

ORAL HISTORY T-0023
INTERVIEW WITH NATHANIEL SWEETS
INTERVIEWED BY DR. RICHARD RESH
BLACK COMMUNITY LEADERS PROJECT
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RESH: Mr. Sweets, could you tell us something about your early life, where you were born, something about your family?

SWEETS: I'm a Missouri boy, I'm the youngest of seventeen children. My father is a farmer from Virginia and my mother is from Kentucky. We found our, my grandparents found there way to Missouri way back in the 80's after having served in the Civil War. And I grew up here, at Lincoln University, Jefferson City, Missouri. I attended grade school there, attended high school there. Was away at school up at Minnesota for a while but I came back to Lincoln University and finished college where I played football, worked on magazines and promoted often times financial deals to outfit the football team there when we didn't have any money. The school was a poor school and it was certainly richly endowed with political maneuver from the politicians of the state of Missouri who were neither knowledgeable, white or black, but felt that they could use Lincoln University as a tool to benefit themselves in the purchasing of ground and many other activities. But I watched all of that from a child into manhood and I always was disheartened and disgusted t think that people way back in Governor Sam Baker's time and Hyde's time and many others would use an institution as a political football to pay off their political obligations. And one of the most amazing things, when I was about sixteen years old, I worked around the capital and many of the legislators in the early twenties, I learned to know all of the Senators and politicians around there. And I learned them talking about deal of buying a plot of ground for an athletic field, and the man who had the ground wanted about, I think he wanted sixteen thousand dollars for it, and I heard one of the politicians say, "Oh, no, no, no, no, we must get twenty-seven thousand for it, I got to get a part, I got to be in on that. "And that thing disgusted me and hurt me, that was way back in twenty-two, I was quite a youngster. Well, I went on and watched those things grow. I went away, as I said, I got a scholarship to go to law school after I finished college in 1928. I had been out of school for quite some time, I took a trip around the world, twice as a waiter, and a butler and a busboy. And I had quite an experience and the one that I most vividly remember was in Scotland, Edinburgh. And my visit out to the Sandy Mac Donald Whiskey Company, that was one the things that will long be remembered in my travels because it was so beautiful. It was just, and to see, I had never been a drinking kid, never did drink even when I was in college, but to go out and see that place. And I got to make the trip through a friend of mine that I was working on the dining car with, who's home was in Scotland. And I, well, that was a very beautiful thing for me. Later on, I worked in Yellowstone National Park, that's where I got the message to come to St. Louis and work the newspaper. I realized that my knowledge was very limited as far as newspaper work was concerned because we had no background of journalism back in '28 and '29. Very little, we

had the Argus, I knew of Freedom Journal, the first paper that was ever published by, in 1827, I knew of John Russworn, I knew Robert S. Abbott who used to stand with rags around his feet on the corners in Chicago selling The Defender which grew to be the greatest nationally known paper in the country. I knew of the beginning the of the Pittsburg Courier and of course of the St. Louis Argus, I was at school with one of the Mitchell's, Orvell Mitchell. Well, I found my way here on August 15, 1928, got: here Sunday morning, a beautiful';, hot morning and I was quite a tennis player and I went to the YMCA and changed my clothes and went right straight to the tennis court, I found my way out there near Annie Malone's beautiful Poro College at that time. And the next morning I was walking around and I went to the courts I have ever known. Just so many things were happening during that time that I felt that there was so much to be done here in St. Louis. And in my .visit that morning I met a friend of my father, Joe Holland, the late Joe Holland who used to work, who was a former attorney general and was later on editor or associate editor for the Post-Dispatch. And I went by the Post-Dispatch which was then on Twelfth Street and had a chat with him shortly after I'd been here. And at that time I met Mr. Pulitzer, O.K. Bovard and Joe Holland, Joe Holland took me up to see Mr. Pulitzer. He says, "Come in". We went in and something they told me was very unusual, he got up out of his seat to shake hands with the young fellow who was coming to work for a Negro paper just about six months old. He says "Well," he says, ""I want to tell you, are you gonna stay with the news weekly?" I said, "Yep, I'm gonna cast my lot here." He says, "That's fine. You'll never have anything in your lifetime, but you may get married here and grow up and have a family. If you do, dedicate your life to trying to educate that family and instill into them the desire to the thing that you desire, to work with the newspaper." He walked over to the window and looked over Olive Street, Chestnut, and all around. He said. "See all those big buildings over there?" I said, "Yes, I do." "They weren't erected by the people who are in there now, it was the people before them who had a desire to do something for their children. And instill in them that they have a job in the community to do and elevate the business that you're in that some day they'll come along and take over and their children and their children and that's how the Post-Dispatch has gained its momentum in the community." Jesus, I didn't forget those words. I talked with him for fifteen minutes and where we left, O.K. Bovard said, "Why, I've never seen him talk that long with the dignitaries who have come to St. Louis." Joe Holland, said "Boy, you have made a great impression on Mr. P." Alright, we all went down the steps. A few weeks later O.K. Bovard called me and invited me out to dinner. Now that was another thing unusual in 1929 to the thirties. Because St. Louis just wasn't geared to that time of leadership. And I said, "Well," I was, I felt very much enthused after having that experience with the distinguished man like Mr. Pulitzer. Well. we went on working and as I'd go around I'd look at different things arid 'observing certain things, and the first thing, being in a small town like Jefferson City, we did attend shows and go to things of that sort and sometimes it was on a segregated basis, but being in a small town like that you wouldn't, you know, you didn't pay so much attention to it. Lo and behold as I went to the shows in the Negro area, all I could see was a white operators, ushers, ticket sellers and everything else, I thought, "My God, how's a thing like this ever happen?" So I made a very serious survey of all of the shows in Negro areas and there was some twenty to twenty-five of them. And I came back and I said to Mr. Young who was the editor of the paper and who is a judge now, but we're still together, because our fathers. He said, "Well," he said, "That's the way it is." I said, "Well, get a lot of money from them," which in '29 or '30. fifteen or twenty dollars a week from , fifteen or twenty shows, that was over three hundred dollars a week. Well, you know what a fabulous income that was and the Depression was just beginning to open up to

break. We wrote an editorial about these jobs must be given and we must train Negroes to take over these jobs. We had one of them working out here up on North, what was it, he was working out here at one of the shows, they had just one Negro now. And all of these shows. And Poro College had a little theatre out there and naturally they had Negro operators. So I came back and wrote an editorial about the condition in the shows and they did not hire Negroes and how in the world, how are we gonna progress, what are we gonna do, get money into the community where we live to support our families. By God, the next week they withdrew all of the advertising after we wrote the editorial. And taking around three hundred to three hundred and forty dollars a week out of a little newspaper just starting during the Depression, you can imagine what we experienced.

RESH: That's almost a crippling blow.

SWEETS: It was a crippling blow. A serious one. And in the meantime there was, A. Phillip Randolph was having fight to establish the union activities, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. I don't recall the gentleman's name, but there was some wealthy man who was opposed to it, letting Negroes join the union and establishing the union of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. And they got hold of many of the Negro papers, and I won't name them, but they got hold of some of them, and accepted a fabulous sum of money to fight against the union. They walked in our office one morning and laid down a stack of money that high. Said, "We want your services. We don't want the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters to organize. It would be detrimental to the railroads and we will go along with your paper, we'll sponsor it, we will subsidize it until you get on your feet if you'll go along with us." I'll never forget Young's expression, I'm a younger cat, much younger than he was, he said, "What do you mean? You mean to tell me that we'll sell out the entire Negro race and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters over the word of Mr. Pullman when he says forever keep the Negroes on the Pullman cars? And the history and the background of the Negro porters in this country can't, can never be submerged. And if you're talking about, I don't care, so and so. how much money you have, we're not for sale." He said, "Come here. Sweets. You look at this man who had the audacity to come in here and offer us money to fight against the organization of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters." I said, "Well, I never heard of anything like that. Why, I think that's ridiculous. And here we're out here fighting, we just lost a nice sum of money from the, against the theatres in the city of St. Louis." And that is true, that was an awful blow to us. I remember many mornings we'd come down to our office after that happened to us and our doors were locked. And we had to find money somewhere, thank God to my dear old mother, she did make it possible for me to have enough money at the first of every month. She advanced loans. "Well, what are we gonna do?" Young said, "We're gonna fight that much harder." He said, "We'll keep on lighting." He said, "Now the next move we gonna make is these stores in this community who were not employing clerks. And we're gonna spread the message, don't spend your money where you can't work". It had little effect. Said, "The next thing we'll hit the dairies. They're delivering milk to all of the community here, the black community," we called them Negroes then, which I prefer now. "There is not a single Negro milk driver on all those hundreds and hundreds of wagons." We got the pictures and the copies of the paper and they're buying them out. We worked on St. Louis Dairy with the help of Joy Stanton who is now a successful businessman in New York. But he could not stay with us because there was no money, but I was dedicated to it and when one of the owners asked me I said I would stick with it. Finally we broke the ice of the St. Louis Dairy, we got milk drivers on. And the

funny thing about it, after most of the Negroes got at the Dairy they wouldn't even subscribe to the paper, they didn't support the paper. They didn't subscribe to it, very little,. But the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, A. Phillip Randolph, McNeal, and Mr. Bradley, they stuck with us. Wherever they could spend a dime with us they did, and often times lifted us out of a very, very bad situation.

RESH: Could you tell us how you came to know A. Phillip Randolph? When you first met him.

SWEETS: Well, I had heard of him by running on the road. I was often times a dining car waiter or a club waiter and I had heard of him but didn't know about this particular incident of organizing the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. I didn't know too much about that. I learned about that after I came here through my partner, N.B. Young. Well, I thought that was an opportunity to do something. That was an opportunity to give my services to an organization that was some day gonna lift the Negroes from their

RESH : Had you ever been familiar with Randolph's publication. The Messenger? Had you read that?

SWEETS: Well, I had read of it , but I wasn't too familiar with it. Youngsters are like that, you know, we were like that. Personally we were more interested in football and baseball and the hitting averages and things of that sort. And I was quite a football enthusiast. I started going to games, big time games right every fall after our playing season was over at Lincoln University, I'd go around everywhere to football games. I, one of the most interesting things, I have to mention this, about athletics. I ran off once and went down to Southern California with Notre Dame, I had learned to know Harry Stuhldreher, Jim Crowley, Elmer Layden, Don Miller, and all the boys on there. I was on a special car that took them down to play in a Rose Bowl in 1923 before I really came here and I followed my interests in athletics from then on. But I worked really hard with the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters and establishing them, and getting jobs for Negroes. And eventually "don't spend your money where you can't work" caught on. Then we got a young fellow named Frank Jones, Joe C. Cochran and a bunch of young people here to start a picket line, draw a picket line around those places that won't give us any of these jobs where you could walk in there at any day, time of day, and find Negroes just like that buying, spending their money, but they couldn't work. Well. we finally got that thing opened up.

RESH: That was an extraordinary gesture, you know, because today one takes those tactics for granted, but then, that was very daring.

SWEETS: No, we were serious, we meant business. So we had a certain very, well they got, they began to get jobs and began to open up and a lot of them began to move out of the, out of the area. Kroger at that time became very liberal with us. Much more liberal then what they had ever been before. Tokenism, and that's really the truth about some of our papers today are supporting these downtown stores who give just token advertising to some of the Negro papers, but I don't, I'm not for tokenism. I think that we are worthy of more than that. And I don't think that I should accept those things that say, "well, here, you're a good boy and I'm gonna give you something because you are a good boy." Now, with a little old ad about that size or something. I want to be in the main stream of all of this sort of thing. Well, now,

coming back to the "don't spend your money where you can't work. " Kroger kicked in, then we finally, got Piggly-Wiggly was in the area and they started giving us some tokenism, but at the original, go back to the original thing, our theatres, they all got scared and next thing you know we couldn't train enough Negroes boys and girls and ticket sellers and one thing to go into these stores. Some of them are still operating here and Negroes are their operators as you know.

RESH: Where there any Negro theatres at that time, movie theatres? Owned by, there was one, the Washington?

SWEETS: Well, the Booker Washington, it was a theatre and a play, stage play. It had these troupes that would go, they were going through here. Owned by Charley Turpin. And naturally most all of his help were Negroes. And the old Booker Washington Theatre. And so they played here a while with stock companies and they finally closed down and it left all the others just like that, they were white operators. But Mrs. Malone of Poro College, she had a, she opened up a theatre as I mentioned before and her operators were naturally all colored. But she wasn't able to get the kind of pictures that they wanted to see at that time. Because the, I won't mention the nationality, but there was a certain element as you well know who have control of the motion picture industry. So we moved ahead after many years of experience. Then we got on another dairy company. And we went at them, it was stated by one of the owners, "I'll never hire Negroes as long as the cow gives white milk." We , that was a headline in one of our papers. Less than three weeks later when he lost a few hundred accounts the first week then losing more the next week and the drivers were going back, the white drivers were going back, said, "They won't buy our milk, they throw it in our face." Well, he jumped in like that. Then we move into another area with another dairy and we got along beautifully with them. We had no more troubles. And the program of "Don't spend your money where you can't work" continued to spread like wild fire. RESH: When did this begin, could you give us some rough dates?

SWEETS: Yes, 1929. 1929 when we started the program. And a similar program was started in Chicago, what was that. The Whip. Joe Bibb, and I think Joe was a classmate of my friend N. B. Young, who was here at the time, up at Yale they finished in the same class. And it became very effective and it spread to many southern cities but it didn't have as much effect as it had in the northern cities or up north, or up-south rather, like Chicago and St. Louis. I used to kid them that, the only difference between Alabama and Georgia and Missouri is that one's up-South and one's down-South. So we were up-South. And to became very effective. Well, in 1932 I was just wondering what we could do to get some revenue into the St. Louis American. We gave the first educational Cooking School and Home Show sponsored by Laclede Gas Company. And, gentlemen, they have been with us every year since. They have hired many of our recommendations, many of our girls who have worked in our Educational Home Show. Laclede Gas Company has been to me perhaps one of the leading utilities in the city of St. Louis in helping our boys and girls into good jobs. Now, coming along behind them was Union Electric, under the leadership of Wesley McAfee. We'd have a Gas Home Show in the spring and an Electric Home Show in the fall. Well, more people cooked with gas then than they did with electricity and they started renegeing some what on participating in those shows. And Laclede Gas said immediately, "Well, we'll take all of it." They said, "Come to us spring and fall. we'll be glad to take it." So after some concern from Union Electric that they didn't meet the occasion, well. Bob Otto down at Laclede Gas Company

said. "Well, we'll take all the shows." He said, "Don't worry about it. It's doing us a great deal of good and we're getting more publicity than we ever had before." I'll remind you now that they had never been advertising in Negro newspapers before, but when I went to them I sold them a bill of goods of what it would mean to the housewife to have an Educational Home Show where we could educate or bring people into your gas cooking school and they could be benefited, it would lift them up, they would know what to buy, where to buy, what even cuts of meat and things of that sort. Well, it worked very successfully and today one of the biggest things that you have in the city of St. Louis is the St. Louis American's Educational Home Show and Cooking School. We have thousands and thousands of people there for two afternoons and two nights. We invite the high schools to come in and take part in our programs and they do it.

RESH: Was this program aimed quite specifically at southern migrants who had come up here? People who were having an urban experience really for the first time?

SWEETS: Well, yes and no. Because you take all the people that were out here they were from down there at one time or another. And we were educating a lot of the people here, the local people here were the same because they hadn't had any identity with things of that sort. Well, when that was taking hold in 1932 and '33, I was sending a lot of boys back to Lincoln University to go to school, we couldn't get into the University of Missouri. And Lloyd Gaines, was one boy that I paid his way up to Jefferson City. I sent him up there to play football. But Lloyd got up there and chickened out and didn't play football. But he; did stay and finish and was a very good student. Cecil Blue, one of the few teachers left up at Lincoln University now, taught Lloyd. And he graduated and came back here and was sitting in my office one day and I said, "Lloyd, you know what you should do? You should go up to the University and make an application to go to the Law School there." He said, "Well, I'll believe I will. But I can't get in its needless for me to go over there." I said, "Well, you go ahead. And I'll go too, I'll make an application to enter," which is on the record over there, "the School of Journalism." They accepted me, when I got over there and they found out I was a Negro and I was talking with the registrar about coming over there, I guess I, maybe I didn't talk like a Negro as they usually say that we talk differently. When I got over there, the registrar saw me, he said, "You must be at the wrong place." We fought about Lloyd went there and, incidentally, the Gaines case had its conception right in our little office. N. B. Young who was a law graduate of Yale University, Charlie Houston, and Thurgood Marshall and all of worked with us untiringly.

RESH: Oh. Thurgood Marshall worked with it?

SWEETS: Oh, yes, Thurgood Marshall tried some of the cases, some to the Gaines cases. And he did a lot of the, he was the N.A.A.C.P. lawyer at that time.

RESH: Oh, I see, you're right, you're right.

SWEETS: And we fought it out and then, of course, you know. . . .

RESH: Mr. Redmond was with this

SWEETS: Sidney Redmond, S. B. John Davis, N. B. Young, and George Vaughn, this just

goes on and on because everybody was so interested in the thing "that they offered, they rendered service and came with their desire to help in the case. They'd do research and sit by the, at the bar and go and look for everything that would help in the case. Well, you know what happened to that. Gaines was in my opinion from all the investigation that I can make, Gaines was paid to leave Missouri after the United States Supreme Court had rendered its decision and we were right in the middle of it from the time it started up until now. Then in 1940, I think it was '40 or '41. When the Supreme Court handed down their decision, Lincoln University as, I was telling you about, the politicians controlling the school, they said, "We're gonna set up an equal school for the Negroes in Missouri, equal to that of the University of Missouri. " I said, "How on earth can that be? It can't be separate and equal." We fought it and we lost good advertising contracts from many people who were graduates of the University of Missouri and heads of large companies. They said, "Well that smart-aleck St. Louis American, we'll cut them off." And, gentlemen, I'm telling you some of them did cut us off. And the late Barak Mattingly, National Committeeman from Missouri, helped engineer through the political influence on the presidents of Lincoln University to go to work and set up a Law School here in St. Louis at Poro College, set up a School of Journalism at Lincoln University to Missouri's School of Journalism. We started the program, "Poro Jim Crow Law School must go." It's in the clippings of our files of our paper. We fought it and fought it and fought it. We got nothing but criticism. And one young lawyer here, David Grant, stood with us, was arrested along with us and taken up to the police station

RESH: On what charge?

SWEETS: Disturbing the peace in front of the law school. Out here at 4200 St. Ferdinand. Well, neither one of us gave a care because those things are not, people, thinking people didn't cater to that sort of stuff and the police department got scared and wouldn't place any charges against us and turned us loose. Well, we moved on and on and on and the decision of the United States Supreme Court began to take its effect in various places throughout the state of Missouri. And one of the first little southeast towns to integrate the high schools was down on , I believe it was Fredericktown, Missouri. Where the members of the Board of Curators at Lincoln University were the most influential people in segregating the schools and building the, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars and millions of dollars to promote the Jim Crow Law School out here and set up the School of Journalism over at the University of Missouri. Unfortunately, many, the last man, Scruggs, condoned it and tried to live with it. The next man was a man who recently went out of Lincoln University, Dawson. Dawson just defended the right for those schools to exist like nobody's business. I have gone over there many days, fought, fussed with him and asked him to destroy those schools. They would not do it. Because I had a child, a little girl who later went to Antioch, Washington University, to the University of England in Leises. And I felt that my child should have an' opportunity to be equal to any and exposed to the same type of education as any other American born citizen. And I wasn't compromising with anything less than that. We stuck by our guns, we fought discrimination in the courts, not appointing Negroes as Circuit Judges, as circuit clerks, and things of that sort. Finally the thing has come to pass. Donnelly, former governor of the state of Missouri had the courage to appoint a Negro to the circuit bench. No one else has had that courage since them. I feel that we, it will come about. Hearnese had the courage to appoint Benny Goins as the License Collector, which has become the finest license collectors this city has ever had. And the most disgraceful and un-American thing that could ever happen for the white people to go against him in August and in November. I

don't say that he's impervious, but I will say he's educated perhaps better than any they've ever had there. He's done a more sincere job than anyone who has ever there. Well, I have seen them, change over the period of 1928 to 1970 and especially the great changes of 1941 and '42. I happened to establish the Human Relations Council down in the rectory of All Saints. Christ Church Cathedral. Stanley, Bishop Scarlett and myself, just three of us got together and sow the seeds for what you have now. you have the Human Relations Council in the state of Missouri.

RESH: Was this the inter-racial committee appointed by, set up by Mayor Kaufmann?

SWEETS: It was set up really by Mayor Becker and after he got killed was carried on by Al Kaufmann. Al had the courage to come on with it. A lot of people wanted to destroy it. But I'm one of the three. We have moved ahead in the area of Negroes in the city government, we have been placed on the City Courts bench, we have an assistant to the circuit clerk of the City of St. Louis, we have members on the school board, the first one who's a member of the board goes back, I believe, to the early 1940's when they appointed the first Negro who became a member of the Board of Education. And people began to realize that we were just human beings after all. Hoping for the same things, wanting the same things, and trying to fight and get them on a basis of equality. And I hate this thing of anybody being put there because of his political activities. It is wrong. And when you inject politics into the educational opportunities of all people, whether it's the University of Missouri or Kansas State or anywhere else, it's an untimely, un-American act. And those are the things that must be stamped out. We have got to do it. The American has stood for advancement on a good clean equal basis. We will continue to fight for, those things. We'll fight for people to gain and win offices. Sometimes you may say, "This man, well, he's not educated, he's not this that and the other." But if he is a good man. like the old man out in Kansas who had the Emporium Gazette

RESH: Oh, yeah, William Allan White.

SWEETS: William Alien White. Sure he didn't have all the high falutin' education that many of the editors had throughout the country. But what did he have? He had common sense and a desire to do the thing that was right. That's why he succeeded. I have seen politicians here who were not highly educated, but how dedicated they were to the advancement of the city. And that's what we got to have. If we ever had a, I don't know too much about what's going to happen in the political realm, but I know that Stuart Symington has meant more to the people at this stage of the game in the state of Missouri than any Senator we have ever had. He's been honest and courageous. And many times, many contracts would have been taken away from McDonnell out here had it not been for Symington being able to, which would have thrown a crisis almost on the employment of the people here in the city of St. Louis. You know, you can't dispel thousands of people off a job today and not hurt the economy of this community. The greatest act that he's ever done when he went into the Air Force and into the Army and said, "We got to do away with segregation." Little Harry Truman, our late President Harry Truman, a lot of people didn't like him, I knew him from infancy, from my childhood. He said this one thing, "If we are going to make progress in the armed forces of our country, it cannot be a segregated Army. " He said, "I've been in the segregated Army," he was a Certain, Captain Truman. I remember when he used to go down to Nevada, Missouri, down to Camp dark the camp that was given by old Champ dark and his son

Bennett Clark. Now, when you find a man like that, who does not have a Ph. D., does not have an M.A. from Harvard or Princeton or Yale or what have you, but he had courage and stood by his guns. I talked to my son a few minutes before you came in here and before I left home, he said, "Daddy," he said, "I have a very fine outfit," he said, "and the young white fellows love me to death." He said, "I'll only have trouble with some of our own." Now in Texas, Fort Hood, if they can come together on a common basis and have a realization of a democracy, that in true democracy, that must come if we are to have a better America. And we're moving. And that's what we have represented, that's what we stand for, that's what we'll continue to work and fight for. It doesn't make any difference. And, gentlemen. I'll tell you this., they can't buy us out, we'll never sell out. We're gonna continue to march on in honesty with humility and I hope some wisdom and I know it will be with dignity. That's what we got to do. That's what we have represented, I think these two things here, will outline, I'm gonna let you have it, our stand and our years of progress even into music, and I might tell you this. I'm speaking to a group of history students from the University of Missouri as a result of this paper in the next few days.. Michigan, University of Michigan, yes; University of Wisconsin, yes; Yale University, yes; Amherst, yes; Brown University, yes; University of Texas where I was last July, yes; University of California at Berkley, yes; Southern Cal, yes: this little paper here is taking its toll in the classes of history and sociology in many of those universities and why is it done? Because we have been honest on our dealings with those. With what is to be with our people.

RESH: Mr. Sweets, I know you have just a moment more, could you tell us a little, very briefly, about this Circle Clerks movement?

SWEETS: The Circle Clerks movement? Oh, yes, that came in with our program "don't spend your money where you can't work." That was one of the, an organization of young people that we stood on the background and urged them. Helped them with money, what little we could get together. And it was one of the fine young people's organizations, the finest that I've ever known of in the city of St. Louis. Most all of the people have gone, many of them have passed on.

RESH: Basically what was the purpose of this?

SWEETS: Of this Colored Clerks Circle? Jobs. Primarily jobs. They would go in to businesses, say, "Ninety percent of your trade is Negroes. You don't have a single Negro on this counter, you don't have a single Negro here. Now why not go along and give us a chance to earn a livelihood like everybody else is?" The drug stores in the community, all the clerks were white, no Negro pharmacists. That was their job, they was their program, that we will follow-up the program set out by the St. Louis American, "Don't spend your money where you can't work." The only difference in what is now and that, was a intelligent approach to jobs. Now the approach of the young militant Negro and the young militant white now. "By God, we're going in and take over. We're gonna do it. You are going to do this or else." Which in my opinion, you can't. Violence has never conquered anything. Every organization in history who has attempted to rule by the spilling of blood and overthrow has ended, I know Hitler tried it. Mussolini tried it. I know over in Japan, they tried it. They bombed Pearl Harbor. They said, "We are going to destroy, we're going to rule with an iron hand. Violence is our creed." But they haven't won yet. They're not gonna win in America. If you think they are, the little fellows up in Chicago the other day, you look at television last night. They were

going to rule the police department. They killed two officers. Over in Kansas City I guess it was. I came back from the funeral of one of my students, Leon Jordon, when I taught school, I taught school for a short while. My God, what has happened? When they walked in I happened to be with an official, couple of the detectives of police here, I went down where they were interviewing him Friday morning. One of the little fellows when they brought him in , he was about eighteen years old, he broke down and started crying, "I didn't do it. " "Didn't do what son, nobody said anything?" "I didn't do it, so and so fired the shot." The trouble with the youngsters today, they don't have guidance. Their leadership, they're void of leadership. Now the fellows that blew out my windows in there, and the fellows that shot through my glass up there, the fellows who broke in and stole all my machinery, things of that sort, that violent attempt to run me out of business, I got a letter after I condemned them for their attitude towards this "whitey," "pig," all of that sort of thing, we wrote a blistering story about it. And their conduct before the mayor's office, in front of the mayor's office.. What happened? They tried to tear me asunder. That's not the answer, that's not the way. And they'll find out.

RESH: Mr. Sweets, we want to thank you very much and certainly when the history of the St. Louis Negro community will be written, and we hope it will be written very shortly, in and accurate, documented! fashion, the role of you and the St. Louis American and your colleagues like Judge Young will certainly have a prominent role. And the role of A. Phillip Randolph will be a significant one and the black history, the Negro history of the United States is being recaptured I think, very slowly and systematically, but I think it's going to be very important that people, young people, white and black, know about those that fought the good fight in earlier years because so many people today it seems date the movement from their own joining of the organization, whatever the organization might be. But there's a very long involved history in all this.

SWEETS: Well, we have been blessed with some good men in our organization, Benny Rodgers, a boy who grew up here, is one of the stalwarts who came from this, and a beautiful leader among the people of the city of St. Louis. A very interesting character. And we have so many of them, there's just many young fellows who have seen the light of building a better America. And if I want everything that you have, or that you want, then I've got to contribute something, I've got to be a part of the movement. I can't stand back and wait for you to do something and to come in on the tail end and say, "Well, yes, I want it too." I want to earn it by the right of toil. That's the only way we want it and that's the only way that, in my opinion, we're gonna get it. When the ship goes down, we're got to make a contribution.

RESH: The ship won't go down I don't think, Mr. Sweets, as long as there are people like you who are willing to

. SWEETS: Let us pray.

RESH: Thank you very much again.

SWEETS: Thank you very much. It was nice to be with you.