UNIVERSITY OF HOUSTON ORAL HISTORY OF HOUSTON PROJECT AND THE AFRICAN AMERICAN PHYSICIANS OF THE 20TH CENTURY HOUSTON PROJECT

Interview with: Dr. Robert Bacon
Interviewed by: Kathleen A. Brosnan
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Transcribed by: Suzanne Mascola

KAB: This is the oral history of Dr. Robert Bacon taken at his home in Houston, Texas on March 28, 2007. The interviewer is Kathleen A. Brosnan. Dr. Bacon, I am going to put this relatively close to you and I am going to talk a little bit loudly but mostly it is important we get your comments. So, I am just going to start at the beginning. Could you tell me where and when you were born?

RB: I was born in a little town in Mississippi, Como, Mississippi, county of Panola. I said I was born . . . I was born near Como because I was born on the Taylor Cotton Plantation and I guess the town itself was about 8 miles away. And when I was about 3 or 4 years old, we moved down near what was Sardis, Mississippi, which was still in Panola County and there, we were living on the Short Plantation. Maude Short was a newcomer to the area and that area was mostly swamp because of the low water. The Corps of Engineers had started draining the land and Maude had bought a lot of this land and he hired Grandpa to help clear the land. Now, the one thing I try to impress upon people is the fact that my grandfather was never a sharecropper. Granddad worked for money. You didn't pay him in cotton or any other . . . you paid him with money, and Short understood that so they formed quite a partnership that lasted several years. So,

Granddad cleared the land and then they started the usual crops of corn and cotton. Later on, they started raising peas because pea made excellent hay. Also, intermittently, they would plant their watermelons and they would have the orchards and the usual things. But basically, from the time I was about 2 or 3 until I was about 5 or 6, my home base was the Short Plantation. I say home base because I was the first and only grandchild and boy, I was bounced around something fierce! One week, I would be with my grandfather and the next week, I would be with one of my uncles or aunts, and the next week, with another uncle and aunt.

My dad's oldest sister, Willett, she lived in Memphis and on Saturdays when everybody would go to visit, they called it "go to town," when the train would pull in about 5 o'clock for them to hand me to one of the workers on the train, and he would carry me to Memphis and then carry me over to my aunt's house. I was a nomad. And then occasionally, my grandmother on my mother's side, had been a widow for a number of years but when she remarried, she moved to Blytheville, Arkansas. So, from Memphis, I'd go across the river into Blytheville. So, I was quite a traveler - Blytheville, Arkansas, Memphis, Tennessee, then back to Sardis.

KAB: And where did you go to grade school then?

RB: Well, actually, my first time I went to school, I don't know if you've ever heard of it but a guy named Rosenwald - he was a big Jewish merchant in Chicago - and the first schools in Mississippi, not only for blacks but for a lot of whites, too, were those one-room schools that Rosenwald built. So, when I was about 4 or 5 years old, because of

attachment to my cousin, Laura, when they started her in school, I accompanied her so I sat learning how to read and write in a Rosenwald school. But essentially, my basic education came when we moved to Lake Forest, Illinois and therein lies, to me, a very, very important phase of my life because the schools in Lake Forest were under the direction of John E. Baggett - an old, bushy-haired Irishman that was written up in several of the academic magazines and I think, oh, I guess about 40 years ago, they had a write-up about him in Reader's Digest as the most unforgettable character. Here is a man who stressed: 1) history; 2) art; 3) music; and 4) penmanship. One of our classes had to do with writing. And also, throughout those schools were copies of all the great works of art. We walked into Gordon School and in the lobby was this copy, this big statue of the Winged Victory. And when you walked in the Halsey School, there was Venus De Milo. And you had to learn all those things. But there was another thing about John E. Baggett: John E. Baggett would spank you, and that was it. Only one time during my time at Lake Forest was there any objection.

John E. Baggett had a little short - like a razor strap - and he also had what looked like a ping pong paddle. Now, when you went to his office, he would pull your pants down and he would really whack you. I mean, he wasn't playing. Girls and boys. I distinctly remember one incident where a young man . . . the folks were in the Navy . . . you see, Lake Forest was between Great Lakes Naval Station and Fort Sheraton. And this kid, he was really a bully, and he was bigger than most of the youngsters. But anyway, Mr. Baggett caught him shoving one of the girls. So, into Baggett's office they go and he gets about 4 or 5 across his rear end in good old Irish style. Well, his folks showed up at the meeting of the school board and who should be present at the school

board but Mr. Held. Mr. Held ran a laundry and after listening to the parents' complaint, Mr. Held announced that: 1) all the members of the school board - I think there were 7 of them - had gone to school under John E. Baggett and all of them at one time or another had been spanked by John E. Baggett and Mr. Capperthorn (sp?) announced that his daughter, Virginia, had just received her spanking about 2 weeks ago. So, it was concluded that if you want your son to go to school at Lake Forest, the options are: 1) he will be obedient and follow the rules; 2) if he breaks the rules, he will be spanked. If you are not satisfied with these rules, take him out and send him elsewhere. Conclusion? He stayed.

KAB: Why did your family move to Lake Forest?

RB: Well, what happened, you know, during the late 1920s, starting around 1926, 1927, there was a great migration of blacks in the south and we were part of that migration. Dad had left Mississippi in the fall of 1928 and he had gone to Lake Forest where mother's sister, Aunt Alice, was located. And he had gotten a job at a restaurant. He was a dishwasher and second cook. So, in March, mother and I joined him. We bypassed Chicago, thank goodness, and moved to Lake Forest. Lake Forest was quite a town. The population was about 3,000 and, to me, it was loaded with millionaires. For instance, the Cudahays, the Swifts, and Armours who controlled the meat packing industry were there. McLaughlin, who had McLaughlin's Meadow House Coffee and owned the Chicago Black Hawks hockey team plus a lot of real estate was there. The Curtis family who had the candy and gum, they were there. Wrigley had a summer home

out there. _____ and McCormick out of McCormick _____ Company, she had a home there. Kirk's, who produced the Kirk's Soap family flakes, they were there. And you just go down the list. But there was another unusual thing about Lake Forest. All the domestics were Swedish or German. All the blacks were small businessmen. The only blacks that were domestics were my mother and dad, my uncle and aunt, and _____. I think there were only about 6 or 8 blacks who were domestics. Most of the blacks who lived in Lake Forest had come from Georgia and Alabama and most of them had attended Alabama A&M or Alabama State. And Mr. Coleman had majored in electricity at Tuskegee. A good example of what the blacks were doing - Alfonso Williams was pressing clothes there. Now, if you wanted your clothes cleaned, you would take things to _____ Cleaners. They would clean the clothes but then when it was time to be pressed, over to Alfonso they could go and he would do the pressing. Also, he would do the shoe shines. And there was nothing that, especially in the summer shine, that passed by his shop and see, can you imagine this . . . 200 or 300 pairs of shoes sitting out in the sun. And he had a truck in which he would start delivering those clothes that he had pressed and the shoes that he shined.

Then, there was Mr. Matthews who ran a livery . . . as I was saying, Mr. Matthews and his sons ran the livery service. He had these auburn and cord cars, superchargers. I remember, you know, they had the big silver pipes coming out of the side. And his sons wore these very smart uniforms with the shiny boots and the caps. And as long as he had his livery service, Yellow Cab and Checker Cabs could not get a franchise. I think there was one taxi cab in the town and that was a gentleman whose family had lived there for a number of years. But other than that, whenever you needed a

cab, you called Mr. Matthews. And it was something to see because, you see, on regular mornings, about 8:15, what they called the millionaire's special on the Northwestern Line would roll in, and Mr. Matthews . . . I think he had, at one time, 5 cabs, they had an allotted spot and they would roll in, the cars were all shiny. Guys would step out smartly and open the doors for their clients, and they would board the train. Then, that evening at 4:15, they would line up again to take the folks home.

The Castleberrys, they ran a trucking service because those people who had those huge estates outside of the city limits, of course, they would get city service. So, the Castleberrys and Mr. Jordan took care of the trash removal, clearing their driveways in the winter when there was snow, and also taking care of some of their gardening equipment, hauling their trash, taking care of their septic tanks, etc. So, all the blacks were small businessmen. And one of the more different ones was Mr. Sloan. Mr. Sloan was a blacksmith and also worked with iron. Now, in Lake Forest was the Onwentsia Country Club and one of the biggest horse shows in the country at that time was at Onwentsia. And when that show would come to town, Mr. Sloan and his staff would set up shop at the country club because it was their job to see that all the horses were properly shod and taken care of. He was quite a master at this. So, as I said before, the only black domestics were my folks. All the rest of the blacks were business people. So, Lake Forest was a little bit unusual. Incidentally, some years ago, a history of Lake Forest was published and it seems that some of the original settlers of the city were black. I never did get that article to find out who they were. But also at that time, the public schools of Lake Forest were listed as some of the best in the United States. In fact, I think at one time, we were rated number one and number two. And in 1937, when they

finally opened the high school, Lake Forest High School, the high school in Highland Park, Michigan, the high school in Highland Park, Illinois, and the high school at Evanston, Illinois, were rated as the best high schools in the United States. So, I was fortunate enough to attend some predominantly terrific high schools.

Incidentally, one reason why we had such a good rating . . . at that time, you know, if you were teaching school, your salary was anywhere from $60 a month and if you were lucky, you made $90. But I think in Lake Forest, you could make about $150, $175. So, you had a waiting list. And, as I recall, all of my instructors had masters degrees. And to show you about the curriculum: O.K., on Tuesdays, Ms. Hatch came out and that was your day for art. All day, you had art work. On Thursdays, Mr. Walker came out and on Thursdays, you had music all day. Lake Forest was one of the first school systems to install the intercom network where you could communicate directly by, what do you say, radio telephone? And, as a result, on Fridays from 2 to 3 o'clock, we listened to the Chicago symphony being conducted by Dr. Walter Danrash. Later, that was extended from 2 until 3:30. Also, all up and down the halls and in every classroom, there were pictures, copies of the world's great art and you had to learn who they were, what they were and how they were. John E. Baggett personally conducted the tests for the examination for that course. You had groups of 4, 5, and he would walk up and down the halls and in and out of classrooms. He would point to a picture and point to you. Now, it wasn't enough for you to just tell the name of that picture. You had to name the artist, you had to give something about his background, where he came from, the pertinent factors about him. You not only had to tell where the picture was hung but you even had to tell something about the frame and the canvas and the mixture of paints. In

other words, it was very complete. So, when he mentioned Rose _____ or Sir Joshua Reynolds, boy, you had to take off and go with it. And, do you know, if you never had an answer, that was just like flunking arithmetic. That was the same thing.

KAB: Were the schools in Lake Forest integrated?

RB: Oh, yes. In my class, there were 3 black kids and I think all together in my school, there were about 18, maybe 20 at the most. Hank, Henry MacIntosh and Josephine Harrison were the only blacks in my class. As I said, it was a small black population. Oh, let me interject this. This is where I had the fun. You know, we always talk about how black folks have rhythm and how they would dance and all that? Well, I've got news for you - I was taught how to dance by a millionaire white woman. I was taught how to dance by Irene Castle McLaughlin. Irene Castle and her brother, for a number of years back in the late 1920s, were the dance team of America. Well, she married McLaughlin and moved to Lake Forest. And when she moved there, she became one of the chief volunteers at the YWCA and one of the first moves she made was to be sure that all the black girls between 6 and about 16 became members. So, after that got organized, they wanted to have a party but then they realized that most of the fellows couldn't dance. So, one Saturday afternoon, they rounded all of us up and who should teach me how to dance the old-fashioned two step? Irene Castle McLaughlin. Black man being taught by millionaire white woman how to dance!

KAB: I think they made a movie with Fred Astaire about Irene and Vernon Castle, if I remember.

RB: That's right. Well, she was it. So, you might say, see that reverses all the theories about how we have that natural rhythm.

KAB: So, you went to both grade school and high school up in Lake Forest?

RB: Yes.

KAB: And was there a point in your childhood when you started to think about becoming a doctor?

RB: Yes. When I started thinking about what I was going to do in life, I think I was somewhere around about the 7th grade. And what happened .. . . my mother had been in bad health for a number of years and she had been to a variety of doctors. And finally, somebody told her about this Dr. Robert Smith who practiced in Waukeegan at the time, about 10 or 12 miles north of Lake Forest. So, one morning bright and early, this Lasalle - they made Lasalles then which was kind of a substitute for Cadillacs - pulls up in front of our house and this very erudite gentleman steps forth and when I say he was black, I mean, he was black. Totally black. But boy, was he sharp. I remember he had on this bowler and this suit he had one and that suit he wore fit him like a glove. And, of course, he had the full Jamaican accent. and he handed me his bag and asked me to carry it in the

house. He went in, walked in the room where my mother was, dismissed me, closed the door and about 20 minutes later, he called me and told me to get a bag, a paper bag. I got the bag. And what he had done - all the medicines that my mother was taking, he put them in a bag and told me to throw them in the trash. And while he was doing that, I saw him loading up this syringe. And I could see mother back away because she knew he was going to give her this injection. To make a long story short, he injected Mother and I don't think it was probably another 10 years before Mother saw a doctor again. But I always remember when he left, as he walked to the car, again, he let me carry his bag and I remember he told me, he says, "You are going to be the next doctor here." Well, I started thinking about a career then and the three M's came up: one was the military because, as I said, Lake Forest being situated between Great Lakes Naval Station and Fort Sheraton, we were exposed to the military. I thought about the ministry. Now, I wasn't going to really be a preacher but I was going to use the ministry as my wheel of getting into politics because one of the most influential politicians in Chicago happened to be a big Methodist minister.

KAB: What was his name? Do you remember?

RB: I can't remember his name. And, of course, the other was medicine. And the final conclusion as to what I was going to become when I went to college, when I went down to Fisk University and Meharry Medical College was right across the street then, then that really did it. But the big influence really came from Dr. Smith.

KAB: He was the one who visited your house?

RB: Yes.

KAB: What was wrong with your mom?

RB: Mother had all kinds of complaints. I don't think we ever knew for sure what was wrong with her. One of the things she did have, she was bothered with an early form of arthritis - we know that. And at one time, we thought that Mother may have developed mild congestive failure, heart failure. But her biggest trouble was always with her back and her hips. Dr. Smith named some form of arthritis that she had. But that one injection, as I said, it was another 10 or 12 years before she needed a doctor again.

Now, the next thing about the schools in Lake Forest. We were always subjected to various testing. But back in those days, back in the 1930s, speed reading was offered to us, but a lot of emphasis was placed upon reading. A lot of emphasis was placed on geography. We had to really learn the resources. It wasn't just to say this is this state and that state. We had to learn what was in that state, what the people depended upon for livelihood and the type of livelihood and the standard of living they had. In other words, we were actually doing environmental studies back in the 1930s. But anyway, we were tested.

At that time in Chicago, there was what they called the Armour Institute and the Armour Institute did a lot of studies on people's capabilities and IQ testing and all that. And out at the University of Chicago, Hutchins had taken over and as some of you might

know, Hutchins came up with the great ideas in a series of books that were later published. Well, there was some thought or some criticism of the old Iowa IQ testing system. So, the Armour Institute people thought they would develop a new series of testing and they had selected students from around the state from about, oh, 30 or 40 different school districts throughout the state of Illinois. And from Lake Forest, Ruth Cohen and I were selected. Incidentally, Ruth Cohen, according to the Iowa testing, she had an IQ of 181. And, as I tell people, that is one woman I chased academically for the rest of my life. I was always second to her. But anyway, we went down to the Armour Institute for about 3 days while they administered this new testing. And, of course, Ruth Cohen came out on the top drawer. I have forgotten how the system worked but on her score, she had something like a 9.5, I think it was 9.5, out of a possible 10. But I was right behind her. I was somewhere around a 7. I think my IQ came out about 151, 160, something like that. But the thing was, Ruth and I became very good friends and her father was an exceptionally fine man. And it was funny - Ruth had a brother, Roy I think was his first name - brilliant as he could be but it took him 3 years to pass freshman French. She had a sister who was pretty . . . and boy, was she a looker. This girl was really a beautiful woman. But all 3 of those kids were sharp. Now, Ruth got a scholarship to the University of Chicago and in 5 years, she had her Ph.D. in Biophysics. She married and she went down to the nuclear plant down in Tennessee.

KAB: Oak Ridge?

RB: Not Oak Ridge. I think she and her husband retired after about 30 years down there.

KAB: When you were in high school, what kinds of science classes did you take that helped prepare you for college?

RB: Well, my courses in high school - I had 4 years of math, I had the usual math courses, precalculus, geometry, algebra, plain geometry. I had 4 years of math, 4 years of English, and really, for all practical purposes, I had almost 6 years of Latin because I had started Latin in junior high school and I had 4 years of Latin in high school. English. I had 4 years of English. And I think the other subjects were . . . science. I had 4 years of science. I had 2 courses of biology and 3 courses in chemistry. I carried 5 subjects. I was an honor student. I received the National Merit and the National Honor Society awards. So, I was a pretty good student. I recall when the first report cards came out, I had 3 A's and 2 B's and, at that time, I was not living with Mother and Dad because Mother and Dad had what they called a couple job and they lived at their place of employment. So, I had to live with other people. And I was living with who I called Ma and Pa Black. And the only difference between Ma and Pa Black and my mother and dad was very simple - it was physical. Dad was 6'1", Pa Black was 5'8". Mother was about 5'10" and Ma Black was 5'2". And other than that, I never knew the difference. But anyway, I can remember the phone ringing, people wanted to know how did Robert qualify to take 5 subjects and how did he make 3 A's and 2 B's? It was really amazing because the local newspaper would publish the list of honor students. But then, when the

second grades came out and here, Robert Bacon had 5 A's, oh my God, the telephone damned near burned up! Wondering how did Robert make 5 A's? Ma and Pa Black said, "How did he make them? I guess he studied." But anyway, I was a very good student. I think when I left school, I guess numerically I had a numerical average of about 96 or something like that. But I never could catch Ruth Cohen. That was out of the question. I tried. I tried but I knew I couldn't catch her.

KAB: In Lake Forest, blacks were given the same opportunities as other students?

RB: Oh, yes. There was this one particular thing in Lake Forest I never could figure out as far as black students were concerned. In gym classes, for swimming, black girls were separated from the white girls. Now, they couldn't swim together. Now, why, we never could figure out. At least, I never did find out. But you take for the boys, first of all, we swam naked and nobody said anything about it. For the men, it was nothing but for the girls, the black girls had to have their swimming lessons separate. I can remember a guy named Emmett who had a movie theater and I never knew exactly what happened but at one time, he tried to segregate blacks by having us relegated to the balcony, and all hell broke loose. I think the mayor and some others climbed down his throat, wanting to know where he was coming from. So, that went down the drain. So, other than that, there was no real out and out segregation. But there was some mixture. I can't say everybody was a love fest but I think the biggest thing was there was respect. Not tolerance but respect. So that we moved along fairly well because when scholarship time came up, the offers we had for scholarships, the offers we had for other affairs . . . Henry

McIntosh and I were very good athletes. We were good at track and field and also at football. And there were offers from several schools - Arizona, Minnesota, and some others. But we found out that for Minnesota, we were too small. Well, I wasn't because I weighed about 175 pounds but Henry only weighed about 160. So, when we visited Minnesota, we met Horace Bell who was about 6'2" and weighed about 220 pounds. So, we knew we were out of line there. But the thing about it . . . Henry's mother and father were graduates . . at that time, Hampton University was known as Hampton Institute so we knew where he was going. But I had an instructor, Mr. Eicher . . .

Mr. Eicher taught history and physics and he had studied at the London School of Economics and while studying there, he had met this gentleman from Fisk University and had visited Fisk. So, Mr. Eicher was telling me about Fisk and later, he introduced me to the lady who was the manager of the Fisk Jubilee Singers. She later visited and when she visited, she had a couple of guys from the Jubilee Singers with her. And boy, I mean, these guys the way they were dressed, in their presence, just knocked me out. So, I ended up going to Fisk. And when I first got there, I thought, oh my God, what a mistake I've made. They had had a drought. They had not had any rain in Nashville for months. And I always remember the social studies building was like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. The campus was dry, the buildings were old and all that but I will tell you something - when the students started arriving, the next thing I knew, you couldn't have dragged me away from there with dynamite. You see, Lake Forest was limited in the number of blacks and I had a limited number of contacts and number of social contacts. And here, I get to Fisk University and there are all these beautiful girls. My God! I had never seen anything like it. All colors, all shades, all sizes, all shapes, and all smiling. I fell in love, I'd say, on an

average of 15 to 20 times a day. I think I thought about marriage at least 8 or 9 times a day. But, I'll tell you, it was an experience I'll never forget.

I always remember one girl, Raven Rivera. When she asked me if I had a date to go to the Get Acquainted Dance . . . Raven was a junior student and she was very popular and across the street, all the guys in my area were shooting at her. And here, she picks me, a freshman, to escort her up to a dance. Oh my Lord. I wasn't in 7th heaven, I was in 11th heaven!

KAB: Fisk University is located in?

RB: Nashville, Tennessee. The school is very rich in tradition. Fisk Jubilee Singers were the people that were responsible for introducing the Negro spirituals to the world. When they made a tour of Europe, they made two command performances to Queen Victoria and that started it. And as a result, that is when Negro spirituals started coming on the market. But they produced several writers, Fisk produced several writers, poets, and, of course, one of the most famous graduates was a guy named Douglas who was an artist. James Weldon Johnson who wrote "Lift Every Voice and Sing," and sometimes referred to as the Negro National Anthem which is an error. It is an anthem for Negroes. But James Weldon made a reputation for himself when he gave the full and complete breakdown of the hay market rise in Chicago. There was Dr. Brady who was head of Chemistry who was doing extensive research for Sinclair Oil Company. Jim Lawson who taught physics. Jim was a young man who was awarded a Ph.D. in physics by the University of Michigan and he was the youngest guy to ever receive a Ph.D. from

Michigan. Mr. Cotten who was head of the Foreign Language department, his name was Cotten but we had to pronounce CO-TEN. But later we found out that during World War II, Mr. Cotten had been consulted on several occasions by the Defense Department because of his extensive travels in Europe and he knew a lot of contacts over there. Mrs. Foster, who was the Dean of Women, had written several articles regarding management of young ladies in college. So, we had faculty that were really outstanding. The student body was small. There were only about 600 students there. So, you got to know everybody.

And, of course, the fraternity . . . the fraternities that we are speaking of were a joke and when I say it, I mean this . . . Henry Hand, Lee and Mayo (sp?) lived together. Henry Hand was an Omega, Lee was an Alpha, and Mayo was a Kappa. So, that tells you how much emphasis we put on fraternities. It was nothing like . . . another good example . . . going across the campus one night, the Alphas decided they would serenade the girls that were in Jubilee Hall. Well, when the serenade came over, I think there were more non-Alphas singing than there were Alphas. We didn't put a lot of emphasis on that. It was just a lot of fun.

KAB: What year did you graduate high school?

RB: I finished high school in 1941 and I went to Fisk, but I left Fisk early because I had early acceptance to Meharry. I left Fisk in 1944.

KAB: Let me ask you a couple of questions about that. First of all, did you ever think . . . basically what was going on in the world was World War II. Did you ever consider leaving school and joining the military at that point?

RB: Not exactly. We thought about it. Now, one thing at Fisk - by the time I left, I think we had heard some of the world's greatest leaders because, at least two or three times a year, we would have leading politicians, educators, philosophers, speakers, and the first time I ever heard of Lyndon Baines Johnson was when he came there. And his opening remarks, the thing about "he that is asleep, awaken him," or something like that. "He that knows, knows not that he knows." Well, that was his opening remark. I always remember Lyndon Johnson. But no, what happened to us . . . when the war started, all of us that were premed students, they gathered us together and pointed out that we were going to be, if we so desired, were going to be inducted into the Army. They had what they called the Army Specialized Training Program. You joined the Army, the Army would send you to medical school, pay all your expenses and, of course, when you graduated, somewhere along the line, they expected you to serve. Well, my generation now, we were the ones that were called up for the Korean War so that we paid our dues. But hey, it was something . . . hey, I'm going to medical school. All my expenses are paid. I am getting the top notch food, steaks, and making $103 a month. I thought I'd retire.

KAB: Did you go to Meharry on an athletic scholarship?

RB: Meharry was an athletic . . .

KAB: Not Meharry, Fisk.

RB: No. I had offers, athletic offers but I don't know why I . . . for some reason, it didn't appeal to me. I think Mr. Eicher, the way he had talked about Fisk and then when I met those people from Fisk, athletics kind of faded away. Now, I'll tell you what did happen. Fisk was like some of the eastern schools. Football was just an incidental thing. They had this victory bell there on the campus. They had not rung that bell for 4 years. Fisk had lost football . . . but that year, Ben Majors, Joe Vaughn, Bob Bacon . . . on the starting team, there were 7 freshmen and I remember the first game we played, we won. We played Fort Valley and we defeated Fort Valley. I think it was like 21-7. And oh my God, you would think that . . . I don't know whether the war was coming . . . they almost broke the bell ringing it. That bell rang almost half the night. And I think that year, we played 9 games. We won 5 and lost 4. But that was the first time in 4 years that Fisk had a winning football team. And before we could get to the second year of the war, it started so we just had to kind of pick up games just for the hell of it.

KAB: Was it difficult for your parents to pay for college?

RB: Well, I had a scholarship.

KAB: Oh, you were on an academic scholarship?

RB: Yes, I had an academic scholarship. All $550. Now, I think when you go there, it is about $18,000. But at that time, if you had about $700, you could just about make it through.

KAB: Most of the students who attended Fisk, would they be students of the black middle class?

RB: Yes. Paul Robeson's nephew was there. Some relatives of Marion Anderson were there. Dawson was there, our elected congressman. His daughter was there. Corneil Davis was a member of the Illinois State legislature. His daughter was there. I am trying to think of this prominent Methodist bishop. I can't think of that guy's name but his niece and nephew, they were there. Some of the "outstanding black Americans'" children or relatives were students there.

KAB: And in Nashville, did you encounter Jim Crow segregation?

RB: Oh my God, yes.

KAB: What was your reaction to seeing Jim Crow segregation?

RB: Well, I was used to it because, you see, what happened to me . . . a lot of times in the summers, I would go back to Mississippi and stay with my grandparents. But I think

the one thing that got me, when somebody said, "Lets go to a movie," I said, "Great." So, we get on the bus and, of course, on that side of town, you didn't sit in the back because everybody on the bus was black. So, we get on the bus and we get off downtown, we go down to the theater and we start down this alley. "Where are you going?" We said, "We are going to the theater." "Down the alley?" You go down the alley and there is the tinted window. And then, you had to walk over about 6 flights of stairs. As I recall, I started up about 2 flights. said, "Hell, no." I had a date! I told the girl, I said, "I'm not going." And she wondered why. I said, "Well, you go ahead. I'm not going. I refuse to go." And I guess, I think one time I was in Nashville, I went to see one movie downtown. Otherwise, I would go . . . there was an all-black theater right across the street from Jubilee Hall at Fisk. If it didn't show there, I didn't go. But, to me, that was a grand insult - going down an alley, walk up 6 flights of steps to see a movie. So, I didn't go. In fact, I think the whole time I was in Nashville, I doubt if I went in the downtown section more than 3 or 4 times. But segregation was there in Nashville.

But then, there were spots that were different. Now, if you were going out around Vanderbilt University, different. If you were going around Fisk, different. Around Tennessee State, oh, look out now - that was a state school, black school support. Segregation was in. But Vanderbilt, the private school, no. Everybody, you know, I recall .. . . we went out to Vanderbilt for something, so it is time to eat - everybody goes to the same cafeteria. But at Tennessee State, no. White folks went one way, blacks went the other to eat. At Fisk, we all went to the same place to eat. And later on after I had left, when the sit-ins started, you know, the kids from Tennessee State that sat in and

were kicked out of school. So, Fisk and the private black schools picked them all up. So, that was where the differences came in.

KAB: And why did you choose Meharry for a medical school?

RB: I guess because it was right across the street and I had gotten to know people. And once or twice when I had some minor illnesses, I had been treated over there. Come to think of it, I don't think I applied to any other school because I had a letter from Dr. Smith in which I was applying to either University of Chicago or University of Illinois, but I applied to Meharry. And I think there I had met Matthew Walker who was Chief of Surgery. And boy, talk about charisma. That man had it. Oh, he could charm the rag off the bush. But that is what got me into Meharry. And I think that is where another big change in my life came because there I could see what black physicians were doing and the circumstances under which they had to work. But that is where a lot of things happened to me.

KAB: What do you mean "the circumstances under which they worked?"

RB: Limited hospital facilities. Now, they had facilities there . . . now you take when guys graduated from medical school at that time, the number of hospitals where they could go to get postgraduate training, you would get some out at Meharry, of course, at Howard in Washington, D.C. And now, the places where they really had facilities for training were Provident Hospital in Chicago, Homer Phillips in St. Louis. Kansas City

General #2 - there were some questions raised about the quality of the postgraduate training there. Harlem Hospital, we never could get it straight. Louie Wright, who was head of surgery there had certain criteria. Now, Louie was black but Louie had some strange criteria that if blacks didn't graduate from some predominantly white medical schools, they didn't know anything. And after some very serious incidents there, blacks were finally admitted into the surgical residencies. Now, at that same hospital, blacks got residencies in pediatrics and medicine and whatnot but nothing in surgery and I don't think anything in obstetrics and gynecology. And in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, there was what they called Katy B. Reynolds Hospital. It was good for about 2 years of training. So, most of the black physicians, the average black physician, went into practice after about 1 year of training and, as a result, you were known as a general practitioner. Nowadays, we have family practitioners but family practitioners have 3 years of training. But, at that time, the number of places where you go could go to get a full postgraduate course was limited. And I was very fortunate that I did an . . . at that time, they had internships, so I interned at Provident Hospital in Chicago and then went down to St. Louis to do my residency.

KAB: And your residency was in?

RB: Urology. And, at that time, the urology program . . . in fact, the training program there was under the jurisdiction of Washington University Medical School. And they had an excellent urology service. Doc Abrams, Weiskoff and several others. But the big thing was Merle Hereford. At that time, there was a black guy in Washington, D.C.,

Frank Jones. Frank Jones and Kline Price were admittedly two of the top urologists in the country but they were black and they submitted some of the most original papers for publication. They were only printed in the Journal of the National Medical Association. The Journal of Urology would not print them. But then, years later when certain articles started coming out, if you look through the bibliography, invariably you would find Jones and Price. Jones, Price, where they had written. I can remember one year when this "new procedure" for prostatectomy came out, it was called retropubic prostatectomy. Well, the earlier papers that came out, guys were reporting on their 5 or 10 cases. Hereford and I and Abrams, we reported on 50 cases. The Journal of Urology wouldn't report it so it was reported in the Missouri Medical Society Journal. Later, we did another article. At that time, we called it "impotency." Now, it is called "erectile dysfunction" in which we pointed out the role that blood circulation of the vascular system, the role that it played in that. Same thing. Published in the state journal. In fact, when the Texas Medical Association . . . the Lone Star State Medical Association, all black, met here in Houston, Hereford and I presented that as one of the articles. That was published in the Journal of the National Medical Association. Later referred to in several articles. Then, when I applied for membership in the International College of Surgeons, I put along with it an article I had written on a rare bladder tumor. Same thing. Published in the Journal of the International College of Surgeons but later, it was referred to in one of the bibliographies.

KAB: How did the journals know that you were black?

RB: By the school you went to and, of course, sometimes just by your name.

KAB: You submitted a CV when you submitted . . .

RB: Yes, you know, you submitted your curriculum vitae and _____. I can remember when Frank Jones and Kline Price submitted an article about tuberculosis in the prostate gland. First of all, there were those who doubted such a thing happened. It raised quite a controversy. But then, when the specimens were submitted to a variety of pathologists, they all agreed, yes, this is terrific. And then Frank had pointed out how they had treated it. I think maybe 15 or 20 years later, the article was reprinted. I think it was reprinted in the Journal of Urology, but I think that was the one article that caused everybody to say, wait a minute. Maybe we are missing something here. So, I think that was the article that broke the ice for the guys that do it.

KAB: And you mentioned, I am assuming after your residency, that Uncle Sam came back for his time?

RB: Yes. When I finished up my residency, the thing had started in Korea. Word was out that Uncle said, "Now look, all you guys that we spent all this money on. It is time for you to pay up." Well, it was quite a controversy because if you were drafted, you couldn't be drafted as an officer. You would be drafted as an enlisted man. As an enlisted man, you couldn't practice medicine. So, are you going to draft this doctor and put him out here as an enlisted man? But me, I was glad to go because listen, I was stone

broke, I was married, had a son. So, to go in the Army, I could get my hands on some money. And to go overseas, that meant I could live cheaper. So, I was quite glad to go, to tell you the truth. I wasn't too happy about going to Korea at first but then I realized with my specialty number, I was going to be in a hospital, not in a battalion aid station. So, I landed in Korea in August of 1951 and I left there in March of 1953. I was there for 19 months because, you know, first we got there, they said, well, O.K., you guys _____. You will be here 9 months. Then they said, well, you will be here 1 year. Then they said, you will be here 15 months. It ended up almost 1-1/2 years. But, in a way of speaking, it was a blessing because it gave me a chance to save a bit more money. So, when I got home, my wife was able to receive a decent bit of money while I was overseas. But then, that is when I came here.

I had been to Houston prior to that. I came here to get married in 1947 and the thing that struck me at that time was, to me, this was what I called the last frontier. Houston was still a big old country town, unpaved streets, dust everywhere, house fans that during the day, brought in all the dust, brought in all hot air, but about 2 o'clock in the morning, boy, those fans would have you cold as the devil. But the thing that struck me - everybody was working. I didn't see anybody laying around. And the job was pretty good, I think. There were those guys working in the warehouses, Sheffield Steel, longshoremen, and what was the other thing? Oh yes, Hughes Tool. And all of those paid fairly good salaries. And later, when I came here to practice, they not only paid good salaries, all except the longshoremen carried good insurance. Later, the longshoremen got insurance. So, it was a darned good place. Guys made good money, and longshoremen really made good money. So, employment was . . . because I had had

an experience while I was still doing my residency, I had a vacation break and I went up to River Rouge, Michigan to work for a general practitioner up there. And he had a terrific practice. When I first went up there, I had vacation time coming, so I was up there about 17 days and he just turned things over to me. In those 17 days, I think I sent my wife, oh, I guess, over $1,000. I go back up there and there is a strike on and do you know, in less than one week, that whole area just went flat. People didn't have a nickel, you might say. And that thing struck me - wait a minute, because that is where that huge River Rouge plant . . . you drive down the highway for miles, all you could see was that plant. But it was to me what I called a one-horse town. Everything depended upon that one plant and when that plant went out, you were dead. And that thing struck me. I said, not Houston. A whole lot of things could go dead and people are still working. And then, I noticed that the doctors here were . . . and another thing struck me . . . we've got 26 doctors down there and they ain't got a urologist. Hey, I've got a good referral base. So, that led to . . . End of Tape #1

KAB: I forgot to ask you earlier how many brothers and sisters you had?

RB: None.

KAB: You are an only child?

RB: Yes.

KAB: You didn't get much attention!

RB: Oh, God! This week, you were with your grandfather, as I told you. Next week, you were with Uncle _____ and Aunt Henrietta. The next week, you were with Lonnie and Lottie. The next week, you were with Sugar and Alberta. The next week, you were with Roosevelt and Emma. The next time around, you were with Martha and Buck. But the big thing was being with your grandfather. That was where the ripeness came in so that really, you know, at one time, I thought about it and I figured out that, all right, in 1933, my mother and father started working what they called couple jobs but, you know, I figured that if you put all the time together that I really lived with my mother and father, I doubt if I had more than 5 or 6 years because as a kid, I bounced around. Then, when I got older, their jobs kept me from around them. So, Mother and Dad were almost secondary. But it seems that I was blessed with people who were concerned about me and did not neglect me. So, I was fortunate in that respect.

KAB: Were you the first member of this extended family to go to college?

RB: Oh, yes. I was the first one to go finish grade school, so to speak because, you take my mother - for Mississippi, Mother was an educated woman. She went to school for about 8 years which nowadays would add up to maybe 4. Dad went long enough to learn how to read and to write his name. As I tell people, I said, "This is what I learned - that when you say that somebody is illiterate, it only means one thing - they can't read and write because, let me tell you something, I met a lot of smart men in my time,

brilliant men, but I don't think Frank Bacon ever took a back seat to any of them. Sometimes, he would find a little difficulty in fully expressing himself but the man had a lot of wisdom. And I learned early on to sit and listen because sometimes he had to almost grasp to find the right word. But I learned that when he talked, you listened closely. And then, when I lived with Pa Black, Pa Black was much more literate. He could read and write fairly well. But again, it was the same thing - to sit and listen. And Pa Black gave me a lot of confidence because he taught me how to box. When we used to have boxing in the round, the other guys used to beat the hell out of me. So, one afternoon, Pa Black came over with some boxing gloves, we'd go out in the backyard and he showed me the stance I should take. He showed me about head bobbing. He showed me about using a left hook and a left hand and the right hand and this stuff. And I guess we went through that procedure every afternoon for about 2 weeks. So, the next time that we had the guys were going to box, I purposely picked on Jack Castleberry because the last time we had boxed, I remember Jack hit me smack dab on my nose and boy, I remember it hurt like the devil. And Jack had a very prominent nose. So, we started the boxing. So, the first round, we are pawing around, pawing around. The second round, boy, I let him have a left hook to the jaw and a right cross to that big nose of his and scared the hell out of him! In fact, everybody looked . . . "Wait a minute. Is this Bob Bacon?" because, man, Bob was weaving and ducking and hooking and upper cutting. Everybody wonder, what in the Sam hell is happening to this guy! But I gained a lot of confidence from that.

KAB: What was your family's reaction to you graduating from college and graduating from medical school?

RB: Oh my God! Pride, pride, pride. I remember for graduation from high school, graduation was on a Friday. Now normally, my mother and dad . . . at that time, if you were in working service, you were off every Thursday and every other Friday. But for this occasion, Mother and Dad took off Friday. And Ma and Pa Black were there, and Uncle Ned and Aunt Alice. Aunt Alice is up here now. And Reverend Richardson from our church. And several other people were there to see me graduate from high school. Now, I did not graduate from college because, as I said, we had that early acceptance to medical school and there, after we had completed our time at Fisk, we went down to Camp Forest to be inducted into the Army and then we came back to the medical school. But to graduate from medical school was the same thing. All the folks came down for graduation. But it was a lot of pride, a whole lot of pride.

KAB: Why did you choose urology as your specialty?

RB: When I was an intern at Provident. There was something about medicine I didn't particularly like. I think one of the things was Dr. Smith, who was an endocrinologist, had all of these diabetics and it looked like these big, huge, fat people all were diabetics . . . they would come in there in diabetic shock or coma and trying to find a vein to start blood or fluids on them was a pain in the butt and I don't know, medicine just didn't attract me. When I got to Surgery, we'd go to the operating room, I am at the foot of the

operating table and I have to look over everybody else's shoulder to see what was going on and whatnot. And the other thing was, patients would be admitted to the hospital and I had to go in there and write up a history and physical. And they may glance at it and go ahead. But when I got to Urology, there were 3 urologists: Dr. Grant, Chauncey Morton and Whitfield. And when they would have a patient, they would call. "Bacon, yes, I've got a patient coming in. Look out." I'd go and I'd sit in on the patient. I'd write a history and physical. And when they would come by that evening, it was almost a routine. They would sit down by a patient's bed, talk to the patient, pick up that chart and read it. And I recalled Dr. Grant would not only read the chart but he would correct my sentence structure. "Bob, this sentence is too long," or "You should have an exclamation point," this and that. Correcting my grammar, my structure. And then, we would discuss the case and he would tell me what the case was all about. He said, "I'll tell you what. Now, tonight, we are going to operate tomorrow. So, tonight, I want you to read this, that and the other." He told me what to read. The next day in surgery, he stopped. "Do you see this?" "Yes." "Do you see that?" "Yes." "Feel this." "Feel that." "Put your hand on this." "Move this." "Move that." And I felt like I was part of a team. And I found out that urology was something of an exciting field. But the big thing was I was allowed to participate. I guess, participation was the thing that really did it.

KAB: You enjoyed the hands-on experience.

RB: Yes. But those three guys, I think they really turned the tables. And then, when I got down to St. Louis, Frank Jones was the same way. And Dr. Abrams who was from

Washington University. They were in the same boat. "Do this." "Do that." But everything you did, they looked by. They were teaching. So that if you made a mistake in your diagnosis, correct it. If you made a mistake on your treatment, correct it. In other words, they were interested in you and in the patient, and how you were addressing your patients because if you spoke the wrong tone towards your patient . . . "Bob, come here. That is not the way you talk to your patient," so that you got a lot of attention. That is what really did it.

KAB: For the students who will look at the exhibit, what type of diseases and conditions does a urologist treat?

RB: Well, basically, urology's concern was with what we called the genitourinary system. In other words, the kidneys and the tubes that come down from the kidneys called the ureters. The bladder. And, of course, in the men, the external genitalia. In the women, it stops at the bladder and the labia. And there is some overlapping, like in all of medicine. But basically, like for kidneys - kidney stones, kidney failure, kidney tumors. Bladder tumors, bladder stones. And then, of course, in men, testicular tumors. And some years ago, there used to be a thing called strictures where the channel coming into the penis, due to trauma or infection, would be narrowed and you would have to open it up. You don't see much of that nowadays like we used to because years ago, the old treatments for gonorrhea were terrible and that would do it. But we don't see much of that anymore. But those were some of the basic things that were happening.

KAB: When it was first known about the Tuskegee experiments. I am trying to get the exact title . . . to study the effects of untreated syphilis on the Negro man, what was the reaction to that among the African American doctors?

RB: I was in Meharry, I guess it was about 1945, 1946 - there were some rumors going around and at that time, a Dr. Brown had moved in there, he was white. And they had moved him into Meharry and he almost took over for the dean, Dr. Bent. And it was quite a mystery to us. And the biggest thing that Brown was doing was lecturing to us on syphilis. And the thing was, what is all this stuff about syphilis? We have had these lectures before. But in the meanwhile, there were some rumors floating around . . . you know, you hear something here, you hear something there . . . you never had a full, clear story. But we knew something was going on that was being hidden. And I think one of the things that really raised our curiosity . . . Brown was supposed to have given this lecture to not only the students at Meharry but some students from Tennessee State and Fisk. I mean, you know, there were about 5 or 6 hundred. At the last minute, the lecture is called off and we heard that Brown had left and was on his way to Alabama. We later found out he was going to Tuskegee. Well, down at Tuskegee . . . at that time, at Tuskegee Institute, there were several guys from Fisk were part of that thing. One of them was Diggs. Diggs was later a congressman from Detroit. So, when Diggs visits Fisk some weeks later, he was telling us about this visit that Brown made over to the VA hospital and to some other place there and again, the secrecy behind all this stuff and the fact that things were covered up, so it made everybody suspicious. So, we never knew

the exact details of this thing until some years later, we found out that these men were not being treated. Now, prior to that . . .

KAB: And, of course, by this time, penicillin was available.

RB: Oh, yes. See, penicillin came out during the war. Now, when we were inducted in the Armory at Camp Forest, we left there and we went down to this army post near Laurel, Mississippi. And while we are down there, you could see all these guys going to the special clinic where they were doing spinal taps. And these guys' blood tests had shown syphilis. And again, as I say, the way things were done just raised a lot of eyebrows but we never knew for sure but we knew something weird was going on. But nobody knew for sure what it was all about. And it was some years later before the final story came out. And, of course, when we found out about it, there was out and out anger. A lot of anger behind that. And this is what led to a lot of distrust of the Public Health Service because later on when the Public Health Service came out with some programs for tuberculosis and other things, it was hard as hell to get some blacks to go.

KAB: And one of my students who does research on AIDS issues here in Houston says even with the AIDS crisis, there was still some resistance by African Americans to seeking help from the medical profession.

RB: Yes. That thing has come up again. You know, I thought it died down but after I retired, I took a job with the City Health Department part-time just to find something to

do. And I was out here at the Medical Center clinic when that issue came up. And I had forgotten all about this thing. And I remember, this old lady, I guess she is in her 70s or 80s, I remember something she said but it was in reference to that Tuskegee experiment, and that was her basis for refusing to participate in the program because she said . . . I have forgotten her words but that thing cropped up again. And as a result, they later found out that in many parts of the country, especially down through parts of Tennessee and Alabama and Georgia, and probably South Carolina, a lot of blacks down there at Public Health Service, have had problems dealing with people because they still remember that thing on syphilis. It was quite a tragedy behind it.

KAB: A terrible tragedy.

RB: Yes.

KAB: I got us a little bit off track but you said you met your wife, you got married in 1947. What was your wife's name and where did you meet her?

RB: My wife's name was Bernice Theresa Narcisse. At that time, I was basically not engaged but it was assumed that Bob Bacon was going to hook up with Betty Grayson. They had been quite a twosome for several years. Also, when Bernice Narcisse came to Nashville, it was assumed that she was coming down to see John H. Wells and that they were going to someway or another get hooked up. Well, I was a senior. I was graduated. We had finished all of our classes, so I was free. John H. was a freshman and they were

having all those exams. And Gladys Ford who was from near Houston, her father was a physician here. They were visiting and Gladys was looking for a date for Bernice. So, she called me up and asked me would I escort this . . . "Yes, I will." So, I go by to pick this lady up and there is this beautiful gal in pink. Boy! So, we go out. I forgot where we went. Oh yes, we went to a carnival. And we stop by a place and have a snack. Go home. The next afternoon, I get a phone call. "Hey, what are you doing tonight?" That evening, we go by some friends' house and everybody is playing bridge. I didn't play bridge but I sat there and chit-chatted with others while these folks played bridge. And then, after they played bridge, there was some dancing and whatnot. I take Bernice home. I guess about 3 or 4 times, that happened. And then, the funny thing happened - Bernice asked Dorothy if I was gay because I had not tried to kiss her, I had not made any moves in any way. Dorothy assured her that I wasn't. But the next damned thing I know, about the 6th or 7th time we are out, we are dancing and I did kiss her. And boy, this gal grabbed me around my neck and she really laid one on me! And that night, I asked the woman to marry me. That was it. So, we were married 56 years, 58 years, because she died in 2005.

KAB: How do you spell her maiden name?

RB: NARCISSE.

KAB: And you said she was from Houston?

RB: Yes.

KAB: Was she a student at Fisk?

RB: No, she graduated from Texas Southern and she had been working in Washington, D.C. with one of those war-time organizations. And she had come to . . . as I said, the deal was she was supposed to be coming down to visit John H. Wells and I don't know if John H. ever got to see her or not. I really don't remember.

KAB: You beat his time!

RB: But all I could remember is the gal kissed me and I kissed her and the next thing, "Will you marry me?" And the next . . . I had taken all this Latin, you know. So, I come down here. Now, this really got me. Before I came down here, you had to take all these lessons. In Evanston. Mother and Daddy moved to Evanston. I go by St. Mary's Church there in Evanston. And who should be the priest there but Lester Sheer. Lester and I had gone to Gordon School together. He and his brother. So, of course, the first night, we spent catching up on what had been happening over a bottle of Old Forrester, by the way. The second night, we go to the second bottle of Old Forrester and then we start talking about the marriage thing. And he goes over all of these things I am supposed to do and what not. And after about 3 or 4 nights of everything and each night, there is a fresh bottle of Old Forrester, he signs this letter showing that I have completed the basic requirements for marriage. Gives me a copy and mails a copy down here. So, I arrive

here and I go by Mother of Mercy Church. The first thing that got me, I can't get married in the church because I ain't Catholic! All right. The second thing, this priest starts talking down to me. "What the hell are you doing?" He brings up this thing about the children should be Catholic and I said, "Wait a minute. You practice the religion and I'll practice the medicine." Talking about contraception, you know. I said, "I'll take care of the medicine and you take care of the religion." I said, "Now, as far as them being Catholic, if they want to be Catholic, fine. If they don't want to be, fine." And he became . . . you know, he and I almost came to blows. And had it not been for another priest there, I think we would have, because at that, I was a little short on patience. I shot across the desk after this joker because I was resenting the fact, hey, wait a minute - I got T'd off when I got to the airport . . . couldn't go in this room, had to come out this door, you know. And then I get this crap in a church!

KAB: You said it was a white priest?

RB: Yes. Father Sullivan. And, oh boy, we almost came to blows because some years later, he came in St. Elizabeth Hospital and I remember he saw me and he told the sisters what a vile temper I had. But boy, we almost came to physical confrontation. But anyway, so we got married . . .

KAB: Did you get married in the Catholic church?

RB: Yes, we got married and back to Chicago we go. Of course, I was going back for my internship. Bernice stayed with my parents for a while, then she moved to Chicago and she got a job working at an insurance exchange. Then later, she came back to Houston. She came back here and she started teaching school because when I went to St. Louis is when she came down here. But that was the extent of our courtship. I guess the courtship lasted less than 10 days. Marriage lasted 58 years.

KAB: Was there kind of a large black Catholic community in Houston?

RB: Oh, yes. You know, at that time, out in fifth ward, Mother of Mercy School and Church, they had a huge following, because all those folks out there from Louisiana, just about all the blacks that came here from Louisiana were Catholic. So, that was quite a large Catholic community.

KAB: And were a lot of the black doctors part of that Catholic community?

RB: I am trying to think. Dr. Perry was Catholic.

KAB: I have interviewed them.

RB: Yes, Jones, but he came later. At that time, Perry . . . I am not sure about Lou Gall. I think Lymon was Catholic. I think only about 2 or 3 of the doctors . . . when I came here, there were 26 black physicians and I doubt if more than 2 or 3 were Catholic.

KAB: When was the Houston Medical Forum founded? Were you a part of that?

RB: The Houston Medical Forum? Back in the 1920s, the black doctors, pharmacists and dentists formed a society and I am trying to remember the dates. I think somewhere in the late 1920s, early 1930s, each one formed as separate groups. I think the Houston Medical Forum as such was formed in the early 1930s or late 1920s. I don't remember the exact date. I used to have all that information around here but I lost a lot of stuff. But I think the medical forum . . . and I think they became recognized by the National Medical Association in the 1930s when they applied.

KAB: It was still a small enough group that you probably knew every member.

RB: Oh, yes. Well, see, I came down here in 1948, 1949, when Dr. Bowles went on vacation and I worked in his office, with great hopes of making some money. And they had this big bus strike, so I think I made 50 cents. At that time, I think about the only doctor I knew was Bowles because he had graduated from Meharry a couple of years before. But most of the doctors here, I didn't know them at the time. I met them all when I later came here. In retrospect, I realize that I was a little too gung-ho for some of them. Most of them were, I guess were more on the conservative side. And here, this youngster breezes in with all his smarts and didn't do them any good for a while.

KAB: Conservative in course of medical treatment? Conservative in politics?

RB: In their overall attitude. There were certain aspects or ways you conduct yourself and I think I was a little too outgoing. And maybe, at times, a little too critical because I recall one doctor asked me to see a patient and I saw the patient and when I wrote up my consultation, a few things I said offended him. To this day, I don't see how they could but I guess because I contradicted his way of thinking of what he thought was wrong, because I don't think I received another patient from him for years, before he sent another patient to me.

But then, the big thing was after I had been here for a while, I began to see the subtleties of segregation. And, as I told people . . . now, in Mississippi, it was blunt trauma almost. But here, it was a rapier, fine-tuned, and a lot of it came through the school system. If you wanted to teach school here, the criteria of teaching and the way it was taught in the textbooks and the undercurrent . . . there was an undercurrent of fear in some areas and this is what I began to see. I understand that John . . . it seems that when he got his Ph.D., he kept it almost a secret for a number of years before he finally let anybody know. However, there was one principal who was principal of Cashmere Gardens. At that time, was principal of Booker T. Washington. Dr. Bryant, was very outspoken, quietly but he did not step back. And then, there was another principal who was principal of the old Jack Yates . . . I have forgotten his name. He was quite outspoken. But we later found out he was related to one of the members of the school board, like that _____ thing. But anyway, to me, _____ have got to know things. The HISD is probably one of the most corrupt organizations I had seen in a long time. People got their jobs by paying off. The ladies got theirs by spending some exclusive

time. And the board micromanaged everything almost, in a way of speaking. You didn't report to your principal as much as you reported to a certain board member. The powerhouse behind everything was old Dr. Peterson. When she was growing up, my wife had worked in his office as a maid and later, was something else. So, when she came back here, she called him and wham, _____. No exam, nothing. Bernice could go to work. That was it. However, I found out that he was quite a gentleman though because for years, they didn't test the black kids. My son was going to what is now a middle school over here, and Bobby came home with his biology textbooks. First of all, they were old . . .

KAB: Textbooks were old . . .

RB: . . . and some pages were missing. So, I called Dr. Peterson. He said, what? I told him. He says, "You shouldn't have those. We ordered all these others." This was about 10 o'clock in the morning. At 1 o'clock that afternoon, every kid in that junior high school there had their new textbooks. Later, one of the black members who was teaching, had an administrative position, finally got them to start testing the black kids. And I can remember when an article came out one Sunday in the Houston Post - "The 11 Top Students" - 5 were black. Number one was a young girl. Number two was Robert John Bacon, Jr. Dr. Peterson called, invited us, my wife and I and, at that time, we had another son, to visit. So that Tuesday/Wednesday night, we go to visit him. Bobby was ill but Kenneth, my younger son, was with us. Kenneth wanted to go to the bathroom. Mrs. Peterson was going to send him downstairs to the basement. I didn't say anything

but when Kenneth came back, I remembered we had another engagement. Nothing was said. We left. The next day, I got a phone call. "I want you to return to my house this evening. It is urgent." We get there. The table is set for dinner. "You are going to eat." That was his way of apologizing. I didn't push the issue because my wife said, "Don't you realize that he was disturbed by the fact that his wife sent our son to the basement bathroom?" But he was quite a gentleman.

But nonetheless, the school system to me was corrupt because the young lady went up in my office, she applied for a position and the gentleman informed the girl, I think he was going to be going to San Antonio for a meeting and invited her to accompany him. I told him, no. Her boyfriend came by and he was deeply offended. So, I said, "No, let me talk to the gentleman." I knew him quite well. So, I stopped by his office when they left and I said, "Look, you know, you are going to get an old-fashioned ass whipping because if that girl goes anywhere with you, that boyfriend of hers is going to kick the dogs out of you." Sometime, she got a job at another school. But I was really quite disappointed in the school system and as a result, when my younger son got to high school, he was accepted at Lake Forest Academy, a private school.

KAB: In the Chicago-area.

RB: Yes, he went to Lake Forest Academy. And then, Kenneth, my younger son, he went to Evanston Township High School. He went up and lived with my mother because I went over here to the new Jack Yates, and John Chartwell was showing me all his high-

sounding programs they had. First of all, I recognized a couple of people they had teaching and I knew damned well a couple of those folks were not qualified to teach anything. I told my wife, I said, "No, Bob has got to go." So that is how they ended up there.

KAB: And where did your boys go to college?

RB: Both went to Stanford.

KAB: Did either one of them choose medicine as a career?

RB: Bobby. Bobby is a psychiatrist.

KAB: And where does he practice?

RB: Here in Houston. Kenneth . . . when Kenneth was 10 or 12 years old, I was on my way out one night to make a house call and I said something about, "Kenneth, do you want to go with me?" He said, "Yes, I'll go with you." I thought he would be the one who would be a doctor because he used to like to go with me, you know. And he told me that night he wasn't going to be a doctor. I said, "Why not?" He said, "Because you are not making any money." We were just getting ready to move in this house. We had a nice house and all that. He told me, he said, "For the time" . . . he had figured out, for the

hours that I put in and how much I was making per hour, and he demonstrated because I think he makes more money in 2 months than I make all year.

KAB: What does he do?

RB: He is the vice-president for FANNIE MAE, the mortgage company.

KAB: And where is he located?

RB: Washington, D.C. But I remember he told me . . . but I just knew he would be a doctor. Bobby went to Stanford. Bobby was going to major in history and literature because he wanted to be a writer. But Bob said after he got out there, he realized that wait a minute, it may be 30 years before I write that right book so I need to do something to make a living. So, he decided, he said, "Well, I know I can make a decent living practicing medicine and if I practice psychiatry, they will give me a lot of material to write about," so he decided he would go into psychiatry. But Kenneth said, "No way. You are not making any money at all."

Anyway, so in 1947, I came here and got married. In 1949, I came here to work for Dr. Bowles. Then when I got out of the Army in 1953, I came here to practice. When I came, there were 26 black physicians - 24 of them were general practitioners, 2 of them . . . Katherine _____ had completed her residency in pediatrics and she was board eligible. Dr. Fletcher had passed his boards but he had passed his boards in New York City and he was almost semi-retired at that time. At that time, he had this thing of eye,

ear, nose and throat literally separating them. But Fletcher, he would see 2 or 3 people and that was it.

KAB: And you explained one of the reasons that so many of the black physicians were general practitioners is because they faced limitations on what they could do for residency.

RB: Right. When I looked at something, what a lot of people didn't realize though, and which I really admired, was the fact that the amount of postgraduate work the guys had put in, a lot of them practiced. A good example: There was Dr. Bowie, one of the older practitioners, and every year when he would take off for "vacation," those 2 weeks he took off, he did at Harvard taking postgraduate courses. And I remember going by his office and I counted - boy, he had about 80 hours in chest diseases and about another 80 hours in internal medicine. Dr. Bowles was going out to Baylor, taking these courses in cardiograms and Bowles really became an expert in reading EKGs. He was damned good at it. Dr. Minor was the most unusual of the group because Minor did not graduate from a black medical school. He was one of those early graduates from a white medical school and he graduated from the University of Minnesota, and he was doing surgery. But Minor read Gray's Anatomy like the preacher reads the bible. You would go by his office and if he wasn't busy, he would be sitting there reading that Gray's Anatomy. And as a result, when he did his surgery, Minor knew anatomy. He is right down the street there.

And then, Dr. Lymon Hughes had put in a lot of time in what we now would refer to as infectious diseases. And then, one of the most striking _____ Dr. Ford. G.P.A. Ford. Gerald Preston Arthur Ford.

KAB: Is that Gladys Ford's father?

RB: Well read. One night, we had a meeting over at the old Houston Negro Hospital and the topic of discussion was various cardiac diseases. And, not our guest speaker but our guest commentator was . . .. I forgot the doctor's name but he was Chief of Cardiology at Methodist Hospital. Dr. Ford gave a discussion on rheumatic heart disease and when he got through, this gentleman stood up and he told him, "Now, gentlemen, never in your life will you hear a more comprehensive, a more complete, a more thorough explanation of rheumatic heart disease than what you heard tonight." He said, "I have learned a few things." And he pointed out a couple of things that he had learned. And he said, "I think we should give Dr. Ford a round of applause," which we did. But G.P. had a very soft voice and he was the one also who gave us a lecture on the building of the Panama Canal - the health issues involved. See, we had a group of doctors here: Ford, Fletcher - about 4 or 5 of them. And I think they were from Jamaica or they were from the islands. And they were all talented. But Ford was very erudite, quiet spoken, but very, very thorough.

The Beal brothers, Perry and Anthony . . . Perry left and moved to Los Angeles. Anthony stayed here. At that time, another unusual thing. At that time, downtown . . . there were two significant buildings in the downtown area that were owned by blacks.

Then on Louisiana was a McDonald's building. Some guy from Fort Worth, Bruce Smith McDonald - a black guy - owned that building. And there were about 8 or 9, maybe 10 black doctors in that building. And then, over on West Dallas, there was the Pilgrim Building which had been originally owned by some fraternal group and later was purchased by some local guys because on the first floor was the Franklin Beauty School and then on the second, third and fourth floors, there were about 6 or 8 doctors and what later became the South Central YMCA. They were located there, too. Then out here in the third ward, there were a couple of doctors here. And later, there was one doctor out in Sunnyside, and in the fifth ward area, I think there were 1 or 2 doctors - Clemmie and George Johnson, were out in Acres Home. George left his practice and went to St. Louis and spent 4 years in residency in surgery. Climmy would take off each year for about 1 month and go to New York. And as a result, she had accumulated enough hours to become board eligible in Obstetrics. And I understand she did pass the board. Also in Obstetrics, was Dr. Patton, Thelma Patton. Thelma Patton had accumulated enough hours. But I don't know if Thelma ever took the board because Thelma got a little old and she was going into semi-retirement.

KAB: For the students who will see the exhibit, what are the boards?

RB: When you say board, that means that is an examination you take to be certified as a specialist.

KAB: And who usually gives it? Is it the association of that particular group or specialty?

RB: Yes, when I took mine, there were 3 parts to it. Part 1 was the written. I went up to San Antonio to this doctor's office and there were about 8 or 9 of us and we went into a conference room and we had this written exam because something new had developed. And I remember he came home and she said, "Look, do any of you guys know anything about this?"

and one guy said he had read an article but nobody read nothing so we took a break and one of the guys went over to the library and got this article and he came in and read it out loud.

Tape #3

KAB: So, you took the exam.

RB: We took the written exam. If you passed that, then you went up to Chicago to take the oral exam. And there, two or three different doctors would question you about certain aspects. I failed pathology. I hadn't looked in a microscope in years. So, I had to repeat pathology. So, I went out here to Baylor and Dr. Wallace, who was Professor of Pathology out there, started me . . . I was a student. And I used to go out there every Wednesday. But after a while, I was going out there almost every day. And then came the big day for me to go to . . . I have forgotten the name of that big clinic in New Orleans. This is, again, where I really ran into some tough segregation. When I got to

New Orleans, only black taxi cabs would pick you up. So, the cab took me over to the Flint Goodrich Hospital where I spent the night. Well, the next day, I had to go over to this clinic. I have forgotten the name of the clinic. It is one of the well-known clinics. But, again, the hospital driver had to take me because the black drivers wouldn't go over there. So, I go over there and I walk in and, of course, people were looking at me. I go to the desk and I announce my name. "Oh, yes, we were expecting you." And she said, "Just a minute." She calls. This doctor comes out. We shake hands. We go downstairs to his office and he pulls out this file. There are 15 slides. He says, "Now, take any 10. Now, we throw this one in for the hell of it so if you miss this, don't worry about it." That was my challenge. Well, anyway, Dr. Wallace had really trained me. I went through all 15 of those files in about 40 minutes and that one file, that one thing, I recognized it was tuberculosis. I recognized it was a former cancer but I didn't know what part of the body it came from because this doctor came in, looked at my answers and said, "By the way, have you eaten? Would you care for a sandwich and a cup of coffee?" And I said, "I sure would." So, we go up to the cafeteria, and you could see people . . . after I sat down and I was aware, you could see people looking. I was a black guy. So, some residents come in and he introduces me to them. His introduction was, "Oh, I'd like for you to meet the newest member of the American Board of Urology." We shake hands. Guys are congratulating me. They sit down. We all drink coffee and chit-chat for about 20-30 minutes. And it is time for me to go to the driver. From that point, he takes me back to Flint Goodrich. I go back. And that thing didn't strike me until we were about halfway back to Houston at about 10,000 feet - oh my God, I passed the

board! It was such a delayed reaction. It hit me, I have passed the board. I am now a diplomat of the American Board of Urology.

Well, here in Houston, I had a mentor. Dr. O'Heroon (sp?). Michael K. O'Heroon who really went to bat for me on more than one occasion. And through him, I became a fellow then of the National College of Surgeons first and then later I became a fellow of the American College of Surgeons. And because of him, I started operating down at St. Joseph Hospital almost 2 years before blacks were admitted to the staff. What would have happened . . . the patient would be admitted under his name and I'd go there and do the surgery.

KAB: This was urological surgery?

RB: And I remember the first time I went there. We transferred this young girl from Liberty. Transferred her to St. Joseph's. So that Sunday, I go to see her. I am scared. However, I pull up in the parking lot and this black guy who is the attendant comes out. He says, "Are you a doctor?" I said, "Yes." "Leave your car right there. I'll take it." So proud. So, I get up and walk down this tunnel. I meet this nun, she is about that tall and about that wide. "Who are you?" I said, "Good morning, Sister. I am Dr. Bacon." "Oh, you are Dr. O'Heroon's friend?" "Yes, ma'am." "Now, you want to go down the hall, turn there and you take the elevators to the third floor and you ask for Sister" such and such. "Thank you, ma'am." I go down the hall, turn to the left. When I get to the elevator, there are about 5 or 6 people in there. And one says, "Are you Dr. Bacon?" "Oh, yes." Everything lights up. "This is Dr. O'Heroon's friend. Mike O'Heroon is the guy who will

curse the nuns if he feels like it." So, I go to the third floor up to Surgery and discuss with the nurses about the case I was doing. But because of my relationship with Dr. O'Heroon, one guy, anesthesiologist, made some remark one day and he was pulled off in the corner and there was no problem after that because Mike O'Heroon was one of THE powerhouses down there. It used to amaze me. If I went some place, all I had to say was Mike O'Heroon.

KAB: How did you meet Dr. O'Heroon?

RB: When I came down here in 1949 to work for Dr. Bowles, one of Dr. Bowles patient's had been sent to Dr. O'Heroon. So, when the patient came back, I called to discuss the case with him. And when he found out I was in Urology, he invited me over to his office. I went over there and we talked. Oh, I guess we talked for a couple of hours and became very fast friends. But Mike was quite a character. He was really my mentor. And it was through he and some others that blacks became eligible, became members of the Harris County Medical Society.

KAB: He was more interested in quality physicians than skin color?

RB: Right. Exactly. And he would stand up for it. And Mike would not take a back seat to anybody. In fact, to give you the impression . . . he'd be ready to fight any time. Somebody said, "Mike, you are a true Irishman."

KAB: When you came back to Houston from the Korean War, what hospitals did you have privileges at?

RB: At that time, there were just two hospitals: St. Elizabeth's which opened in 1947 and at that time, Houston Negro. Houston Negro needed everything, and when we got ready to try to do something about it, I found out that that hospital had been reviewed by every hospital group in the country, I think. They had been evaluated by the Public Health Service, by the American Hospital Association, by everybody. But the Houston Medical Forum met at Dr. Bowles' house one night and a subject came out about the need to do something for Houston Negro Hospital. Well, I opened my big mouth so I was appointed chairman of the committee to do something about Houston Negro Hospital. And I selected a committee and we thought the first thing we should do was to get an administrator because they had never really had anybody qualified as an administrator to run the hospital. And through a process of elimination and prayer and everything else, we came across Jim Robinson who had his masters degree in hospital administration and we got Jim here. Then, the next thing was to get money. The old Burton funds . . .. well, _____ basically, there were enough hospitals here but because of segregation, we kind of got in through the back door, and with the help of a guy named Mack Hanna who was one of the black politicians who knew his way around, Mack helped us and we got the grant to build what we later named Riverside General Hospital. So, for a while, we had Riverside and St. Elizabeth's. And Riverside was well-equipped, well-staffed. St. Elizabeth's was, too. The biggest problem we had at Riverside for a while was anesthesia because the young lady that was good at anesthesia had not really completed her training.

But then, Dr. Hamilton Wolfson came here. Hamilton had had 2 years of Medicine and one year of anesthesia and he was very good. But a big break came when Lectili (sp?) Johnson came here. Lectili had passed his boards in anesthesiology and boy, he made a difference. And surgery at Riverside Hospital was going 6 days a week. In fact, sometimes 7 because there were a couple of Jewish orthopedists who wanted to know if they could operate on Sundays and also if they could bring their white patients over there. We told them, yes. And St. Elizabeth's was going pretty good, too.

Then, later they opened what we called a proprietary hospital, Lockwood Hospital, which was opened to make money. But there were so many things that went wrong with that hospital. They finally closed out. And, of course, by that time, too, St. Joseph's and a lot of the other hospitals had opened up for the guys. And I know for me, I started using St. Joseph's a lot because I wanted to support the other hospitals but I had gotten to the point where I was getting tired and if I put patients in St. Joe's, we had a resident there so I didn't have to worry about night calls and a lot of calls I would get otherwise, I didn't have to worry about them. And if I did get a call, it had to be something very serious. But otherwise, the resident would take care of it. And that took quite a bit off me. And a lot of the paperwork - histories and physicals, I would write a little note or just co-sign his. So, I ended up doing about 80% of my surgery at St. Joseph's.

KAB: I know you had mentioned you had started operating at St. Joe's before you had privileges. Do you remember generally when you were able to get privileges finally at St. Joe's? Was it in the 1960s, the 1970s?

RB: It was in the 1960s that we got privileges. I am trying to remember. I guess it was somewhere around about 1966, 1967, somewhere in that area, I think, is then the hospital opened up and for a while, we were quite welcome. They were very cordial to us. And then, things changed a little bit because, you see, up to that time, it was not at all unusual for white doctors to have black patients. But now, here come black doctors with white patients and that kind of brought on a few changes.

As I was saying, I think one of the most significant social changes that I have seen in Houston that has been done quietly and nobody is saying anything about it which I think makes it more effective is that there are several black physicians that I think you will find most of their patients are probably white. Some years back, that was unheard of. But now, I know several younger colleagues . . . that also shows a change in attitude by a lot of people. And also, the fact that some of our younger black physicians have chosen certain specialties. One of them who had started out in ear, nose and throat, is now doing mostly facial cosmetic surgery. There is another young man whose lone specialty is injuries to the hand. There is another who has a specialty in . . .

KAB: You were mentioning the gentleman who does hand surgery.

RB: Yes, and a young man here who specializes in injuries to the hand. And, of course, we have had our share of general surgeons. I think one of the most significant things in surgery came some years back when Dr. Thelma Patton had a patient out at St. Elizabeth Hospital and this lady had an aortic aneurysm. She called Joe Gath and Eddie

Banfield in to see her and they performed surgery. Well, Eddie went out to Methodist Hospital to get some of the material, especially the graft that he needed. And the interrogation that he went through out there was, on one hand, almost humorous. Everyone wanted to know how and why and where and when this was going to be done. Well, the surgery, of course, lasted I guess 9 hours. But he and Joe Gath, I guess, with assistance from Robey and Barnett. Lector was giving the anesthesia and Lector would be relieved by one of the assistants from time to time. And the operation went off very successfully. And from what I can gather, each and every morning and each and every evening, a call would come from Methodist Hospital querying about the condition of the patient. And someone tells me that on one occasion, someone from Methodist actually came out and asked if they could see the patient. But anyway, the guys performed the surgery very well. Joe and Eddie also had a patient from Dr. Rowin. A kid born with some type of deformity of the esophagus and the stomach. And this had been a problem for surgeons and pediatricians over the years. The surgical procedures that had been done had never been totally successful. Well, Eddie and Joe devised a new system and performed it successfully and that stirred quite a bit of conversation around here.

Then, of course, the other thing came when Cecil Harrell was elected Chairman of Surgery down at St. Joseph's Hospital. Lector was Chairman of Anesthesiology at St. Joseph's. John, I can't think of John's last name, was Chief of Family Practice. I am not too sure if Higgins became Chief of Pediatrics or not but I know on the Executive Committee, there were 5 black, physicians on the Executive Committee so that at St. Joseph's for some while, the black physicians did very well. In the meanwhile, slowly but progressively, the number of blacks on the faculty at Baylor College of Medicine

started to grow. I know I became the first full-time faculty member up there when I joined the faculty in 1975. Later, Al Poindexter became full-time faculty. I am not too sure but I think there is a fairly representative number of blacks on the faculty at Baylor and also at the University of Texas Medical School here in Houston. At one time, when I came here, there were 26 black physicians, and someone told me a while back that there were supposed to be about 200 black physicians. I really don't know the exact number but I do know when I thumb through the pictorial roster for the Harris County Medical Society, there are very few pages that I don't see an Afro-American face. So that I think we have moved along pretty good and I think over at the VA, I think there are a number out there and some of the surrounding hospitals. And at Kelsey-Seybold. At Kelsey-Seybold, I think their chief administrator is a black woman and I do know there are several blacks on the faculty and on their staff because I think there are two black urologists that are there on their staff. And there are also one or two black gastroenterologists on their staff. So that I think the movement of the black physicians has not been explosive but to me, has been a steady and a progressive thing and we have moved into areas that, to me, a few years ago, I think hardly dared to think about. But as I pointed out from the very beginning, not to my surprise but what a lot of people didn't know was the fact that the black physicians all along had been preparing themselves and had always become aware of the progress being made in the medical field.

And on a national level, we like to point out that the National Medical Association, as I recall, in 1946 . . . I believe 1946, the National Medical Association met in Louisville, Kentucky and at that time, they made a survey of the health needs of this country. And if you read the white paper they published, I think it will almost sound like

what you would read today. Maybe a few changes in words but the basic problems are still with us today. But there proposal calls for three stages of Medicare or National Health as they called it. Stage 1 would have been for those individuals who have the finances to buy their own insurance to pay for their own Medicare or pay for their own doctors. The second level would be those individuals who can afford doctor fees and medicine but would need assistance for hospitalization. And, of course, the third level would be those individuals who need everything. Well now, when that report came out, all hell broke loose. Members of the National Medical Association came under unbelievable pressure. They were labeled Communists, Socialists and everything else. In fact, there was so much pressure brought to bear that in the subsequent year, they actually retracked that paper. But it was brought up again a couple of years later and they passed it. But in some areas, I understand that some of those physicians actually feared for their lives. Well, you know, in 1948, Harry Truman backed the idea of Medicare but it didn't go through. So, when Lyndon Johnson became president, Lyndon informed the guys that they could get the bill passed but not under the circumstances they had originally proposed. He informed them that if they made everyone else eligible for Medicare at age 65, that he could probably get the bill passed. And he was quite right. When the Medicare legislation was passed, it included all citizens 65 and over. In fact, I think the exception was women were 62 and over. And as a result, on the Medicare or you might say, the Medicare rolls, we have thousands of people who do not need Medicare, who are quite capable of taking care of themselves but that was the price we had to pay. But as I say, the most interesting thing was the threats and intimidation that

officers and members of the National Medical Association were subjected to when they wrote that white paper.

KAB: Doctor, you were president in the Houston Medical Forum how many times?

RB: I was president of the Houston Medical Forum on two separate occasions. I can't remember the years. I think the first time was somewhere in the 1950s and then again somewhere in the early 1970s. And I was also president of the Lone Star State Medical Association. And while it was not affiliated with the Houston Medical Forum, the Harris County Urological Society was made up of 129 urologists and I was the only black member, and for 18 years, I served as secretary treasurer. And then, I was elected president. The thing, I guess, I have to brag about a little bit - when I became president, the Society was $4,000 in debt. And when I completed my second term, we were $10,000 in the black. Case closed.

KAB: And I also wanted to ask you, I know President Johnson came when the Houston Medical Association met here. I forget the year. Did you get a chance to meet President Johnson at that meeting?

RB: I didn't meet him personally but I was at a gathering of people around him, and I think I got within about 10 feet of closeness of "Hey, ya'll" or something like that.

KAB: The Houston Medical Forum, during the 1960s, as I understand it, helped to support some of the civil rights activities in the community?

RB: Oh, we were very active during the civil rights movement. There was a group of youngsters from Texas Southern and a lot of people don't know realize were also from Rice - they were known as Progressive Youth Administration and a guy named _____ Stearns was their president. And as I recall, there were about 8 or 9 students from Rice who joined him. And what they did, every Saturday for about 6 weeks, they would go down to Union Station and would sit in on the lunch counter. George Washington was the attorney who represented them and George would call up to the Lockwood group on Fridays to warn us what was going on. So, on Saturday evenings at about 7 or 8 o'clock, we would all go down to the police station to bail the kids out. And they would never let them out en masse. They would let them out one at a time which meant we would stay there from 7 o'clock, 8 o'clock in the evening until 6 and 7 the next morning. Another theory was this: when the kids formed their organization were meeting at Lector Johnson's house and they came over one night to ask for our support. And I recall Dr. Thelma Patton and Dr. Hughes Lymon both said that: 1) we should not in any way affect their program but we should give them the support they needed. In other words, you kids carry out your program and we will pay the costs. And that is the way it worked, so that all of their court costs and whatnot, we paid for. And in that respect, the late George Washington used to have a statue mounted. I doubt if George collected more than 10% of what he would normally charge. I think one time, we did pay George about $1,500 and

that was for about 6 months of his work. But George was one that always acted as the kids' attorney.

Incidentally, there was one incident next to the last meeting, a last sit-in the kids had that a youngster from Rice whose father I can't . . .. never did know his name but understand, his father was a very prominent attorney here in town. So that night, we are all down at the jail and about 10 o'clock, I think about 22, 24 kids had been arrested, so we'd be there until sometime late Sunday. But this gentleman showed up and said he was there to post bail and just bring his son out. He said, "What about the rest?" There was some stuttering, stammering. He said, "I am here to release all of them." Do you know, within 35 minutes, all those kids were out? And the next Saturday when they were arrested, we went down to get them out. I think in about 45 minutes, everybody was out of there because they were sure that this young man's father would again show up. But, as I say, we supported the civil rights activities.

When the police raided the womens dormitory over at Texas Southern, I don't know if anybody recalls but the police went through the womens dorm. Some of the young ladies were in the shower. Some were dressing and undressing. There were police that went through there with police dogs, frightened these girls to death. And, again, for some of the damages and whatnot, the Houston Medical Forum posted the funds necessary to compensate for the damages done.

KAB: Let me ask you a two-part question for the big finish: Part 1 is about what do you see is the biggest change or two changes in medicine over the last 50 years you were

involved in it? And second, what are the biggest changes for you as a urologist?

RB: I think the biggest change in medicine has been the fact that we have to admit it: the insurance companies, to a great extent, are dictating how we practice medicine. When you go to the doctor's office now, maybe he wants to do procedure X but the company says we don't pay for that or we will only pay one nickel. But if you do procedure Y, we'll pay 25 cents. But the biggest thing is the fact that we have lost control of it. And while we can hoop and ha about the lawyers and insurance companies, a lot of it is due to our own acting. I think back on the 1940s had the National Medical Association and American Medical Association met and that came together and not let the issue of race get between them, we could have been more effective in controlling medicine. For me, the field of urology is like, I think, most of the surgical fields. A lot of cases where we used to do surgery, we are now treating medically. And this thing called robotics is moving in so that now, you might say, controlling the robots which are doing some of our surgery. But we are in the field of high tech now, so that medications are taking the place of the knife.

KAB: O.K., great. That concludes our interview with Dr. Bacon. Thank you very much, sir.