

Oral History of Robert P. Watkins
Third Interview
May 9, 2019

This interview is being conducted on behalf of the Oral History Project of The Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interviewer is James McKeown, and the interviewee is Robert Patterson Watkins III. The interview took place at the law offices of Williams & Connolly on Thursday, May 9, 2019. This is the third interview.

MR. McKEOWN: Mr. Watkins, when we last met, we left you at the doorsteps of Columbia Law School, so maybe that's the appropriate place to start today. I don't know if it's a coincidence, but you brought along what looks to be a treasure trove of photos from that period. Why don't you just tell me what you want to tell me about the photos.

MR. WATKINS: At Columbia, I was one of two African-American students in a class of about 300. My freshman year was uneventful, but my second year, I joined a group called Law Students Civil Rights Council. In 1963 in several events occurred in Birmingham, Alabama, the most important of which was the bombing of a black church in which three young black girls were killed.

MR. McKEOWN: This was the Baptist church in Birmingham?

MR. WATKINS: Yes. Law students met at Columbia and decided there was something we ought to be able to do, and we contacted other law students at Harvard and Yale. We had a meeting in the spring of 1964. Several other young lawyers or would-be lawyers decided they would go south. We went to Mississippi at that time because there were only two black lawyers in all of Mississippi.

MR. McKEOWN: This was your last year of law school?

MR. WATKINS: No. It was after my second year of law school. We could help Black lawyers in Mississippi by doing research and whatever they wanted us to do when there was a need for lawyers. I'm looking at a picture of these people who drove together from Columbia to Jackson, Mississippi.

[Talking about the pictures:] This is Mike Starr, Bill Robinson, Dan Shapiro, and this is me. This was the summer of 1964. This is the courthouse in Canton, Mississippi. These people were involved, these are other summer students, from various colleges who decided to go south to help with voter registration. We were there when people got in trouble, by assisting them.

MR. McKEOWN: Can you identify some of the folks?

MR. WATKINS: I can identify them. This was a woman named Nancy Cooper and a colleague called Richard from Massachusetts (MA). I can't recall Richard's last name.

MR. McKEOWN: Was there a leader of this particular group?

MR. WATKINS: It was called the Congress of Federated Organizations, (COFO). It was a combination of Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and other groups that were active in the South. They all served under COFO. Many college students were in Jackson and various other cities in Mississippi. Some went to Alabama, and I have a friend who was in Charlotte, North Carolina. The project was called the "Freedom Summer." It was widely covered by newspapers, radio and television.

Television cameras covered almost everything that the students did; pictures went back to the rest of the country and people would explain why they were there and the kinds of things that happened. The coverage highlighted and exposed how difficult life was for black folks, not just difficulty in terms of voting and being on the street, how blacks were treated by white folks. It was a revelation to me because I grew up in Boston and I had never really had been in the South for any substantial amount of time.

MR. McKEOWN: You had had the train story.

MR. WATKINS: I had been to the South in a much protected kind of situation. I went south to play in a junior tennis tournament. I was with a group of men and women, some of whom had lived in the South, some were still living there. They knew places blacks could go and what blacks could and could not do. But this was the first time I was there alone and in a hostile area where I was going to have interaction with folks who were less than happy to have me there. [Looking at the pictures:] This is George Raymond. He was the head of COFO in Canton which consisted of volunteers who were helping in voter registration, and others who were teaching at freedom schools. Volunteers interacted young kids who wanted to know about voting and what they could do. This was a time when several civil rights organizations worked together.

MR. McKEOWN: How many people would you estimate were volunteers like you down there at that time?

MR. WATKINS: I estimate that there were a couple hundred. Many more students spread throughout southern states.

MR. McKEOWN: How long were you down there?

MR. WATKINS: I was in Mississippi (MS) from mid-June to the end of August. It was interesting going to Canton, MS, I arrived in Jackson, MS and was sent off to Canton, on about the 12th or 13th of June. When I arrived in Jackson, I was told that I was to replace the people who have had gone to Meridian, MS to investigate a church bombing. These were the students killed in Meridian. In late August, their bodies were found in shallow graves. Their names were James Cheney, Mickey Schwerner, and Andrew Goodman. I was in Canton as one of the replacements for them. I was terrified in that situation. For the first week, I didn't eat very much. I lost ten pounds in seven days.

MR. McKEOWN: What were the living accommodations?

MR. WATKINS: We stayed in Black folks' homes. This picture is in the back yard of the people I stayed with. We arrived in Jackson. I was told I was going to Canton, and I said how am I getting there? They said you're going to take the bus by yourself and do not to sit on the back of the bus. The Freedom Riders had been successful in changing the policy of Blacks only in the backs of buses. One of the leaders of the group took me to the bus station and watched me get on the bus and watched where I sat. I did not go to the back of the bus. I sat as in the front of the bus behind the driver. I arrived in Canton, and had been told to connect with Charlie Robinson.

I did not know who he was, what he looked like, or whether he was black or white. When I got off of the bus, a black man waved at me. He asked if I was Bob Watkins. I replied that I was. He said, "I'm Charlie Robinson." He was a mechanic in Canton. He had a wife and a son about 5 or 6 years old. He said I was to stay with his family. When I arrived at his house, there were three other students from various groups staying there. Richard from Massachusetts; Nancy Cooper; and Nancy Wright. I mentioned Richard and Nancy Cooper earlier in this interview. There was one extra bedroom, so the men slept on a pull-out bed in the front room, and the women slept in the extra bedroom. We'd get up in the morning, and fix breakfast, and go off to a central gathering place called the Freedom House to get assignments for the day.

I met a young white man, Mike Peori who had just graduated from Harvard. He was an economics major, a Phi Beta Kappa. He would be attending MIT the next year. When I asked why he was in Mississippi, he said, "I had to do the right thing."

Richard, the other man stayed at the Robinson's with me. This is Nancy Wright from New York. When I put these pictures together, I remembered their names. I haven't seen them or talked to them at all. This is Sharon from California. I don't know remember who the others were. This is Alvin, Charlie Robinson's son who lived in the house with us. He was quite mischievous.

MR. McKEOWN: Did he give you a hard time?

MR. WATKINS: No. He just wanted to be involved in everything, and he wanted to show how much he knew and what was going on. About half-way through the summer, Charlie's wife Marian and Alvin went to Texas; me, Richard, and the other two women were left in the house with Charlie. I guess that was an unusual circumstance in MS. There were two white women, one white man, and two black men staying in the house.

One night, two white men drove by the house and fired shots that went through the house. Charlie would not report it to the police because nothing would be done. Charlie said that we would defend ourselves; and he went to a hiding place under his house and returned with three long rifles. The next night the white men came again and when shots were fired at the house, we shot back. I'm glad we didn't kill anybody.

MR. McKEOWN: I was going to ask you if there were any feelings of intimidation. Gunfire certainly qualifies. Was that gunfire the first you had heard in your life?

MR. WATKINS: No. If you recall, I was in the Army and learned how to use a weapon, but never had anybody shoot at or injure me. The experience at Charlie's home was my first. I knew these things went on in Mississippi. When Charlie said we're going to shoot back, I felt much better because we had the weapons, and we would not be sitting ducks.

MR. McKEOWN: Was this a predominantly African-American neighborhood?

MR. WATKINS: Yes. I didn't see any white folks in the neighborhood other than the volunteers living with the Robinson's.

Look at these pictures. That's Charlie Robinson in the kitchen. That's Nancy Cooper; she liked to be in pictures. These were neighbors of the Robinson's. They came to visit and told us if we needed something, we could call on them if Mr. Robertson was not available.

The Freedom House was about a quarter mile from the Robertson's; we'd pass by a Black restaurant on the way to it. We ate there whenever we didn't eat at the Robertson's.

Mike Starr was a Georgetown law student and a would-be film maker. He called me in 1996. He knew I took pictures while we were in Mississippi in 1960's; he wanted my pictures and what I could tell him about them. He wanted to make a film about the summer of 1964. So I sent the pictures to him and he returned them. My wife said that I should use them to make create an album.

MR. McKEOWN: What were your actual duties down there?

MR. WATKINS: To help the black lawyers when anybody got into trouble, In one situation a young man, 13 or 14, who worked in a sawmill was late getting to work one morning. The owner said you're late and he slapped the young man; the young man slapped him back or hit him with a board, and then he ran away. He was arrested by the sheriff and put in jail. I was not admitted to the Mississippi bar and couldn't represent him. I called Carsie Hall, one of the lawyers in Jackson. The next day, I appeared in court with Mr. Hall. The judge knew Mr. Hall who had appeared before him recently. He said, "Judge, how are you doing today?" They talked about fishing

and hunting. Before they finally, reached the case the judge said, “Carsie, what’s going on up here?” He replied, “You have one of my folks in the jail, a young boy. The judge said he smacked Mr. So-and-So with a board, is that right?” Hall replied, “After Mr. So-and-So hit him.” The judge said, “I don’t know what I can do about this case.” Hall said, “The kid is not going anyplace, he lives here, and there’s no risk of flight. He’ll be around if the case goes to trial.” So after some back and forth, the judge, set a \$500 bond. He said, “This is Mr. Watkins and he’s down from New York.” The judge said, “Oh, we have one of these New York lawyers down here.”

MR. McKEOWN: Was that your only appearance in court?

MR. WATKINS: That was the only appearance I had in court. Whenever there was an event students were planning that they thought might cause some trouble they would tell ask me, “Can we do it?” I would tell them there may be some problems. What if we get arrested? You can’t resist, but, and you can’t fight the sheriff or his deputies. If anyone is arrested you must get that information out to me, and I will talk to the lawyers in Jackson to find out how to handle the problem.

I went back to the Freedom House and after being in the courthouse with Mr. Hall to see what we could do to help the young man that was released on a \$500 bond. We’d get the money back if he appeared in court, but if he doesn’t appear they will keep the money and go after him. Everybody looked for a way to come up with \$500 because

they didn't want to have the kid in jail over the weekend. We gathered at a country store where we ate and met people. The store had huge barrels of pickles, barrels of rice and candy, and other comestibles. It was owned by a Black shrewd businessman named George Washington. He had a nice home and lived well.

MR. McKEOWN: He was an African-American?

MR. WATKINS: Yes. We told him about the bond, and he said, "Oh, you need \$500 to get this kid out?" He put his hand in his pocket and pulled out some bills-- one, two, three, four, and five \$100 dollar bills and handed them to me. I told him, "I said, I can't guarantee that you'll get this back." He said, "I know that." This is my community. People have been doing things for me for all my life, and if I get the money back, good. If I don't get the money back, well, that's probably how things happen." He was a "godfather," in the best sense of the word, for the community. Members of the community talked to him and he gave them advice. He was a respected person. This man didn't bat an eye and just laid out \$500. So we went down to the courthouse, paid the bond and got the kid out.

MR. McKEOWN: What about your own interactions outside the legal sphere, your interactions with the white community?

MR. WATKINS: It was relatively limited. Here's what happened. There were lawyers from the Justice Department in that area because they were investigating what happened to Schwerner, Goodman and Cheney. They would call the Freedom House, ask to come to speak to someone, and ask about things

that were happening. I would have conversations with them on a regular basis. If we had a problem, I could call and go see them, and they would tell us what we could and couldn't do. They were all white. Those were the only white people the volunteers could depend on.

We didn't interact with the sheriff, and if we had any legal problems that might cause us to have to deal with the sheriff, we'd call the Justice Department and say this is what happened, what can we do, what should we do.

It's important for me in this story because those lawyers that I met in Mississippi asked me what I was going to do after law school. I said I did not know. They said I should come to work for the Civil Rights Division in the Justice Department. I said I haven't passed the bar yet, and was told don't worry about that.

So after spending almost two months in Mississippi, I went back to New York to finish my third year at law school. A Justice Department lawyer I met in Canton, MS called me and said that I ought to send in my resume, to be interviewed by the head of the division, so I did. When I came to Washington, I was interviewed by a supervisor in the Civil Rights Division. I had a great interview and was hired.

MR. McKEOWN: Before we leave Columbia completely, I wanted to ask you, and maybe this tie in with what you were saying, but at the end of that summer, were you the same Robert Watkins that you were before?

MR. WATKINS: I was not the same Robert Watkins. I think that 1964 summer was pivotal in my life. I came back from that and I felt good about my experience because I had an opportunity to use whatever limited knowledge I had to help folks who looked like me in dire situations. It made me feel very good.

My mother was from South Carolina, and she only went back once for a funeral, and I went with her. I was about five years old. I don't have any recollection of it. She related many stories about the South that made me afraid to go there.

It changed me, and I felt good about helping people. I felt that Black folks in the South needed help because they didn't know how to assert themselves or how exercise the civil rights they should have had and were blocked from using. They passed the Voting Rights Act in 1965. The first elections were in November of that year. I was assigned to Tuskegee County, Alabama which is where Tuskegee University is located. My job was to monitor all voting in the county and to make sure that all registered persons could vote. I told the registrar who I was and why I was there; citizens, both white and black, came in to vote without incident. I did that all over the county. I met up with the Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. We worked together in that county. This was after law school.

I felt good about being in Alabama helping Blacks exercise their voting rights. My father had taken me to register on my 21st birthday. He

didn't say go to the courthouse to register. He took me to the courthouse in Boston to see that I registered to vote. I cast my first vote before I went into the Army at age 21.

MR. McKEOWN: Let me stop you there because that's interesting to me. Many of the people I know, and I asked you about your Columbia experience, you started off with this seminal moment, it seems for you, was the South in 1964. I've spoken to a lot of people who reminisce about their first year of law school. It seemed to have made a mark on you that it didn't make on a lot of other people--1L, I think they called it.

MR. WATKINS: I was thrown into a situation was very daunting. I had no relatives who had gone to law school or knew people who were lawyers. I had to learn a new language. The professor and student talked about things that I, the student, had to look up in a legal dictionary but, in some cases, I did not understand the material or understand what they were talking about. It was a demanding kind of existence. A professor would call upon a student, ask them to stand up in front of their peers, describe what a certain case was about, and what its important aspects were. I was accustomed to having teachers tell me to stand up and recite because that's what they did at Latin School. So I wasn't afraid to do that.

MR. McKEOWN: You were familiar with the Socratic method?

MR. WATKINS: I was familiar with the process. I didn't know it was called the Socratic method. There was so much material to cover, and professors could ask you about anything. The worst thing I could do was say I don't know or

I'm unprepared. That was not something I was not willing to do, so I worked hard trying to understand the assigned cases.

MR. McKEOWN: Do you think there are any particular professors that made a mark on you that you felt justified your law school experience?

MR. WATKINS: I took a course from a professor named Louis Lusky who had been a U.S. Supreme Court clerk and had been involved with some famous cases. I did well in Professor Lusky's class. Lusky called me in to his office my third year and asked what I was going to do after I graduate. I said I wasn't sure, I'd been interviewing for jobs. He asked if I'd considered clerking, and I said I don't have any connections to get a clerkship. He said, "I have a friend who's coming to town in a couple of weeks that I'd like you to meet. He's a judge in Chicago." He gave me the date for the meeting. I was preparing for the bar exam, and I forgot the date that the judge was coming and missed meeting and. I was very embarrassed and apologized profusely to Professor Lusky.

MR. McKEOWN: Was it a District Court clerkship?

MR. WATKINS: I now know that if I had gone to that meeting with the Chicago judge, I would have clerked for him in Chicago because Lusky had set it up.

MR. McKEOWN: Which bar were you studying for?

MR. WATKINS: New York.

MR. McKEOWN: My last question before we leave Columbia is the three years you were there, was there some particular area of law that you really loved?

MR. WATKINS: I took a criminal law course with Professor Monrad Paulsen. Do you know him?

MR. McKEOWN: I know the name.

MR. WATKINS: I said, I was you're going to take the criminal law course because all the lawyers I knew in Boston were always been representing people charged with crime. So I took that course and I did quite well. I also took a tax course. I was not really interested in tax, but I said it's one of the things lawyers ought to know about. It was a basic tax course for people who may have to deal with tax matters. I thought I had to learn the basic issues.

I wasn't planning on being a legal scholar, but I took a couple of courses I thought I should to know something about. If you're going to be a man of the world and you're going to be educated, you just have to know something about accounting, how it works, and how important it is. I was able to get through the course. I knew generally what accountants did, but I didn't know any accountants.

MR. McKEOWN: Do you think your mom and dad were proud of you graduating from Columbia and Harvard?

MR. WATKINS: I think they were also happy that I graduated from Latin School. They were happy that I graduated from Harvard. Harvard is a big deal in Boston. The question that my mother always asked, "What are you going to do with that Harvard education?" I said I don't know exactly what I'm going to do, but there are some things I'm not going to do." She said,

“What’s that?” I said, “I’m not going to work in a post office. It’s a waste of my time. I’m going to get this education and do something more with it.” She said, “If you have a family, you have to support your family.” I think she was unhappy with my answer. I didn’t say that I would do anything that I had to do. I thought, I have all this education, and I’m supposed to do something with it. And that was confirmed after my experience in the Army. I was exposed to people who had relatively little education, some were farm boys and factory workers; others because their families had maids and never made a bed or had to earn money for themselves. But I realized that I was given a terrific gift in having had the education that I had, and I had to use it someplace.

I thought about college as an obstacle. My parents didn’t go to college, and I didn’t have any real role models, people that I had known.

MR. McKEOWN: You had a friend who went into the Army before going to Harvard. His father was a doctor wasn’t he?

MR. WATKINS: Yes. His father was a doctor but he was more than that. His father probably looked back on his college experience and knew his son was not ready for Harvard College. He knew his son did not understand what college could do for him and what he should be focusing on, learning, and/or what would make him a more sophisticated/ knowledgeable person.

MR. McKEOWN: Did you take advantage of office hours of the professors?

MR. WATKINS: Not as much as I should have. I told my sons when they were in college, should know the professors and the professors should know them. I told

them that they should spend at least one hour a week with a professor during office hours. They did it sometimes, but not often enough. I know that my youngest son, Matthew, who ultimately went to architectural school, did get to know one of his professors.

I told my older son, you don't take the courses; you take the professors, because you'll learn a lot from them. The courses are just a vehicle for you to expose yourself to a certain subject, but you'll be exposed to the professor who is more important to know and for the professor to know you. If you go to his office hours he will know you and you will write better exams.

MR. McKEOWN: We'll finish up at Columbia, and while we're still on the record, I want to encourage you or your wife to at least give a thought to a graduation photo of you with your mother and father. I would very much like to make that part of your history. Let your wife make whatever determination she feels appropriate, but I certainly think that one is truly apt for this purpose.

So you graduated. Soon after you graduated, you took the bar.

MR. WATKINS: I took it after I graduated. I was coming to Washington, so I took the bar in Washington.

MR. McKEOWN: You took the bar in Washington for New York?

MR. WATKINS: No. I took the bar in Washington because I was going to be here, so I thought I should take the Washington bar.

MR. McKEOWN: You were coming down to interview with the Justice Department?

MR. WATKINS: I interviewed for the Justice Department in the spring of 1965, and when I had the interview, I was sure that I would get the job. They gave me the job before I took the bar exam. They said to take the bar when I could. My duties at the Justice Department kept me going out of town quite often. I was going to Alabama, Mississippi, and South Carolina on a regular basis, so I couldn't take the bar review courses the way everybody else did. Since I had studied for the New York bar, I thought I could take the D.C. bar without studying. But I didn't pass. So I told Justice I haven't passed the bar, and I'm going to take the next month and a half off because I have to study for it. "Oh you'll do all right this time. Don't worry about it." I'm not going to do that. So I took the time off during which I studied and passed.

MR. McKEOWN: Where does Cambridge fit into all of this? You were in Cambridge, England, a different Cambridge.

MR. WATKINS: Here's what happened. I spent a year-and-a-half at the Civil Rights Division of the U.S. Attorney's Office in Washington, DC. The general counsel for the Federal Maritime Commission said he's looking for an assistant and he wanted me to work for him. I thought why not. He said you have to learn the rules of the commission and the way we handle the issues that come up. I spent a month learning the commission rules to understand them. Then I went to see him and said and I was familiar with the commission rules, is there something that you want me to do. He offered me a job in the Office of Hearing Counsel's Office. I wrote briefs

and filed cases that were presented before the Federal Maritime Commission. After a hearing in front of an administrative judge, the commission gave its ruling. These were trials, in a manner of speaking, because I prepared and cross-examined witnesses and you argued to the court. This was my first exposure to gaining some trial experience. Afterwards, he told me, "I'm leaving to be general counsel of a bank in San Francisco." So now I didn't have a mentor to look out for me. I was put in the Office of Hearing Counsel.

The Maritime Commission regulates shipping companies that carry goods between countries. If these companies meet the rules of the Maritime Commission, they are exempt from antitrust laws.

MR. McKEOWN: They weren't conspiring?

MR. WATKINS: They are exempt from antitrust laws. So the cases often involve antitrust type issues. For example, when a company is shipping peas from Panama to the U.S., the prices are the same as their competitor's. It was interesting, but it's not interesting for people not in the industry.

MR. McKEOWN: It was a quantum leap from protecting civil rights.

MR. WATKINS: I recognized that in Washington I had to have an angel if you're going to be successful. Being the assistant to the General Counsel of the U.S. Maritime Commission could have been a great job if my mentor stayed at the Commission. But when he left, I started to look for another job.

One of my friends was clerking for Judge William B. Bryant. He told me that Judge Bryant was looking for a clerk. He said he wondered if

I'd be interested. So I went to see the judge. He asked what my salary demands were, and I said I didn't want to make less than I made at the Maritime Commission. So he offered me the clerkship. The next year was a pivotal moment in my career because I learned things from him by being exposed to him. I learned things that I wouldn't have learned anywhere else. It was important to have a knowledgeable friend who has your interests at heart. Judge Bryant was that friend.

He was a gentleman who had, as a practitioner, some very important cases in the District of Columbia (D.C.). He received those cases because he did great work when he was in the U.S. Attorney's Office; he then received big civil cases. There was an African-American who had a big estate and the judges in D.C. thought an African-American should represent this estate, so, they appointed him. The estate of a very successful minister called Daddy Grace; he was kind of a showman. He lived Washington, D.C. During the Depression, you could go to Daddy Grace's church. You could get fed and you didn't have to be Black. He had kitchens and things like that and he was a very shrewd businessman. When he died, he didn't have an executor or a will. Judges in the court had to find a representative to handle his estate, so, they called Bill Bryant who was at that time a practitioner. He had been an Assistant U.S. Attorney. They trusted him, and they liked him, and they asked him to do it. They appointed him and he handled the case over a period of three or

four years to settle everything; he made a pile of money that he didn't think he was ever going to make as a Black practitioner in DC.

MR. McKEOWN: It was your first real exposure to trial work?

MR. WATKINS: Right. Well at the Maritime Commission, I did administrative agency hearing work, but it did not involve the court room trials. I had a great experience by seeing what goes on in trials, how things should be done, or how they should not be done. I learned who was a good lawyer and why and who was not a good lawyer and why. I had not decided what I was going to do after the clerkship. I was offered a job running a program at Harvard where law students would take cases from indigent people who were charged with crimes in the Cambridge area. The law school wanted the students to be exposed to what is now called pro bono work. I accepted the job to run the program. I hadn't move to Cambridge yet, I was just meeting people. I did that for about a month-and-a-half before the students arrived to begin the fall semester. I decided that I didn't want to be in Boston/Cambridge area. It was not a place where lawyers who look like me had any chance to be successful.

MR. McKEOWN: That's why you left New York in the first place, right?

MR. WATKINS: Right. I wanted to be in New York, so after being hired and told what my duties were going to be, I said I really don't want to be in Boston. I came back and I told Judge Bryant. He asked what I was going to do. I heard that clerks had applied to the U.S. Attorney's Office. If you clerked for a judge in that courthouse there was a good chance of being hired. David

Bres was U.S. Attorney at that time. I went to meet him. He asked why I didn't apply sooner. I told him that I thought I was going to take a job in Massachusetts but I didn't like Massachusetts. He said, "That's interesting, let me think about it." I didn't know what was going to happen. He hired me.

MR. McKEOWN: When you were working first for the Civil Rights Division and then for Federal Maritime Commission and then Judge Bryant, where were you living here in Washington?

MR. WATKINS: Yes. I lived with friends of my parents. They said I could stay there until I found a place. That was great because I was never there. I was traveling often in the South. It got to a point where I said I can't continue living with these family friends, so I rented an apartment in Southwest Washington at a place called Capitol Park. It was great location.

MR. McKEOWN: Where was the Maritime Commission located?

MR. WATKINS: It was in a building between 14th and 15th Street near New York Avenue. It was an older building.

MR. McKEOWN: I think that's where there used to be a movie theater and is now the Museum of Women in the Arts.

MR. WATKINS: The Commission is in that area, but it's on 14th Street.

MR. McKEOWN: There was some mobility in your career early on. Was your mom still asking you the same questions?

MR. WATKINS: No. She was pleased. When I became an Assistant U.S. Attorney, I didn't give up my apartment in Southwest. I had a place to live, and if I came

back to Washington and worked in the U.S. Attorney's Office. My apartment was great because I could walk to the courthouse.

I met my wife I think when I was working for the Maritime Commission. I thought I was going to be doing things that related to the criminal law. So if I came and worked in the U.S. Attorney's Office, I would be trying felonies in the U.S. District Court. I would have a lot of trial work if I were there. That was what I expected to do, and I could leave the U.S. Attorney's Office and go to some law firm saying that I tried so and so many cases in the U.S. Attorney's Office in the U.S. District Court. I didn't realize there are many lawyers that did not want to go to court. If they did not have the experience of arguing before a judge or jury, they avoided actually trying cases.

I thought that trial experience would be a saleable commodity. I decided that if I was going to do criminal law, I should have some academic background, more than I got in law school, so I applied to Columbia for Ford Foundation money that allowed for Columbia students to study criminology. I said this would be good, and maybe I'll do something internationally. I granted a fellowship, we got married, closed our apartments, and went off to Cambridge, England. I spent a year there studying criminology with Rabinowitz, the criminologist who was the person most responsible for the British Isles eliminating the death penalty.

MR. McKEOWN: During this fellowship, you were doing what?

MR. WATKINS: Academic criminology.

MR. McKEOWN: Were you a teaching assistant?

MR. WATKINS: I didn't teach. It was like a graduate school. I wrote papers. I had lots of course work on the history of how people different jurisdictions deal with crimes; how some activities were decided to be criminal and what the basis for making certain acts that were criminal was. How they do it in Britain, in England, in Holland, and in Africa. So I had intense exposure to the area. Then I had to write a paper, and I took an exam. I did well and I was awarded a diploma. It's not called a master's, but that's what its equivalent to. My wife was studying development economics and she was invited to stay and work on her PhD. I was invited to stay to see if I could get a PhD, however, there was not an established PhD in criminology; I thought it was a little iffy. I didn't know what I was going to do with degree PhD unless I was going to be a teacher, and I wasn't sure I wanted to do that. So we both decided we wanted to return to the States.

MR. McKEOWN: Before we leave Cambridge, what was the paper that you wrote? What was your thesis?

MR. WATKINS: It compared the advantages and the disadvantages of crime commissions.

MR. McKEOWN: Wasn't it Charles Percey who was head of the Kerner Commission?

MR. WATKINS: It was Kerner who headed the Commission. What came out of that commission was that there were two worlds in Chicago. The two worlds that did not interact with each other and the worlds were growing further apart. That had to be changed to have a better community. It was quite well received. I studied a similar commission that was formed in New

York in the 1920s. It was called the Wickersham Commission after the man can't remember who chaired. I did a report on that commission and compared it with the Kerner Commission and drew some conclusions on how the criminal justice system could be improved and how Kerner's commission was set up to improve criminal justice in Chicago and how that commission worked and how the New York Commission worked.

MR. McKEOWN: Have you revisited that paper?

MR. WATKINS: No I have not. I wrote the U.S. Attorney and said I'll be coming back to Washington. He sent me a short note saying come in and see me. I went to see him and he said that he would be glad to have me back. So I was sworn in as an Assistant U.S. Attorney for a second time.

MR. McKEOWN: Thank you Mr. Watkins very much.

MR. WATKINS: Thank you.