

Mr. Johnny “Jay” Diggs
Oral History
Kennedy Space Center
Interviewed May 11, 2004

Interviewer:
Gregg Buckingham

Gregg Buckingham: We are here today, May 11, 2004 at the Kennedy Space Center Press Site as a part of the KSC oral history program. This is Gregg Buckingham and I am here today with Jay Diggs, retired NASA. Jay, please state for the record your full name, and your birth date and place of birth.

Jay Diggs: Gregg, my full name is Johnny Albert Diggs Jr. I'm referred to as Jay. My date of birth is March 27, 1938. I am a native of (???), Alabama.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. Now we are going to talk a little bit about your formative years that led to your career here. Let's talk a little bit about where you grew up and a little about your family.

Jay Diggs: Well, I am a native of (???) Alabama as I stated. We stayed in Alabama until 1953 when my family moved to New Orleans, which was probably the best move we could have made because if I had stayed in Alabama I probably wouldn't have finished high school. We got to New Orleans in 1953. And the contrast was (that) in New Orleans the books were free, the paper was free, everything was free. Whereas in Alabama, we had to buy our books and when we got to New Orleans we were so elated we thought we had died and gone to heaven. There was quite a contrast in the education process in those two states.

Gregg Buckingham: (???), I take it, was a small town.

Jay Diggs: (???) is not a small town. It's in Jepson County the same city as Birmingham. We overshadow Birmingham. Birmingham probably doesn't know it. And probably never will. But it's a pretty good sized place. Probably the second or third largest city within the state of Alabama.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. Tell me a little about your parents and your siblings if you have any.

Jay Diggs: My parents... my parents were Johnny Diggs and Perilee Diggs. They are both native Alabamians. My dad worked in oil mines and my mother was a domestic. And of course the oil mines played out in 1949, 1950, and we were living in a mining camp. We wound up leaving the mining camp and moving into the city of (???). Times were very difficult and my dad went to New Orleans and found employment there. And my two sisters and my brother and I moved to New Orleans. As I said, that was the best decision, probably, that my dad could have made -- to get us out of that environment into the city of New Orleans. Not that New Orleans is the best place to live right now, because it's seen some very difficult times. But at that time it was a wonderful place to live.

Gregg Buckingham: Now, you went to the public schools in New Orleans and graduated from...

Jay Diggs: Yes. I went to the Booker T. Washington Senior High School in New Orleans, which is a comprehensive high school. We had everything from metallurgy, to carpentry, to planting, and of course we had the academic side of things as well. And I chose the academic side and finished high school in 1957. And upon completing my high school career, I matriculated at Southern University in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. And my first semester I did reasonably well. The second semester came along and my mother became ill. And I had to drop out of school and go to work to help out with my younger siblings. I regrouped and went back to Southern in September of 1958. And I completed my career at Southern in June of 1962.

Gregg Buckingham: 62.

Jay Diggs: Right

Gregg Buckingham: So in '62 the Space Program is just getting started. Did you... what was your major in college? And did you have any inkling that you would end up in the Space Program?

Jay Diggs: Gregg, I remember very clearly the Sputnik activity. I was a freshman or sophomore in college and I remember how excited we were about Sputnik. Space was relatively unknown to us as of that time. Anyway, I was in my career and I majored in Spanish and English. I had a double major, Spanish and English. You know I was so unfamiliar with college that I didn't even realize that I had to have a major. And I'll tell you how I came about that major. I had done extremely well in high school in Spanish. And I felt very comfortable pursuing Spanish as a career. So, I went on and got a degree in that. And I enjoyed it. Enjoyed it. In retrospect, I wish I had gone into some other arenas, but when you are limited in your knowledge and concepts of what one needs to do when one gets into the worker world. You know...

Gregg Buckingham: And you were the first person in your family to...

Jay Diggs: Yeah, I was the first person in my family to get a college degree.

Gregg Buckingham: So, you didn't have a role model within your family?

Jay Diggs: No, no role model within my family. I must say that our high school teachers and our high school counselors served us well in that capacity, but it might have been easier for me to make some decisions had I had some first hand knowledge through my parents or some other means to know I might have been better suited for. Anyway, the degree in Spanish serves me well. As a matter of fact, that's how I got to Brevard County. I applied for a position in New Orleans after I finished. And I didn't get a position there.

Gregg Buckingham: Is this a teaching position?

Jay Diggs: A teaching position. That's correct. I really wanted to stay in New Orleans, but New Orleans offered nothing. And Old Man Needmore suggested I find a job wherever I could. The first job offer I got was out in San Bernardino, California. And I thought that was a little too far away from my family. Plus, my car probably wouldn't have made it there anyway. So, I went to the placement office at Southern University and told them I was looking for work. And I got a letter from the principal at Stone High School, it was then, in Melbourne. And my experience with Florida was Pensacola. You know, in fact we honeymooned in Pensacola, my wife and I, when we got married. And I looked at the map and saw where Melbourne was located and I started to call that principal back and tell him forget it. But, again Old Man Needmore suggested that I not do that. So, I jumped in my little '50 Chevrolet and drove on down to Florida and I've been here ever since, including a two and half year hiatus in Atlanta.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. So, '62 you graduated from Southern and you ended up in Melbourne. Now where in that progression did you meet your wife and end up getting married?

Jay Diggs: I met my wife at Southern. We were preparing to attend a (???) conference that was held at Ohio University. Atkins, Ohio. And we were part of a study group in preparation for that conference. That conference was held December 1959. And we sort of fell in love with each other. Not immediately. You know, it was love at first sight but the relationship didn't materialize until... Actually, the summer of '62 we had both... well she was getting ready to graduate, I had graduated in June. And she jokingly said, "Hey Diggs! When are you going to come to visit me?" And I said, "Oh, I'll probably see you this weekend." Well, you know, she thought I was kidding but I showed up. And we started dating and we got married June 1st, 1963. And of course, I was here August 15th, 1963. And she had already worked at home in Louisiana for a year and was under contract for another year. So, she honored that contract and worked that '63-'64 academic year there. And then at the end of that academic year she came here and joined...

Gregg Buckingham: So you spent the first year of your marriage apart?

Jay Diggs: Exactly. Not an easy thing. Not an easy thing, but I used to go home at least every other month or she would come here. That made things a little easier.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. So you're here now and you're teaching high school. What...

Jay Diggs: Two or three... Well, I had several high school classes and one junior high school. As a matter fact, I had on that one, there was one elementary school class in Spanish. And that was a real challenge because I had... Brevard County was just going into what they call a non-graded system. And what that meant was that students were allowed to progress at their rate, you know, rather than all of the students, let's say tenth grade, being in one classroom. They were divided according to their abilities. We had what we call advance, regular, and basic classes. And I had a couple of... This was English. Of course Spanish we were all in the same classes. But in English they were

separated according to their abilities, or their perceived abilities. And I had to make preparation for junior high school Spanish, senior high school Spanish, regular English, basic English, and of course my elementary class. So that was quite a challenge. But it worked well. We enjoyed it. Had a wonderful four-year career in the education system.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. Before we leave that, '62, '63 the Space Program was just building up. What were your impression of Cocoa Beach, and Melbourne, and the community at that time?

Jay Diggs: Well, I was sort of removed from the Space Program, initially. When I first came to Brevard County, the NASA Causeway, for instance, didn't exist. A lot of... They were in the process of constructing the VAB and all of the other facilities that we used extensively in the Apollo Program. But one Saturday, we were invited to come out to the Center. And I think all of the aerospace contractors were part of this. They invited educators from all of the schools in Brevard County. Which were incidentally very rigidly segregated at the time. So, all of the black teachers were invited out on one Saturday and I am assuming that the white teachers were invited at a different time. And that was my really first glimpse of the Space Program. If I can back up, Gregg, I would like to say that the (???) facility in New Orleans was in existence at the time. As a matter of fact, I applied to work out there. But I was not successful in my employment. And it gave me some peripheral knowledge of the Space Program. But I didn't even realize when I came here that the Kennedy Space Center was located in Brevard County. My focus was on getting a job and getting my wife and me to live in the same venue, you know. But during that year... it must have been about '66 ... '65 or '66, they sent a bus out to the school. Picked us out. Picked us up and brought us out and gave us a tour of the facilities and gave us information on what to expect.

Gregg Buckingham: Now there wasn't much here, as you alluded to.

Jay Diggs: Very little. Very little.

Gregg Buckingham: And just to kind of set the stage for people that are not familiar with the area back then... when you came out here was State Road 3 there, or did you come out...

Jay Diggs: I really don't remember. I really don't remember, Gregg. It's been quite a few years. But I do know that we came to the Center and that we left here and went to Cocoa Beach where there was a reception for us.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: Now in 1967, we were having Career Day at Stone School and I inadvertently asked one of the (people) from TWA if there (were) going to be any jobs available for educators during the summer. And I forgot the gentleman's name. Anyway, he sent me to the TWA offices that were in Titusville at the time and to tell them that he had recommended me. So, I did go to Titusville. I was hired on at TWA as

a tour guide. And one of my ambitions, my greatest ambitions, as a kid was to be a bus driver. OK... and when I graduated from Southern, I went down to public service in New Orleans, which was the organization that was responsible for the transit among other things. And I applied for a position as a bus driver. And I never heard anything else from that application. Again, rigid segregation. There were no black bus drivers in the city of New Orleans at this time. So, when I got the job with TWA, they gave me an opportunity to do what I had long wanted to do. As a matter of fact, we learned to drive on old Greyhound buses. You know, and I remember the first Saturday that I went out. We had to drive the bus through the industrial area and take the bus up on the camera mount over on the... I forgot the name of that road...but runs off the parkway into the guest viewing area.

Gregg Buckingham: Beach Road?

Jay Diggs: No, it's on this side of the... anyway. We had to pull it up on the camera mount. Pull the break up and ease off that camera mount. There was a crew there. And I remember, my first thought was after I had successfully completed that, navigated that route, "Hey! They can fire me now." I had fulfilled that desire to drive a bus. It was a wonderful job. Met a lot of very interesting people.

Gregg Buckingham: So TWA, at this time, was running the...

Jay Diggs: TWA was the tour.

Gregg Buckingham: Visitor's Center...

Jay Diggs: Visitor's Complex. We were way out front. You know, at the entrance where the Pass and ID, PIDS 3 is now.

Gregg Buckingham: You were on the West side of the Indian River?

Jay Diggs: West, just west of the Indian River.

Gregg Buckingham: Not on Merritt Island, per se.

Jay Diggs: Right.

Gregg Buckingham: Do you remember the summers then? Were they busy? Were there a lot of people?

Jay Diggs: You know, there were quite a few people, you know. We were busy the entire summer. As matter of fact, I thought that if the pay had been good enough I would have continued in that position. But, along came President Johnson's War on Poverty. So, I left the school system and went to the local community action agency there in Cocoa and served as the Executive... the Deputy Director of the Brevard Community

Action Agency for a couple of years. And then I was selected for the Executive Director's position. And then...

Gregg Buckingham: You left the school system.

Jay Diggs: Left the school system.

Gregg Buckingham: And it was full time?

Jay Diggs: Did that full time. And that (???) was overseen by a board of directors. And several people on our board of directors were NASA people. Ben Hersing, our former director of personnel, was on the board. Sid Simons, who was his deputy, would serve in his absence. I got an opportunity to meet several of those on the NASA side, as well as the contractor side, on that board. And that was tremendous experience. And that's how I learned more about the Space Program. So, I remember one day, I took a busload, well I took the board through several of the (???) of the areas and the Central Brevard County. I remember Ben Hersing hadn't been there, remember Sid Simons hadn't been there, remember George English hadn't been there. So, you know, these were the people, the movers and shakers, at least on the administrative side here at NASA. I began to, to cultivate a relationship with these people. And, so, you know...

Gregg Buckingham: And then did you answer an announcement to ... In terms of getting a job finally at Kennedy, did you answer an announcement or was it through work?

Jay Diggs: Well, it was a combination thereof. I left the community action agency in March of 1971 and went to the regional of economic opportunity in Atlanta. That was the agency that founded the local (???) program. That was my first entrance into the federal government. I was there two and a half years. And during the course of my tenure there, I worked in the Space (???) in Mississippi, working again in the (???) poverty to attempt to alleviate the poverty conditions in the two states that I worked in. And I guess it was in mid '73 I was advised that there was position vacant here at the KSC, an equal opportunity specialist. And I applied for it. And I was selected for it. And I came in and began to work side by side with these people with whom I had worked privately. When Matt Powell was the newly appointed equal opportunity officer at KSC. And it was Matt Powell who hired me initially into the program. I came on board September 8, 1973.

Gregg Buckingham: And what were your initial impressions when you got here? I know you already knew the Center from working with TWA, but as far as the institution, did you report to headquarters?

Jay Diggs: I reported to Matt Powell. In fact...

Gregg Buckingham: Physically who was that?

Jay Diggs: That was... We were located in the headquarters building, second floor. Matt reported back to Debus who was the Center director at that time.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: There were initially three of us. Three professional administratives. Matt was the chief of the office. And of course, at that time, we had the responsibility for contract compliance as well. We had to work with our contractors, which was numerous at that time because of all the construction that was going on. And of course, the ongoing business of the Apollo program. So, we had to be sure that they were operating within the labor department guidelines as far as the utilization of minorities. Women were not yet on the horizon as part of the equal opportunity program. That was to come later. But we were to work with them to be sure that they utilized every opportunity that they had to integrate the work force. The workforce, particularly the contractor side, were very... the desegregation was very limited. And we had established goals, you know, that the contractors would use to reach out to minorities to get them into the program.

Gregg Buckingham: So, as a civil servant, you not only had (???) over the civil service workforce but you also had (???) into the contractor world.

Jay Diggs: That is correct. With regard to the utilization of minorities. That is absolutely correct.

Gregg Buckingham: And were there special programs at that time to support the hiring of additional minorities? Were there...

Jar: You mean within the contractor workforce or...

Gregg Buckingham: Either, either civil service or contractor.

Jay Diggs: Yes, there was. When I, when I came on board, one of the things I remember was that we got involved with a very vigorous recruitment effort. Minorities represented only a small percentage. And if we focus on the civil service workforce, minorities represented a very, very small percentage of the workforce. So, we established some targets. The concept of affirmative action was, which was sort of perceived as negative by the powers that existed at the time. We had... our work cut out for us so to speak. A lot of the managers were not really interest in who was doing the work. They were interested in getting the work done. And, of course, the notion of getting minorities in was a very novel one. I think our highest ranking black at the time was a GS-13. And the non-technical work. I don't think there was anyone over the GS-12 on the technical side of the house. So, in addition to getting number increased, we also had to get grade levels increased, you know. There were no minorities in management on the technical side of the house, on the administrative side of the house there were one or two minorities in management – lower level, you know, entry level management positions.

Gregg Buckingham: And ... and do you remember any of the names of those folks?

Jay Diggs: Yes.

Gregg Buckingham: Obviously not...

Jay Diggs: Mike Powell was one. Jim Smith, who wound up going to NASA Headquarters. There was a young man named Rima Crimps, who was probably the highest ranking black in the engineering environment. This was a young man who had come into the Center in a clerical position, I understand. And this was a perfect example of the way that things should have been. His managers saw some potential in him and then encouraged him to go on and get a degree in mathematics or engineering, I don't remember which. And he did that and came back and was hired into a technical position. And he went on to NASA Headquarters. Did extremely well. Eventually became an SES. I believe he is now retired. But he was here. You have A McGee. You had Lonny Blocker. You had Dan Evans. There was a young man by the name of Harold Simms who was unfortunately killed in an auto accident early in my career. He was also an EEO (?). There was Robert Tuli. And I can't remember all of them by name. But there were a few who had made it or were approaching the GS-12 level. But, we heard much talk about the glass ceiling, well that glass ceiling for minorities at the time was at the GS-12. So, we had try to move them from the GS-12 into the GS-13 and make them qualified to compete for supervisory management positions.

Gregg Buckingham: OK... And let's talk about your job a little bit. You came in as an equal opportunity specialist.

Jay Diggs: Specialist... that's correct.

Gregg Buckingham: And then about 1980 I think your job changed.

Jay Diggs: (In)1989, Matt went to NASA Headquarters. He was selected to participate in the career development program. So, Matt left in August of 1979 and went to NASA Headquarters. By this time, we no longer had responsibility for the contractor compliance portion of our function. That was moved to the labor department.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And the person who was responsible for that position was transitioned to the labor department as well.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: So, I became the senior person in the office behind a.... so when Matt went to headquarters, the Center director asked if I would... if I was interested serving in an acting position until Matt got back. And of course, I was elated to do that. This was my first attempt at being a supervisor manager within the federal structure. And so I did that. And my staff and I worked together quite well for that year.

Gregg Buckingham: And this was '79 or '80?

Jay Diggs: This was '79.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: August of '79. Matt returned in July or August of 1980. But his tenure in the equal opportunity office was short lived. He went to summer support as it was called then. And the job was competed and I was selected for the position.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. Then from '80 until you retired, did you serve in the ... in that position?

Jay Diggs: I served in that position from that time until I retired April 4 of 1998.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And, Gregg, I've seen a lot of change over that period of time. Mindsets changed considerably. The more minorities were got into the workforce, and they were given positions of real responsibility, it gave them an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to perform. And a lot of the apprehensions that existed prior to those times were eliminated. And we saw more minorities coming in. And a segment of management, supervisory management positions, in the technical world.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And I think that's real positive.

Gregg Buckingham: And was there... you served then under several Center directors. Was there...

Jay Diggs: I served...

Gregg Buckingham: Was there... I was going to ask you if there was one who was more proactive maybe, who really took hiring minorities on as sort of a challenge.

Jay Diggs: I'm not sure I want to answer that but I'll give it a shot anyway. I had the support of all of the Center directors. Of course, as time went on and more minorities entered into the workforce and proved themselves capable of doing the job, the more they were embraced by the managers. But I would... if I had to... you're dragging this out of me... but if I had to... no, I don't want to do that.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. The sixties included, of course, many civil rights issues and as we progressed through the seventies and eighties here at the Center, were there any

major issues with race other than, of course, trying to hire more minorities or get them higher, into higher graded positions?

Jay Diggs: You know, the issues were more people oriented. It's hard to deal with the uncertainty and the supervisors and managers were all white and they'd not had an opportunity interface with minorities socially, economically, on the job. So it was very difficult to change mindsets. And what I had to do was cultivate relationships with supervisors to help them to understand the need to just, hey, place one or two, monitor their product... process... their progress, their activities. Give them the same kind of support you would give non-minorities and let's see what happens.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And it was successful.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: It was very successful. Not 100%. I don't think we're ever going to be 100%. But we certainly went above the 75% - 80% level of success in doing that.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. And as more minorities, and women by this time also...came into the workforce in the 80's and 90's, did the Center undertake any activities to help the workforce meld together that you recall?

Jay Diggs: Yes. I think so. And a particular note was the Hispanic employees. At one time our... there were fewer Hispanic employees than black employees. We made a concentrated effort to go to Puerto Rico, to go to northeast New Jersey, New York, where there were heavy Hispanic populations and recruit Hispanics. Well, we were very successful there, but we had a language barrier problem. So, particularly for those who were coming out of Puerto Rico and other countries in, and countries in South America. So, what we did was we established some English proficiency courses for these young engineers.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And that helped them to... to... well they would have to understand the language... they've helped them understand the culture. And it facilitated their integrating into the workforce. That was very, very successful. That would be an example of the kinds of things that were undertaken to try to balance the workforce.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And I'm not sure that it's still... the challenge is still there but the challenge is lessened considerably because of these activities. We had some similar problems with some, a few, of the Asian employees that were hired during this time as well. And we worked them. We worked them very well. But what we did was we created, we worked

to create an environment whereby these employees felt comfortable coming to us, sharing their issues, sharing their concern. And we encouraged the managers to do the same. And I was impressed with several of the senior managers in particular. You know, I used to meet with them on a quarterly basis to talk about their organization, the level of utilization, talk about promoting minorities, talking about promoting women. And I was somewhat impressed with some of the managers who knew so much about the... their employees, particularly those at the lower level. And I walked into a couple of offices and that senior manager can tell what is going on with this lowest-graded GS employee, you know, right on up the scale. So I was impressed with that.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And, of course, I recognized, we recognized that by way of the Equal Opportunity Award and other such mechanisms that show our appreciation to those managers for their efforts at helping us to get where we needed to be.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And we had the full support of the directors in this... activity.

Gregg Buckingham: And I know another role of the EO office is to handle complaints.

Jay Diggs: Right.

Gregg Buckingham: Over the years, as far as you recall, I know you don't have any numbers with you, but did the number of complaints tend to stay the same or...

Jay Diggs: There were peaks and valleys. There were peaks and valleys. I don't think we ever had over four or five complaints.

Gregg Buckingham: A year?

Jay Diggs: At a given time.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. At a given...

Jay Diggs: At a given time. I don't remember what we had from year to year, but sometimes we had a significant number and sometimes we had zero. But what we did was we worked, when we got a complaint of discrimination, we had... the Agency has a very elaborate and productive pre-complaint counseling system. And we worked our counselors, who were the front-liners on complaints of discrimination, worked hard to try to resolve these issues. And again, we had to, we had some people who really thought any complaint was horrible (???). But to a person who feels that he or she has been discriminated against, it's real. It is real. So, our counselors worked those managers and supervisors and tried to resolve. Sometimes they were successful, sometimes they weren't. If they weren't successful, that complainant had the right, not a privilege, but a

right, to file a formal complaint of discrimination. And, of course, once the complaint of discrimination is filed, the Agency has a responsibility to investigate. And I am happy to say that, for the most part, they were resolved. Not all of them. And I would also (???) to say, when we first started, the workforce as a whole thought that the complaint system was designed for minorities and women. The law says that any employee, or applicant for employment, who feel that he or she has been a victim of discrimination has a right to use the system. And what happened was, before it was over we (???) had several white males to engage the system. And, hey, several of them were resolved. The Agency had been found to have... I don't know that there has ever been a determination that they had been discriminated against, but we had engaged in poor management practices. Which is fine... as long as that employee is made whole or that applicant is made whole. But we had a cross section of employees utilizing that system. It's a very effective system. And it's still in existence.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. Let's talk a little more about your career. One of the things that we're interested in is Kennedy's relations with Headquarters and other Centers. What was your interaction with the Headquarters office or other Centers around the NASA system?

Jay Diggs: Very intimate. We spoke with NASA Headquarters almost on a daily basis. The... We respond to the Associate Administrator of Equal Opportunity Programs. We seek their advice, their counsel, almost on a daily basis. We also have the responsibility of keeping them abreast of what's going on at the Centers. We had a network of equal opportunity offices across the Agency. We met periodically. And we were a resource to each other. You know, no matter how long you've been out here or how short a time you've been out here, as an equal opportunity officer, you run across situations or circumstances over which you have had no experience. And it's important to know your fellow EO officers and what their experiences have been and to feel them out on issues. When I first came on board I relied very heavily on the EO officer at Ames, the EO officer at Goddard, the EO officer at Johnson. Those were the senior EO officers and most of the experiences that I was going through they had experienced already. So, I had no problems picking up the phone, this was before the days of fax and e-mail and all this stuff, I had no qualms about picking up the phone and saying, "Hey Jim, how do I handle this?" or "Hey Willard, how do I... or Joe, how do I handle this?" or Bernie at Langley, you know. We had a very strongly and closely knit network of people. We had no problem calling the associate administrator to ask her opinion. We had no problems calling the division chiefs at NASA Headquarters, getting their opinion. They had no problem... and they reversed the process sometimes.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: They would call us and ask our advice on things.

Gregg Buckingham: And when you left Kennedy, which was in the late 90's, how would you characterize the workforce at that time?

Jay Diggs: Well, the workforce was certainly much more diverse that it was when I came here in 1963. We had periods of ups and periods, and down time. If you recall – well, you wouldn't recall, you're too young. But back in '75, I had only been here for two... less then two years really, and the Apollo program ended. That was July 15, I believe of 1975.

Gregg Buckingham: This is including the Skylab and the Apollo-Soyez.

Jay Diggs: Yes. That was, it was really the Apollo-Soyez mission. After that launch, that afternoon, was the 15 of July, a lot of people, particularly in the contractor workforce, received pink slips.

Gregg Buckingham: Right after the launch?

Jay Diggs: The day thereof.

Gregg Buckingham: Oh.

Jay Diggs: They received... if my memory serves me correctly. Because I had a lot of friends, I have a lot of friends who were in the contractor workforce at that time. They received their pink slips. And that was a joyous day in that we had successfully launched ATSP but it was a sad day for those employees who were laid off. You know, you have success on one hand...

Gregg Buckingham: Yes.

Jay Diggs: There's a price for success sometimes.

Gregg Buckingham: And so. . .

Jay Diggs: It did not impact the federal workforce as much. Except, you know, we were gearing up for the Shuttle Program and we were not in a hiring mode. You know, so our recruitment efforts were substantially reduced until we began to approach the Shuttle Program's initiation. So that was downtime. Of course, following the Challenger accident, we had some downtime. Our recruiting efforts were sort of curtailed for awhile. So incidents of this nature certainly impacted our ability to... to increase the numbers of minorities...

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: ...and women in the workforce.

Gregg Buckingham: When you left there were... can you think of senior managers who were minorities or women?

Jay Diggs: We had... when I came here there was no such thing as a minority SESer. When I left, we had at least two and several women. Jim Jennings, of course, was the deputy director of the Center. Dr. Irene Long was the head of the biomedical office. We had Joanne Morgan, who is the head of what became external... but she was IRQ then, I believe.

Gregg Buckingham: And several payloads...

Jay Diggs: Yeah, she had had several positions as an SESer. I'm not sure about Shannon. I think Shannon might have been in an SES position and if she wasn't, she was placed into one shortly there after. So, yes, there have been some significant successes.

Gregg Buckingham: Do you remember who the first minority SES was?

Jay Diggs: Probably Jim Jennings. Probably... I'm sure it was Jim Jennings. I have had some conversation with his boss early in his career, who was Joe Maluga, who's now deceased. Joe in one of my quarterly reviews says, "Jay, I bet you Jim Jennings is going to be the first SESer at Kennedy." And lo and behold he was correct, because Jim knows his business, you know. And that's the way it should be. If you know your business, if you have proven beyond a doubt that you can do the job, you should be given the opportunity to compete for SES positions. And, I think, I don't know how many SES's have now, but one of the things, one of the highlights, is that we sent -- in one year -- two minorities to the astronaut core. And both of them are astronauts in waiting right now. One Hispanic male and one black female. Now I understand there have been some more since then.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. We'll take a break and come back in a couple of minutes.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. So we've talked about your career and we've talked about some of the workforce changes over the years. Is there anything else you want to add about that? I want to now talk about some personal recollection. Anything else come to mind?

Jay Diggs: You know, Gregg, there have been so many wonderful things that happened. Everything wasn't, you know, obviously. But there were so many good things that happened. That when I retired, I felt really good. You know, I look at the minorities, the one person I didn't mention who was also very supportive was Hurt Pete. You know, I look at those guys who came in here under very difficult times. They weren't wanted, you know, but in spite of it all, in spite of all the headache, they came and they persevered. And they, those guys, I went off a lot to the advisory committees that we had. You know we had advisory committees that played a significant role. And...

Gregg Buckingham: Are these local KSC?

Jay Diggs: These are all KSC. We came in early on with what we called the Equal Opportunity Advisory committee. This committee was chaired by first line directors, you know, at the Center. And those guys did a fantastic job. One of the things, an outgrowth of that, is the annual KSC picnic. The committee decided one of the ways that we could use, one of the things that we could use to help us to better understand each other was an annual picnic. And we put that first picnic on. I remember who the first chair of the committee was. When most of the senior managers at one time chaired that committee at one time or another. But, we decided that a picnic would be the go... the way to go. And, it started out very small at KARS. My office and my staff and I, along with the committee, took care of all of the details on it. And it just blossomed, it just blossomed into what we now have as the annual KSC picnic.

Gregg Buckingham: In what time frame about, don't need a year, but what time frame? Was this late 70's, 80's....

Jay Diggs: 80's.

Gregg Buckingham: 80's.

Jay Diggs: 80's, right. I never understood how we got it. But I guess because the committee was part of our responsibility, the EO office took the responsibility. But then it got too big. Now we just didn't have enough staff to do it. So, we all agreed that we would rotate it among the organizations at KSC. And it became sort of a competitive thing, you know. DE had to do better than SR, or SI had to do better than, you know... and it just grew and grew and grew. And we're real happy about that. But in talking about advisory committees, the Agency embarked on something that I think is very significant. We had a training session, I think it was Hagerstown, Maryland, and out of that came... No, the first one was at... somewhere in Pennsylvania. We went, Dr. Jenkins had us all to come together. She had...

Gregg Buckingham: Dr. Jenkins was the EO...

Jay Diggs: Harriet Jenkins, she was the associate administrator for Equal Opportunity Programs. She was at...

Gregg Buckingham: At Headquarters

Jay Diggs: Headquarters. She had a couple of the line managers, the director of Human Resources, the equal opportunity officer, to come to... I don't remember if it was in Pennsylvania... anyway OPM had a training facility. Where is the Amish country? Where... where...

Gregg Buckingham: It's in Pennsylvania.

Jay Diggs: Yeah. I don't remember the city. But we came together, and this must have been about '84, '84 maybe, and we put together what we call a multi-cultural approach to

equal opportunity. And the folks that was to help us to better understand each other. We did a couple of surveys, found out how people felt. And probably...

Gregg Buckingham: There were, like, culture surveys.

Jay Diggs: Culture surveys, that's correct. And in the late '80s or early '90s, I don't recall when, we went to Hagerstown, Maryland. A team from KSC, this is the second iteration of the same thing, we put together that multicultural team, and we came back and we did a fantastic job. The Center director at the time, I don't remember whom it was, got behind this and we provided framing for all of the employees at KSC. This was not only managers and supervisors, but employees. You know, we have a tendency to lay all of our problems at the doorstep of our managers and supervisors. We got all, all of the employees were scheduled to take that, that course. I won't say training. It was a course in how to deal, how to recognize differences in people, how to appreciate those differences. And our team from KSC did a stellar job in doing that. We had people that volunteered for the teams. And Gregg, I don't intend to embarrass you, but I'm happy you were a part of that team along with Barbara Brown and Sue Dickenson. There were 8 or 10 core people involved in it. And I think that went a long way in helping all of us to understand each other's culture and what we're about. We often take it for granted. And a lot of our cultural biases are based on perceptions that are a far cry from reality. And I think that team helped us to do that. We had some rough moments in getting it started because it represented a paradox. You know, it was something totally different from what we had done before.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And I think we got a lot of mileage out of that.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And it's this kind of thing that has been ongoing that I think, if we were successful, and I think we were, it's this kind of thing that contributed significantly to those successes. We still have the advisory groups. They're active. The BEST team, we had an Asian team, we have a Native American team. Very dynamic teams that grew out of these things. And I'm very happy that, to my knowledge, all these teams still exist. Native American team, advisory groups.

Gregg Buckingham: I believe they are.

Jay Diggs: Yeah.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. Administrative people, when it comes time for a launch, often help out. As you know, so many people want to come to Kennedy for a launch. When we have a launch did you play a role in that?

Jay Diggs: Absolutely. Absolutely. A role that I enjoyed almost as much as I did driving that bus. You know, we, I remember at first... That was the ATSP launch, was probably the first one that I worked. And Dr. Jenkins had a guest, a group of people coming over from, they'd met at a hotel in Orlando. And I had the pleasure of escorting Dr. Jenkins and her guests over. And that did an awful lot for NASA. You know, here for the first time an effort had been made to include, you know, we've always had guests in large numbers, but an effort had been made to include minorities on the guest list. I felt very, very good about that. And that was the beginning of many of those. Most memorable was the Guy Bluefoot launch, you know, that was a night launch. We had people, such luminaries as Dr. (???), we had, we just had so, I don't remember. . . I remember her specifically. The National Council of Negro Women were leaving Bethune Cookman College and Dr. Jenkins commissioned a bus to go up and pick them up and bring them down for a tour of the Center the Saturday before. And on launch day they went up and got them. We had a tremendous reception at what is now the Visitor's Complex. And they were just happy to be here. I was, I was just like the kid in a candy store. And there have been many others. It's, it's. . . . I still do it. I enjoy doing it.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: You know, I work with the External Affairs Office and whenever there is a launch, whenever I can serve as an escort, I'm more than happy to do that.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. In your time here you mentioned the one launch, Guy's launch. What, are there any others that kind of stand out? Or not only launches, but just events at KSC that stand out as. . .

Jay Diggs: Yeah, on the plus side, the Sally Ride launch. You know, I think we had Glen Campbell and a lot of entertainers here. Of course, the Challenger incident, I can recall exactly where I was and what I was doing on that particular one. You know, it was cold. I had the Center director's guests that morning. And I, we had picked them up the day before and it was so cold we didn't launch. And, I picked them up that morning and we attempted to launch and, of course, we know the history on that.

Gregg Buckingham: And how did you handle that, without any personalities, how did you handle that difficult situation after the fact?

Jay Diggs: Well, the first thing I had to do was to get the guests calmed down. You know, the Center director's wife was there and those were their guests. I had to get them calm. And that wasn't easy. You know, I was standing on the roof of the LCC. I was standing next to Dick Lyon, who was the then deputy director, the DE. I said (before the accident), "Dick, you all done good." Just like that. Because Pad B was just. . . . that was the first flight from the modified Pad B. And, of course, the accident happened, and it was difficult. I got them composed and got them back to Merritt Island. And I came back. I just couldn't deal with it. I had to leave. The halls of Headquarters were like a morgue. You know, a pall was over the entire place. Probably the most difficult experience that I've had here at KSC.

Gregg Buckingham: And was the return to flight in October of '88 the opposite side of that coin?

Jay Diggs: It was. It was a very happy time for all of us. You know, I was just ecstatic that we had returned to flight and so was everyone else. It just made us feel good that, you know, we have had a hiatus, but we. . . during the course of the hiatus we corrected the situation. We had a successful launch. NASA was back in business. You know, KSC was back in business. The business for which we were established was going to. . . Happy days were on their way back. And that's the way it really was.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: It really was.

Gregg Buckingham: I meant to ask along the way, since you started right when Dr. Debus was here, I know he left shortly after. . .

Jay Diggs: Shortly after I became acting EO director.

Gregg Buckingham: Did you, you obviously met him.

Jay Diggs: Oh no, no. Oh yes. I met him. Well, Dr. Debus left long before Matt.

Gregg Buckingham: About '74, I think he left.

Jay Diggs: Yeah. He left shortly after I came. And Lee Sheerer became the Center director then.

Gregg Buckingham: Yes, yes. Any recollection, I know you didn't have much of a chance to overlap with Dr. Debus, but . . .

Jay Diggs: No, I, the only time I probably was in his presence was when we did training, equal opportunity training that was required for all senior managers. And I don't think I was in his presence over two or three times.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: During that short period of time.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. Any of the other early pioneers, do any of them pop out that came. . .

Jay Diggs: Mike Ross was his deputy and he was Matt's boss. Of course in Matt's absence, if it was a situation that dealt with the internal EO program, I would have to meet with Mr. Ross. And back in 1977, we did a series of symposia, "Telling the NASA

Story.” You know, again used as a recruitment tool to get minorities interested in engineering. And he had complimented us as the senior manager on those symposia. We had one at . . .

Gregg Buckingham: This was Mike Ross?

Jay Diggs: Mike Ross. We had one at the University of Miami. We had one at Jacksonville University and we had one at Florida A&M. And he went, I know he went on two with us. One I think he sent a surrogate because of his schedule. He couldn’t make it.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: But, and that was a good thing. That was a good thing,

Gregg Buckingham: Now you mentioned recruiting and that is something we have sort of talked a little about. Were there any universities that you specially recruited from or that worked out that, you know, maybe we had a special relationship?

Jay Diggs: Well, the first recruitment activities I took were at Tuskegee University. I went up recruiting. I had interviewed the candidates for employment and when I got to the rental car agency there was a call for me to call back to the Center. And I did. There was another student who had graduated, a graduate they wanted me to interview. So, I found this young man and interviewed him. And I think he was my first hire or the first hire that resulted from my interview. He stayed with us a couple of years and I think he went to one of the airports. He was a researcher, really. And sort of ill-fitted for this environment, you know. So he was selected for a position. I think it was (???) in the Panhandle. But he was my first success. We also recruited at, well we recruited at most of the historically black colleges and universities that had engineering disciplines. I’ve personally gone to Tennessee State. I’ve gone to Southern University. I was accused of trying to establish a southern colony since I’m southern bred. I said that’s OK, no sweat. But we went to Perdue, I never did go to . . .oh, North Carolina NT. Those are the ones, basically, that I recruited.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. And then you previously mentioned Puerto Rico.

Jay Diggs: Puerto Rico. Well, I never did go to Puerto Rico. They said Puerto Rico was a little far and we didn’t have the money. Of course, that mindset has changed. Everybody goes to Puerto Rico now. That’s just like, I live in Titusville and I couldn’t even get a trip to Mims. And I couldn’t get a trip to Puerto Rico, but that’s OK.

Gregg Buckingham: For employees that might, current employees that might watch this, read the transcript, do you have any insights you want to impart to them or best practices, something that worked really well while you were here and you would urge employees to pick up?

Jay Diggs: Two things come to mind, Gregg. One is, know what you are doing and do an outstanding job. Go the extra mile. It can't be clock-watch. You can't say, "Well my duty hours are 8 to 4:30." I would get -- mine were 8 to 4:30 -- I liked to get there 6:00, 6:30, 7:00 and leave at 5 or 6. You know, when the task is complete. You know, you've got to be vigilant. You've got to show that you are interested in the job. And the other is to be truthful. Tell the truth. And that to me is probably the most important attribute that one can have. When you are dealing with an arena like equal opportunity, one, and I think it applies on the (???) sense, one needs to be fair and honest and tell the truth. And when I say tell the truth is sometimes you find yourself in a situation, one finds oneself in a situation where one wants to tell this party one thing, that party another thing, and a third party something altogether different. And then, as you progress you have to try to remember what you've told to whom. Where, if you tell the truth, and tell the same story to all parties concerned, recall is simple. The truth. You know, but you've got to recall what I told this person, that person, or the other person. It can be devastating. So I just believe in telling it as you perceive it. The truth as you perceive it and going from there. You don't have to worry about what I told someone else and when.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: That would be my advice.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. Looking back over your career, what do you think your biggest contribution was?

Jay Diggs: I think my biggest contribution, if there was any, that was what I just said. I always tried to be above board and tell the truth. You know, EO is very difficult, it seems like it's easy but it isn't easy. You've got management and supervisors on one side, suggesting that you're biased toward non-managers and supervisors, and minorities and women particularly. And you have minorities and women on the other side, who feel you're attuned to management at their expense. So how do you walk that middle line and deal with both sides of that equation effectively and efficiently? Then, the, the, we have to worry about, be concerned about the individuals with disabilities. You know, it's a cauldron. And how do you stir that cauldron and come out positively? That is the key. You've got to treat all parties with respect. You've got to treat all parties with dignity. And you've got to treat all parties fairly. That's the only way I know how to deal with it.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: Now, that doesn't set well with everybody, but I'm very comfortable with that. Because that's the way I have attempted to manage my program and the programs I have responsibility. . . That's the way I try to manage my life. You know, I don't know what else I can do. But I am very comfortable with it.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: And if we can all do that, I think we'll all be better. Respect everybody. Respect their opinion. You might not agree with it, but in the United States of America everyone has a right to his or her opinion. And no one has the right to challenge their opinion. You know, I would go to my grave defending their right to have their opinion. Not that I am going to agree with it, but the right to have it.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: That's, that's philosophical, I know. And I didn't intend to get into that but that just the way I feel.

Gregg Buckingham: If you take this to (???) look to the future, what would you like to see the United States Space Program do in the coming decades?

Jay Diggs: I would like to see, I would like to take the president up on his challenge. You know, to the Moon and to Mars, you know, and beyond. That's just for starters. I would like to see the Congress get behind the president's initiative and move the program forward. You know, the Shuttle Program is fine, but I think we've got to get beyond that. You know we are, as a people, very curious about what's out there. And the only way we can find out what's out there is to get out there. And I think we need to do that. That's what I am looking forward to.

Gregg Buckingham: OK.

Jay Diggs: You know.

Gregg Buckingham: Well, I want to thank you for your time today. Is there anything left that you want to comment on?

Jay Diggs: Excuse me. I can't think of anything in particular. I haven't said all that I had planned to say. I don't have any notes. I didn't jot down any specifics. But, I (would) like to say that from September 7 of 1973 through April 4, 1998, I had a marvelous career. I had an enviable career. That is not to say there were not some ups and some downs. You know, I don't need to, I don't intend to imply that. But overall, I had a challenging career. I hope I've earned respect from others that I have a tendency to give. So all I can say is hang in there. Hang in there. It was a good career. I have no regrets... well, I do have one regret. I probably should have stayed a few years longer. Hey, I'm happy. I'm happy. I have no regrets of, about having retired because it gives my wife, who is retired, and me an opportunity to travel. To see (???), spend some time with our grandchildren. And that's what life is about. We've got to teach them to be prepared to live in this world.

Gregg Buckingham: OK. Well, thank you for your time today.

Jay Diggs: It's my pleasure. Thank you.