, I mean, hey, you know, you get so in tune with what you're doing and with them 'til I could understand how couples work, you know, they get it into your head. And, you know, we had to go – in order to actually, you know, get our pins and all this – I mean, we had to go through hazing. And we had one called 'you got to go through the "burning sand."' And when I think about all the stuff that they had made us do, now I don't know if anybody would be willing to go through that. But anyway, that's- that was what it took to actually "cross the burning sand" and you got to do whatever the big brothers would tell you to do whatever and you did it and if you did then you got snap fuel that night.

Karen Boyd

07:00

Snap fuel?

St. John Dixon

07:02

Yeah, that's the paddle. [Laugh]

Karen Boyd

07:05

And what about those relationships contributed to you taking this walk?

St. John Dixon

07:11

Nah, that didn't- well, being close with a group, I mean, you know, if you decide that you're going to do it and a number of them are doing it, I mean, that's just... gravy. I mean, you just willing to do it more then, because, you know, you got your brothers out there with you. And that was the fact that the part that they played is being with you, and a part of you. And willing to have to go through whatever changes in order to get there.

Karen Boyd

07:43

How about the rest of the men that you said that sometimes you just hung out together with them?

St. John Dixon

07:49

Oh yeah, we, you know, we just went to football, basketball games together and so forth. But most of those were not really part of the group that went. You know, I was very popular with all the people of

the college, you know, like I didn't- I barred none. I mean, hey listen, we'd walk into a basketball game, McFadden and I, and we wouldn't go in until the game was in the second quarter or whatever and when we walked in the whole stands would applaud. [Laughs] That's the kind of thing that, you know, college kids do.

Karen Boyd

08:23

Yeah.

St. John Dixon

08:24

And if you know a lot of people, see, you put a group in the certain area that you know those are your boys; you know that you're gonna get it when- from them. And, you know, the whole crowd is saying "Follow suit." And we would do that at many basketball games; we would walk in and we would be clean, that's the other thing. Now I didn't have a lot of clothes, I didn't, but there was one other guy – and he didn't even pledge the same fraternity that I pledged; he pledged Omega Psi Phi – but we were about the same size. And he had clothes for days and he had a couple of suits that fit me perfectly. And he was always willing to let me wear one of his suits. And we will be the cleanest thing in the house. And I always had my little stinky head in a hat(???). And I always wore a trench coat. And-

Karen Boyd

09:18

Which is what you were wearing that day?

St. John Dixon

09:20

Yeah, I always wore it.

Karen Boyd

09:22

So how about those relationships? That sounds like you had a relationship with the student body as somebody that...

St. John Dixon

09:29

Yeah. I did. Now he wasn't in the same fraternity, but he lived in the same dormitory that McFadden and all of them was in, okay. And we knew each other, and I think we may have had some classes together, too. So, you know, it was just one of those things; you get together with friends and so forth in there and that's- you become a part.

Karen Boyd

09:51

Let me ask you this, then: were there any staff that you had relationships with..?

St. John Dixon

09:57

Very little staff that I had relationships with other than, you know, my instructors or whatever, you know. But I didn't really hang with them or whatever. Now McFadden probably had more staff people involved with him and so forth than I did. Because, you know, I was just a little poor boy in the group, you know, I... yeah.

Karen Boyd

10:21

So switching concepts and contexts-

St. John Dixon

10:23

Okay.

Karen Boyd

10:24

These- all these things that we talked about in your college experiences, and I think that helped you sort of think through some of them now?

St. John Dixon

10:31

Yeah.

Karen Boyd

10:32

Are there any that you think specifically helped you recognize the opportunity to step up and be socially responsible with the civic action that you did?

St. John Dixon

10:40

I had no idea. I had no idea that this would actually be history making or whatever.

Karen Boyd

10:46

Not so much the history part but knowing that what you were doing- 'cause what you're saying was right so..?

St. John Dixon

10:51

I didn't think it was gonna elevate me to some high point or whatever; no, I didn't think it was- I didn't look at it that way. I mean, I can see more now how- what effect it has and so- it had and how many people are really involved and so forth. And my hat's off to guys like you and people who are willing to

actually take that stand and do the research and the legwork in terms of getting this on the map. I mean, I could never forget people like you.

Karen Boyd

11:23

Well, all I'm really asking about is, is there anything about those experiences that you had that helped you recognize: this is wrong, as you said, and I want to make this change?

St. John Dixon

11:32

Well, I knew that all along. I mean, I even knew that before I got to Alabama State because of the way that, you know, how I was treated even at home and-

Karen Boyd

11:42

You brought with you.

St. John Dixon

11:43

Yeah, things that are- were not right in terms of how may I was treated, and not just me but my father and so forth. And, you know, if they called him boy or made fun or whatever, all he could do was just hang his head. I mean, he couldn't take him on. And I never forgot that.

Karen Boyd

12:06

Was there anything about your experiences at college that helped you make decisions about whether or not to do this?

St. John Dixon

12:14

Well, I guess being there and being around other people that were also willing to actually make this step was important to me because I don't think that I would have done it just myself. That had a lot of influence on me and the more we talked about it the more, you know, I got involved.

Karen Boyd

12:39

And how about your experiences while you're a college student that helped motivate you to do this?

St. John Dixon

12:47

Well, when I heard about students doing it in other areas or starting it, then I felt that it was as much of my responsibility as anyone else to actually take a stand. And that was the motivation for me to- hey, if we gone do it, we gone do it all over. Let every college in the nation to rise up. And that was a real motivation for me; to actually see somebody else is willing to take a stand.

Karen Boyd

13:22

And this was something that you heard pretty quickly; that the governor was saying for y'all to be kicked out of school?

St. John Dixon

13:31

I didn't really hear that-

Karen Boyd

13:32

Okay.

St. John Dixon

13:32

I didn't hear that part of it. I know that he was uptight about what was going on, but I never had any idea that he was gonna talk about kicking us out of school until it got almost to that time.

Karen Boyd

13:44

Well, let me ask this differently: the night before you went, you knew you were- you knew that something bad could happen?

St. John Dixon

13:52

Yeah, I did.

Karen Boyd

13:54

What about-

St. John Dixon

13:55

But I thought more physical than anything else.

Karen Boyd

13:56

Right. Right. So what helped you persist?

St. John Dixon

14:00

Well, I guess that innate feeling that, hey man, I got to do what a man got to do. And I said, "Hey, listen, I'm not backing down." That's another thing. I saw a lot of other people who were backing down from



actually taking that stand. I said, "It won't be me." And once I got to that point, hey, I was sold on the idea; nobody was gonna be able to change my mind.

Karen Boyd

14:21

Was there anything that happened in your college experiences that helped make that more so?

St. John Dixon

14:26

Oh, yeah. What I- the more I read about it and the more I became aware of what was actually going on and I felt that this was one of the times that we could actually make a difference. And that was what we were doing.

Karen Boyd

14:40

So you talked earlier about having read about Gandhi and learning about the nonviolence-

St. John Dixon

14:46

Yeah.

Karen Boyd

14:46

When did you get that experience?

St. John Dixon

14:48

Well, I got that experience when I was- in my association with Dr. King. I didn't have that before, you know, leading up to the demonstrations; I didn't have a lot of that behind me. But you know when he started talking about nonviolence then I got interested in terms of... what was going on.

Karen Boyd

15:09

When did you get exposed to that? Can you even remember that?

St. John Dixon

15:12

Oh, it's probably when I first started going to his church or that maybe- months after I got there.

Karen Boyd

15:21

'Kay. So, from your experiences, which college experiences – and including these moments that we've talked about – impacted your civic engagement that's happened since you left college?

St. John Dixon

15:34

Well, since I left college, I've seen a lot of things happen. I've seen them- a lot of injustices in terms of mistreating of people and so forth. And, you know, one of the things that I look at now is the fact that, you know, I look at all these young people being killed and maimed and so forth and all over the drug war, and I say, "Well, hey, you know, we almost gonna lose a generation of people and somebody gotta, you know, say something or do something or try to change that there factor because if not, who knows? I mean, it may be years and years before we get on track of actually trying to curtail some of the ill effects of the country and what's going on now." I mean, another thing I look at it; I say, "Well, how can we actually go over to Mid-Eastern countries and so forth and tell them what they should do and how they should farmer to markets, when we don't have it here?" But I can't say that because they, hey, you know, they want to get you for treason and so forth, you know.

Karen Boyd

16:40

Well, but going back, you know, since you've left college-

St. John Dixon

16:44

Yeah.

Karen Boyd

16:44

you've outlined a few things that you've done; that, you know, you've been involved with NAACP-

St John Dixon

16:47

Yeah.

Karen Boyd

16:48

and you've been involved with union organizing.

St. John Dixon

16:51

Right.

Karen Boyd

16:51

You've gone to the Georgia with the church and-

St. John Dixon

16:53

Yeah. Yeah.

Karen Boyd

16:54

you marched with Cesar Chavez, you said.

St. John Dixon

16:57

Yeah.

Karen Boyd

16:58

You shared that earlier.

St. John Dixon

16:59

Yeah.

Karen Boyd

17:00

And you've been invited to do some of those other activities with some of these dignitaries from across the globe, so you've done a lot even though you say haven't. With that said, though, what about these college experiences do you think had an influence over those-?

St. John Dixon

17:15

Well, I think that had an influence in terms of made me willing to do that. If I had not gone to college and gone through that I probably wouldn't have been this active or involved with a lot of things because once people find out that I've had that experience, then they seek me out. I don't go looking for them. But, you know, I always- first of all, when I address groups and all, I try to make sure that it's not- that I'm not preaching a hate thing. You know, I don't want them to go out and get an attitude and because of what happened to me wanna kill up a bunch of people and so forth. I make sure that they know that I'm not there for that. Now, see, another thing I was invited to do- to talk about this at one of the... I guess, it's a predominantly white church or whatever. But somehow, they wanted to dictate to me what I had to say. You know, they go "Bleep out this and that and so forth." I said, "You're talking to the wrong person... If you feel that way-" and I had my little briefcase and all and went to make the presentation. And when I got there, there was a black gentleman – I guess he was sort of involved with that department or whatever – and he was telling me "You know, well, you know, you can't say this or that." And I said, "Well, hey listen, you got the wrong man; you have to get somebody else." And I didn't do it.

Karen Boyd

18:58

So how do you-?

