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**William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection**

INTERVIEWEE: Al Lineberry  
INTERVIEWER: William H. Chafe  
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WILLIAM CHAFE: [—talking with Al Lineberry, who has been involved in a number of ways in the story of Greensboro race relations.] You were just talking a second ago about your religious background. What church do you—?

AL LINEBERRY: I belong to First Baptist Church here in Greensboro. I don't know whether you are familiar with it or not. It's a rather large church.

WC: Yeah.

AL: And it's a very inspirational church. I arrived Baptist, I guess, because my mother and father were. That's the rather basic reason. And since then, after studying some of the background of the various denominations, I feel strongly that I'm in the right denomination, as far as I'm concerned, because of the freedom it gives me to think and to do and to act.

WC: Do you think your own religious background has a lot to do or relatively little to do with your involvement in public issues?

AL: I think it has a great deal to do with it. I might tell a little story to you briefly. When I was in Asheville, North Carolina, before coming to Greensboro, I was real active in civic affairs after World War II—and before World War II, actually, but mostly afterwards. I was a pilot during World War II. There's a picture over there on the wall. I got back and became very active in Jaycee [United States Junior Chamber] work and other civic work,

membership in the Red Cross and Community Chest and other things, et cetera. [I] spent my time that way, day and night, and working at the same time. And the church was secondary. It was there, but it was secondary.

And I got to talking with my minister one day and he said, “Well, Al, you are going to learn something one of these days.” And the minister was somebody I had never talked to. “The work you do in civic work and community work is good and valuable and it should be done, but the day you do it, the next day it’s forgotten,” he said. “And work in your church and for Christ, it goes on from then on, even after you are gone and [unclear].” And that made an impression on me, so that began to turn me around the other way. And I started to strive to put the church work first and all this other second, because I still felt and still feel that if you have the church-related work within you, you will do the other work. If you don’t, I don’t believe you have too much of the church in you. Because if the churchman cannot be active in the community and the civic and the social affairs of his community, then it’s just left to harum-scarum, and he has no right then to sit back, I don’t think, and complain. Maybe that philosophy is not good for some, but it has helped me.

WC: Are there a lot of people like that in the circles, people like on the school board and places like that?

AL: Yeah, I think there are a lot of—I know a lot of people that think and feel this way.

WC: Would there be any kind of prayer group, for example, that—

AL: Not into this degree. There are a lot of prayer groups around the city. I don’t happen to belong to one, but there are a lot in the city. There are an awful lot of people in this city who feel, I think, just as kind of as I said: that we want to—first, the work of Christ, the work of the church—whether it be the synagogue, whether it be the Baptist church or the Presbyterian church—but we also want to be involved in the social and civic aspects of life. Society means something besides just meeting at the john to do it.

I had—one of my sons, who is in business with us—a very fine young man, marvelous son, who is now president of the Greensboro Jaycees, which is a rather challenging position in this area, because I think they are the number one in the world, three of the last six years—and one of his members, one of the members of the Jaycees had stopped being active in the Jaycees, and one evening our paths crossed. And he’s real, real active in his church, and he began to tell me he just couldn’t. He couldn’t be active in the Jaycees because they did so and so contrary to his belief, and what it was, and his church, et cetera. You get the picture I’m trying to say too. And I said to him, I said, “Well, you have no right to criticize the Jaycees.” He said, “I know they did”—he’s speaking of a few guys that do things that didn’t correlate with his thinking. But I said,

“Yes, but unless you are in there as a Christian, as a churchman, to try to lead, guide, and direct on that basis, what right do you have to criticize?” I said, “Now, you get back and get active and then you can say and do anything you like, but until then, I’d rather you didn’t say.”

WC: Well, how did he take that?

AL: Well, that’s not the best way to win friends and influence people.

WC: When did you first become concerned about—where did your involvement in public service, either the school situation or in the [Greensboro] Chamber [of Commerce]—did it have anything to do with the issue of race as—when you initially became involved?

AL: Originally?

WC: Yeah.

AL: Absolutely none. Because when I became involved, there was no 1964 Civil Rights Act that had been passed. I had always had this feeling within me that—I’ll have to draw a picture again, and I’m doing this contrary to what you want, and I’m sorry.

WC: That’s quite all right.

AL: My home is Memphis, Tennessee, and my father, a great man—he’s eighty-seven and still living today, and one of the most progressive men, progressive minds, that I know of—he never went through the third grade, and yet he is a calculus genius and this type of thing. And I can remember him coming home one evening. He was a machinist and he came home riding the streetcar. And I can never forget the story: he said “I had to get up and literally pick up a nigger and throw him off the streetcar.” I was just a kid, and I wondered what he was going to say next. I remember and he said, “Because he came in and sat down by me.” This—and I don’t know why I’ve always remembered that. And my father was not a violent person, and all he was saying was this shouldn’t be done. And today with six children in my whole family, he’s the most progressive, loving man in the race situation that you can ever find—eighty-seven years old. I’ve never reminded him of that, and I wouldn’t, because I know it must hurt him today, too.

But I think the most startling thing that I remember about the race part: long before 1954, I remember going in a restaurant one day and sitting there eating. And this black lady came in, and she went up to the counter to order a hamburger, hotdog, or whatever it was for her two children. And this was at Christmastime. And her two children were outside the door because they couldn’t come in. Then she had to wait and

wait to get her sandwiches, and then had to take them outside to eat. And I remember that story, and those two things disturbed me and always have, because I just don't see human beings treated this way.

And maybe that had some degree or something with some of the positions I've seen myself in. I don't know, but I'm not a psychologist. But some little studying I've done—maybe that is something in the back of me, I don't know. But it had nothing to do with me getting into civic work. I didn't think those two examples would say I would go and do this. I got into civic work, I think, because I just felt the need, as I said earlier. I think I felt the need that people ought to be involved in the society they live in, just like the work I'm in. To me this is a vital part of society, because it does help people to go through a traumatic experience and adjust. If they do it real good, properly, they are going to adjust back in society quicker. They are going to gain something from it. And I guess this is what life's about. Unless you and I can contribute one to another, really what is there here for us? It's great for me to say, "Yes, I'm a Christian. I'm going to live for Christ. I'm going to do everything I can along this line," but if that's all that's within me, then I'm afraid that he's not going to see much in me either unless I can give out to someone else.

WC: When the school board handed down or voted to comply with the *Brown [v. Board of Education]* decision in '54, were you active in the schools at that point?

AL: Yes, I was on the school board. That's interesting. The day that was handed down was the day I was made chairman of this board.

WC: The '54 decision?

AL: Oh, I'm sorry. I was thinking, the Mecklenburg decision [*Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education*]. In '54—and I've got to go back a little bit, and please erase that. In Asheville, before I came to Greensboro—see, I came to Greensboro in November '55. But in Asheville, oddly and strangely enough—and here again, God works in mysterious ways—we didn't want to leave Asheville. We were playing golf three times a week, building a new home in Biltmore Forest, had a halfway decent job, four and three-fourths children, no reason to leave. But here all of a sudden, bang, bang, bang.

I was on the Buncombe school board when I came here. Why I got on the school board in Buncombe County, sometimes I question it in my mind. It was the only elective office I've run for in my life. I did it, I suppose, because two or three people in the community whom I respected highly asked me if I would, that they were going to need some help because this law was now in effect, you see. So I went on the school board, and the year—in '54, and so I served there just that short period of time, about a year,

before coming here. So I know the effects it had immediately there, and then transferring here [unclear].

WC: When you came here, did you have a—what kind of impression did you have of the leadership in the community on this issue?

AL: Really, I don't know that I had any at that time, because I knew no one in this city at all, and I'd walk down the street and I'd think I was on the planet Mars or somewhere because I couldn't recognize anybody and that wasn't my life. I'd been used to recognizing everybody up and down the street in Asheville, so really I had no preconceived notions or ideas about it at all.

I knew that the school system was well thought of in the state here, because I had kept up with it from that standpoint through Mr. T. C. Robertson, who was the superintendent of the county schools in Buncombe County, and we had discussed this and this type of thing before I came, when he found out I was coming. And I had this talk with Mr. Howard Carr[?], who is the county chairman here, through Mr. Robertson, and Howard Carr had commented on some of the problems and so forth that they were having. So I really had no preconceived ideas on the school board. I didn't think at the time that I would ever be on the school board of Greensboro. That was not an ambition of mine whatsoever.

WC: Did you know [Superintendent] Ben Smith at all?

AL: Yes, I knew Ben Smith—thought very highly of Ben Smith. My heart bled for that man during those days because he went through things, and that's another story. You know, I went through a lot of things [unclear]. I guess I'm trying to say his were far more serious, I'm sure, than mine.

WC: That's an important part. You had a chance then to talk about some of the things that he was—

AL: Oh, yes.

WC: Do you recall any of those conversations in terms of how he felt about the way things were happening?

AL: Well, I think the little knowledge and the few conversations that we had, Ben saw the necessity of education for all children. First of all, he believed in education. He also believed in upholding the law. And it wasn't the decision—in my opinion, the decision that Ben Smith came to was not a difficult decision within Ben Smith. The difficult thing

for Ben Smith was how to arrive at a decision that people would understand. Because I think within Mr. Smith himself, he was convinced that every child needed to have an opportunity with education, and equally so. If we want to use the word “equal” [unclear]. But he felt the need that this country [unclear], once we get our masses educated properly, and that there is an opportunity to give it to all of our people. I don’t think that decision was hard to come by. It was the decision of, “How can I do this [so] that people will understand and come together?”

WC: How many [bases?] were thinking that he was disappointed in the support that he received, or that he thought that the board could have done more at that point than it did do?

AL: I really don’t know. I’m just not that familiar with that phase.

WC: Do you recall much discussion during those years in the mid-fifties with the Pearsall Plan and where on that issue people were?

AL: Well, I remember, of course, the Pearsall Plan. Something about it—my mind is a little hazy on it right now. I think people thought probably at that time that this was a catch-all, cure-all type of plan that would get some things moving in the direction the law called for, and yet it would not really overturn anything we were now doing. That seemed to be my concept of it. Now, that could be completely wrong.

WC: No, I think that is very much the way things were. I’ve sort of been intrigued by the fact that Ben Smith was one of the—well, really, as far as I’ve been able to find out, the only school leader who spoke out against the Pearsall Plan.

AL: Yes.

WC: I think that was a fairly courageous act on his part.

AL: Well, this again is what I was trying to say a minute ago. That I don’t think Ben had any problem with his decision within himself. It was the hard thing—and it’s always hard for me or any other [unclear] people to find a way to do it that people will understand and will come along and follow.

WC: He seems to have been a very remarkable man.

AL: I certainly felt that he was. And what little I've read since then about him and some of the things I've followed through the minutes and so forth, I think he is a very remarkable man. The man that followed him I think is just as remarkable.

WC: When did you first go on the school board?

AL: I'll have to subtract that. I went off after eight years. I was elected in '73, I guess it was, and eight from '73 is '65, 1965. That's right.

WC: Now, I have not done my homework here because I have not been back to do the school board minutes from '60, which I will do at some point. Without having the minutes, I do get the impression that those were certainly difficult years and that there were at least some forces in the community, white as well as black, who felt that the school board—in the period of the early sixties, carrying through into that '65 and beyond period—felt that the school board was not doing all that they might have done to implement desegregation. I wonder what your own feelings were about that and how you saw the conflicting forces in the community. What kinds of pressures were being applied to you on the school board?

AL: Well, I think—and again and I'm trying to reminisce in my mind, and this is always a difficult thing to be completely accurate on—but, as I recall in my own mind, sure there were those who said that the board was not doing everything they could to this. Of course, they are still saying that today, but I had the deep-rooted feeling that we were going through a new period. This was something completely different from anything that this area of the country had ever thought of before, much less done. You had a school board here who at the very outset said, "We will obey the law." And if you study the records, you will see that that was the first thing that was said.

And what is the law? The law, as I recall, was quite un-interpretable at times through those periods, because one group would interpret this way and another this way and another this way, and then Washington this way, and back and forth, and everyone was toying with it. So I can't say that the board wasn't doing all it could. It may not have been doing all it could as one group would have it or as another group would have it, but they were doing it as another group wanted it, this type of thing. And yet it wasn't doing [it as] a group pulling one way or the other; it was a board coming to grips with a situation that they felt the community needed guidance in.

And I cannot—back through the days when HEW [United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] became involved heavily and they suggested that the districts of such and such—and this went on for years, you see. It would have been, I think, a [unclear] for us not to have carried through as we did with the plans that we had. And Phil Weaver did a tremendous job, along with Dr. [Wayne] House, who is now

superintendent and who was his assistant, in drawing up lines where our school systems here under HEW's umbrella. These types of things will be worked on constantly. I think the [unclear] course in anything that is hard, tugging as this decision was, that this situation was then—But, of course, you can go so fast that you get in trouble. You go so slow you get in trouble.

So I think the board used excellent judgment in those years in feeling its way, not jumping off all of a sudden, and doing one thing and saying "Here it is; bang, this is it." They felt their way along until everything was used and exhausted in every way to find an amiable solution that people could adjust to, and I think that every one of the boards through those years did an excellent job with perpetuating this type of thing. And I think basically that's one of the reasons that this community is as well off in its school desegregation as it is today, because we didn't. The board [unclear] didn't jump off to any conclusions that this is the line and anybody steps over it, and so on and so forth. I feel that the boards did an excellent job in deliberations. They carried through. They were sincere.

And I can never recall any time any of the board members with just—just to get something because he wanted it that way. I just can't. And when I hear occasionally people criticizing school board members and accusing them of privately wanting something or favoring this or favoring that, I just get amazed, because I know the eight years that I served there was absolutely nothing like that going on.

WC: I did get a sense that there was a fair amount of hostility toward HEW from the administration of the schools.

AL: I don't question that at all, and I think rightly so. I think rightly so, because whenever you send in a group of people to any city that have never been in that city before, they not only know where one street is, they don't even know where the schools are located, and they come in and in less than forty-eight hours in some cases try to tell you exactly what you are supposed to do. I think they deserve criticism.

WC: Wasn't there one episode in particular when someone from HEW came in without notifying the superintendent or the school board, went to Dudley High School, and did some on-site kind of work, and the school administration in particular felt that this—

AL: Something rings a bell with me, but I'm not real clear on it. I know of one time they came down and they presented a plan back here for us to do and left out one or two of the schools, like we didn't even have them. They didn't—I guess they didn't know they were there. So this is the type of thing. I think they deserved a lot of criticism.

WC: You were—you became president of the chamber in what, '68, '69?

AL: I believe that's right, '68.

WC: You were president of the chamber as well as being on—

AL: The school board.

WC: On the school board during this, really much of this crucial period.

AL: Much of the HEW period.

WC: Yeah, and the problems at Dudley High School and at [North Carolina] A&T [State University]?

AL: Yes, I can recall them very well. The chamber took a very active role in this community. I suppose it started with Allen Wannamaker. It seemed that the business people in the community and the Citizens Committee[?] within the chamber—I don't know how it developed. We just—as things opened up to us, we just went along with them as if it was the normal thing to do. I know at one time we—I think we didn't have any black members in the chamber of commerce. All of a sudden, I think today we have something like three hundred or four hundred. I'm not sure, but they are very active. But an interesting thing was Los Angeles, at that time, I think, had one member in the chamber that was black, and this was interesting to us.

But I suppose one of the things that opened up a lot of the ways, as far as to understand our community better and people better, we created what we called cell meetings. If you are familiar with this, I won't go it with you. But I suggested this when I was head of the public relations department for the chamber, that division of the chamber. I suggested that we have these meetings over the city. And at that time Hal Sieber was here. And Hal was a tremendous man in my book, did a tremendous amount of good for this city, led, in many, many ways, us through days that could have been real harsh. And through his leadership and guidance, we came through it well. But we set up these meetings, and this way it gave everybody a forum. And the news media was not allowed. If they came, they had to come simply because they were just another person there, and so this meant that everyone could express themselves as they saw best to. And it must have gone I guess for five or six years. And I think that this had a great deal to do with it. We all of a sudden began to find out we could eat breakfast in a cafeteria or a restaurant in the black area of our community, no problems at all, you see, and these things gradually all built up into the pyramid.

But the chamber took the position—stated that position: open chamber, open city. We desired black membership, we desired black participation, and not on a token basis.

Not just the presence of [A&T president] Lewis Dowdy or this type of man, but we wanted the businessmen of the black community, and they came forward, many of them. Some of them are still very active in the chamber. You know it's a—I remember [unclear] saying one time—you have to realize that up until 1954, 90% of the professional black people were in education. Where else could they go? So the chamber started looking for those other people out of education as well, even though it was a small percentage. Consequently, I think we made some real good inroads in our city.

WC: Did you have a feeling—what were the kinds of attitudes toward that innovative policy which the chamber adopted? Was there a lot of opposition within the chamber?

AL: No, I didn't find it at all. Now, I think the opposition to it grew a little over the years, but as it started the first few years, I think people in this community were ready to find a way, you see. These are great people in this city—I know [there] are pretty well the same all over the country; I know this. But there is a comradeship, there is an understanding here among people like I've never seen. I think they wanted this to happen. They wanted someone to take the leadership in it, and yet at the same time, as the chamber continued to take this leadership and the black community became more and more involved, some of them took the attitude that was the activity of the chamber, which it was not. And—but I don't know if—the chamber hasn't let off any. It's still a growing chamber, and the membership is still growing, and in the white and black community, so. However, there were some who felt that maybe the emphasis were a little too strong in some areas, and maybe it was, because this is not only the feeling of some of the white community, it was also some of the feeling in the black community that I have talked to.

WC: How would they express that effect?

AL: Well, the white community would say, "Well, all you're doing is gearing everything to the black businessman," or this type of thing. And one of two of the black people I talked to said, "Well, it looks like you are trying to just butter us up, pacify us, just trying to put us up on a pedestal," this type of thing, when neither one was really true. There was some [unclear] of trying to be normal, trying to let the normal events of the day happen.

WC: Of course, in reading the kinds of things which the chamber was doing in those years, it was no question it was breaking new ground daily.

AL: Oh, yeah. Breaking new—and to break this new ground, you know, as long as you've got that tall dry grass growing on that ground, there is always a danger of fire. And when you break that ground and turn that grass under, the fire dangers are much less. So the

chamber was breaking new ground to keep out any of this hostilities and this fire type of thing that could happen overnight.

I remember an instance one time at Belk's Department Store. Had the chamber not been in this type of program, we could easily have had very serious difficulty there through a group of belligerent people who just wanted to take over a situation. But we had rapport with the group, with the black community. The black community had rapport with the whites through the chamber. And the whole problem [unclear]. It could have been a very touchy situation.

WC: Of protestors demanding things from Belk's?

AL: Yeah. That's just one instance and there are many, many others where the community came together and said, "We don't want this to happen either." And the Community Unity group—I'm sure you've gotten into this.

WC: Yeah.

AL: I think this has been a highly—a highly developed group of people who have really done some good in this city.

WC: Who are some of the people who you think would be most important from the black side of the population in that—the ones that you remember most outstandingly as—

AL: Well, I can't call their names. Al—owns two or three businesses here, first name is Al, same as mine—Parker. As a matter of fact, he's chairman of the ABC [Alcoholic Beverage Control] Board here. Al Parker[?] was a big help here. The police department here in this city had men on this Community Unity to do tremendous jobs. There was a big black fellow with the police department to that was involved in it. I can't recall his name. I just can't recall all their names for some reason or other. But everybody on that committee participated, because that's what it was about.

WC: [unclear] To what extent, do you think, would this have happened without Sieber being here?

AL: I rather think we would have. Yes, I think it would have happened, but probably we would not have had as good a guidance, as good a rapport, in getting to where we are, had he not been here. Yes, I'll think it would have happened, because I think the people are that way. I don't think Sieber made the people, but I think because of his insight and his inroads to both groups of people that it helped tremendously to bring them together bring us together and understand each other.

WC: That speech you gave to the [chamber of commerce] annual meeting, that was a very strong speech. Do you recall the circumstances around which you gave that and what might have caused you to be so straightforward and strong in that speech?

AL: Well, I think several things. Of course, we were in the process of trying to get the school thing straightened out, and the suit had been brought against us there. HEW was giving us a real rough time in the school situation. We had people in the community who felt we should go forward, and we had other people who said we ought to slow up. And I felt strongly that we had done this much, we've come this far, and it's time now to let it be known that we need to continue this work as strong and as hard as we can. I didn't want anyone to—black or white—to think for one minute that what had been done was just to pacify somebody, [but] that it was done because people are people, and that we all need each other. It's not a matter of me needing you and you not needing me; it has to work both ways. These are just thoughts, I guess, that toyed with people.

WC: I was just—that speech, in a sense, seems to have been the [unclear] point of the public campaign at least to address these issues in a forthright way. I mean, I think that as I read over the Greensboro business for ten years, '64-'74, [unclear] but that speech seemed to be unusual.

AL: Well, it had a lot of what had been going on in the chamber over the years. No question about it, it was the whole pitch. And I talked to Hal Sieber considerably about this [unclear] and then several of his thoughts that I agree with [are] in this talk. And there were one or two that he didn't agree with of mine that are in there, so. But I don't know. I have no great insight. I did feel that there were days ahead of us that the community was going to have to be called on in a different way than it had been. If saying these things then might help just two or three good leaders understand better what they are going to be called on to do later, [it was] was worthwhile.

WC: Who among the leadership of the business community do you think were most important to you and to the ideas of [unclear], in terms of being supportive?

AL: Are you speaking of the chamber days?

WC: In that period of late, the late sixties—mid to late sixties, when you were very much involved in both the chamber and the board?

AL: So many people. Bill Little, executive secretary, quiet but tremendous in the background, always there to support you. Of course, Hal Sieber was tremendous in his support and his

activities, working un-tiredly. He was tirelessly [unclear]. Then [in] the community there were people like Stanley Frank, Marian Fuller[?], Allen Wannamaker, [unclear]. You can go on and on with these people. Jack Elam, who was the mayor at the time, did a tremendous job. And just so many people who contributed—not all of us in the same way, not all of us always agreeing, but in our own ways and our own concepts we were willing to contribute what we thought was helpful.

WC: What—this a point—in some ways I have the impression that there was a place where the enterprises like Burlington [Industries], Cone [Mills], and Western Electric are somewhat detached from the business community as it exists, and that there may almost be, you know, kinds of layers?

AL: I don't think that's true at all. You see, Burlington, Jefferson [Standard Life Insurance], Cone, these businesses put a tremendous amount of money into this type of thing. Just the annual contribution that these companies make to the chamber of commerce is far above the normal. And they are involved. They have their personnel in the chamber work constantly. The man that I preceded on the school board as chairman is one of the key people at Burlington Industries, George Norman. And George served the school board for eight years, usually well. So I don't think that there is any detachment here at all. These organizations—John Hatfield[?], tremendous in his help to this, who is head of Sears Roebuck mail order here. You can just go right on down the line. It's just—[Howard] “Chick” Holderness, who is presently on the board, retired down of Jefferson. Chick Holderness was a tremendous instrument in this city. No, there is no detachment.

I remember one time when the line in employment rate was something like 1.8 or something like this. Industry was looking to help in finding people work, and they hired hardcore. Unemployment was a thing we needed to look to, and we got the idea of creating a manpower commission within the chamber of commerce. I went out along with some others, and these industries that you are speaking about gave us fifty thousand dollars to nothing but to train and bring these people into work. We'd find things like an individual that [would] go to a job, go to work for you, and he'd work one day and not show up the next. Then you say, “Well, he just doesn't want to work.” We took the attitude there is no person who does not want to work. And I still believe this. And what we found was, a guy [would] come to work for you one day and no one showed him how, where the bathroom was, no one showed him where to get a drink of water, no one showed him the number of the bus or how to get on that bus, and he didn't have twenty-five cents to get back home. And these were the things that were happening to this one and that. And these industries that you are talking about, man, they pitched in just readily to help.

WC: I guess the reason—I was thinking that in terms of the actual committees, it seems that there would not necessarily be that many people from those industries on the committees, although—

AL: But they had their people there. They had their self-makings, these people on these committees. They had their [unclear], this type of thing. [Ed Morris?] is president of Blue Bell and worked diligently. [unclear] What you don't have—and I think this is probably what you are really—in going over your mind, you do not have in this city, in my opinion, six, eight, or ten men who can sit down and say, “Well, this is the way we are going to do it.” Now, there are cities, I think, close by us here—without mentioning any names—where five or six men can pretty well decide what you are going to do, when you are going to do it. I don't believe that's true here. I think we have more of a cosmopolitan group of leaders. We have a base spread [unclear] in our leaders, yet we have all the impact and all the support from our major concerns here than any city could possibly ask for. I get amazed at what these concerns did. When you go ask them and you present to Burlington Industries, to Jefferson, Blue Bell, to Cone Mills, Sears, and any of the others, you present something that is legitimately needed in this city and get it to them in a way that they can grasp it, and they always come through. It's beautiful.

WC: Well, I think I've probably taken a good deal of your time and there are many, many more questions. Perhaps we can reconvene at another time, if you have another hour available.

AL: Well, we can go on for awhile longer if you want to.

WC: Okay, fine. I'm very much intrigued by the whole question of how the—I never can remember—the CCE, the Concerned Citizens for Education, is that it?

AL: Concerned Citizens for Education.

WC: Right. I know what the initials are. I never get the order right. How did that get started? Were you involved in starting that?

AL: No, I was not. I was chairman of the school board at that time, and I was not on the chamber as such at that time. Hal Sieber and a committee under him and the chamber wanted to help in some way, to participate in it without getting the school board into a real difficult situation. And so from that then, his committee—and I think Joan Bluethenthal and [unclear]—and, again, I can't remember everybody—but they got together and they started this committee. And he got some funds for it, as you well know, to—not to say what the school board is doing is great and fine and wonderful; that wasn't

the point. The point was to try to educate the citizens of our community as to what could be happening, and what would happen, and how it would happen, where this is going to be, and what your child is going to be involved with, and why don't you look at this, and why don't you see this, these types of things. Information—a kind of a hotline situation where people—because you know these were times when we we're all—when you start dealing with my child, that's close to home, and I could never blame people for being upset. I could never blame them for being upset. But the committee picked up its role, strictly as a chamber and community role. It had no connection whatsoever with the school system of Greensboro or the school board, absolutely none.

WC: Weren't you in a situation of having to cooperate with it quite a bit, especially once the—

AL: We would cooperate to the extent that we—whatever the program was, if they needed our help, we would help them and that was about it.

WC: Wasn't there a process whereby people visited the schools that their children would be going to?

AL: That's right. They organized and worked this plan up. We furnished the buses, of course, this type of thing—if this is the type of cooperation you are talking about. We furnished the buses, and I can never forget stories, like I was being interviewed one day on television. The announcer said to me, "You know, my wife was upset about our child having to go all the way across town to this such-and-such a school." And he said, "I said to her"—this was before we went on air—"have you ever seen the school? She said, 'No.'" And he said, "Well, let's drive over and see it." So she drove over to see the school and came back. And she said, 'You know, the homes around that school are nicer than they are here.' [laughter] And she said, 'The school looks great.'"

But this type of thing began to unfold, you see. I made three talks during this period of time, during those years I was chairman.

WC: To?

AL: To different groups in the city. And in doing so, I would relate these [unclear] of stories. Somebody else would pick them up, and somebody else would pick them up, then the chamber implemented their program of being able to get people to where they wanted to go and let them see, and give them information, give them a hotline, and this type of thing, to talk through. The school board and the chamber's program were there to work together, but there was no connection.

WC: Now, would Hal have talked to you before—I call him Hal because I’ve met him—would he have talked to you before the committee proposed this, to sort of seek out your—

AL: He simply asked me what I thought about the chamber organizing a Concerned Citizens for Schools, had I thought about them organizing such a committee, and if I thought it would have any workable advantage to our community. And, of course, I had to tell him yes. Anything you work positive towards it has to have a good effect, and I had to tell him yes. But I also told him that it would be bad if they started telling the school board what they ought to do. This is always a danger in things like this, because this committee had no concept and didn’t want to do that at all. They did a beautiful job.

WC: You said you became chairman of the school board the morning of the day of the Mecklenburg decision.

AL: The day of the Mecklenburg decision, right.

WC: Was that expected?

AL: No, it was not.

WC: Tell me if you would, what kinds of things happened that day or afterwards? You said you had to come to grips with this.

AL: The first thing—and then, of course, we were under a law suit to desegregate our system. Naturally we had all the questions that people wanted to ask: what we were going to do, how we were going to do it. There was no way to answer it, except that we were going to obey the law. Whatever the law said, we were going to do that. We had excellent legal counsel, a fellow named Bill Caffrey, who happened to be [unclear] a high school principal and teacher before he became a lawyer in this system. So many things for us, during this period of time transpired, trying to get ready because we had to do something. We had to bus. We had to desegregate. And I didn’t agree with all the busing aspects. I didn’t agree with all of that at all. But I strongly supported that every child should have an equal opportunity to equal facilities for education, and that the quicker that this country could do this, the better off this whole country and society will be. Because it just makes sense to me that two heads are better than one, and if you can educate them, all of us, then we’re going to be a better nation. So then we just had to simply start designing how we were going to do it.

Well, many, many plans were drawn back and forth, and lines, and HEW—not HEW, but the counsel for the plaintiff was bringing his aspects of what he thought ought to done. It was just a real long hard struggle in getting—implementing the first step. And

then when it was implemented, we had to then begin to let people know that we were willing to listen to them as well. But I can recall one day I was walking down the street, an attorney stopped me in the middle of the street. In fact, it was in a very loud voice—and his father, incidentally, was a judge in this state—a very loud voice, [and] he started using some profanity and saying, “I don’t know why in the world you all are doing this type of thing to our schools and ruining our schools and ruining our children.”

And I said, “What would you do? The law says it has to be done.”

“Defy the law.”

And I said, “You, an attorney, your father a judge”—other people walked up about that time, and, of course, he was getting some to agree with him, but there were people here who had that feeling just like that attorney: defy the law, fight it. Well, I’m not a pacifist by any means, but neither am I one to defy something that I really firmly am convinced that in defying it we destroy it. So I got off the corner and went home.

But that happened several occasions, and there were people upset. And when we first came out with our lines—I remember the first set of lines. You got accused of, “Well, you drug by his line because you know him, and you didn’t know me,” this type of thing, which is a normal reaction. It’s not an unhealthy reaction. But then occasionally you would get the guy, the politician, who would accuse you. There are some people now, they stayed; they are professional politicians. One in particular I never will forget saying that we ruined his house. He had the finest house in his section, and how we degraded in such a way because we had put his section—drawn the line to where his children are going to have to go to a different school, and we had ruined his whole section and degraded his house and so on and so forth, and that we did it simply because it was him. But as a whole, we found many, many people wanting to help and wanting to get the job done, not that they agreed with what—all that was being done.

But it’s an interesting thing to me as I look back. I believed it then, and I know it’s somewhat now. We can talk about equal education. As I said earlier, this word “equal” is so out of use sometimes. We didn’t even know what equal education was, even among the all white schools. You take a school in one section of this town where parents are more affluent than another, both white, there is going to be better education at that point in the more affluent areas because those people are going to be able to do things differently. I think today we haven’t minimized that, I don’t believe. I don’t think in this city system we have minimized and hurt anyone’s education. Now, there may be exceptions to that statement. I know this, because we have some students who have had a lot of difficulty with this process. But I’m thinking now of the full thirty thousand students, and as I’ve said to people over and over again, “Sure, your child—I’m sure we’re doing things that are contrary to what you would have your child know and learn and do, and surely your child, under different circumstances and different situations, may excel far better than he is today, but I can’t think about your child alone. I have to think about a certain thousand children.” And usually when you say this to people, they have a

better understanding. But today, as far as I can see, in this city we're as close to having every child with an opportunity on the same level of any time that I can remember, with facilities, teachers. The entire process of education, I think, is closer to being on a level for all children than anyone ever dreamed it could possibly be at [unclear].

WC: During this period, did you work with Dr. [John] Tarpley?

AL: No.

WC: You did not. Who were some of the—I guess Professor George Evans was on the school board for quite a while.

AL: Yes, George and I served on—he was on three or four years while I was on.

WC: And then—

AL: Walter Johnson and Otis Hairston.

WC: How did you find their attitudes? And did they—did you feel that they were representing the black community or that they were—I understand that they undoubtedly wore many hats, one of which was being representative of the black community. But could you assess the relationship that took place between them and the rest of the board, in terms of resolving some of these issues over desegregation?

AL: I think one of the most interesting things I learned in all of this—

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AL: [unclear] handled it very well, and certainly Judge Ed Stanley, he was certainly complimentary to us, because he felt that we had done an excellent job.

WC: Is he still alive?

AL: No.

WC: I thought he died a couple of years ago.

AL: I would expect we got out from under the court order quicker than anyone else I've ever heard of anywhere, but under another judge. But had Ed lived, he was pleased with what we had done. But, you see, there were several things in all of this that you have to realize. People are always, as I said, get uptight when it's their children, and I do to. I tried to convince people—tell people, not convince them. I tried to tell people “by law, you can make me desegregate a school system, by law. But you cannot by law make me integrate, that can only be done from heart to heart.” And I suppose that was as strong a statement that I've made [unclear].

I'll never forget speaking here at the church one day for their group, and one of them asked me, “Well, don't you believe, Mr. Lineberry, that you're holding back a lot of children because they are [unclear]? And such-and-such group who have come in out of these schools, don't you feel like you are holding the others back while these catch up?” I said “No, we do not,” I said. Now I'm speaking of the total now, and of course, this person got quite indignant with me because I would not agree. And I said “Well, let me put it to you like this, where maybe you'll understand it, to both of us a little better.

I said “I went through high school with a man by the name of James Riley. We went through the second grade through the twelfth grade together, and Jim was an A student all the way through. Today he happens to have his Ph.D. degree, at Houston, Texas, a very successful man, a very fine man.” I said “I was a C student all the way through high school, and I don't remember holding him back one day.” And I used that many times, not that it was a great, classic thing to say, but it gave them something to relate to because many of the people I was saying it to. They knew they were C students too, and they knew their A students were—so it gave them something to relate to.

We had fiascos, of course, like Page High School. The night we had a public meeting at Page High School, have you heard about that one?

WC: No, I haven't, no.

AL: We had about fifteen hundred people and we set our microphones up and we opened it up to anybody who wanted to ask us questions. And of course, we got cussed at, fussed at, yelled at and everything else, and occasionally somebody would say something nice about us. But we gave people the opportunity to express themselves, and I felt that this was so important. Then my wife said “Should we take the phone off the hook?” I said “No, let it ring anytime day or night, because whoever calls, they got a problem and somebody needs to listen to them.” And my phone would ring all night long, but I’d listen and talk, listen when they had [unclear] in their cups, listen to them when they had real problems, and listen to them when they hung up, [when] they were cussing me out. But most of the time, after you listen to a person and you don’t [get] very argumentative with them and they get through, why, they thank you for letting you talk to them. I found this over and over again. I remember times—

[remainder of transcript unavailable]