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DATE: February 8, 1956
 TIME: 11:00 a. m.
 PLACE: 3938 Narrow Lane Road
 Occup: Attorney, Office, 1st Nat'l Bank Bldg.

INTERVIEWER: Anna Holden
 RESPONDENT: Mr. Jack Crenshaw

General Statement: Mr. Crenshaw is probably in his mid-50's, has been in Montgomery a number of years. I did not check on this, but would guess that he came from another to represent the bus company and was the lawyer brought in to represent the bus company in the meetings re change in seating arrangements after the Colvin incident. He was involved in all the meetings with the boycott group, the Mayor's committee, etc. after the Parks incident. Mr. Crenshaw was extremely cautious about what he said when he talked to me, and on the basis of what Rev. Thrasher and Bob Hughes both told me about him, I figured that he had been considerably subdued since the boycott first started. Both Thrasher and Hughes commented that he was extremely emotional about the situation; Hughes described him as a "twisted" person and stated that in his (Hughes) opinion, "Crenshaw is the person who is responsible for this situation." According to Hughes, Bagley relied heavily on Crenshaw's advice in the beginning. There was a rumor going around about the time I talked to Crenshaw that he had been fired by the bus company. Used "Nigra".

Presented myself as a staff member of Fisk University, working on a study of the Montgomery community. Told him we were interested in the bus situation, that I understood he had represented the bus company in legal cases for a number of years and thought he could be helpful in terms of background of previous incidents, earlier complaints, negotiations, etc.

Respondent: "Montgomery City lines began operating in 1936 and the first case I know about was in 1938. . . .that involved a white passenger and a "Nigra" woman. I don't remember any other cases until the early or mid-forties, during the war. We had a great deal of overcrowding on the buses during the war and at that time, there were more whites than "Nigras" riding the buses. Most of the trouble we had then was with whites who sat in the "Nigra" seats and refused to move. The bus company took a few of those cases to court, We had some trouble with the "Nigras" too, but I don't believe any of those cases were taken to court. After the war the picture changed because more whites were buying cars and their trade on the buses fell off. The situation reversed so that we had more "Nigras" than whites riding, where we had more whites than "Nigras" during the war. We didn't have any actual cases where "Nigras" were arrested for refusing to move until last spring when there was a case involving a high school girl. In fact, about 1947, one of the state legislators made a complaint that the bus company was favoring "Nigras"--he said we were giving them all the seats and not making enough room for whites. Beginning with 1955 starting with the arrest of the girl. For one thing, they have some new leaders and the thing was brought into politics for the first time. One of the candidates for the police commissioner's seat stated that he would not sell his Southern birthright for any block of votes and the thing was thrown into the political arena. It would save us a lot of headaches if the law let people sit where they wanted to, like they do in Chicago, but as long as the law remains as it is, the bus company has to obey the law. We have suggested all along that they change the law if they don't like it--that is their business, not ours."

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Interviewer: You mentioned that the bus situation was brought into politics. In what way? Did one of the candidates make a statement to the effect that he would change things in his platform?

One of the candidates

Respondent: "We don't know what he told them. He didn't come out and say anything in a public speech, but this arrest of the high school girl took place about the time the commissioner's race was on and the person who was police commissioner then (Birmingham) talked to them and promised them--well, we don't know what he promised them, but he did arrange a conference to decide on the proper construction of the law. The NAACP lawyers, the city attorney and I were present at that conference, so that I definitely know he promised that. What else he promised, I don't know, but I did take part in that. It was about the time of the commission race and Sellers, the present police commissioner, made the statement during the race that he would not sell his Southern birthright for any number of "Nigra" votes. Seller's brother was the bus driver who had the girl arrested and that probably account for some of it. We have had several cases this year and we expected them to contest the law, long before this. We anticipated a case last Spring and when they didn't file one at that time, we thought surely they would the next time. A Mary Louise Smith was arrested Oct. 25, 1955 and we thought that arrest would result in a test case."

Interviewer: Is segregation on city buses, such as the Montgomery buses, carried out through state or through local laws?

Respondent: "I don't want to go into all the technicalities of the law, but briefly, there are three laws governing segregation on the buses. Two of those are state laws and one is a city ordinance. *(What we suggested that the Mobile ordinance be adopted to replace the present city ordinance governing segregation.)* We thought that that would work here-- in fact, any plan will work with the cooperation of both races and no plan will work without that. I want to illustrate that point with an experience a friend of mine had recently on the bus in Mobile. He was sitting in a seat at the dividing line between the white and "Nigra" seats and a "Nigra" woman with a baby came up and was standing beside his seat. He got up and gave her his seat and then a small boy got and gave him his seat. With that kind of a chain reaction, with people being considerate of each other, any plan will work."

Interviewer: I have gotten the impression that the main point of conflict in the bus situation has centered around the seating arrangements.

Respondent: "Our big headache is the legal provision for separate but equal seating. The commission has interpreted that provision as meaning that seats must be available for both races. There is a provision in the segregation law giving bus drivers, police powers on the bus and giving them the right to reassign passengers. That is a bone of contention because nobody wants to move, once he has taken a seat, even when there is another seat available. Reassignment is a headache, and the city has adopted a policy of using sections to avoid reassignment. We don't want vacant seats on the buses, because vacant seats are bad for our business--the less vacant seats, the better we like it. They--the "Nigras"--don't want the drivers

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to have the power to reassign seats and they don't want the reserve sections either. Our drivers were always instructed not to move passengers unless there were vacant seats for them. One of the reasons we suggested the Mobile ordinance is that it spells out everything."

Interviewer: Has part of the trouble been the law is not clear? Is the law worded so that it leaves a great deal of leeway for interpretation?

Respondent: "The law itself is clear and we have told the boycott leaders all along that we could not operate in violation of the law. When we first started negotiating with them they asked us for a 60-day trial period to see if the first come, first-served seating would work. They said that they were willing to agree to a trial period of that length and drop it if it would not work. We told them that they were asking us to shut our eyes to the law for 60 days and we couldn't do that. We have said from the beginning that the bus company can't advocate a change in the law, but that we wouldn't fight it."

Interviewer: The law then is perfectly clear and what they are asking for in the way of seat arrangements is impossible under the present law?

Respondent: "You see the bus company is caught in the middle. We don't want to operate our buses with 1/3 of the seats vacant--we are in business and the less vacant seats we have, the better we like it, and that includes reserve seats. But we can't operate in violation of the law. We have told them all along that our hands are tied by the city commission and that the thing to do was to change the law."

Interviewer: I am trying to understand why the boycott. If the law is clear and not subject to interpretation, what was the boycott for? If the main thing is seating and the bus company was not in a position to change the seating, what could the boycott accomplish?

Respondent: "I assume that they originally thought that the bus company had the power to change the seating if it wanted to, otherwise they would have filed their suit to begin with. I think they began to realize that the bus company's hands were tied about the third week of the boycott they began to see that they would have to approach it through the law. That the boycott has done is to divide the city into two opposing camps and give impetus to the White Citizens Council. It will be difficult to change the law now, but it could have been worked out by amicable means in the beginning. You never can get anything by force."

Interviewer: I noticed in the paper that the leaders are meeting to consider whether they will continue the boycott.

Respondent: "I saw the story and I was pleased to see that the "Nigras" want to re-open negotiations."

Interviewer: I also want to ask you about the leadership in the boycott. From what you say you have been living in Montgomery some time and you would be familiar with people who do civic work and are well known. Are the leaders in the boycott men who have been active on things like the United Drivers Fund and educational committees? Would they be the

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people who usually represent the Negro community?

Respondent: "I never heard of King until this boycott. I have been on the United Community Service and other community committees, but I never heard of King."

Interviewer: What about the other top leadership?

Respondent: "All I can say is that I never heard of them."

Mr. Crenshaw had another appointment and ended the interview at this point. We were interrupted in the middle by a long distance call from Chicago and he asked me to wait in the outer office while he answered it. I talked some to his secretary while waiting--she wanted to know if I were a reporter and commented that you would think they would know what was going on, because Mr. Crenshaw represented the bus company, but that they didn't know any more than the public. He remarked, "This is really a terrible situation. It looks like all the blacks and all the whites in Montgomery are plotting against each other."