

Felix Armfield: Take two with Dr. Bashful. Continue Dr. Bashful

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yes, as I said, I was the safety officer at this shoot. And a command came down which would have moved the guns outside of the range of the chute, outside of the range, the safety range. And so I said, "Cease fire. Unsafe to fire." And so many mills in the mills in the [indistinct 00:00:37] area, you had sixty-four hundred mills for a complete section. So many mills outside of the safety zone. And so then I was directing the pride and that they had their own radio man taking the command from the observation post. So someone at the observation post wanted to know who said that is unsafe to fire. And of course the radioman said, "Lieutenant Bashful, the safety officer." So this person, "Let me speak to him." So he said, "Jones so-and-so wants to speak to you." And I said, "Lieutenant Emmett Bashful," I gave him a serial number, "Speaking."

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: He said, "Well why did is not safe to fire?" I said, because it is outside of the safety range that we have. He said, "Well I want a fire." I said, "Well, just give me your name, rank, serial number and you'll assume responsibility for whatever happens. You fire." I said, "If you do that and you ordered it as a general officer, I'll have to obey it." And he said, "Well no, no. All right, well what would it take to put it back in the safety range?" And I told him, they gave the command to put it back in safety range. And he wanted to use his rank but he had to take responsibility for it. He didn't want to do that 'cause that rounds could have gone anywhere and created some problems.

Felix Armfield: Yeah.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: So that was an interesting thing. So finally the group of us about I think twenty off—Black officers were assigned to the 46th field itinerary gate at Camp Livingston, right out of Alexander, Louisiana.

Felix Armfield: Yeah.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Interestingly, when we came there, the General, General Payne, P-A-Y-N-E, General Payne wanted to meet with the twenty Black officers and he came in there. He said that—

Felix Armfield: That which you are one of?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah, I was one of the 20.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And he said that he had a good outfit, he wanted to keep it a good outfit. And then

he told us about where we would've to sit in the dining hall and he had a salt and pepper deal at table here, some Blacks, Whites and [indistinct 00:03:18] salt and pepper we call that.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And he told us that at the theater the Black officers were supposed to sit in the back row and a bunch of other stuff he said. Then he even where we were quartered, in our quarter, all the Blacks were quartered in the same area.

Felix Armfield: Mm-hmm.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: So we decided to go to the movie that night and we did not sit in the area that he told us and the little fella that came and little corporal and, "You can't sit there, sir." I said, "Well, we all sit in there. We can. It's nice in there." And then he went and call a sergeant or somebody and he said, "You can't sit there." He said, "Yeah, yes, we're sitting here. We comfortable, that's all. And don't bother us." And he almost insisted and one of us, I don't think it was either one of us said, "Sergeant, did you understand that I said, I didn't want to be bothered."

Felix Armfield: Oh, gee.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yes sir. Then he left. So it got to the general and next day he called us all in. He wanted to know who was the leader of the conspiracy where we had just come out of Officer Kennedy's School, we had a military law, we knew that it was conspiracy that's subject to court-martial. And we started looking at just, "What conspiracy, General?" He said, "Well the conspiracy to go to the movies." "We wasn't into conspiracy to go to the movie." So we just— he thought he was smart trying to get just something in. And of course even if he had court-martial, we'd have been on a general court-martial. And a general court-martial had to be reviewed in Washington. So he not really—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: But anyway, that went on and we had problems all the way in. They didn't promote any Black officer the whole time we were there. All of these guys were college men from all of the various colleges. You name them, they came from various colleges. They didn't promote any of our, not a single one—

Felix Armfield: Really?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: — at that point. Then we were transferred to Fort Sill and we ran into all kind of problems then with, so we really got the inspector general to come down to deal with the situation, got so bad. They even had, while we was at Camp Livingston, they'd have a slit trench dug when we out on bivouac out on camping. They'd have two slit trench so they— This slit trench for the Black officers and this one for the White officer to urinate in. And that sort of thing.

Felix Armfield: Really?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah. Oh, yeah. And we'd go out, we'd go right on way and say the Black White officer, as soon as he said we go and urinate in the White officers— We did it.

Felix Armfield: As if the urine was from one was any more wasteful than the other.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And this was a diamond. So anyway, when you wouldn't get promoted, so we just did our thing. And so when we got to Sill—

Felix Armfield: What made Fort Sill so bad? You said it really got worse then in your—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: No, no, not the Sills, as much as that unit. The same unit that was at Camp Livingston.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: This is just a unit, the 350 field arterial group, two battalions and Sill, once you left that, Sill wasn't so bad, the camp.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: So anyway, we got the Inspector General down there and he came down and he had us to come in and talk and then so, later on when he got all the van, they took this up with the commanding officer and of course they later on when they moved us to Camp Gruber and the Inspector General continued his inspection then he found out that there were problems. And so when they got to leave Gruber, we were headed overseas. The twenty officers, about ten of us were pulled out of there and sent to, I think we went to Camp Meade in Baltimore, right out Baltimore. And then from there to Patrick Henry in Virginia. And then we went to Italy, we ended up in Italy. And they wanted to pull us out because we had spoke to them and the Inspector General and our General, I guess, of the Army.

Felix Armfield: How long was your tour of Italy?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Almost two years. Let's see, November of '44 to February of '46. So we went to Italy and we were bid wagging on Count Ciano's farm that's mutually his son-in-law. He had a big farm and they took over that and had us bid wagging in big tents there. So we were there and our course during that period while we just bid wagging, didn't have too much to do, we'd go to Florence and go to the opera. The scholar had been bombed. So the Scholar Opera, the company had moved down to the Verde Theater in Florence. And we'd go there, we'd go to Pisa, we'd go to various places in Italy and we— We really enjoy it. And then I was called up to the line. And I was called up to the 92nd division artillery in 92nd division in a what we call division artillery. And I was a fort observer with the infantry, of that infantry.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And I took part in two or three campaigns with them. And as a matter of fact, I was

in the forward elements when the Germans and the Italian surrender. I was in the forward elements right there watching them surrender and forward elements of the—

Felix Armfield: And how segregated were the forces once they [indistinct 00:10:27]—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Oh, the officers they were segregated. The officers were White, but all Black troops now. But believe it or not, I was assigned as artillery officer to a White unit during that trip.

Felix Armfield: Were you?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: For a while I was with division artillery and they moved me to the 380-something field artillery, I'm not sure of the number now. But they were at the aircraft artillery but there wasn't any need for them over there because the Americans or the allies command the sky. So they didn't have any need for any aircraft material. So they moved them into field artillery [indistinct 00:11:13] infantry. Moved into infantry.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And I was assigned to them as a field artillery liaison officer. Now I wasn't as much a forward observer, although I was a forward observer too, as I was assigned to the infantry battalion as a liaison, field artillery. During part of this situation, I think this while I was with the 92nd division, we were on a hill and we attacked and advanced a hill. And the— As an artillery man, once you get on a hill and you take it, you have to shoot in what's called defensive fire. So if they counter-attack, you can ring in artillery load so shoot in. So I was in the process of doing that and my radio man said, "Lieutenant, everybody is going." I said, "Going where?" And so we were in front of the infantry. I'd get out where I could see. And they said they pull off the hill.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: I said, "What?" And then I saw the enemy contact. So I just called for all the defensive fighter I'd shot in and I called for about ten rounds, that meant a whole battalion of guns started raining that material. So when the enemy saw that and they thought that we were counter-attacking with our counter-attack, so they pulled back. And then we called the people there, "Come on back up here then." And they came on back up. Believe it or not, another officer got the Silver Star for that action because one of the White officers put it in that he did that. That he shot the, fired— So he got the Silver Star. I didn't get anything of that. They really straightened it out later on, but I never did get anything for it.

Felix Armfield: Really?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And then another situation that we went up on a hill and I was right there with the infantry commander, a guy from Baltimore, a Black guy, and he got shot standing right by me, got killed and right by me. And Bullet went through my leg and I just dropped to the ground, right. But he got killed right there.

Felix Armfield: Standing right there next you.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Right there.

Felix Armfield: What kind of impact did that have on you?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Man, you don't have time to— You looking for— You got to do what's necessary there. Now, later on when I got a chance to think about it shook me up quite a bit. But at that time— And I got back— When he got killed, I think I was the ranking officer up there at that point. And I called back and told their infantry commander, a colonel, that, "There's no anyway you can hold his hip? You don't have a few men up here and they got machine guns and everything else." So he said, "Well you got to pull back." I said, "Well, if these men try to pull back now without some sort of camouflage, they'd be cut down like—" So I fired in smoke rounds, you can do that. And the smoke they couldn't see and then we pull them off the hill and save them. So it's that kind of thing.

Felix Armfield: Now, while you were in Italy, what kind of treatment did you receive from the civilians there?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: If it just left to them, we wouldn't have had a problem. But the White officers, I mean, the White soldiers told Italians that the Blacks had tails. Oh they had tails. They like monkeys, they have tails. And so they would ask, they wanted to see our tails. What tails? And they did everything they could. We had a guy, Major Wemp from Chicago, you see in the field artillery over there, they had two field artillery battalions that were all Black from the colonel on down.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: The 597 field artillery and the 600 field artillery. And Major Wemp was the executive officer of the 600 field artillery. And of course some of these little gals over there, looking at him, he's passing for Black frankly. But anyway, the White soldiers had a very limited command of Italian land. So they said, "Major Wemp is Negro, Black." He said, "No, Bianca. White." That's what they would say. They said, "No Negro." So they couldn't say that he is a light skin Black man. They didn't know how to say that. They got it all mixed up.

Felix Armfield: I see, I see.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: So that was the situation. Incidentally, when the war ended, you was supposed to come home if you had so many points. I didn't have the points. This guy who got the Silver Star for something he didn't do.

Felix Armfield: Mm-hmm. Wonder how many—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: He had enough points so he came home as soon as the war ended. He came home, I had to remain over there a little longer. And I was just put in an outfit that was just there, just a [indistinct 00:17:41] outfit. During that period, they had a group going to Switzerland. They asked me where I wanted to go and I said, "Yeah." So I went to Switzerland. Went all over Switzerland and on a tour and [indistinct

00:17:55]—

Felix Armfield: With no problems—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: No problems.

Felix Armfield: — as a Black man.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: No problem. And went and up to Engelberg [indistinct 00:18:02]—

Felix Armfield: Now when was this?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: That was 1946, early '46. Around January. No, in December of '45, because I was in Engelberg at Christmas and I was there and then—

Felix Armfield: And by this time the war ended.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah, the war ended a little before that.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And so I made that trip and came back and found out I was sent back in February. And incidentally when I came back and ready to be mustered out, they said, "Well, you have to stay in the reserve." I said, "Why do I have to stay in the reserve?" Said, "You have an 1193 MOS military specialty. And so I had to stay in reserve. And when I came out, I was called back in for the Korean conflict. But at that time I was at Florida [indistinct 00:19:12] teaching and I got a deferment for six months and at the end of the deferment, I was able to get out of it all together.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And when I was put in the reserve, it was an inactive reserve too. But I still was called back in the service for the Korean conflict. But you never served in. No, I never. I didn't see myself coming back if I went over there. That's just how it's been all that time in combat in Italy. I didn't see myself coming back.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: It's an interesting thing. One time we went Florence, they had what they called the spaghetti boy. Some of these Blacks and Whites too had— And I think at that game on the Blacks, that football game. So several of us went and Lieutenant Hicks and I were walking and I just stopped and I held his hand. He said, "What's the matter?" And just about that time, boom. Right in front of us. A stand from way up there, one of those big photographic stand, right there in front of us, almost hit our foot. And I don't

know what told me to stop, but if we had taken another step at the boat, we'd have been killed right there.

Felix Armfield: Now, did you ever know where it came from?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah, it came, the photographers. Up there at the game. They dropped it. It fell from up there.

Felix Armfield: Was this so from [indistinct 00:20:47]?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: No, no, no, no. They had to just— Just one of those things, right.

Felix Armfield: As you returned home from World War II on your tour with Italy.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah.

Felix Armfield: What's happening at home?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Well, when I came back, it was nothing happening that much. As I looked around, I came back and as I said in February, I was not mustered out because I had a lot of [indistinct 00:21:13] leave accrued. And they came mustered out until the enemy [indistinct 00:21:16] leave. And by the way, I had been promoted while I was in Italy. I was promoted while I was in Italy, first lieutenant. And I looked around and I didn't see too much in the future in Baton Rouge.

Felix Armfield: Mm-hmm.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: So I said I'm going to see if I'd go on back to school. So I went on to Chicago, I had a lot of relatives in Chicago, went on to Chicago and during that period I went over to Cincinnati and I looked over the University of Cincinnati, came back, of course I'd looked over— I knew about the University of Chicago. So I filed applications there. The University of Chicago, University of Cincinnati, University of Illinois. Well the Cincinnati was the first school to reply and they admitted me. Then the University of Chicago taking a long time and that's really where I wanted to go. They were taking so long.

Felix Armfield: [indistinct 00:22:23].

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah. So finally the University of Illinois admitted this. So I decided to go down there because they had a state school and it wouldn't have cost as much. So I went on down there and went to school there.

Felix Armfield: Now were you on financed through your G.I. Bill?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: G.I. Bill, yeah.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: I had a little money. In addition to everything else, I was a PX officer and I had all the cigarettes in the whole 350 field artillery group.

Felix Armfield: Now is that what PX officers means?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: No, it's more than that. All kind of stuff.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: This is just something on the side you do. I was assigned, I had a regular assignment, but that was one of the things. And all this stuff was coming, I'd pass it out. And these pilots and these, we had planes, you know, the Level-5s observation plane. Pilots said, "Look, we can get some good money for these cigarettes." So I let him have some, they would give me thirty dollars for a cotton.

Felix Armfield: Mm-hmm.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And they'd take ten dollars, they can get forty dollars from it. Anyway, I'll just leave it there. Made a nice little piece of money there.

Felix Armfield: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And so I had a few dollars when I went on up there. But the G.I. Bill was a main thing that I went to school and I went in '46 at the University. In '47, I took my masters, but I remained in school another year in the summer, until the end of the summer in '48. And then I went down to Florida and then went back to [indistinct 00:24:11] he was the president then. And I stayed down there. I ended up staying in there ten years. Matter of fact, I organized the political science department down there.

Felix Armfield: Oh, really?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah. In '51. I came back each summer, '51, '52 and '53. So I got everything out of the way. At the University of Illinois, you had to take an examination in French and German. I took the German [indistinct 00:24:43]. I knew I could pass the French, I wasn't able to try with the French. And I took the Germans first and I passed it. And it's an innocent thing. And many of the White students had been around there trying to pass these language examinations for years. And I came and I took it first time and pass it.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And everybody wanted and then I took the French, the following summer and passed it. That was in 19— I took one in 1952 and 1953 in the student summer and passed. And then in 1954, I went up— By the way, in 1954, I decided to take '54, '55 off the whole year. And I received, in addition to the G.I. Bill, I received a Ford Foundation Grant. Ford Foundation Fellowship. Paid me everything, including a



salary as if I were working, money for expenses and everything. And I was still getting the G.I. Bill and that was taking care of all expenses.

Felix Armfield: So basically you could [indistinct 00:25:49].

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah. But well I had to pass the, what's it called in Illinois? Preliminary examination. It's a qualifying exam. Once you pass, you admitted to candidacy for the degree. Otherwise you're just taking the courses. Anyway, I took it in October. That October, all that summer I was preparing before I took the classes, but I spent most of the time preparing for examination. So I took it and passed it. And then I started on the dissertation and I had to go back to Florida. When I came home from Christmas in Baton Rouge, I just went on down to Tallahassee to get some more material, 'cause I did my dissertation on the Florida Supreme Court.

Felix Armfield: Yeah, I was just—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Hm.

Felix Armfield: Yeah. That citation of the—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah, yeah. And so I went back and I finished it. And I received— When they wanted a copy of it, I sent them a copy from [indistinct 00:26:56] Havana and the seven justices of the court read it and when I got down there about October, they called me and sent that citation to it. And—

Felix Armfield: Now what made you decide on Florida, looking at the Florida Supreme Court?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: My field was constitutional law in the political science area. And I had taken some of my students down to the Florida Supreme Court just to hear cases arguing [indistinct 00:27:41] and martials there and other things. There was not any study that had ever been done at the Florida Supreme Court. So even before I went up there, I had decided that's what I wanted to do. And I had gone through about three years of newspaper clippings and had gotten that information.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: They had all the newspaper down in the gallery and I'd go through there and photograph what I needed. So I did that and had all that material. But when I went back down there, I was able to have complete access to the files of all the justices. I was able to interview all of them. I was able to interview other persons who had run for judge and had not been successful. So an innocent thing that after I came here that one of my students who was in— I taught him his first course in constitutional law [indistinct 00:28:58] second course—

Felix Armfield: And you said when you came back here? [indistinct 00:29:01]

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: When I came— I was saying I taught him down in Florida when I, Florida. But when I came here, that young man who had gone to Harvard and taken his law degree and had been a lawyer for a

while in Jacksonville, Florida, became an assistant US attorney and finally was appointed the US Magistrate. And then later on he was appointed by the Governor to the Florida Supreme Court. I had done a study at the Florida Supreme Court. He is one of my students who's been appointed, first Black. So they notified me and invited me to come down when he was sworn in. So I went down and they had me on the front row, front seat.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And now he is now a US court of appeal judge in— Well, he sits in Atlanta in [indistinct 00:30:04] court of appeal. His name is Joseph Hatchett, H-A-T-C-H-E-T-T, Joseph Hatchett. And he said the first time, he'd never been inside the state supreme court building until I took him, 'cause when I took the students down there. And I'd take them down, I'd take them to the legislature, take them to regular courts and that sort of thing. So he had a briefing as a matter of fact. Yeah, you have to— Personal experience is just as important as anything else.

Felix Armfield: Quite exhilarating. If we can back up a little bit and talk about this tour with Italy, before you left the war. What kind of fraternizing did you the Black officers do in Italy? While there?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: You mean with the White officers?

Felix Armfield: Yeah, with the White officers and then with the civilian population. I mean, what kinds of things were—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Well, well let's start with the White officers. There wasn't much of that at all except when you were on the line, when I say on the line, I mean up there fighting. They had a deal they call it rest leave. They'd give you, you'd be up there a month or two. They give you two weeks rest leave. And when we came back, rest leave, we'd go to Rome, we'd get in the jeep, go to Rome and we'd go in the hotel. We'd have authorization to go in, it was Excelsa Hotel then. We have been back there since then, it's a dump now. But it was a nice hotel then.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And the White officer stayed there, so you in the same hotel, ate in the same mess and everything else as the White officer. The officers in our unit, there wasn't much of the much fraternization in the unit. With the population, depends on who you got, [indistinct 00:32:30] always had a gal that I, you know, we don't get a gal. And I had little gal who followed me all the way. And so she was at my disposal time anytime I could get away. And other officers had the same thing. But basically they were White. Most of them didn't want to be bothered Blacks.

Felix Armfield: Mm-hmm. That's interesting. That's interesting. The war is over. You're back to the US by '46, you said?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: '46.

Felix Armfield: Back in the States. If we can talk about for a minute, your own, the fraternity that you belong to. Did you pledge your fraternity as an undergraduate student?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Oh, yes. That was made 1939.

Felix Armfield: 1939.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: I've been in the fraternity fifty-five years now.

Felix Armfield: And that fraternity being Alpha Phi—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Alpha Phi Alpha.

Felix Armfield: Fraternity incorporated. Yeah. I like that. I don't know of too many other ones, do you? But no, I guess what I want to talk about at this point, Dr. Bashful is, what kind of temple was being exemplified through fraternities and sororities at that time? Were you joining them strictly for the party or were there some other kinds of things that people were doing at that time that made these fraternities and sororities is viable to the communities in which they serve.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Well, when I went in, I went in the strengths club in, I guess in '38. Keep in mind that you didn't go in one time in media the next semester. They didn't have that back then. You had to stay in the pledge club at least a year, back there. Anyway, I went in and sometime in 38 and I guess, it had to been made in '38, the latter part of '38. But I just didn't have the money.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And I went in, see Doctor, most of the people around Baton Rouge, the big people were Alphas, the president of the university. The president of the [indistinct 00:34:54], well, in '38, Dr. Felton Clark became president of the university. But in—

Felix Armfield: Now which university?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Southern University.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Southern University. Dr. J.S. Clark was president of Southern University when I went to Southern in 1937. And Dr. Felton Clark was a dean, that is Felton Clark was the son of Dr. J.S. Clark. He became president in 1938 when Dr. J.S. Clark retired.

Felix Armfield: Mm-hmm.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: So these men were top flight men and then you had [indistinct 00:35:35] at Alabama State. Charles Wesley was the president of Alpha Phi and I was just tremendously impressed with him. So I

pledged and I was made in '39 and incidentally, fraternity, had its annual convention at New Orleans in 1937. And I just kept up with what went on. I wasn't here or anything. And I wasn't even a member or then I wasn't even a pledge club, but I— And I was very impressed with the guys who were in the chapter of Beta Sigma Chapter of Baton Rouge. So I wanted to go in because Alpha was the place where all these top flight men that I admired, so were members. So that's why I went in. It wasn't a party 'cause you didn't have that many party, you had won one big dance. That's the social affair, they had didn't have much of it. Except that one big dance, every organization had a dance on the campus. So it was not the social affair as much as other things as well. And so that's when I became a member.

Felix Armfield: What kinds of things do you recall the fraternity doing as outreach kinds of activities?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Oh, back in those days, the main thing they did was inspire you to do well in school. To make top flight grades to— But they didn't have a lot going on other than that. They didn't have much outreach. They had this, of course the education for citizenship and they had the situation of hopeless people, the hopeless people. But keep in mind that Blacks in the South were not voting in the Democratic primaries in the '30s anyway. When they registered, they had to register, and only voted in the general election. And then as only as Republicans. They registered as Republicans is that kind of thing.

Felix Armfield: So Black people were not involved in those primaries?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Not the primaries. Not the Democratic primary. No.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Only Democrats and Blacks couldn't register the Democrat until after the Texas primary cases, which opened up the primaries to Blacks, there were four cases. They were called the Texas primary cases and they opened up the primaries to Blacks. The one that opened it up was really Smith v. Allwright, was the big case that opened up the primary. They had three other cases that—

Felix Armfield: Now when was this [indistinct 00:38:48]?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Smith v. Allwright, I think was 1944. See, the Democrats said that the primary is a private group and was not substitute the Fifteenth Amendment or even the Fourteenth Amendment. Fourteenth Amendment because they said this Fourteenth Amendment, "No state shall do so-and-so and so-and-so."

Felix Armfield: Exactly.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: All right, then the Democratic Party said, "This is not the state acting, this is private action, not public action."

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: So in the first case, they had a definite regulation of their legislation saying that the primary be for Whites only.

Felix Armfield: Gotcha.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Because the Supreme Court, when that was taken to the Supreme Court, the Supreme Court knocked that down, that'd be in the violation of the Fourteenth Amendment.

Felix Armfield: Mm-hmm.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Deny legal protection of law and that sort of thing. Then the next time the legislature passed the law, empowering the Democratic Central Committee to regulate the primary. And they proceeded to pass a law, pass the regulation that only Whites could take part. That was taken to the Supreme Court, they knocked that down. Then the next time the legislature didn't do anything, but the Democratic Central Committee, on its own volition, on its own, passed the regulation denying Blacks the right [indistinct 00:40:59]. *Grovey v. Townsend* and the—

Felix Armfield: [indistinct 00:41:03] versus—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: *Grovey v.* — but you can look up the Texas primary cases, you can see them all there. You can find them in almost any textbook. And so at the Supreme Court they say, "Well, that that's private action. That's not public action and not a state." So then that meant that Blacks couldn't take part in primaries at all. And finding out the was the case here in Louisiana called the classic case, *US v. Classic*. And—

Felix Armfield: Classy?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: *Classic*. It's like *classic*. It's like *classics*. The *classic*.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: *US v. Classic*. And, in effect, what it said is that the primary is a part of the electoral process. That the primary part of the electoral process.

Felix Armfield: Yeah, yeah.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Then in *Smith v. Allwright*, they went back to the last Texas primary case and then that's when the US Supreme Court said, "The primary is an integral part of the electoral process and that they cannot deny Blacks the right to participate in the primary."

Felix Armfield: And this was the one that took in 1944.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: 1944, yeah.

Felix Armfield: Okay. And is that the reason that Smith v. Allwright stands out today?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah. Yeah.

Felix Armfield: As one of those major—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah. It's one of the major cases—

Felix Armfield: — very important cases.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: One of the major cases that are dealing with the right to vote for Black Senator South.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Right.

Felix Armfield: It would be declared in 1944.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: 1944.

Felix Armfield: Yes. And that was, all this was a part of the Texas [indistinct 00:42:43]—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Well, it was done in Texas, so it was called the Texas primary cases, 'cause it was done in the State of Texas. But the NAACP handled the cases.

Felix Armfield: Okay. And all of these were NAACP cases—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And if you know, old Maceo Smith, who was the former national president of Alpha. Was one of the leading persons involved in this.

Felix Armfield: Oh really?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: A. Macio Smith.

Felix Armfield: Yeah, I [indistinct 00:43:06].

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Out of Dallas.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah. And he was president of state conference of branches, I think, in NAACP.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah.

Felix Armfield: Okay. Now this has also taken place with, if Smith v. Allwright occurred in 1944, can you recall whether Charles Hamilton Houston was playing a major role in these Supreme Court cases at that time?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yes. He was—

Felix Armfield: He just the council to the NAACP, isn't he?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: He was. I'm not sure the actual date, although I have it over there, I can get it. But he was advising the NAACP all along, even before he became counsel. So yes, yes, he was involved. But basically his principal involvement was in the education cases.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: But, yeah.

Felix Armfield: Okay. So there were others who were working just as actively—

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah.

Felix Armfield: — on voting rights.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah. There were Black lawyers in all these states that were involved in this sort of thing.

Felix Armfield: But Texas would break that ground for voting rights kind of thing.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah. And that, even [indistinct 00:44:34] Lawson was involved in—

Felix Armfield: Now when you talked about your fraternity Alpha Phi Alpha, having that slogan, "A Voteless People is a Hopeless People," is this the fraternities, were they actively out there advocating for these kinds of voting?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Oh yes, yes. During this period in the '40s and even the late '30s, but especially in the '40s, they were out there doing everything they could to and get people the right to vote. And many of

these people who involved in the Texas primary cases were members of Alpha Phi Alpha.

Felix Armfield: Okay.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: And then they had the other thing, education for citizenship, which these were outreach programs.

Felix Armfield: Now what was that, education for citizenship?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Well, they would have education programs that we, which they'd have education citizenship and they would have programs all over and to teach people of their rights and responsibility to their citizen.

Felix Armfield: Okay. Okay. I see. I hadn't heard about that. That's an interesting one.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah, it's in the history as one of the principal thrust [indistinct 00:46:04]—

Felix Armfield: Education for citizenship.

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Yeah.

Felix Armfield: I don't think we can go wrong with that one. We can't go wrong with it. As the '40s would come to a closure and the '50s are clearly mounting and you can see it, were you able to sense a change was about to be forged?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Well, a change was coming because keep in mind, you've had the education cases, the higher education, especially at the graduate level. You had the Gaines case in Missouri. You had the Sweatt case in Texas. You had—

Felix Armfield: Texas is just a hotbed, huh?

Emmett Wilfort Bashful: Well, that's one of them. You had the case and most—