

**MSFC HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW WITH CLYDE FOSTER
INTERVIEWED BY ANDREW J. DUNAR
APRIL 23, 1990**

DUNAR: Mr. Foster if you could tell me a little bit about your own background and how you came to work for Marshall.

FOSTER: I was born in Birmingham, Alabama in 1931. I was educated in the public school system. After leaving the public school system in Birmingham, Alabama, I attended Alabama A&M University and upon graduation from Alabama A&M, I was drafted into the Army. I spent two years in the Army. One year in the United States and one year in Germany. After returning back from Germany, I was able to get a job teaching school right outside of Selma, Alabama. At Selma I was separated from my wife, she was still in Madison County. I wanted to move back to North Alabama. My wife assisted me in making application for employment at the Redstone Arsenal. I made application at Redstone, I was hired by the Army Ballistic Missile Command. That was headed by General Medaris at that particular time. That was about 1957 and after '57 I worked for the Army Ballistic Command up until the formation of NASA. In 1960 when Marshall Space Flight Center was established I decided to transfer into the space program. That is how I became affiliated with NASA.

DUNAR: What were your responsibilities with the ABMA?

FOSTER: I started off in the computation laboratory. I started out as a physical science aide. I was able to move from that job description to a mathematician aide. After securing further courses in mathematics I was able to be classified as a mathematician in the Computation Laboratory, dealing with computers, writing mathematical models, programs for the computers back then. Late 50's and early 60's.

DUNAR: Who were you working for then in the ABMA?

FOSTER: Dr. Hoelzer. Dr. Hoelzer was there and another guy was over the comp lab, over my section, Bill Moore (William). I remained in the computation laboratory for about 20 years. Then I went over to the Equal Opportunity Employment Office.

DUNAR: So that would have been mid-70's? In the early thing, you must have been one of the few blacks working in the technical field.

FOSTER: That is right and with NASA. I think it was about 10 or 12 at the most.

DUNAR: In all of NASA or just at Marshall?

FOSTER: In all of Redstone Arsenal. Both at NASA and at the ABMA. What had happened in the county of Madison. There was only one public high school for blacks. I came up during a period of time when there was the dual system of education. It was unfortunate for the blacks in Madison County that they only had one high school up until about 1948 or 1950. So all of the kids that lived in rural Madison County did not have an opportunity to attend high school unless they would have transportation to get into the one high school that was located in Huntsville, Alabama. The launching of a program like the space program, caught many, many local blacks without any training that was necessary to enter into those kinds of business.

DUNAR: Were the opportunities for those that did have training fairly open at that time?

FOSTER: We were never able to experience that because there weren't any and I would say yes there would have been some difficulties because of discrimination. The kinds of discrimination that I encounter in terms of upward mobility, I could not leave the reservation and participate in all reservation type training. All of my training that I received had to be conducted off of the reservation. Otherwise I was not able to participate because of public accommodation. I was denied that opportunity to attend a seminar or symposium that was being held downtown. So I was restricted. I would say that even if those individuals had been in numbers, qualified, I think the power structure would not have been responsive to that.

DUNAR: At Marshall there was some pressure brought to bear on Marshall by NASA Headquarters by James Webb, for example, during the period from about '63-'65. Were you ever aware of any of that?

FOSTER: No I was not aware of any pressure brought on whatever as far as bringing about an integrated work force. I have always worked with the people at Marshall Space Flight Center in an effort to bring more minorities into the work force through my contact from outside, and was responsible for bring in. In the earlier days I brought blacks into the organization.

DUNAR: Was there any discrimination on the Arsenal itself, on the reservation?

FOSTER: Oh yes most definitely there was discrimination. There was this subtle kind of discrimination, upward mobility just wasn't there. It was not like discrimination off the reservation.

DUNAR: Was there discrimination in the work conditions other than upward mobility?

FOSTER: Now, before I started to work at Redstone, yes. I was told by some of the earlier individuals who had worked in a non-professional capacity that there were separate restroom facilities, water fountains and cafeteria areas. Yes, on a federal reservation, now that was a little prior to my employment.

DUNAR: There was a case there involved when you were there in 1957. Had that ended by 1957?

FOSTER: I did not see those sort of things after I started to work there in 1957.

DUNAR: That was still all the case in Huntsville?

FOSTER: That was the case on and off the reservation. This was on Federal grounds, separate facilities.

DUNAR: That was before '57?

FOSTER: Yes that was before '57.

DUNAR: After '57, at least on the reservation there were no physical separation.

FOSTER: Not identifiable.

DUNAR: It was more subtle?

FOSTER: The remnants of sorts.

DUNAR: Do you find that it was less so in the case of people like yourself who had some technical or mathematical background than it was for people maybe in service areas?

FOSTER: Yes in a lesser manner. But still there were some barriers working in terms of moving up into supervisory, leadership positions, etc.

DUNAR: One thing that we heard from some people (I don't know about this, because I am not from the area myself), we heard that conditions generally in North Alabama were not as bad for blacks as they were in much of the rest of the state in the 1960's.

FOSTER: That's true.

DUNAR: Could you make a comparison?

FOSTER: I was surprised when I came to Huntsville area to see blacks and whites living in the same community. In the community of Birmingham that I came from, there was a large buffer zone between a black neighborhood and a white neighborhood. Here in Huntsville there was no buffer zone. There were blacks and whites living on California (Street). There were blacks living on Clinton (Avenue), Holmes (Street), side-by-side, next door to each other. As a result of a civil right movement in 1960's, Huntsville became a segregated town.

DUNAR: Really?

FOSTER: That's right. That's when areas where I had perceived as being an integrated neighborhood, became a segregated.

DUNAR: Not until the sixties?

FOSTER: That's right. There was separate facilities, public accommodations around. But I am just talking about the housing pattern. There were separate schools, elementary. As I made mentioned, there was only one high school here. Later there was a county school established. Council Training School and that school served the whole county. The area of

the county that I was living in was about 27 miles road map, that was 40 miles round trip per day. Living that far from work, I would have even quit the job.

DUNAR: That was when you were going into A&M, or high school?

FOSTER: That was when I was going to high school.

DUNAR: Which one of the high schools was that?

FOSTER: Council High. Council Training was the county school. Council High was the city school.

DUNAR: In the early 60's, we have seen some accounts, also, of the fact that there was some sort of, I guess it was the Huntsville AHAC. Are you familiar with this?

FOSTER: Yes, very familiar. AHAC was the coming together of all the pillars of the community. Businessmen and other civic leaders, in all the professions. The doctors, the lawyers and business folks. This came at a time when the civil rights movement was peaking. It seem to have been on the part of some that if we refused to address the problem of integration then a heavily funded community would puddle funds. It was perceived by some that we ought to come together and see what we could do in terms of making some changes in the community. I recall Milton Cummings made mention at one of the meeting that it never had appeared to him that he did not have any professional blacks hired in what is now Teledyne-Brown Engineering (it was Brown Engineering at the time), other than in janitorial capacities. Now he made this statement and similar to that other companies didn't have any blacks in profession. It came together to respond to what they had perceived what could have been some impact on funding of the federal activities that they had going here. Then with the coming of different laws that had been passed by the legislature, the Congress of the United States. They wanted to respond. Now, to some extent it was pretty effective in bringing about and bringing to the attention of the leaders that something would have to be done. The image at that particular time was the George Wallace image and made it very difficult for people like myself to go out and to recruit other blacks who could qualify to move into Alabama. Because of this George Wallace

image that was being depicted. In order to be successful in attracting minorities and students coming into, they thought they had to do something. A lot of things were done. In an effort to desegregate the facilities in this town, in comparison to other parts of Alabama the move was much more easy. Not to say that we did not have any trouble, but it was with much more ease than anywhere else that you would find. Not only in Alabama, but in the South.

DUNAR: Your feeling then is that it came as a result of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964?

FOSTER: And a combination of the local power structure. Otherwise it would not have taken place.

DUNAR: I am wondering to what extent Webb's pressure had some rule there. Do you know when that group came together?

FOSTER: You keep mentioning Webb. I wish, I never...

DUNAR: The reason I keep mention him is that we came across a letter at one point to von Braun and also a speech that Webb gave to a group, I am not certain it was in Huntsville, in which he said that Alabama has a bad image on civil rights issues and if Marshall doesn't do something and Huntsville doesn't do something about cleaning up this image, that it will impact on Marshall, the funding from Marshall will be cut back and at even one point a threat of even closing Marshall. I am wondering that this might well have been the response to that.

FOSTER: It might have been the reason for the fellows to have come together. My early experience in the late '50, the Huntsville Community was not interested in the space program. They were not, in fact, there seemed to have been some resentment toward the German scientists that they had brought in here. They really didn't know what they had in hand. It took a very convincing person like Dr. Wernher von Braun to convince the community as to what could happen. But it took forever for them to catch on as to what he wanted them to do. I can recall, I think it was around 1952 or 1953, that Dr. von Braun came Alabama A&M University and used some of the students, and I was one of them, to

put on a demonstration for him in some of the things that he wanted to do at now what you call the Stone High School, (it used to be the old Butler School). In trying to arouse the interest of the majority population here. Even my good people at Alabama A&M were not too receptive of him coming to their institution. But we went ahead, the students from the science department, and did this for Dr. Wernher von Braun.

DUNAR: Could you explain your feelings about Dr. von Braun's stance on civil rights?

FOSTER: At time as to what he wanted to do, the resources that were available, we were the only thing available to him. So the path as far as he was concerned, he was not looking at the color, but he was looking for the quality, for the kind of person that could perform. He went after that.

DUNAR: Do you think that he put himself on the forefront of doing something on these issues of civil rights in Huntsville? Did AHAC lead him, or did he promote AHAC's activities?

FOSTER: I wasn't that close to that aspect of it. But I think it would have to be a combination of both. It took some time for him to convince the power structure in the community that this could be a very viable and lasting program for this community in terms of what could develop. Even back in those days and times, talking about not only placing a man on the moon, but eventually to have and build another planet. That's were we are now. After the space station, its going to became a space platform. After structuring the platform, its going to be a planet. That could go on forever and ever. Crossing all disciplines. Your social sciences discipline as well as your natural (science) discipline. We are going to need psychiatrist, psychologist, social worker walking around on a man-built planet.

DUNAR: A couple of things I think you would be interesting in knowing just in terms of civil rights issues as time went on. There was continued pressure from NASA headquarters because they were getting pressure too. Von Braun responded, one of the things that kind of substantiates the thing you said earlier, was that he would like to hire blacks into

industry and these technical fields, but there was a problem of training here for blacks and that it was difficult recruiting in the rest of the country because of Alabama's image to get anyone here.

FOSTER: Look at the impediments. Alabama A&M was already here, but because of the system, this is systemic, that we couldn't use available whites that were qualified to go out and teach at the Alabama A&M University with course offering as they are doing now.

Alabama A&M couldn't pool from the resources that the installation had promised them.

DUNAR: Were there cooperative programs then between Marshall and A&M?

FOSTER: No, that was unheard of during those days.

DUNAR: He (von Braun) mentioned in these letters a couple of things that weren't in the terms of things that you were speaking of, but he did mention an interim program, on-the-job training during the summer, grants and aid to A&M and to Oakwood. Are you familiar with that at all? This would be during the late '60s, around 1967?

FOSTER: Yes, you are talking recent! Yes they have all kinds of programs now, management type programs.

DUNAR: These were earlier.

FOSTER: Given Dr. von Braun, that was a chance on his part to work with them. He was not able to get the kind of support from the school administration as well as he could not get the blessings of the community to go along with it. When you left the reservation, you left sacred, protected grounds! You could not, like I say, the school could not draw from the resources that had been assembled here. What is they had been able to draw from the resources? Both from government and from the private sector? Where would they have been now in their schools, technology, engineering, physics, computer sciences. Back in 1968, I requested from Marshall, to place me on loan to Alabama A&M University to establish a degree program in computer sciences. They did it. Paid all my salary, stayed over there two years. First public institution in Alabama to have an offering in computer

sciences at the Baccalaureate. Now what if they had been doing some of those things back in the '50s as to where they would have been.

DUNAR: So by 1968, there was cooperation, but it took until then?

FOSTER: Yes.

DUNAR: Another that we have heard. Somebody suggested that in the early in the '60s, there were a very few blacks working at the Arsenal and that they divided them up into different buildings on the Arsenal itself. Is that true?

FOSTER: Well, that was not, necessarily by design, but by discipline. You found during that period of time, historically black colleges and universities their strong suit in the natural sciences were chemistry, biology and mathematics. Mathematics and chemistry, the chemistry laboratories and the computer labs. The individuals with math background went into the computation laboratories.

DUNAR: Were there other blacks working with you?

FOSTER: Yes, there were three others. Back in the late '60s I think that Marshall Space Flight Center had about 82 blacks out of a population of 8,000.

DUNAR: That includes people of all levels?

: And all disciplines. Secretaries, truck drivers, technical people, etc. I don't have to say well there wasn't any discrimination if there were qualified blacks that sort of answers itself. We have always had some schools that had offerings in engineering. That was Howard University in Washington, D.C., Tuskegee, Alabama, there was A&T College in North Carolina. But like I say when you start a big population of engineers coming out of Tuskegee were blacks that had come from the North for an education at Tuskegee and they were on their way back North.

DUNAR: Were you involved in the recruiting?

FOSTER: Yes. I was involved in that and never worked a day in personnel. That was one of the things that I felt I should do. I did it with the help of the Center, the administration.

Even before going over to the Equal Employment Opportunity Office as a mathematician and programmer I was glad to do that.

DUNAR: Could you describe what you did in working with recruitment? Did you travel?

FOSTER: Yes, I traveled. I went to the campuses, I was set up, I didn't have any money to carry my own per diem. I told them about Huntsville. What I thought about Huntsville. What opportunities would be available to them in the space program.

DUNAR: When was this?

FOSTER: This goes back into the early 60's.

DUNAR: What did you tell them about Huntsville?

FOSTER: I told them that Huntsville was really not as bad as, North Alabama was not as bad as the image that George Wallace was given. I told them, now if you really wanted the challenge, good discipline, the space program has it for you. I also spoke about the kind of experience they would have in later years if they would be interested in becoming an entrepreneur. Those opportunities would be available to them because of some of the spin-off and some of the things that we were having breakthrough in the early part of the space program that companies were already starting to develop. I related those things to them. We have had since that time, two or three blacks that have spent a tour either with the NASA or through a support contract, that have established business here in the community. I spoke of that and I also spoke of the housing, what recreation would be available to them. I spoke about the two colleges being here.

DUNAR: Could you say a little bit about what you would have said about things like housing? I think that would give a good idea about how things were.

FOSTER: I told them that there was a discrimination in housing at that time, but the pattern that have taken place here now, you can pretty much live in any of the neighborhoods that you wanted to live in. That was about true in the time that I was recruiting. I said now in terms of public accommodations, we just don't have them, just like here or wherever I was going moving in the southeast. We just didn't have any

accommodations in these cities. Now in the larger cities like Atlanta, they had black motels. But you could move on over to Augusta, Georgia, to Macon, Georgia, you would not find those types of facilities.

DUNAR: And there was nothing in Huntsville?

FOSTER: That's right. We didn't have a very large black population to support those sort of things. So when they came over for an interview, they would live with a friend or with you.

DUNAR: So you kept people?

FOSTER: Yes.

DUNAR: You mentioned earlier that segregation in housing developed as a result of the civil rights movement. Could explain how that came about and also how it broke down?

FOSTER: With the monies coming in you had developers coming in a establishing all of these subdivisions that you see in the northwest now. So they moved from the old downtown area of Clinton and California and etc out into those newly developed subdivisions. But the blacks could not go because they did not have the means and the income to purchase.

DUNAR: Was it just means and incomes, or was it also their color.

FOSTER: It was also that. But it was not on the surface. It was more of an economic type of thing. But when blacks started getting into either the aerospace company and into the federal government, with both the husband and wife working they were able to buy and make purchases into those areas. You know the rest of the story. They started moving southeast.

DUNAR: When did that breakdown, when they started moving into the south?

FOSTER: That was late 60's, early 70's.

DUNAR: Was there a lot of resistance to that or did it go smoothly?

FOSTER: Very smoothly. It never made the headlines. It was never a thing you might have read about.

DUNAR: You went to the EEO in the late 70s. Why did you move over to that?

FOSTER: I thought I could make an even greater contribution to increase the work force to a more integrated work force. There was some legislature coming down that I felt could really compliment what I was doing. I decided to go over and work directly into the Equal opportunities.

DUNAR: What kind of legislation? The legislation that got the EEO office started?

FOSTER: Yes and there were some reaffirmation of legislature that Lyndon Baines Johnson had passed. That says that the EEO office now would become a part of the executive office. That showed some pretty good signs, something that had peaked.

DUNAR: Were those expectations fulfilled?

FOSTER: Some of them.

DUNAR: Which ones were and which ones weren't?

FOSTER: (laughter) In terms of upward mobility in the work force, there were many, many programs developed to carry those individuals to journeyman levels and above. I still was not able to meet the expectations of numbers in terms of sheer numbers. To have the work force more representative of the local population.

DUNAR: Have they reached that objective yet?

FOSTER: No, it will be some time. It might be just a little longer now because the whole population is not going off into the technical fields. When we were coming along I felt there was no other way to go, except into the technical disciplines. If we were a major technical society. But that is not true. It was mandatory that we took physics, chemistry, mathematics, biology, algebra, calculus in school. Those things are electives now. So you don't have enough. In order to do the technical kind of work at the space center like that, you've got to come with those prerequisites. Those are not all of the job opportunities that are available. You have to have some people that are non-technical. But the thing about it, if you have 300 or 400 available individuals for the non-technical jobs, you would not have any individuals available for the technical job.

DUNAR: Is the major problem then in terms of getting a representative population training?

FOSTER: In the technical field, yes. Then even if you get them trained in the non-technical field and qualified, the competition is so stiff, because those individuals that make it into that system, they are going to die or retire! Where the technical people are more mobile. You can move in and out into any company and any city that they want to live.

DUNAR: Did you have to court order those sort of programs from the administration at Marshall?

FOSTER: Yes. We developed programs in the non-technical area and the technical area we called cooperative education. [This] is where you can bring a kid in who is studying accounting and work as a co-op in the procurement office. You could bring in a kid studying media, bring them into the public affairs office as a co-op. Take a kid that is studying political science, bring him into the personnel office. But still you are limited because you aren't going to have that many opportunities, when you are using a technical oriented organization.

DUNAR: It would seem that you would have to work very closely with personnel. Could you describe that relationship?

FOSTER: We had a very good working relationship with personnel office and some of the things I would learn about from other agencies that I thought was a real good program we were able to adopt those programs at Marshall. Such programs as the summer intern, the summer scholarship program. I don't recall all of them. There were about a dozen type programs that we would give exposure to the students. Both none and disadvantaged students coming through. One program they have disadvantaged students working year-round. It was not a co-op program, but it was similar to a work-study type program. He would go to high-school and half day and then work as a courier, data-entry type person. Later after he had completed that program with the diploma, now if he goes on to college he would move on to the co-op program. After that he would move into full employment

or go on to graduate school. We have had some to go on to that, some minorities. Well, mostly minorities because that was who the program was targeted for.

DUNAR: Then personnel office would accept your recommendations for programs like this?

FOSTER: You would have to have had their support.

DUNAR: Over the years even going back to the early '60s, who were key people in Marshall administration that were maybe most supportive or had the biggest role in working out issues regarding civil rights?

FOSTER: I am going to speak about individuals that I had direct contact with. That was Dr. Rees. I had direct contact with him and only things of minority informing. Coming on down would be Mark Sanderson who was the Director of Personnel at the time.

DUNAR: Your contact with Dr. Rees, was that before he became Center Director?

FOSTER: When he became Center Director. When he was a Deputy.

DUNAR: Could you describe your relationship with him?

FOSTER: I would more or less outline to him what I felt could not remedy the problem, but could certainly bring about a population change in the work force more representative with the population of the area. He would tell me to formulate my ideas and go after it.

DUNAR: Did he work with you?

FOSTER: The other elements within the organization, and if I had any problems always feel free to come and tell him about it.

DUNAR: So that would be while he was Center Director, but before you went with EEOC?

FOSTER: Right. At that particular time I was the Deputy Director for EEO. Now when the director retired who was Art Sanderson at the time, I became the Director, and Rees was the director of the Center.

DUNAR: That was '72 or even earlier?

FOSTER: Yes, '72 or '73. Something in that time frame. That was when I was Deputy Director.

DUNAR: So he was very supportive of your position.

FOSTER: Oh yes. After Rees was Dr. Lucas.

DUNAR: There was Petrone for a little while.

FOSTER: That is right there was Petrone and Potate. P-squared! The program, my expectations of the program ...I think with Potate and Petrone, I spoke more to the spirit of the law and the intent of the law. I think that some of the things that was happening at that time. I just disagree that all of the old fellows around, Stuhlinger, Hoelzer. I knew all of the Germans from Brown Engineering were leaving. I am trying to push affirmative action, equal opportunity. So I spoke more to the spirit of the law.

DUNAR: That was a difficult time because of the RIFs too at the same time.

FOSTER: Yes. There was a significant amount of reduction in the program.

DUNAR: How did affirmative action and RIFS clash or how did they work together?

FOSTER: I think I was able to convince the administration that the old rule, "last in first out" could not prevail. If it would prevail in terms of the population, it would be very, very serious problem. I don't think that the intent of the law was such that those would be the first out. I was speaking from the spirit of the law. And it prevailed. Now I don't want to get into the mechanics, but the loss was insignificant.

DUNAR: I talked to Art Sanderson last week. He said that one thing about RIFs its difficult to get into issues of personal grievances on RIFs because regulations in RIFs are so straight forward that its right down the line. Now you are describing it in a little different terms of variations of that. Could you just explain how that worked in light of the fairly rigid regulations on RIFs.

FOSTER: Yes, it is but, as I said last in, first out would have presented a very serious problem.

DUNAR: Did Petrone accept that?

FOSTER: It prevailed. I don't know whether he accepted it or not. The thing was that we did have at that time, some minorities employees that were eligible for retirement. They left to retire voluntarily. That helped.

DUNAR: You were able to protect others who might have been under the first in?

FOSTER: I was able to protect them. I don't know that that is the right terminology to describe it. As first out could not prevail. We kept a good representative crowd of the minority population through this period of time.

DUNAR: I don't know much about Potate. Could you describe who he was and what his role was in this?

FOSTER: Potate was the Deputy under Petrone. He was a very, very sharp individual. He followed the books. In terms of affirmative action, I didn't have any problems with him. After a good long discussion on what the intent of the program and the spirit of the program was like. Really I was able to get the kind of cooperation needed from Potate as I had been able to get from others. I don't remember any action that caused any segment or aspect of my program any trouble. I had adequate funds to do programs, to recruit. This thing of hiring employees takes a combination of many elements within an organization to accomplish those tasks just by virtue of the fact that you go out and recruit an individual, you get your recruiting money from Potate. Now you go out and recruit the individual, you bring him to the Center. Now you have got to get the blessing of the personnel people to look at the applicant and see if he meets all the qualifications. Now you have to pass that application on down to a department within the organization and you have to have them on your side. Its more than just identifying some individuals and bringing them to the Center. You have to have support all through the organization. So in terms from where I start if I want to visit the 10 campuses on what I called first and advancement recruiting program. That needless to say is that I was sent out some scouts and survey the area and see if there are any they can identify that are interested in coming to Marshall. That's the first team. Then I would send out a second team to go in a bring those back. So now I have to have

the support from the Deputy Center Director to do that. Then I have got to have the personnel people in mind that will process these people. Then I have got to have the lab directors, supervisors and all those to be on ...

DUNAR: To identify the slots that they could fill?

FOSTER: If the chemistry isn't compatible.

DUNAR: How about when Dr. Lucas was Director?

FOSTER: Dr. Lucas, yes, I had a good time with him. We were able to work. I was able to, at this time I had become Center Director, and was able to give my presentation.

Before then I would give input to Art Sandersons presentation, when I became director then I was able to give my presentation. Here again, I didn't have any impediments that would have prohibited me from doing the things that I wanted to in the terms of the Equal Opportunity Employment office programs.

DUNAR: Throughout this period, not just Dr. Lucas, was there a difference between accepting these things because they were mandated by Congress and EEOC office and really seeking to generate a program. At what level did Marshall's approach to this fall in. Was it simply because the requirements were there, or were they really consciously seeking to improve minority plight?

FOSTER: To be fair with myself, to be fair with the Center, I would have to say that if the mandate had not been there, that the programs would not have been.

DUNAR: Marshall is not alone in that category!

FOSTER: Implying now in as much as the programs were there, there was all of this resistance to the program. There are some organizations even with the law being there yet there is resistance. Strong resistance.

DUNAR: I want to jump back again to a couple of things that I meant to ask you earlier and skipped over them. There were a couple of cases, this was in the early '60s, discrimination cases at Marshall. Joe Gaines was one of the names and Joseph Ben Curry. This was in 1963. Do you remember these cases?

FOSTER: I remember those individuals. I don't remember the specifics.

DUNAR: One, I can't remember which was which, one of them involved employment in an inappropriate spot. The other was a promotion case. Both won their cases. Did that have any impact on blacks in general at Marshall?

FOSTER: We had a lot of cases coming in after. I don't know. Those cases might have had some influences from this standpoint. I think during my term as Director, I was able to resolve all of the other cases as they came in without having to litigated through the system.

DUNAR: They gave you more leverage.

FOSTER: It was very costly for both. On the part of management and on the part of the complainant. I have seen complainants fall apart both physically and mentally. I can site you some cases non-minority as well as minority. When I speak of non-minority, I speak of those individuals who brought cases for discrimination because of age, or for some other reason. It damages them both physically and mentally to the extent that they are non-productive now. Non-productive, some have died from it. It is a very, very traumatic experience to go through one of those things, in my opinion. Trying to prove discrimination when its subtle, when its not the obvious type. When they had the white water and the colored water, its easy to prove.

DUNAR: About the time that you moved into the office, the issue of discrimination against women must have just beginning to come in.

FOSTER: Yes, sex discrimination.

DUNAR: Do you remember anything in particular of how the Center reacted to that?

FOSTER: In a very positive manner. We were able to put out a lot of information on it. We developed what we call a federal woman coordinator under the EEO office in order to work closer with the female population of the Center. It took a lot of resources to bring to the attention to a work force that had been male and all white. The kinds of perception that prevailed among the males to the extent that you don't even belong here. You are going to have a baby and going to go home. You don't have the intellect to be an engineer

or scientist. You are too emotional. A lot of them would pat them on the butt and a lot of them had the opinion that all females loved to be patted on the butt.

DUNAR: Were there grievances that were filed on the sexual harassment type cases?

FOSTER: Sure. There have been some changes made in management. We have had two or three cases of that.

DUNAR: It sounds like a job of education more than anything.

FOSTER: We developed a management-type seminar. The EEOC had to segment that program, had to bring my fellow woman's coordinator and let them give a presentation as to what the law says, how management responds to it.

DUNAR: Was Marshall's response to that more or less on the same par with its response regarding blacks and other minorities?

FOSTER: Yes. The resources and the responses were the same. The results might vary.

DUNAR: Could you elaborate on that?

FOSTER: You would tend to think that if you would apply the same amount of energy that you could get the same results from both, but not necessarily so. Its how the target population is going to respond.

DUNAR: They were more resistant to having women?

FOSTER: No, the other way around. They were just a little more resistant to having the blacks.

DUNAR: That's been on the agenda longer, so do you think that Marshall has made progress now as we look at the situation now? How would evaluate the Marshall performance?

FOSTER: I would be remiss if I didn't say that Marshall has made progress. But Marshall has a hell of a long way to go. In terms of the elevation of its minority population, I am talking of minority population inclusive of all; Asian, Hispanics, Blacks, Native Americans. Mobilize them into female, we don't have a Female Minority Division Directors. You don't have an minorities as SES, Senior Executive Systems employees. I think we have one black

GS-15 and maybe three female. We have a long ways to go. Then on sheer numbers there is a long way to go in spite of the shortage of categories, the shortage of personnel to field them.

DUNAR: What do you think are your most significant accomplishments as EEO Director?

FOSTER: I put these to part and increase the number of those minorities many-fold. I was able to resolve over 95% of the complaints without going into ligation.

DUNAR: What was the volume of cases?

FOSTER: Pretty high. I forget those numbers.

DUNAR: What was the nature of your dealings with the unions?

FOSTER: I didn't have any other than to keep them apprised of what I was doing and let them look at the plan of action to accomplish.

DUNAR: Would they get involved in the EEO issues at all?

FOSTER: Yes, they were not really suppose to get involved in EEO issues, but from time to time they would want to screw over into that area.

DUNAR: They were more involved in issues like working conditions rather than in employment?

FOSTER: That is the difference there. However, there were many cases in which they felt that it was a EEO problem, but they wanted to resolve it, but we had the jurisdiction over those types problems. We were able to work it out with them.

DUNAR: We talked about RIFs before, but there is one more thing I want to talk to you about. I talked to Jim Wright and he said the most volume of issues that they have coming in is the issue of age-discrimination. That issue kind of come with RIFs because you have some sense that when the RIFs came after Apollo, at that point there was some feeling among the Germans that they were being forced out, a house-cleaning. Can you describe your perspective of that, what you thought was happening?

FOSTER: Only by what you notice that the Germans were leaving. A lot of them didn't want to leave. I hear some say that they left because they could not cope with the condition that was being brought on by the current administration.

DUNAR: Some of them were force to accept reduction of grade too.

FOSTER: Reduction of rate also meant being relieved of their duties, because the Germans held all of the top positions at Marshall.

DUNAR: Was that something that Petrone Administration thought was necessary or were they simply carrying out orders from headquarters? Do you know how that worked?

FOSTER: No I don't know anything about that! But I knew that before Petrone came here that they had all the top positions. I know that when Petrone left they were all gone!

DUNAR: Are there any other issues that we should be looking at that I haven't brought up that we should be considering in this.

FOSTER: No, I think you have pretty much gone over past, present what the future. The only other thing that we need to bring up is the fact that how are we going to get these kids back into the technical discipline in order to respond to our needs and we are losing our competitive edge. As I visit all of the colleges and universities, both black and white, when I get to the science department, its just like the U.N., just like the United Nations. We have got faculty members, foreign nationals. It is very hard, very difficult to find an American born in those disciplines. Yet, with this population, the resources are there. The minds are, but for some reason we are not attracting individuals. Unless we can backfield into the universities as well as into the industries. We aren't even producing enough technical people to carry on the work in industries. We need enough to carry on the work in industry and in our educational institutions. Its going to be a very sad day for us. If the system is allowing impediments that is keeping the total population from developing all its innate abilities, something is wrong, seriously wrong. We have got minds out there that can do it.

DUNAR: One last thing came to mind that we didn't touch on that I would like to ask you about. There was a question of sometimes reducing during a time of RIF, reducing the civil service force and shipping some of that over to contractors. There was a suit over early settlement of that as well. Do you remember anything about that issue? Did that affect minority unemployment?

FOSTER: I remember that Webb was the one that went to subcontracting. He introduced the concept that in as much as some of the programs would be short-lived, it would be best to contract this work out, rather than build a large civil service work force, which in some instances you might be stuck with, rather than face reduction. But we can give it to contractors and then those contractors would be in a position to pick up other contracts and it could be continuous. Naturally that would have some effect, not only on a minority population, but naturally here again, the minority population would be the one to suffer the most. If it is a big program but short-lived, it is because of the size that you want to bring minorities in.

DUNAR: You also run into the first in, first out thing.

FOSTER: When they carried it over to the private sector and now we have to reeducate the private sector about the affirmative action program. How it applies with the federal contract. And there is some resistance to that. The one time the EEOC was the monitor of all the contractors that had worked with NASA. I was involved just a little bit with contract compliance. The civil rights commission allowed personnel management elected to place that out into the EEOC. That was a thing of education for them. They had a lot of them resisting.

DUNAR: During the time you were involved, were there cases in which you had to bring in the force of the government to force compliance when people were out of line and you had to do something to mandate.

FOSTER: Those were some very strong words, forced compliance mandate. We went and told them that it is pretty obvious what is coming down and we would like to see a more

representative work force. We have here after looking at the statistics and other actions could be taken. There were some contractors that resisted to the extent that there contracts were removed.

DUNAR: They became examples and then would others get in line more quickly once they saw what could happen?

FOSTER: No, not voluntarily.

DUNAR: You had to face a battle each time?

FOSTER: Each time. Even today, the law says that you are to look at your contract and make a determination as to what set aside that you would be able to subcontract with the minority sector. Some submit it and some don't. Some get the award without and nobody says anything about it. The contractor goes about his merry way. Its tough. But industry is very challenging. The unfortunate thing that I can see it. There are so many of us not willing to challenge. We have an umbrella for those individuals with less desire, the underclass that cannot see. What are we going to do with them?