

Interview with Rev. Donald Skeir by Harry Wells, September 10, 1969

H.W.: One of the first questions I want to ask you, what organizations are you a member, or do you participate in, and what is your position?

D.S.: I am a Baptist minister in the Preston area; I am also a school teacher in the Preston area; a member of the local ratepayers association; home and school association; I'm a council member of the Black United Front and also, a member of the NSAACP.

H.W.: You are relatively new and an outsider, what do you hope to accomplish and what are your anticipations for organizations and how do you feel toward them.

D.S.: The Black United Front is something new. It is just starting here in the last ten months. It has grown out of a need for Negro people in the Halifax-Dartmouth area and also throughout the province to come together in a common effort to promote their welfare and social status and to work as a unit. Prior to this we were not united except within the church, the Afro-African Association but we have had no provincial body speaking for the entire province of Negroes and this is how BUF has come into being. Now as I said, it is relatively new and therefore many people are not too well aware of what its aims are and some perhaps are afraid of what its aims are, the way it grew, it came out of the presence of the Black Panthers when they were here last November and because of their presence, the racial situation was becoming so acute there was a great need for such an organization. Because of this fact also, many people have fears that it is an offshoot of the Black Panther movement, but I believe that in time, as the people become more aware of what the aims of the BUF is, I think it can be a very positive step in our efforts for advancement here.

H.W.: What effect do you think the visit of the Black Power advocates had on the Nova Scotia situation?

D.S.: I think it has served as a catalyst. It made us realize that we were faced with a problem here and it was more or less subtle, it was under the surface, with their presence and what others thought they were going to do, made us aware of our problems.

H.W.: How do you think the Black people responded to the Panthers?

D.S.: Locally, there was a great deal of apprehension. Many people had their doubts about them. There was a great deal of newspaper publicity about them, about their methods and what they intended to do and poisoned the minds of a great many people. I think because of this it sort of divided the Negro population here.

H.W.: Do most people still feel that way about the Panthers, are their minds still in a quandry about them?

D.S.: I think that the average Negro still isn't too well versed as to what the Black Panther movement is, but I think that on the average you will find that there is some fear of them yet.

H.W.: In terms of your own personal thinking, your own present perspective, about the struggle among our people, what factors have influenced your thinking?

D.S.: About the set of the Negroes today?

H.W.: Yes, and the fight, the problem, the struggle.

D.S.: Well the think that has hurt from my personal feelings, the thing that has hurt other people is that we have never had a real sense of pride in ourselves. We have accepted what has been given to us. We have been victims of propaganda and we have never stopped and thought about ourselves as people, and I honestly believe that in the last ten months this thing has undergone a tremendous change particularly on the part of our younger people. They are beginning to realize now that they are someone.

H.W.: Before going on, maybe I should say this, I interviewed Dr. Oliver and the rest of the people, and I am also doing another study that I came here professionally to do but this is my own thing, the information which I can get on this/^{new consciousness}and the attitude among our people in this area will be given to BUF to do what they want to do, I think too long, people have done research on poor people and Black people and they shelve the information. Do you think the American experience has had any effect.

D.S.: Definitely so. In fact, not only in America, the whole world wide problems of race has had an effect. It only takes a casual observer who reads a newspaper or sees Television to realize that Black people, and by that I don't mean black as a colour, people of all darker races, are really coming to the fore and it would be idiotic for anyone to think that the status of the Black man hasn't changed over the past few years. It has definitely and the situation in the United States is certainly having an effect on the treatment of Black people here in Canada.

H.W.: You talk about dark people all over. Do you see all non-whites as having similar problems?

D.S.: Definitely I do.

H.W.: Could you expound their problems?

D.S.: Without perhaps using some common expressions, it's White against the rest of the world. That's my impression. White people have ruled everything as long as we can remember and internationally, or nationally community-wise, this is definitely changing now. The change in Africa in itself is something that makes us open our eyes. The pendulum is swinging now towards the darker countries.

H.W.: Do you see poor Whites as having the same problems; do you see them as part of our struggle too?

D.S.: Yes and no. In spite of the fact that poor White people share the same sense of poverty as Black people may share, I don't think that they could ever understand what Black people have gone through. In spite of the fact that they have had many many hardships, yet they are still White. It's not the same to my way of thinking anyway.

H.W.: What local problems have shaped your present opinions.

D.S.: Well, for one thing, our problems go back many, many years, the fact that we were ~~xxxxxxx~~ settled here in these isolated communities, the way we have been, has been a handicap to us. We have been denied in the past ~~xxxxxx~~ proper education facilities; we have been denied the opportunity of ~~xxxxxx~~ building better homes, our men have been deprived in the community better employment, get the poorer types of jobs; our income has always been marginal level consequently it has given the average Black, in our area, has given him as I said before, a sense of being second class. He has never had an opportunity to realize who he is and what he can do, anything just went because he took what was handed to him and he just thought he had to be thankful for that. I think this is changing now. Young Negroes today are not accepting this. They realize they can be put on the same standard and the same level as anyone else and they are striving for it. It's coming rather slowly although in the past twenty-five years there has been a big change educationally. Now the young people are getting into the highschools they are going to university, whereas twenty-five years ago only the exceptional child could go to university. Very few got into highschool, generally as far as grade six.

H.W.: What books oriented to Black people have you read in the past two years?

D.S.: Of course I read the Ebony quite often, I read The Black Rage

Black pschiatry, I read some of the books of James Borwin, Borwood? I forget some of them now, I haven't read too extensively on it. Unfortunately we don't have the opportunity of buying them here.

H.W.: Did you ever get a chance to go through books like Malcolm X?

D.S.: I read ~~excerpts~~ excerpts from his books, I haven't read it through, no. I understand it is a very fine book.

H.W.: What about Carmichael's, Fenon, and all these people?

D.S.: No

H.W.: You speak about Ebony. Do you take in all the periodicals, or magazines oriented to Black people?

D.S.: Well, the only two that I know that come into our area are Sepia and Ebony. Those are the only two I know of.

H.W.: How do you take the subject matter. Let me explain this for you. How do you feel, how do you apply the subject matter of these ~~books~~ books to the Nova Scotia situation?

D.S.: I think basically they tell the same story. From the American scene of course it would be a much bigger scale but basically I think the problems of Black people are the same no matter where you find them. They may be more pressing in the larger ghettos in New York and Los Angeles and other cities like that but we have evidence of them right here and racial prejudice is ^{as} acute here as it is anywhere else.

H.W.: It seems that most Nova Scotians are beginning to sense this. I was talking to another fellow this afternoon so subtle it was ?

D.S.: I think also one thing too that has ~~engendered~~ engendered a great deal of interest on this subject is the fact that a number of ? of what they have to do. They are not sitting down now and just taking handouts; many

of them are realizing that they too have to do something to better themselves and they are doing it. ~~M~~ It may not be as widespread as you would like but things take time. You ~~can~~^{IN}'t change a man hundred years of existence over night, he's not going to change overnight.

H.W.: What other sources do you use to get information oriented to Black people?

D.S.: We don't have too many sources here really. It's unfortunate we don't have much of a medium here for getting information.

H.W.: What about friends and relatives? Do you talk usually with friends and relatives:

D.S.: Yes, they come over from the States and we talk on those subjects and you can even sense, we have an uncle that comes over here from Boston, he's been coming here for the past number of years making his annual visit down here and even in his conversations we can sense a difference in the past two or three years. Before he would just talk on light subjects, now ~~you~~ you can sense the tenseness in the conversation that even the ^{average} Black man in the States must be keyed up to the situation. I realize that when you talk to people like that.

H.W.: When you see and hear about riots in the United States how do you react?

D.S.: Unfortunately, again, I must admit that we get one side of it. Then again you might get a magazine and get the other side of it. Well, to give you an example. I think there was a case in Detroit a few months ago in which the police made a raid on a church but the side that we got here was that these people were conspiring to do some harm and ~~were~~ the police were justified in what they did. Then when I read the article

~~xxxx~~ in Ebony I got a different slant on the whole situation so therefore many of the stories that we get with regards to these riots are all slanted so we don't get the real story at all.

H.W.: When you see people in the streets destroying buildings, taking merchandise, what emotion does it have in you?

D.S.: Like any riot, I suppose, it comes to the point where it becomes ridiculous. You realize, of course, that there is obstruction there, there is waste. I understand, I've been told many of these establishments businesses are Negro-owned. I can't seem to understand why they would be destroying their own but like any riot they reach the point where it just becomes a, there is no rationale to it at all. As I say, we are in the States, removed from the scene, there may be justification for a riot there, we don't know it here and if we were on the scene and if we experienced the difficulty that these people are going through, maybe there is no other recourse but to do what they are doing whereas here in Canada perhaps we can get the same thing but not in that way.

H.W.: In the first place when we say those businesses are owned by our people, I doubt it seriously, because I went to Los Angeles during the riots and I have also seen in places like Buffalo and New York where a store would be burned here and this store would be up, and this store would be burned, next to it,

D.S.: And these are Black stores that are not

H.W.: That is what it seems, I'm not sure about that. I know in Los Angeles when the riot was going on, I think it was. A lot of white stores were saved because Blacks were working at the store.

What effect did the assassination of Martin Luther King have on your thinking about the struggle of the Black man?

D.S.: It just reached a bottleneck, that was it. The bitterness that night and we were not even Americans but the bitterness that swept through the average individual was just terrific. Even my own feelings, I mean, there was no justification for it and reading about what happened afterwards, I can understand it, but that was going too far really. A man preached love and brotherly concord and all the rest, now that just ? and I think this was the feeling of most of the Negro people here. He was a symbol and they destroyed him, well it made you wonder just what did they want? That was my reaction to it. A

H.W.: Are you still interested in ideals, the struggle of Black leaders today?

D.S.: Yes, I am. I realize, of course, that Black leadership is going through an internal struggle and I suppose it is only natural we are a people like any other race of people. They have their differences of approach to different problems and why shouldn't we as a people have a different approach and I think ultimately all Black leaders want the same thing. They may be approaching it in different ways but I think they all want the same thing. Even at our African Baptist Association this year we had a speaker from Chicago, one of our local boys, Peter Parris, and he gave us a different insight about the Panther movement. From what we hear about Panthers we know that they are very destructive, revolutionary, wish to overthrow the government and all this, whereas he was telling us about the humanitarian things they were going, feeding young people, and students and caring for the aged, and things like that. We don't get that aspect of it at all.

H.W.: That's the news media again.

D.,W.: Yes that the news media again and so there when the word panther

is spoken here it immediately causes one reaction in the average person and that is, "these are violent people, ~~they~~ they wish to overthrow" whereas they are young/^{Negro}people the same as any other young ~~people~~ Negroes.

H.W.: What Black leader do you like now? Everyone seemed to have followed Martin Luther King.

D.S.: Martin Luther King was the symbol, obviously, there is no doubt there. I don't know if I could say I'm a follower of any particular leader at the present time because it doesn't mean any particular one, there is none that has taken his place but I only hope that the factions in the States could come to some sort of unified effort, I really do think so, I hope so, anyway. Even Stokely has severed relations with the Panthers. It depends upon just what how you approach the whole struggle, I suppose. The NSAACP, I imagine this is an old organization, maybe their method are a little bit too slow for the younger generation, I don't know but I think a combination of all groups are worthwhile really. The ? they express, what the labour, the working aspect of the struggle, is that it?

H.W.: I'm not sure about, but maybe that's what they do, and the NSAACP, they are more sophisticated, I suppose. The National District groups they are more outspoken, ultimately, I think they all want to get the same thing, really.

H.W.: I would like to know what you think of the following tactics as a means of solving problems, letter writing, phone calls to officials.

D.S.: Yes, I think this has an effective if you are in a place where enough phone calls, enough letters are going to have an effect but

I don't know whether they play much of a part here in Canada, in our area anyway, I don't think there are that many Black people that our amount that much. It has its place but I would say that if our people would come together as a group, as we are doing in the Black United Front, and speak as one unit, I think this has more effect than say, letter writing.

H.W.: Community organization

D.S.: Organization, yes. This has been our problem down through the years, too many leaders and not enough followers

H.W.: What about marches?

D.S.: Marches, again I don't think we have the numbers here that have effect, it might, the effect would open up the issue and make them aware of our problem. I don't know whether the average person herein Nova Scotia is that much taken up with the problem and go on marches as they are elsewhere.

H.W.: Civil disobedience?

D.S.: Well, if there are places where there is overt, active discrimination I think civil disobedience has its place.

H.W.: Boycott?

D.S.: Where it can be effective? Yes.

H.W.: Do you see where it has been effective in Preston and Halifax.

D.S.: It hasn't here because there has never been any organized effort to ever put a boycott into effect but I think it could have a place.

H.W.: What about violence, how do you see violence as a tactic?

D.S.: I don't think it would work here in Halifax-Dartmouth area. I don't think violence is the answer. For one thing, we haven't got the numbers and I don't think we can truthfully say what we go after we have been denied

by negotiating.

H.W.: Do you see violence as being important?

D.S.: I do, yes I do, there is a place for it.

H.W.: Do you think only Blacks should be leaders in organizations fighting for their rights?

D.S.: At the present time I will say yes. I think this is what we have to create in the young Black people, an image of themselves. Too long they have had the image of the White man, consequently, we have never had pride in ourselves and this is what is badly needed now, and image of ourselves.

H.W.: How long have you been

D.S.: The last two years I was, all of us, when I say all of us, I would say right from the very top down. We have all been the victims of White propoganda and I think that this whole new feeling of race has really touched everyone of us.

H.W.: What word do you prefer to call yourself?

D.S.: It doesn't really matter. I am not offended by the word "Black" I'm not offended by the word "Negro", "Coloured". I must admit of course that I consider myself a Negro, it is pretty hard to adjust to another name but I think that the word "Black" goes beyond just the colour of a man's skin and I think it creates within the individual a sense of pride as a whole philosophy of life, not just a matter of a Negro getting in and calling you a Black. It's putting black alongside of white.

H.W.: How do you instruct your kids, do you tell them that they are Negro, or what?

D.S.: I told my baby not to be ashamed of the word "Black", they don't have to be ashamed of it and I think they are hearing enough of it now to realize that they don't have to be ^{was} ~~was~~ ashamed. When I ~~was~~ coming along

I think they are hearing enough of it now to realize that they don't have to be ashamed. When I was coming along it was a derogatory term but I think the younger generation today are accepting it as something different.

H.W.: Do you consider yourself as an African living in Canada?

D.S.: I really believe myself as African descent. I don't believe in this idea that Africa is over there, and I am here and there is no race ? I really believe myfolks came from Africa, and the same way the Whiteman prides himself and ~~goes~~ goes back hundreds and hundreds of years. I am going to be proud of my background and go back to where they came from.

H.W.: When people ask you what are you in terms of nationality, how would you rank yourself?

D.S.: Canadian

H.W.: Canadian Black or

D.S.: Canadian Black. I have never had the experience of defining myself that way but I have no objection to Afro-Canadian, or half Canadian with African descent. I have no objection to it at all.

H.W.: Do you perceive the militant self-help program as being necessary if the Black man is to succeed in his struggle?

D.S.: In certain areas yes.

H.W.: Could you define the areas?

D.S.: Well, in areas of the South where I don't think some Whites areas or going to give up without a struggle. I think the Black man will have to show some militancy.

H.W.: What about in Nova Scotia?

D.S.: I don't think we have any areas in Nova Scotia. As far as I know, we don't have any areas in Nova Scotia where militancy will have

to come out in that way but I do feel that Black people have to be firm, definitely firm; they have to stand pat in what they believe in, what they want, and that would be it, but I also believe too that it more than just a matter of demanding this, it is a matter of qualifying ourselves and preparing ourselves for it, it is going to take an effort on the part of mothers and fathers to keep their children in school, educate them and prepare themselves for what they want.

H.W.: I'm having some trouble with some people, they are asking me what is a militant self-help program, you know. Thinking about that I guess I wasn't thinking it through as much as I should have but I don't think my parents would like economic organization

DaS.: Well here it would be good to have Black businesses and Black stores but I'm afraid they couldn't just thrive on just Black people patronage. We don't have that number that could keep them going. We would have to have an integrated clientele, if you want to put it that way, you could have little stores here in our little Negro community, grocery, but big businesses, I don't think the Black people could keep them going.

H.W.: To me its a society of prejudice. Who has to be changed, prejudice and discrimination, ~~who~~ who has to be changed, the White man or the Black?

D.S.: Well definitely, the White man has to be changed. There is no doubt in my mind about this, he has to realize that he is only another man like all other men. He hasn't any God-ordained superiority and this is not going to come easy with him, in the past as you know in your history, he has been riding the roost for many hundreds of years. He has to be made aware of this fact, he is just another man.

God didn't give him no privileges and as for the Black man himself he has to make a change in getting a higher understanding of himself as a man. This takes some express^{ion?} on his part, he has to realize what he is worth and what he is capable of and realizing that he is capable of getting what other people can get. There is no limitation to what he could do and as far as I can see now in the Preston area, this is one thing that we definitely have to do. We just can't be satisfied, this has been our situation for years, anything goes with us. Carelessness and cleanliness around your home and this sort of thing, just have to push it out of the minds of Black people, these things have to be changed.

H.W.: Which of the two tactics do you think are most appropriate fostering individual excellence, a strength of community powers, which one would you push for?

D.Sm: If only to foster individual excellence and if by doing this these people are going to contribute something to the community, I think they both go hand in hand. One of our troubles has been that individuals have been able to do much for themselves but they have been no help to the local community, they have gone off, ~~many~~ many of them have married across the line, they have taken their economic status across there, they have been no good for the Black man, they have gone away to the larger cities, oh you can't blame them for that but as long as our individual excellence is going to be taken away from the community it is not going to benefit the community at all.

H.W.: In terms of ~~the~~ devising a strategy, let's say, in terms of East Preston, which would you try to do first, would you try to get

a few individual, and help the community. Would you try to make and then sure the community was strong, individual development would come later.

D.S.: Its pretty difficult to answer that question. I don't know Community wise there is lots to be done but as I see the situation here it has to be done on an individual basis. I don't think the community itself will change for some time but perhaps the individual can be changed within a reasonable time.

H.W.: What do you think are our most important ^{qualifications} ~~problems~~ for Black leadership.

D.S.: Love of his people, I don't care what else he has, education is all right, his qualities of leadership are all right, but he has to have a love for his people, and anything other than that, to my way it is only benefitting himself.

H.W.: That 's really funny. You are one of the very few people that thinks like that, and I agree with youm he must have love for his people and to represent his people. I think education and those things come later. Even some great men are not educated, not a formal education, educated in their minds, and most people seem to think that education is more important. I don't see that.

D.S.: I don't exactly see that either. We are educated people in Nova Scotia but as I said we are in this struggle, we've had, boys have been off to university with me seventeen years ago and they graduated, some of them married white, they don't make any contribution to the Black community at all, so what good are they. Here again we get into a personal matter but one of our problems in these areas in North Preston, Cherrybrook and East Preston is to get Negro teachers. White teachers are hesitant about coming out here and we

have had to put up with teachers who were less trained than the normal teacher; we couldn't get anyone else, and then when we get qualified Black teachers they would look for opportunities in the city and then we would lose them. Of course I suppose self-preservation has its place but what were they contributing to the upbuilding of Black people. It would only take a bit of sacrifice on the part of people who just come in for just love of their people; it may take a sacrifice to help better the people but they are going to take their formal education and go off elsewhere to work, still leaves us back here with nothing.

H.W.: I'm going to ask you a number of statements, I would like to know whether or not you agree or disagree with these things: Most Whites want to keep Blacks down as much as they can.

D.S.: I feel that most Whites feel that Blacks have a certain place and that is as far they want to keep them. I don't think that the average White feels that Blacks are on a level with them.

H.W.: Some people have said that there are White stores that take advantage of Black people, customers. Would you agree with this?

D.S.: Take advantage of what?

H.W.: A white store taking advantage of Black customers.

D.S.: In the Dartmouth area there are a few, but I think on the whole the larger stores are not too dependent upon Black patronage. I don't think they are. You may find some of the smaller stores but I think that in the larger chain ~~groups~~ grocery stores, I don't think they are depending too much upon Black patronage, really.

H.W.: Most Whites who take part in civil rights demonstrations aren't really interested in the problems of Blacks. Do you disagree with this?

D.S.: I would disagree with that. I would say there are exceptions to every case. There are many, many White people who are concerned and very dedicated to the struggle of the Black man but they are in the minority and I suppose that where you would find a feeling of suspicion on the part of Black people that this has only been the result of what has come up over the years. It is rather hard for the average Black man to think of a White man as being sincere with him, I mean, this is a part of his makeup and this is nothing his fault, this is something that the White man has made from that point but I do think that there are some White people who are really interested in Black people. Then again, I qualify that because even sometimes very liberal White people some of the expressions that they use makes me realize that they can't shake off their ideas on race. This common expression they use, "you people" right there and then it just shows that there is a difference.

H.W.: Which one do you think is in the majority, the one who goes around saying "you people" or the ones that are really interested in the Blacks.

D.S.: I think the majority of those who say "you people" really. I think they try to assume that they have guilt, they have a guilty conscience, they know that their past hasn't been glorious and they are trying to make amends for it, but some of them are doing it in a rather sloppy way.

H.W.: What type of neighbourhood do you prefer to live in if all were equally well kept up: a mostly Black neighbourhood, a mixed neighbourhood, mostly White, Don't know.

D.S.: I think that you'll find different levels of people whether

they are Black or whether they are White and I think a person should be allowed to fit in that level where he bests, where he is more comfortable. I think I would ~~xxx~~ prefer to live in a Black neighbourhood than a White neighbourhood.

H. W.: Another job I came around to do was to sort of document what happened to the people of Africville when they were supposed to move and I would like to get your opinion on what you think about the Africville relocation?

D.S.: That was something that was planned for years. That's a very ideal locality and I think in the long-range planning of the City of Halifax they looked forward to the day when they were going to move those Negroes because they wanted that area. They didn't do anything to help those people, / It was planned, it was deliberate, and when the time came for them to move them, they moved them.

Africville was right in the city limits and those people were denied the very basic things that they should have been receiving.

H.W.:

~~xxxx~~: Did you ever preach ~~xxxx~~ there.
served in Africville

D.S.: I've ~~xxxxxx xxxxxxxxxx~~ for two years.

H.W.: Two years. Was the community a very stable community?

D.S.: Yes, it was, it was a very stable community but over the latter years it just went down. The young people just lost hope and lost faith and that was it but when I was a young boy coming along Africville was a beautiful little spot. You go there hoe tickies ? on the Basin Shore but in latter years you couldn't do that. Again, unfortunately, I think that this was, although I'm not absolving the civil authorities for their lack of initiative and effort, but I think also this again will show a lack of pride on the part of the Black man too. Of course, again, I suppose you get a reaction because

you can bat a man around so far but he just loses hope within himself, and he gets the idea of what's the use, what's the use, and that is what has happened to many of our young people, and what has happened in the last number of years has put a stop to this and Black/^{young}pepple have begun to realize it's a struggle. They are not going to get anything for nothing, you've got to struggle for it.

H.W.: Do you think the people in this community learned from the Africville experience?

D.S.: Some of them are learning from it. Some of them realize that if they don't pull up their breeches and look into their needs and get their businesses in order, the same thing could happen here that has happened in Africville. Halifax cannot expand any further. If there is any expansion in this area, it is going to be in the Dartmouth area out here on the number seven highway and we have a number of Black homes on the main highway, in fact, I think we have one of the few Negro communities in Nova Scotia where/^{Black}people are still living on the main highway and if the area expands if those Black people don't get themselves in order they are going to be pushed back into the woods.

H.W.: Could you teel when you were in Africville whether or not the community was more or less a a cohesive group or was there a distinction between the regular people of the church people and sort of outside transients.

D.S.: There were no transient people there, they all lived there. The church was the only organization that they had but unfortunately they didn't have any community organization. Everyone just spoke for him or herself; there was no getting behind an organization as a motive and pushing it for their own good.

H.W.: Are you talking about relocation now, or before relocation. Could you give me an example of something like that, there was no community organization?

D.S.: The only organization they had in the community was church and the church only had a few people who were interested in it. I think if Africville had had a community consciousness and an organization that they might have been able to fight for the thing that they needed but they didn't have it. Anyone just went to City Hall just spoke for himself and they were denied it. Unfortunately, the average Nova Scotian Negro hasn't had faith in himself. I don't know if I can give you the right feeling or not but he has been more willing to listen to what the White man tells him more than he is going to listen to ^{what} his own tells him. If you stood up and wanted to speak on his behalf, there would be a backlash, who does he think he is talking to and all this, and this has been our experience for years, we have had no real cohesiveness, we have had no real sense of organization and realize that in strength, there is power.

H.W.: Do you think the people have a strength now?

D.S.: In a sense, but even now it is not as it should be, that's why the leaders of ~~BUF~~ BUF are going to have a hard time of it. They are going to have a hard time to really get all the segments put together and say, we are speaking for the people. There are going to be those who are going to scuttle it really. They are going to try to scuttle it anyway.

H.W.: Would they be going this for the White man.
Indirectly

D.S.: ~~Indirectly~~ they would be doing it for him and then there will

White people around that will plant the seed in the minds. I think there are lots of White people who don't want to see this thing work, and I also think they are afraid of the fact that what has happened in the last few years can be a threat to them and I believe they will do their best to try to scatter the whole thing.

H.W.: You mention in the last few months there has been a new feeling among people in this area. I'm not sure of caused, you say that the Panthers made the situation more acute. It seems like it was coming before the Panthers.

D.S.: It was coming. The NSAACP had been struggling to make our people aware of different problems. They weren't getting anywhere. There was another movement in Halifax, Rocky Jones, and anyway he had a good tool and they were gathering the outfit together, and there was certainly a firmness there, and then the Human Rights Conference developed in November and just focussed the whole thing; there were those who came down from Montreal, there were rumours flying here, there and everywhere, the press became concerned and the Premier realized the seriousness of the problem and it just hit right in on it. It was so tense. Were you here then? You weren't here then, it was so tense that you couldn't even walk down the street before an average white person would come to you and ask you seriously if there was going to be any trouble. That is how acute the situation got, and I think with all this focus on the local Black people, it made even the average Black man who was unaware of these things to become aware of what was going on. He got a new awareness of who he was; otherwise, before this, there was just conferences,

meetings, meetings, meetings, all the same old thing, housing, employment and all the rest of it, but here everyone was in on it; the premier, keynote speakers came over, Dr. Carthwright from Boston and this other chap from up in Ontario here. They all came down. The T.V. focussed everything and this is where it came out and it was a good thing. I don't think that anything that has happened in the past fifty years that really opened the eyes of our people than that one incident.

H.W.: The Panthers

D.S.: The Panthers, and the Human Rights Conference.

H.W.: I haven't heard too much about that Conference. Did people suddenly become aggressive. Did they suddenly realize they had to go about it a different way?

D.S.: It started out as just an ordinary Human Rights Conference except for the fact that these keynote speakers were brought in, and the presence of the Panthers just made it just that more tense. They thought that the Panthers coming in and the Conference was all tied together. They thought that this was going to be a jumping off point for something violent, in fact, some thought that their stores were going to be wrecked, going to be riots on Creighton and Maynard Streets. Even had a rumour that there was two hundred of them flying in, that is how bad the rumours were. Then there was a rumour that the Dominion Government was going to station troops on the border and going to stop any of them coming across the border. However, then of course they picked up some guys in a search but apart from that aspect it was a good thing.

H.W.: This could be interpreted in a sense that more coverage for the Black

D.S.: That in itself was something. Front-page news. We weren't relegated to the third page, we were front-page news. News report from the radio, television, all focussed on this.

H.W.: I think this is the positive thing for the young people to see this. You don't have to stoop with us, You slap me, I'll slap you

D.S.: This is something we have been labouring under for so long we have always had to come with our hat in our hand or stand in back of the line, or if we had an appointment with someone, we always had to come in stuttering, not being able to express ourselves well and all this foolishness, let's hope that as Mrs. Carrie Best said on Saturday morning when we organized the BUF and council met for the first time, she said "Let it be known here and now that Uncle Tom is dead" and that was it.

H.W.: I tried to get to her when she was down in Halifax. She is coming down next month.

D.S.: She is a live wire and she has been in the fight for this thing for years. She had a paper here some years ago and she ~~pub~~ published news and was in the vanguard of this thing for a long time.

H.W.: It was pretty lonely for her at one time too. I have no more questions to ask you unless

D.S.: Well I hope this thing helps you in your thesis and give you a new evaluation too of our problems. Our problem basically is the same as yours no doubt.

H.W.: One problem I am having though, I am trying to figure out the differences, structurally differences in Nova Scotia and I'm trying to see why the Nova Scotia approach cannot be the same as the United States, although there are the same problems, Nova Scotia is going to have a different solution I guess. I was thinking it might be the ~~sm~~ small number of people here, something like that. What should I take into account when I show ~~what~~ Nova Scotian Blacks are doing.

D.S.: Well, educationally, there have been improvements, not as big as we would like, but there have been improvements. We have I don't know how many, Blacks at the University now. Before the only Blacks we had at the University were those from West Indies or the ones from Africa. In housing, there still has to be a lot done there. Our housing situation is very, very poor, and of course this is attributed to the fact that many don't have higher paying jobs and consequently their economic situation is low, and they live in the poorer types of homes. Other than that I would say there has definitely been some ~~advantages~~ advances made among our people. As you said, the solution to them may not be the same as they would be in the States. I don't think they will be the ~~xxxx~~ same. I don't think that the average White people here in Nova Scotia, those that amount to anything, I don't think they think the same as the Whites in the States. I honestly believe that many white people ~~xxxx~~ weren't just aware that Blacks were having problems, they just never thought about it and this may seem hard and you may say, well the Blacks are under their eyes all the time and you ^{saw you} wouldn't they know, they just/go along in a happy merry way

and just didn't think that you were troubled with anything. You came as a domestic into their kitchen, you did their work, and you got paid, you seemed happy, everything was going along all right. In fact, there were some people, white people who said when the Africville situation came out in the paper, they didn't realize that the Blacks were living that way. Now that's hard to believe. This was the responses that many of them gave so I don't know. Maybe I often think of it this way, the Jews claim that they have great difficulty and I never give them any thought about the problems they have, I think they are getting along well and good, maybe if I looked a little bit more deeper, maybe I would realize that they do have problems. Maybe that is the way White people look upon Black people; they never took the time to think about it.

H.W.: It wouldn't be so bad if we were in the position of the Jews because in terms of an ethnic group, they have the highest ethnic group in the whole North America, standard of living,

D.S.: And of course they could get along without the White man he has his own businesses

END OF TAPE