

ORAL HISTORY OF THE HONORABLE WILLIAM B. BRYANT

Chapter 3

Law School at Howard University: 1932 – 1936

Interview Date: May 19, 1994

Bill Schultz: Judge Bryant, you attended Howard Law School, and I want to ask you about some of the people that you met there, some of your teachers. The first and most obvious one is Charles Houston. Did you have courses from him, and what was his position at the law school?

Judge Bryant: Charles Houston was the vice dean of the law school. Technically, he was never the dean of the law school, he was known as the vice dean of the law school. I don't really know why that was so. But I knew this, that Mordecai Johnson who was the president of Howard University, was interested and had been convinced by somebody that the law school was a very important part of the University and could play a critical role in something down the line. Don't know whether Mordecai Johnson, who was a Baptist preacher, had a wide range of insight or whether he fully envisioned what lawyers might do down the line, but he was convinced that the law school shouldn't be a stepchild of the University.

Bill Schultz: What years was he president of Howard University?

Judge Bryant: I went to Howard University in 1928 and he had been there a year or two, so I would say that he was president of Howard University from about 1926 until sometime in the '40s or '50s. But Mordecai was influenced by some Young Turks, so to speak, Ralph Bunche and Abe Harris and a few other people, young energetic teachers. And I think that they might have had some influence on him, I don't know, but at any rate, Howard University Law School had been a night school for a long time, and a few people went through it. Charlie Houston was a graduate of Harvard University Law School. He went to Amherst, Harvard, and the University of Madrid. Charlie had good credentials. He was chosen by Mordecai and given

carte blanche to make Howard University Law School a top law school. The emphasis on enrollment wasn't in the picture as it is now. They had no hesitancy to fail students who did not perform.

Bill Schultz: What do you mean by that?

Judge Bryant: There were, the entire student body in the law school at that time was fewer than 35, all of the classes fewer than 40 people. My freshman class had 15. When I went there the senior class had, I guess, about 20 or 25, which was a big class for them. When Thurgood graduated, he and Oliver Hill, I think there were about eight or ten graduates in that class.

Bill Schultz: What class was that?

Judge Bryant: Thurgood graduated in 1933, I believe from law school. They had gone on. And Charlie did the best he could to do that. He put together a group of excellent teachers. Again, by virtue of segregation he had a kind of good pool to pick from. I mean there were a lot of bright guys who could not be members of firms and what not, who had graduated from the University of Chicago Law School, Harvard Law School and other law schools, who were on law review and what not, and we had good teachers. Charlie himself was an excellent teacher.

Bill Schultz: Now did he have his law firm at the same time as he was vice dean?

Judge Bryant: Yes, he was a member of his father's law firm. His father's law firm had been there, oh, since I can remember. When I was in the third or fourth grade, his father was down on F Street. Charlie and Bill Hastie, I think were cousins. I understood that they were cousins. They were very, very close and very, very tight. Bill Hastie was on that faculty, he was a very good teacher. The only white guy on that faculty was a Dutchman from Wisconsin named Alfred J. Bouchet, and he was a member of some kind of security commission at that time,

whatever was the predecessor of the SEC. And he taught contracts and negotiations, and business interests, and bills and notes and that commercial stuff. And he was a terror to a lot of people, a hell of a teacher. All of them were good teachers.

The only teacher that I ran into that was kind of a weak reed was a guy who was not really a weak reed but he was weak because he didn't have the experience. He was a graduate of Harvard Law School, and he came right out of the law school and came to teach public evidence. And that's a bad course to teach for somebody who hadn't had much experience. He taught us out of his notebook and it was obvious, but even he was not a poor teacher. Bernard Jefferson was his name, he was from California. He ended up being a judge out there, I think ultimately. But the law school was a good school.

Bill Schultz: I want to come back to Houston and Judge Hastie, but other than those two, are there any other teachers who you had whose names we would recognize?

Judge Bryant: George Hayes. George Hayes was the practicing Black lawyer, the one Black practitioner in this city that you could point to and say "hell of a lawyer." He was a terrific lawyer. George was a graduate of Brown University, and I don't know where he went to law school. He might have gone to law school at Howard, I don't know, but he was a practitioner, a very capable man. He headed up his law firm next door to ours, Cobb, Howard & Hayes. I think he taught us criminal law and something else. He was a good teacher. The instruction was good and Charlie did bring Harvard down there. The first day in his classes he handed us that business. He would look to the left, and look to the right, and say at the end of the year one of you might be there, and he meant it. Because when I went in law school there were 15 of us, and when we graduated I was home. I sat on my front porch. I didn't even go, I was so mad. You know, I told you about my experience. And there were two, no three other guys that graduated, I was the only one that graduated on time.

Bill Schultz: From your whole class?

Judge Bryant: From the whole class. Bill Lonesome and a boy named Scovel Richardson graduated next semester.

Bill Schultz: I wanted to ask you a little more about Charles Houston. Can you give me a sense of first of all how old he was; what his teaching style was like; what his style as an administrator was like; what his relationship with the students and faculty was?

Judge Bryant: Charlie was obsessed with the concept of excellence, there was no question about his standards. You know at that time when you went to school, there was no such thing as a curve. You were marked on the basis of 100, and if you got less than 70 you failed. He was a teacher who was thoroughly prepared and seemed to have a wide range. You know, some teachers come in and you know that if you take them outside of the boundaries of the particular subject that day, you might lose them. But Charlie was one that could swim through any length of the pool in that subject, he had some depth to him. He was good, a good teacher. As were the rest of them, but I think that when you talk about inspiring teachers, I guess he was. As the dean, as the administrator of the school, he was the one who was always pumping for excellence. You've got to excel; you've got to excel; you've got to excel. Other teachers taught you the stuff, and they were good at teaching the business, but they weren't so much into the motivation business as Charlie was.

During the time that I was in the law school, Charlie took a leave of absence, and went down in Virginia and represented some guy, I think his name was Crawford, who was charged with towing some social life in the hunt country down in Virginia. I don't know all of the details, and I'm not certain whether Thurgood Marshall was involved in that. Charlie went down there and took with him a couple of graduates from Howard University Law School to help him work on that case. One of them, I remember, was a fellow named Tyson, Pete Tyson, and I think that Thurgood was one of those two, but I am not certain. Early on, Houston, I guess, had this notion

about the courts being the best chance of breaking down some barriers. I think he understood that.

Bill Schultz: He is sometimes said to be the genius behind the civil rights litigation that the NAACP Legal Defense Fund brought leading up to *Brown v. Board of Education*. In a sense, that is the beginning of public interest law, and here was a group of people dedicated to using the law to change society. Did he talk about that as a teacher in the law school?

Judge Bryant: No, not really. I don't remember him doing that. And then again, I guess he did. He taught a course called the History of Law, and I think he did to some extent. But he didn't emphasize it, and leave a real impression. I didn't get the idea then and I never have associated it with the civil rights concept so much, but in that History of Law course I guess he did. He pointed out the role that the law played in our system. Most of it was negative. You know we had *Dred Scott* wasn't too old, and *Plessy v. Ferguson* wasn't too old. In America, it is significant that we can trace our growing up right to the court, to tell you the truth. When you stop to think about it, *Dred Scott*, *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and then the rest of them, and then *Brown*. I guess from that point of view, Charlie was right.

Bill Schultz: Here is a lawyer who is practicing law and you explained that Black lawyers really didn't make much of a living in those days. He's trying to establish a first-rate law school and then he also devotes himself to trying to change the law on racial discrimination. He obviously had a lot of drive, and very strongly held feelings about justice. Do you have any sense about where that came from, or what it was that drove him to try and do so much?

Judge Bryant: Yeah, I think I do. I think Charlie was of the same stripes as Du Bois and some of the rest of the leaders in those days. Charlie was fortunate enough to be well

equipped, and had some native talent, basic brains and was an inquisitive person mentally. He was exposed to the very best you could have for anybody in the United States.

I told you that his father was a lawyer; his uncle was a doctor; an uncle was a lawyer; and his only aunt was a teacher. His only aunt taught me in fifth grade, and she was a wonderful teacher. And Charlie was the only sibling there. Ms. Houston, my teacher, was a spinster. Theophilous, who was a lawyer, he had no children. And Dr. Houston had no children.

William L. Houston was the only one who had a child, so all of the resources and hopes of the Houston family were poured right into Charlie. So that's why he could afford to go to Amherst, and that was at the time when Ivy League schools would take a handful of Blacks. But purely on the basis.

There was no affirmative action. I mean it was purely on the basis of ability. And it was so, that this business that you have got to be twice as good as they are, and they meant the dominant group. You have got to be twice as good as they are to get half as far. When you went to the New England schools, Ivy League schools, you found somebody in Brown and Amherst and Dartmouth. They were top people. They were top people. So when Charlie went there he displayed his wares and did very well. He went to Harvard Law School and I think he was on the Law Review at Harvard. And he would say, "No tea for the feeble, no crate for the dead." That was his motto. "I'm not asking for anything, you know, just give me my due." That was the attitude of Black leaders of that time. All they were asking for was to remove the barriers, and let us go. Those who can, will, and those who can't, you know, too bad for them.

I always thought — and I am careful when I say this, and maybe it's a harsh judgment — I had this feeling about Du Bois: Du Bois was an intellectual, an arrogant sort of fellow, and he obviously was well trained. He graduated from Harvard University in 1909, and a degree from Harvard entitled the recipient to certain privileges in the society. I assume that he was naïve enough to think that he could lay claim to them, and then he realized that as the setup was then,

after he had counted the last white man on earth, then you might count him. And that was a two-edged blow. I think that was a shock to him. I really do. I might be wrong, but I think that was a shock to him.

I think it was a shock to Charlie. I think it was a shock to Charlie because Charlie went to Harvard Law School, and guys were going to firms, law firms and various other places, a Harvard lawyer had some entree. He had no entree, he came back to his father's law office, which wasn't a teeming law office, and he came back to Howard University Law School. This may be harsh, but I think that the thing that interested the original leaders of the NAACP was not that they really were so outraged at first about the fact that whites discriminated against Blacks, but they were really pissed off about the fact that whites didn't discriminate enough to draw the line between them, and the rest of Blacks. Do you know what I mean? In other words, the fact that they were lumped in that fashion, I think they were insulted, and I can understand that. That sounds like I ascribe bad motives to people, but really I don't. They resented being plowed into a mass of underclass and mediocrity and second-class citizenship, that's what they called it. And I think that's what drove Du Bois, I think that's what drove Charlie. And if that's so, good. Now, when I say that, I don't mean to speak in derogatory terms about them, but I think that's human nature. Then you realize, you know, I can't be free until all of us are, because we are looked upon as "all of us," and the only way I am going to get out of this box is to get everybody else out of the box with me.

So that's why, you ask me about the motivation, I really think that was it, it was rather selfish motivation.

Bill Schultz: That's fascinating.

Judge Bryant: Well, I think that's true of all minority groups and human behavior.

Bill Schultz: Now what was he like personally? First of all, was he married, did he have children?

Judge Bryant: He had one son, and he is around now. I think he lives in Baltimore. He had one son and he was married twice. He was married to a girl named Ethel Moran and that ended in divorce and he married a girl named Henrietta Williams. And Henrietta ended up having mental problems. And Charlie died relatively young, I think he was 52 when he died. No, I know, I'm not right, he died in '52.

Bill Schultz: So he died before *Brown*?

Judge Bryant: Oh yeah, he died in 1952. I was in the U.S. Attorney's Office when he died.

Bill Schultz: He died of a heart attack?

Judge Bryant: Yeah, I think so.

Bill Schultz: Was he a hard-driving person?

Judge Bryant: Hard-driving person. I think it was officially pneumonia, or something like that. I think, I am not certain of this, but I think that Charlie was a veteran of World War I, and he had some pulmonary problems; tuberculosis it seems to me figures in there somewhere. He was not a robust man physically. He looked robust, but underneath, I think his underlying health was not too good.

Bill Schultz: How big was he?

Judge Bryant: Oh he was over 6', not a whole lot, but about 6'1" or 2", kind of broad shoulders, had a massive head on him. He was a well-built fellow.

Bill Schultz: An imposing figure?

Judge Bryant: An imposing figure. Yeah, Charlie was an imposing figure. I was in the U.S. Attorney's Office over in Municipal Court looking out on Fifth Street one day, and I saw him walking toward his office across the street on Fifth Street. The Supreme Court had handed down a case in one of these labor union things, I think *Steel Workers* cases, and he had

argued that case and he was obviously very happy. It looked like he was walking on air going back to his office, and it wasn't long after that that he died.

Bill Schultz: Did you ever see him argue in court?

Judge Bryant: No, no. I never saw him, and I don't know how effective he was. He represented a guy named Fisher, who worked at the Cathedral in the library. One morning the custodian out there was working and allegedly the assistant librarian had got into an argument with him and called him some kind of nigger or something, and this guy lost his head and he hit this woman with a table leg or something and killed her. And Charlie tried to defend him on the basis of insanity, temporary insanity and that guy went to the chair, and it was nothing but a manslaughter case. He was convicted of first-degree murder. He argued that case to the Supreme Court.

There is no question that he was the catalyst, he was the guy who lit the fire under people like Oliver Hill and Spottswood Robinson, and I think it was too bad that he did die. I think he died very young. I don't know how old Charlie was, I had the idea that he died when he was 52, but he wasn't 52, I don't know how old he was but it was 1952 when he died. I think he was a veteran of World War I, and I think he contracted TB or something during that period of time. I think I'm right about that. I'm going to check that too, because now these things come back to me and they are kind of foggy, but his health was kind of bad and he had had TB and I think that was associated with being in detention during the war.

Bill Schultz: Now, what was he like personally, if you know? Was he warm? Was he stand-offish?

Judge Bryant: He wasn't warm; he wasn't warm to us. I only knew him on a teacher-student basis. I didn't have any social contact with him, so I can't say that he was warm. Among his acquaintances I think he was okay. I mean, he seemed to get along with people all right. He knew Ralph Bunche, and I never heard Ralph say anything derogatory about him. As a

matter of fact, I never heard anybody say anything derogatory about him, except myself, and that was on the basis of my experience with him. But then I think I could understand he really wanted to make Howard a Harvard. He really wanted to do that, and he didn't think anybody could work eight hours and graduate from his law school. He thought that the law was a jealous mistress, and wouldn't stand that competition. So whatever he did, I don't ascribe any evil motives to it, except that when he saw to it that I didn't get my scholarship. I thought that was retaliation; I had crossed swords with him personally.

Bill Schultz: Do you remember anybody else having that kind of experience with him?

Judge Bryant: With him?

Bill Schultz: Yes.

Judge Bryant: The only guy — I didn't know him, I had heard of him — a fellow named Cox, who preceded me at the law school. He was in Thurgood Marshall's class, I think. Cox was supposed to be a hell of a student, but a rather independent fellow. Cox went to the race track or something one day and cut class. Charlie found out about it, that he went to the race track, and Cox didn't lie about it. One word lead to another, and Charlie began to sort of send messages to him. So he ran him out of school personally.

I never knew Cox. I wouldn't know him by sight, but he was a legend. I mean to Charlie Houston the Cox situation was a legend. In other words, that's what they told me when I crossed swords with him, you can't cross the dean: remember Cox. Well, I didn't remember Cox, except as an incident which was a legend when I got down there. He'd just hound you out of school.

Bill Schultz: Now what about Judge Hastie, did you have him as a teacher?

Judge Bryant: Yeah. I had him, and he was a good teacher. He always worried me though, because whenever he would look at you he talked to you, and when you talked to Bill Hastie, you didn't get any eye contact from him. He looked at you, but he didn't look you in the

eye. I found out later why that was. He had bad hearing and was too vain to wear a hearing aid until very late in life. So when he was looking at you, instead of looking at your eyes, he was looking at your lips. I didn't know that.

Ralph told me that, and I told him, and complained about it. He had asked me, how you getting along with Bill, and I said, "All right, but he doesn't look at you." He said, "What do you mean? And then he said, "He's got bad hearing." I didn't know that, and he didn't wear a hearing aid until late, when he went on the court, as a matter of fact. But he was a good man.

Bill Hastie was a good man. He was on the cutting edge. You know Bill Hastie was a special assistant to the Secretary of War, and the services had a little building over here. First, it was the State, War and Navy Department at 15th & New York Avenue. Then they moved to the Munitions Building down on Constitution Avenue, and then with the coming of World War II and what not, the Pentagon. The Pentagon was on the Virginia side of the river. And you know how the contractors will get a building together and the people will start moving into it before the building is really turned over? In those days we were hurting for space; the country was gearing up for war. They had a cafeteria in each one of the wings of the Pentagon, and Bill was in the line to get his food. A guard went up to him and told him, "In Virginia you can't do that," and got him out of line.

Bill Schultz: Inside the Pentagon?

Judge Bryant: Inside the Pentagon. And, of course, you know he broke that up.

Bill Schultz: He broke that up?

Judge Bryant: Yeah, you know. It was an embarrassment really to the administration. There was always an unrest and irritation to discrimination to the extent that it was inconvenient, and demeaning and costly too. And then we had World War II and Hitler with his master race theory. We were at war with him, fighting for our very existence. We were fighting him with a military apparatus which recognized very thoroughly the master race

principle of completely separated and segregated armed services. There were people who realized that was not good, and there was a theory that there was a correlation between prejudice and ignorance. It was a theory that if you ran across people who were well trained and had some cultural development, and intellectual development you had less racial animosity there because they were more secure and less intimidated.

So operating on that theory, there were some people who thought that the Air Force, which was the latest arm of the military machine which was being developed rapidly, and the one they called for when they took the exams, you know mental exams, aptitude exams. The Air Force always grabbed off the top guys because it was new, and they had to have a level of capability to run an airplane or work in the shops, and so forth and so on. So the Air Force took the cream, and Bill Hastie got a commitment from old Stimson at the time that we would, that they wouldn't segregate the Air Force. The Air Force developed as a new branch of service that didn't have any precedent to break and didn't have any built-in resistance. This was the time to start integrating.

There were some forces pulling for other things. And there came a time when the question was whether to fold Black applicants and pilot applicants and training into the Air Force, or set up a separate Air Force for Blacks. You know we had a separate Black combat unit, the 93rd Division, the 92nd Division, and the 32nd Regiment up in New England, all Black. There was some infighting, and there was some disagreement. Patterson, who headed up Tuskegee Institute — he was the president of Tuskegee Institute — figured into the picture.

One day it was announced that the Army had set up the separate air group, a fighter training group at Tuskegee Air Force Base for Black airmen. When that happened — it happened at about 10 or 11 o'clock in the morning — Hastie packed his stuff, and walked out of the Pentagon that day. He quit. The reason I know it was because on that day, on the day he quit, I went on active duty in the Pentagon. I was going to my office in the Pentagon, and I saw him

come down the hall. I had met him in the hall, and he was making his rounds to different people telling them goodbye, and so forth and so on. Left in his place was a guy who was his assistant, a boy from Chicago named Truman Gibson, who was a lawyer from Chicago. Truman stayed on after Bill, and of course he got a bad name for himself by staying on, but Bill quit.

Bill Schultz: When you say he got a bad name for himself by staying on, what do you mean?

Judge Bryant: There were people who thought that he should have walked out too, they thought that was an insult that people just couldn't tolerate, and that Truman Gibson shouldn't stay on as special assistant to the Secretary of War because he really didn't have any influence on him. If the man didn't respect his commitment to Bill, he would not respect any commitment to him.

Bill Schultz: Was Gibson Black or white?

Judge Bryant: Yeah, he was Black.

Bill Schultz: Was this the feeling among Black people?

Judge Bryant: Yeah, it was the feeling among Blacks.

Bill Schultz: Now, did you have contact with Judge Hastie after this?

Judge Bryant: No, not until I came on the court. As a lawyer, I didn't have any contact with him. He practiced a little bit of law out of his office over here. It was Houston, Houston & Hastie for a while, and then it was Houston, Houston, Hastie & Waddy for a while. He practiced law out of that office over there.

Bill Schultz: But not while you were over there. This was before you were there?

Judge Bryant: Yes. Bill was a good lawyer. He was a good lawyer.

Bill Schultz: Now was he involved in the NAACP Legal Defense Fund cases?

Judge Bryant: I don't know. I don't think so. I don't think he was on the brief. I think he was involved; he was in the government service; he was the governor of the Virgin Islands for a while; and I think he was caught up in federal service some sort of way. I have no doubt he had some input with those guys, because there were those who thought Hastie had a better brain than Bill; he was highly regarded.

Bill Schultz: Better brain than who?

Judge Bryant: Better brain than Charlie, or as good. He was highly regarded. Hastie had a good head on him.

Bill Schultz: Then he was appointed to the Third Circuit, before you came on the bench here?

Judge Bryant: Oh yeah, he was a judge in the Virgin Islands, too. Bill had a lot of experience judicial-wise. He got up on the Third Circuit before I became a judge.

Bill Schultz: Changing the subject, when did you meet your wife?

Judge Bryant: I met my wife during the summer after I graduated from college, or towards the end of that summer. I met her the year before I went to law school because I was dating her. Well, Astaire was really my first girlfriend.

Bill Schultz: How did you meet her?

Judge Bryant: I went to school with a boy named Ed Simon, and we worked together. He worked at an apartment house running an elevator I was telling you about. He ran the passenger elevator, and the job on the other elevator opened, and he got me the job. He and I knew each other. We worked together. He later worked at a job in the Post Office.

He married a girl that I grew up with in the second, third, and fourth grades, and that girl knew Astaire. I was at their house, and Astaire was a good friend of the girl's and they introduced us. That was the connection.

Bill Schultz: What happened then?

Judge Bryant: When I won my room, board and tuition scholarship, for the first time in my life I was going to school without paying for it. And I was crazy, so I went on and got married.

Bill Schultz: Well, before that, after you met her, then did you start going out with her right away or

Judge Bryant: Yeah, it was just like we kind of made for each other. We started keeping company kind of inseparably, and we went on and got married.

Bill Schultz: What would a date be like? What sort of things did you do?

Judge Bryant: Well, I would just go to her house and sit around, and visit, and talk and then we would go to work. I had to go to work. I would go over to her house, and sit around and talk to her and her family and go to the movies. We would go to the Howard Theater, which had all of the stage plays and the bands, and what not. That was the high point of entertainment in town at that time. All of the famous band leaders and performers that you hear about today.

Bill Schultz: Who were some of the ones that you remember you saw at the Howard Theater?

Judge Bryant: Noble Sissle, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway, Lena Horne, all of them. Lionel Hampton. All of the great musicians over a period of time played. I think there was a boy, there was a guy named Willie Bryant, who was a hell of an entertainer. Lena Horne made her debut at the Howard State. Ella Fitzgerald. All of them played at the Howard Theater. We would go over there, but I didn't participate that much because I had to work at night, and it cost money in those places and there wasn't much of that. We didn't go to nightclubs until after we got married and I changed some jobs. There was considerable amount of night life in the District of Columbia among Blacks. I don't think they suffered along that line. I think people had a lot of fun.

I look back on it, and when you talk about it, and I hear the arguments now on television about things going full circle, segregation versus integration, and the side effects of integration on race, and so forth and so on. And the students now in these various schools in these Ivy League schools wanting separate buildings and separate facilities, and so forth and so on, and people saying well, this is not what we fought for.

The other night, somebody had Jack Greenberg and somebody else from the Harper's magazine, talking about the impact of *Brown*, what *Brown* did, and what it didn't do, and segregation and integration, and so forth and so on. As I remember, coming up in the District of Columbia, I don't know, there is a difference between being an integrationist and an anti-discrimination person, do you know what I mean? And I think that the thrust was to eliminate discrimination.

I don't think that at the end of the line the goal was integration, except that the lifting of the discriminatory bars meant a certain amount of integration. But the motivating factor of the civil rights movement was to throw off the fangs of discrimination. When you approach it that way, you get a little different concept. I mean if somebody wanted to go to a theater where somebody, let's say where a great artist was performing at X place, well you wanted to be able to go, not to rub elbows with some white folks you didn't know about, the hell with that. They could let you in by yourself. If they had a concert, fine. That's what you were interested in.

You weren't interested in the social intermingling with people. But of course that was the thing that Heflin, and Senator [Howell] Heflin's uncle, and Bilbo and those people would raise the specter of social integration and cohabitation and mixing the races and all that sort of business as the bugaboo. But civil rights leaders weren't interested in that really. They didn't give a damn about that.

Bill Schultz: Who is Senator Heflin's uncle?

Judge Bryant: Tom Heflin. He and Cole Blease of South Carolina and Bilbo of Mississippi. They were terrible. They were the exponents of racism. If you picked up the *Congressional Record* for the period of time when Mrs. Roosevelt invited Mrs. Bethune to the White House. Mrs. Bethune was as Black as that telephone, is that Black?

Bill Schultz: Yeah.

Judge Bryant: Well, Mrs. Bethune was as Black as that telephone, a massive woman, she and Eleanor Roosevelt were real tight. She was a great youth leader and the founder of the Bethune-Cookman College, and Heflin, and Blease took the floor over in the Congress and the *Congressional Record* is full of it. One of them made the speech: "Niggers in the Red Room, Niggers in the Blue Room, Niggers in the Rose Garden, Niggers all over the White House." That's in the *Congressional Record*. Can you believe it? But I'll say this, I think we were lucky in the District of Columbia. The racial separation throughout the country, I think hurt worst in the educational opportunities across the board. In the District of Columbia I think there was an atypical situation. I don't believe, for instance, that Dick Lyon got any better education when he went to Central High School than I got when I went to Dunbar. I probably got a better education, really, because, as I say, this pool of talent only had so many places to go and we had Ph.D.'s, and what not, on our high school faculty. I think I probably had a better education than he did.

But I don't think that was true outside of Baltimore, and Washington right up to Richmond. Out in the states generally, and certainly outside of the urban areas I mean, it was terrible, you know those country schools, they weren't too good for whites, let alone for Blacks. I remember when LBJ, Lyndon Johnson, said that when he was teaching school in the hill country of Texas, and he saw these poor folks, these barefoot, poor people coming to school, he wished he could do something about it, and he said I want to let you in on a little secret I wish I had the power to . . . I've got the power, and he said he would do it. What I'm saying is to illustrate the level of opportunity throughout the country for everybody wasn't too good. But Charlie Duncan

and I were talking about that the other day, and he asked me about life in the District of Columbia, and Charlie mentioned the fact that when he was growing up until he went away to Northfield Mount Herman School, he said the only white people he knew were the grocery people on the corner who owned the store. And I told you that.

Bill Schultz: And the same thing for you.

Judge Bryant: The same thing, with that particular. Charlie said when he went away to school that was his first time tackling race relations. And Vince Reed, you know Vincent Reed who is with the *Washington Post*? Vince said that the same thing was true for him. He grew up in St. Louis, and he won a scholarship, a football scholarship, to the University of Iowa. He said when he was on a train going up to the University of Iowa, he was full of apprehension about whether or not he could do it with these people. He said he didn't know; he'd been told that they were superior in every regard, and he said, "I was apprehensive on that train riding up there wondering what's it going to be like with these people who obviously had some edge on him." He said it was the shock of his life when he found out that they were as dumb as he was from time to time, and when he hit them, they went down like everybody else when somebody hit them around the knees. I think that's really, that's true. I think that's true.

I mean when Charlie said he went to law school and sat in the classes and he found guys that couldn't understand Archie Cox, and he said he could. He found that he was getting better grades than somebody else. And I think that is a shock to a lot of people, not a shock, but reassuring to a lot of people who found out that really this is a bunch of b.s., you know, about this so-called superiority of people. Bunche used to tell us about that, but of course, he grew up in California and he wasn't subjected to a segregated school system. He went right on through UCLA and Oberlin. But the same thing with Charlie, when Charlie grew up in Washington, D.C., he had the same exposure that I had, until he went to Amherst.

Bill Schultz: Now at that time what form of government was there in Washington?

Judge Bryant: The government, it was a commission form of government. We had three commissioners.

Bill Schultz: Were they all white?

Judge Bryant: All white, of course.

Bill Schultz: And the school board?

Judge Bryant: The school board. The schools were divided into certain divisions, and whatever the eleventh division or thirteenth division, whatever it was, consisted of Black schools. They had one superintendent of schools. I remember this guy named Ballou who was superintendent of schools, and, of course, there was an assistant superintendent in charge of Black schools and that guy's name was Wilkerson, as I remember, when I was in grade school. And that was it.

Bill Schultz: And he was Black?

Judge Bryant: Wilkerson was Black. Ballou was white, and of course now on the school board I think they had one or two Black members on the school board, but they were just two of the tokens.

Bill Schultz: So let's go back to 1932, 1933. You decided to get married in the summer of 1934, and that was after your first year of law school?

Judge Bryant: First year of law school. When I finished my first year of law school and got my grades, and I knew I didn't have to pay tuition, and so on, I was wealthy enough to get married.

Bill Schultz: And you were how old, 23?

Judge Bryant: In 1934, 23.

Bill Schultz: 23.

Judge Bryant: Both of us were 23 years old. It was the height of the Depression. It made no sense at all. It will be 60 years in August, can you imagine that? Sixty years? I told her the other day, I said you know I haven't known any other life but you, and that's true. I started to think about before her, I've got to go back a long way. I can't remember before her.

Bill Schultz: Where did you get married?

Judge Bryant: Baltimore. We went over there one Saturday afternoon. We got a guy over here who drove a cab, two brothers named Frazier, had a cab and drove us over to Baltimore on Saturday afternoon. I made the courthouse before they closed at noon. They told us about some preacher who lived at a certain place. We found him, and he married us in his living room. I don't know who the guy was. We got married.

Bill Schultz: Was anybody else there?

Judge Bryant: No. Just the preacher, and he had his family, his wife, or daughter or somebody as a witness and he married us. And then we came on back.

Bill Schultz: Now did your families know that you were going to do this?

Judge Bryant: I don't think so. I didn't tell them. I knew that I wouldn't get any encouragement for it, because there were no grounds for encouragement. I mean nobody would be against it except to tell me that you are not equipped to do that, you are not able to get married. And I knew that if they told me, that would be true. But I also knew that if we waited until we got able, nothing would ever happen. You know, I had gotten to that point. It wasn't a question of knowing that they would be dead against it for any reason other than economics. But we did it.

Bill Schultz: Well, what about her parents. Did they know?

Judge Bryant: Ah, I don't think so. We didn't ask. I didn't ask her, could I marry your daughter. But nobody ever mistreated either one of us on that account. I was welcome to her family and my folks, they accepted Astaire.

Bill Schultz: Where did you live when you came back from Baltimore?

Judge Bryant: We got married and lived in the house. We got a room in the house of the people who introduced us at 1034 Park Rd. We rented a room in their house and we stayed there for a while. Then we moved to our own apartment, and into another apartment, and then we built a house out on Kenilworth Avenue, which house I was talking to these people about just now.

Bill Schultz: So you still have it?

Judge Bryant: Yeah, and why I didn't sell it, Bill, I don't know. When I moved, I don't know, don't ask me why I didn't sell it.

Bill Schultz: When did you buy it?

Judge Bryant: 1950.

Bill Schultz: So it was after the war?

Judge Bryant: After the war, I was in the U.S. Attorney's Office when I bought it.

Bill Schultz: Did you borrow money to buy it?

Judge Bryant: Yeah. I borrowed \$1500, I had a note at the bank or something. I had a note at the bank, and I don't know how I financed that house. I borrowed the money, I think the Perpetual Building Association financed it. Whoever sold it to me arranged the financing. A nice little house, in a nice little community.

Bill Schultz: How long did you live there? How long did you live on Kenilworth Avenue? When did you sell that house?

Judge Bryant: Bill, I probably lived there about eight or ten years, I am not certain. But the children were small. I guess that's about right, about eight or ten years. Maybe a little less than ten, and then I moved from there to 17th Street, N.E.

Bill Schultz: And then you moved from there to your current house?

Judge Bryant: And then from 17th Street I moved up to where I am now.

Bill Schultz: So you said that you didn't have any business getting married because you didn't have any money. How did you manage?

Judge Bryant: Oh, well, Astaire had a job at the Civil Service Commission, some kind of low-level clerk, and I had a job working at Howard University. I was working at the switchboard from 12 at night until 8 in the morning, and the two of us managed. I made, as I recall it, I made \$90 a month, and she made probably \$120 a month, or something of the sort. Can you imagine that? The cost of living was different then. Then, when we moved into our apartment, we lived in a nice apartment on 2nd and Douglas Street, N.W. We moved out of the Suburban Gardens apartment development, which was a very nice development. So it wasn't too bad, it wasn't too bad.