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William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: Tom Bailey

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DATE: July 9, 1977

WILLIAM CHAFE: —begin by doing is talking about your college background and when you first came into contact with the movement in Greensboro.

TOM BAILEY: Okay. That's an interesting place to begin, in the sense that actually my involvement with the movement didn't really begin in Greensboro. I guess in a way it did, and a way it didn't. In 1963 I was graduated from high school, okay, and that year was the year of the March on Washington. And realistically, in a big city like Winston-Salem, we didn't have any concept—at least I didn't—of what was going on in the world around us, so that the March on Washington was technically my first contact with any kind of movement whatsoever. Now prior to the March on Washington, there had been a few sit-in demonstrations going on in Winston-Salem. But for the most part, being in high school, my mother had taken the position that it wasn't something that I needed to get involved in, okay, and it certainly was not something that was discussed to any degree in our house, so that we were completely oblivious, just completely naive about what was going on.

WC: So you and your classmates in high school would not have talked about the sit-ins in 1960 or—

TB: No, no. It was never discussed

WC: Did you ever talk about Dr. [Martin Luther] King [Jr.] or—

TB: No, never did. I mean it just wasn't within our realm of understanding or interest at that point. In any event, I went to the March on Washington. I think that my own curiosity had gotten the best of me by that summer, particularly since there had been a few demonstrations in Winston-Salem dealing with the public facilities, et cetera. But when I got to Washington, again not having any background, it was a function of just going to Washington and being with a lot of people. In fact, what I ended up doing was going to

Washington on a bus and milling around the [Washington] Monument and then catching a cab and going to my aunt's house, right, and watching the rest on TV. Okay, so that's where I was.

And basically from there went on to [North Carolina] A&T [State University] in the fall, and the activity on the campus had slowed down by that time, a lot. Jesse Jackson was still there, but there really wasn't much going on. There was a lot of talk. I guess I stayed there about two years and left, really.

I had intended to go to the Peace Corps, and, I guess, basically was afraid of the idea of leaving the country and going to Africa to place I didn't know anything about—because that's where they were going to send me, to Sierra Leone. And [I] decided I wasn't going and took a job in the poverty program, okay, and worked a year, but it was during that year that I developed some skills as an organizer.

WC: Where was that?

TB: In Winston-Salem.

WC: In Winston-Salem?

TB: Right. And discovered, after working with the community for some time, that the system had no real intention, okay, of bringing about any appreciable change with respect to quality of life of people in that city, particularly those persons who lived in “the ghetto” or who lived in the black community, because that was primarily the area that the anti-poverty efforts were directed at at that time in Winston-Salem.

WC: What were you doing exactly in the way of organizing?

TB: Well, I worked—I think there were about fifteen of us, and we took a map and sectioned out what was essentially East Winston into neighborhood areas, not based on neighborhood interests or kinship or anything along those lines, just simply laying out some terrain for all of us to work in. And after that, it was my job to basically go into that community and get to know the people and find out what problems were, other than those things that were obvious with respect to housing, unpaved streets, those kinds of things. And I did that, and after about, I guess, three months, there were a number of issues that developed. Some of them had to do with getting rid of trees, garbage collections. There were a number of clean-up campaigns that were organized during that period, and we started interacting with city hall.

And along about the same time I—the movement activity—I guess this was '66—started to gear up again. Stokely Carmichael was moving around the country about that time. And by that summer, we had a couple of full-fledged riots.

WC: In Winston?

TB: Yeah. Well, in Winston and it was going on every place about that time. In any event, it got to be very clear to me that the system was not going to respond and that we were really playing a game to some extent. And so that, I began to develop “a different kind of perspective” on what was going on, and my sensitivities were not necessarily conducive with the poverty program. The poverty program itself was undergoing a change at that time. The Edith Green Amendment had been enacted so that we were really talking about a board that set policies, which was primarily the people that the community folk would come into direct conflict with, so that there were a number of demonstrations and marches with respect to recreation, with respect to community stores, and that kind of thing. And the agency began to get a lot of pressure to cool it. In fact, one white merchant that was located in the community died with a heart attack as a result of some community pressure, some demonstrations, people going into his store, turning stuff over. And that was about the end of it; the community organization was beginning to die.

In any event, by the end of that year, I had somewhat of a reputation. In fact, people had accused me of working with Stokely Carmichael, whom I didn't even know at the time. And what they did in effect was to give me a lot of money and sent me back to school.

WC: Who gave you money?

TB: [chuckles] The people in the poverty program and the city government, to get rid of me. And it was about two or three thousand dollars.

WC: A fellowship? [laughs]

TB: Yeah. So I went back to school with one thing in mind: to get a degree. And I realized at that point that that's all I would be going for, because the institution was not responsive to nor was even aware of the needs of people.

WC: Which institution, A&T?

TB: A&T—Well, A&T—

WC: Any institution?

TB: Any institution. We were talking about academia, and academia was an entirely different world. While A&T had been involved in the sit-in earlier, that was more of a function of

the times, historical times, as well as some feelings, for example, on the part of the president, Sam[uel] Procter, at the time, who later left, and the energy generated by the student body.

WC: So you thought Procter was basically pro-movement?

TB: Right, at the time.

WC: Did he leave because they wanted to get rid of him?

TB: I'm not sure. See, by the time I got there, Procter was on leave some place.

WC: Yeah, right.

TB: And [Lewis] Dowdy was the man in charge. And by the end of my freshman year, Dowdy's position as president was solidified, and so that I never had an opportunity to really get to know Procter that well or to observe his style. In any event, when I went back to school, which was in '67, of course Dowdy was there, and the institution just wasn't involved in anything. The people were basically back to going to school and trying to get an education to become "productive members of society." So that, I guess—
Well, prior to going to school I had an interesting experience. The experience was that an organization was developed in Winston-Salem to try and deal with riots. And many of us who worked for the poverty program were involved in the organization. Now that organization was not part of the poverty program. It was actually part of the police department. And we sort of worked with that. I don't know if we worked with it or not; we were involved with it. The primary reason for my involvement was that they wanted to keep up with me, okay. So they took us down and fingerprinted us and gave us a little card and said basically, "These niggers can run around the city," this kind of thing. And the card never got used for what they thought it was going to be used for or what their intentions were, but that's another story. In any event, that was part of my education process.

WC: They were trying to make you kind of an intelligence outfit?

TB: Right.

WC: You and how many others? Ten or fifteen?

TB: A whole bunch of people, bunch of people. But it never worked out that way because we did basically what we wanted to do once it was apparent to us what was afoot. And I

mention that simply because I took the card back to Greensboro with me when I went to A&T; I didn't give it up. And sure enough some more riot-type activity was going on, and it got to be something I could use.

WC: With the Greensboro police?

TB: Yeah, yeah.

WC: It gave you a kind of a sanction with them?

TB: Well, they didn't really know what it was. I don't think they ever even took the time to find out because they had—if they had, they probably would have put me in jail, but they never did. So I got—I could move around when there was a curfew, and that's what I used it for really, at least for about two months. And then I began to think about it and decided that having the card was more dangerous to me.

WC: You'd get it from either side.

TB: Right, so I destroyed it and just went on about my business.

In any event, there was an organization in Greensboro at that time called YES.

WC: Called—

TB: YES.

WC: YES.

TB: YES, Youth Education Services. And basically what they were doing was organizing in the black community, and it was sort of a coalition group, both black folk and white folk in it.

WC: Who were some of the people who were—?

TB: Let's see, Nelson Johnson was involved in it. A fellow by the name of Cecil Butler, who is now in Winston-Salem, had been involved in it, okay. And what they were doing was basically organizing, one, around those basic kinds of things that I had done in Winston-Salem; working with the Greensboro Citizens Association [GCA] and the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] in traditional, you know, all of those traditional community organizations on various kinds of issues in the city;

among them were things like housing, rent, equality of housing, the cost of rent, those kinds of things. So while on campus, I got involved in that.

WC: This is '67, now, that we're talking about?

TB: Right.

WC: Who were the white people in that?

TB: I can't even remember—

WC: Can't remember that. Were they young people or older people? Young people?

TB: Very young.

WC: Would they be from colleges in the area or—?

TB: I think UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro], but—one was named Dora, if I remember correctly. I'm not sure how they got there.

WC: Dora was the first name?

TB: Yeah.

WC: D-o-r-a.

TB: Yeah.

TB: I'm not sure how they got there. In any event, I met them. There was a meeting someplace that I happened to attend, and I sort of liked what was going on, so I kind of got involved in it. And it was from there that the process developed. At the same time, the Foundation for Community Development of Durham was active and had been set up from the North Carolina Fund, and Howard Fuller was the director of community organizations at that time. And the process—a separate process was going on, and that was the organization of student groups around the state for the purpose of working with communities to bring the college community and the city community together around issues. The idea was that—[snaps at pet] Sprout, stop. Yeah, he's a [proud?] fellow. The idea basically was that there was a lot of energy on campus that could mobilize to assist the community at large in redressing some of its many problems. That in addition to that, if there was anything to be done in terms of picketing, et cetera, that certainly the energy

of students could be mobilized for that purpose, and even beyond that. But it was important that some of the black students began to understand what was going on in the real world as opposed to being locked up in academia.

In addition, the Black Power movement was beginning to materialize by that time. I think back in 1966, McGeorge Bundy had raised the issue of black economic development or black capitalism, so that he had given a definition to Black Power. Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton, of course, had—by middle of '67 or maybe early '67—published a book, *Black Power [The Politics of Liberation in America]*, and so that was out, and H. Rap Brown was on the move. So there was a lot of energy, a lot of what had to be defined at that time as progressive leftist kind of energy in the community.

So we had a year of things going for us—and that same year as the year of Dr. [Reginald] Hawkins, so all of that was going on. One, we were talking about defining our identity, who we were, what we're talking about. We're talking about black folks and blackness as opposed to Negroes, that whole kind of thing. In addition, the relationship between the educational institutions and the community, and the consolidation of the notion of black pride. That that was a function of that, that certainly we could not talk about black unity without being able to forge some relationship between that community and the community at-large and to develop a real kinship. So that was basically the energy or the activity in Greensboro, and that was basically the activity of Howard Fuller and the Foundation, at that point in time.

WC: So there are two or three things that I hear you saying contributing to this, to your own, and maybe more general kind of involvement: one is the experience in the poverty program and seeing that that was not going to do anything, but that there was a real problem out there in terms of the community which had to be organized; two was the Black Power movement in its overall impact; and three was the Foundation for Community Development as a kind of catalyst, which was trying to emphasize this particular union of community and college. Now Frank Williams was involved in that too, right?

TB: Right, he worked with YES.

WC: How did that— when was the first time you met Howard Fuller or Frank Williams? Do you remember?

TB: Oh, gee. I met Frank maybe three or four weeks after I got back to Greensboro, and I had met Howard Fuller prior to that while I was still in Winston-Salem. We had not established a relationship, a long-term kind of relationship, but we had met. I had gone to the Foundation for something—oh, for some books on community organization and development, and so I met him that way.

WC: This is the fall of '67 you return to A&T, and this is within three or four weeks you're connecting up to Williams and Fuller and YES.

TB: And Nelson. Yeah.

WC: You met Nelson through YES or you met him on the campus?

TB: Yeah, I met him through YES, and maybe they were on campus or maybe—I'm not sure how all that got started, but our paths crossed. And by that time I had written a paper on—well, I guess the paper was on the system, basically, and its responsiveness to black people. There had been enough civil disobedience, and certainly a lot of people were talking about it, and I basically sat down, I guess, and sort of regurgitated the things that had helped to formulate what was to become basically my way of thinking and responding to people. So that at that point I was committed to change. It was very clear to me that the existing order was not right. I knew in general who the perpetrators were of injustice and in my opinion the real crime that was going on, so that I was ready to work.

In fact, I had told the draft board just that—they had attempted to draft me, and I went down and basically told them that I didn't have anything against the people in Vietnam, and I definitely had something against the people in the United States, and was ready to fight against them, and that my war was in this country. And I remember, I imagine people thought I was insane because—

WC: That was pretty early.

TB: Yeah. And I was talking very loud in the place, and everybody was just looking at me. And later I got one Y classification, and I never heard from them again. I said, "Fine, right on." I didn't want to be bothered.

So from there we went into seriously organizing the students on campus and responding to any issue that was raised either with respect to the campus itself or with respect to the community at-large.

WC: Okay. Could I just ask a couple of questions about the campus and the college before we sort of move on to what goes in the winter and spring of '67 and '68? Did you have a sense on the campus of their being identifiable factions in the faculty for and against activism, or was it pretty much kind of diffused and not defined?

TB: At that point we were relatively new to the idea so that we didn't even spend any time looking for that support among the faculty. I think that John Marshall Stevenson or Kilimanjaro had a kind of consciousness and an interest. I think that Dowdy was

politically astute enough to know that there was something going on, but that beyond that people were somewhat afraid, really, of all these folks on campus and what they were doing. Because there was another group on campus that was developed about that same time known as the Black Liberation Front, and by far they were the most militant of all of the groups on campus, more so than we were at that point in time. They were very serious. They had a lot of guns and a lot of other stuff. They were serious. But we were able to work with them. They were into Black Power and had picked up the slogans with respect to “picking up the gun,” et cetera, et cetera, that were being espoused by the [Black] Panther Party, us, and a whole bunch of others. So with respect to your specific question, we didn’t even deal with the faculty. They were persona non grata as far as we were concerned, and technically did not see the relationship. I think it was part of the experience on campus with many of us, as well as the media and things on the outside which related to Black Power and various speeches and activities going on that served as an educational process for them.

WC: Yeah, right. So they in effect could involve only after things started happening outside. This is a very hard question, and I know that there is no specific answer to it, but if you had to kind of portion out the student body at A&T in terms of whether they would be supportive of the Black Liberation Front, of YES or of just being different politically, what kind of—how—what kinds of constituencies did the different groups on campus have?

TB: Well, now that’s very interesting. You had the traditional fraternities and sororities, you had the “academically superior students,” and you had the rest of them. Now the movement itself pulled people from all those things. There were folks who were just students and who just did that, but at different times for different reasons. You could stir them up and get them involved, not of the long periods of time, but for short periods of time, and so that we viewed the entire campus as potential recruits. But they were not in the main active, so it’s really hard to single out whether or not there was support. You could say, well, at various times, for different reasons, you could pull different people.

WC: But, for example, in the meetings that you would have for YES, how many people could you usually count on coming?

TB: We never really had any meetings. Okay, we had meetings, but it was really meetings of the cabinet. And we were talking about say, for example, people from Bennett [College], people from UNCG, people from A&T, and people from FCD, all whom were working together. And we would hold cabinet meetings to lay out what it was we were going to do, and then we did it.

WC: Now the things that you were going to do, would they usually involve the community?

TB: Yes and no. There was activity going on on two levels. Nelson at the time wasn't in school.

WC: He was not in school?

TB: No.

WC: This is the year before he becomes vice president?

TB: Right, right. And the decision was made later that the most politically expedient thing to do was to take over.

WC: The campus?

TB: Right, to add some legitimacy to the activity because—well, during '67 there was another group, in fact, which included Henry McCoy[?]¹—now in Greensboro—and I can't remember the rest of them. But in any event, their orientation was not along the same lines, okay. They had been picked up as the leaders on campus, and whatever you do on campus, that's what they did. And that was the extent of it, so that that year had been a year of turmoil and conflict on campus in the sense that we would have to go in and take over things going on on campus.

WC: So that in a sense, there was fragmentation on campus between different kinds of political directions, or not political direction at all?

TB: Right.

WC: And YES would be one thing and the Black Liberation Front would be the other thing and Henry McCoy's group would be a third thing, and—

TB: Right. By the end of the year, it was very interesting; the Black Liberation Front stopped [unclear]²—well, sparked enough fear in the hearts of the administration that they were being recognized. My own role certainly branded me as around at that time. That was very low key. We never dealt with them in formal settings—with the administration—until very late in the game; they finally decided that they wanted to sit down and talk with us. But we didn't really deal with that. We let the Black Liberation Front run what was in effect the front line, and it seemed to have worked out rather well.

WC: So in effect they would legitimize you by being so far out—

TB: Right.

WC: —in the eyes of the administration? Was that all planned on your part?

TB: Well, yeah. Once we recognized that they were just ahead of us—well, they weren't ahead of us; they were coming at us in a different perspective and, hey—

WC: Overt confrontation, rather than a combination of confrontation and working from within?

TB: Right, right. There's more of a gut response to things and it was usually very clear, so that we just let them go ahead and do it. We would debate among ourselves, but we would not openly debate on campus.

WC: And they would?

TB: Well, I mean we wouldn't debate with them openly. They may attempt it, but we would always move away from that and sort of stay out of it.

WC: How did they feel about you?

TB: Well, there was a fellow by the name of Eric Brown—

WC: Yeah.

TB: —who went to jail.

WC: Eric [Pasha?] Brown.

TB: Right. And I'm not sure where Eric was coming from, but he was involved in the Black Liberation Front. In fact, [he was] a leader in the Black Liberation Front. And one of the members is right now in Central Prison in the psycho ward. I don't think he's crazy, but I think that during that time they got him, and that's where he's been ever since.

WC: And Brown spent an awful long time in jail, right, for nothing.

TB: Yes, that's right. But, yeah, anyway, Pasha represented the leadership. There were some other people and a couple of intellectual guys, I mean for that time, who were also

involved. Their names at this point sort of elude me. Nevertheless they became a very strong force on campus.

And later that year, I think, it was a riot. I can't remember what it was about. I guess it was '68 by that time when they—when Dr. King was assassinated and the campus went wild from going to the ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] building to get guns to setting up troops and platoons and bringing in hand grenades and everything else.

WC: And this was BLF or was this the campus generally?

TB: Right, well the BLF had a lot of the heavy artillery. The campus in general, by that time, had moved to a level of political sophistication, but they simply used the tools or the things that had been given to them—ROTC, et cetera—as a way of redressing or dealing with their feelings.

WC: Right. Now the authorities managed to put Brown away for nothing. Did they do that to the rest of the leadership of the—I just want to check and see how this is doing—the rest of the leadership of the BLF, too?

TB: Yeah. What they did, they had some—well, I don't know who did it—I guess between the administration and the police. There were a few instructors around that we had concluded were spies. They had been placed on campus primarily to find out what to find out what the niggers were doing, and a couple of them disappeared, so it was clear to us that our underlying assumption had been correct, that they were indeed spies. And it was through that mechanism that certain members of the BLF got picked up and dealt with.

WC: Right, so that in effect by the end of the school year in '68 you, or YES, had—

TB: YES was no longer in existence. It was an entirely new organization on the scene by that time. In the summer of '67, the Foundation—well, moving between the summer of '67 and the summer of '68, the Foundation had its last major push, and that was to establish community organization all across the state of North Carolina, and that they had interviewed some interns who were trained during the summer and who worked, for example, in Greensboro, Fayetteville, Durham, Raleigh, Rocky Mount, Wilson, and—let me see, where else was there? I guess that was about it that I can think of. In any event, they had sent people every place, and the student movement as such, okay, was merely a function of the energies of Howard Fuller. And on campus the movement among students was a redefinition of education. At the same time, there was a move afoot to develop in the community the necessary leadership to deal with the system. So we were moving from those two angles, as well as to in-between utilize Owusu's [Sadauki—a.k.a. Howard

Fuller] skills as a speaker, as an orator, to weld the students and the community, and to keep them both fired up.

WC: Right, right. Now, the police are harassing Williams and Owusu all during this time, but especially after King's assassination. Isn't this when Williams was picked up for having a couple of cans of beer in his car or something like that, and there is a big PR [public relations] attack on the Foundation for being—supporting guerilla war or whatever?

TB: Oh, it was more than that. A fellow right down the road in Warrenton, Jim [Lee?], was picked up in Sanford for having an M-16 that was—not an M-16, an M-1 in his truck. Somebody claimed there was some dynamite in a Foundation car, okay, so that the Foundation came under a lot of pressure. And fortunately, though, at that time Nathan Garrett was very strong, because he could have virtually put an end to it all, but nevertheless supported Owusu. And the way that things worked out was that we were able to continue at least until 1969.

WC: Yeah, in effect one year of continued Foundation support—

TB: Right.

WC: —even after the big attack came in the spring of '68. Is Garrett still around?

TB: Yeah, he's in Durham.

WC: Is he a white guy or black guy?

TB: He's black.

WC: Black guy.

TB: Harvard trained CPA [Certified Public Accountant].

WC: And he started that. Is he the one who sort of—I mean, I know that—

TB: Well, okay, it's complicated. It was the North Carolina Fund that came into existence, I guess, about '64.

WC: Yeah.

TB: And it spun off the Foundation, the mobility project, and a number of others. It was really the forerunner to the anti-poverty effort. It was one of the first ones in the country.

WC: And it was a Ford Foundation funding, wasn't it?

TB: Yeah, Ford money. So it spun off FCD, and along with it, it spun off Nathan Garret. But the big person behind it all was a guy by the name of George Esser.

WC: Yeah.

TB: That was the big cheese.

WC: Did you know Esser at all?

TB: I met him, yeah. And George Autry was involved.

WC: Did Esser have a good reputation?

TB: Yes.

WC: I met him a couple of times. I just wondered.

TB: I think that, as it goes, that he was obviously a liberal at that point and interested in changing the quality of life, getting people involved in their own community, and that was his orientation. Of course ours was somewhat different, but they didn't necessarily come to conflict. So that's how that was able to survive.

WC: Now you said YES was out of existence by the summer of '68?

TB: Yeah, so FCD picked up everybody.

WC: FCD picked up everybody. What was the organizational form of FCD in Greensboro at A&T? Was it just called FCD or was there a—

TB: No. Okay, in '68—by the summer of '68, GAPP [Greensboro Association of Poor People] was in existence.

WC: GAPP had started by that time. So GAPP in effect became—

TB: Before.

WC: —the instrument for bringing together the community and the campus.

TB: Right, right.

WC: And FCD funded GAPP for the first year.

TB: Right.

WC: When GAPP started, was Nelson Johnson its first head?

TB: First director.

WC: First director, and that was the same year he was vice president of the student body, right?

TB: Right.

WC: [19]68-'69.

TB: Right.

WC: Was [Vincent] McCullough the head of the student body that year?

TB: Right.

WC: He was the president. Okay. Now how did Nelson Johnson get elected vice president of the student body when he hadn't been a student the year before?

TB: It was really very simple. You got registered on campus, okay, took a few courses, and ran. That was it.

WC: And you had organized the voters in that effect?

TB: Yes. All of us: me, [Lewis] Brandon, and a bunch of other people.

WC: So that Johnson's name was well known to the students and his face and what he stood for.

TB: Right.

WC: Okay. I wish these damn things had a buzzer than went off at the end because I can't [cross over?]. So were you at that point in GAPP?

TB: Okay, no. At that point—by the end of the summer, I left Greensboro.

WC: You left Greensboro. So you're back at school for one year, and then you leave Greensboro to go to Davidson County?

TB: Davidson County, right.

WC: And you go work for the poverty program there again, don't you?

TB: Right, as executive director.

WC: How did that happen?

TB: Well, it's a long story. I ended up having to get married. Well, I didn't have to get married, but I made the mistake of deciding to get married. My wife was, at that time, pregnant, so I had to find a job. So there was this little job in Davidson County that I read about in the paper and applied for, and the lady who became the director—

[End of Tape One, Side A—Begin Tape One, Side B]

WC: You're having a—you're giving the folks there a good time by organizing the right people?

TB: Right, yeah. I didn't—we worked both with black folks and white folks. We hadn't really gone completely into separatism at that point. So that there was—the housing project is always a good place to start, okay, so straight to the housing project and a couple of other [unclear], and a place called Arrington Heights where nobody lived but some poor white folks, and they were all renting houses from this one guy who owned them, some little shanty houses. And he had the houses all on one water system, and they had outdoor privies, so that what was happening was that the privies were—the fumes, the residue was really going into the water system and they were all getting sick. So we fumbled around and found out what was going on and got the county health department to condemn the well, and in turn got the people to stop paying rent, and then went to the county commissioners and demanded that they do something about it, okay.

And the county commissioners were all Republicans, at that point, and we had Scott, who was a Democrat, in Raleigh. What we had done was we sent a telegram to the

governor laying out the condition and saying the people were getting sick, and so they sent the National Guard in with water for the people. So they got involved in a rent strike by the back door. And then the county refused to even deal with it. White folks went into the meetings—these are poor white folks, right—they go to the county commissioner and start raising pure hell. And in fact, the county commissioners got up and ran out of the room, and they had the police to come in and get the white folks. And in the meantime, I think I had made some statement to the effect that “What we will do is, we will talk with them today, but we will fight with them tomorrow.” And that was supposed to be some inflammatory bullshit.

In any event, the upshot was that they got the director, [Goddard?] Davison, to fire me. And the board, on the other hand, said that there was no reason to fire me, so that—but they had given him the power to hire and fire. And there was a lot of other little political kinds of things going on. At the same time, we had developed a credit union, because they were giving—OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] was then giving incentive grants, so I had taken \$27,000 and just given it to some people in the communities out there. “Y’all got it. Do your thing.” And they were pissed off about that, because they were saying, “Wait a minute. You just give away \$27,000 to people who don’t know what to do with it?”

And I said, “Yes.”

So that was part of the problem. In any event, I ended up being fired. The board exonerated me, but she would not work with me. So two weeks thereafter, he was fired.

WC: By the board?

TB: By the board. So I never went back to Davidson County.

WC: Was that the point at which you went to the OEO in Greensboro?

TB: No.

WC: In Guilford County?

TB: No. Well, for four months I was in Morganton. A guy by the name of Russell Heath, who still works for the state government, but who is now working with the Indian Commission [sic—North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs], was at that time in the OEO office in the state. So he knew what was going on, and so he helped me get a job in Morganton. So I went—I stayed up there four months and concluded that that was not the place for me to be. And I was in Washington for a meeting and ran in Charles Davis at the, what, the National Association for Community Development, one of their meetings, and talked to him a while.

And he said, "Look, how about coming to Greensboro?"

So I said, "Right."

I always wanted to get back to Greensboro anyway, so I went to Greensboro. And so the scenario was complete. All of us were back in Greensboro.

WC: And this is like—

TB: Sixty-nine, really.

WC: Summer of '69, isn't it?

TB: No, it was in November of 1969.

WC: Okay, so it's after the Dudley [High School] and A&T—

TB: Right, right. I went to Greensboro during that.

WC: You did?

TB: Yeah, myself and a fellow by the name of Reggie Durant, who was still connected with the Foundation for Community Development at that time.

WC: Dumark?

TB: Durant. And went to Nelson's house and moved around with some of the groups to find out what was going on, and slid into Greensboro, slid out of Greensboro, with various and sundry things. And that was basically all we did.

WC: Tell me about—even on the basis of that brief—you know, not having been there before or afterwards—I mean from what I understand, this—right now at least the thing really began with stupidity on the part of the Dudley school administration and the citywide school administration.

TB: Right.

WC: Now, was Claude Barnes closely associated with Johnson and GAPP before this?

TB: Well, okay, that's a hard kind of thing. See, actually a guy by the name of Walter Brame—

WC: Yeah, B-r-e-h-m or B-r-a-m-e, something like that, yeah.

TB: Yeah. He was just here last week. [He] had taken charge of GAPP, technically, and Nelson was on campus. And what they had done was organized a student group. Claude was a member of the student group. And as I understand it, they were in the process of trying to take charge of the student government, et cetera, over at Dudley. And to that extent, Claude was associated with GAPP, but there was no real heavy kind of thing. But he was associated with it.

WC: And then the administration at Dudley, in effect, got paranoid and made sure Barnes wasn't on the ticket.

TB: Right.

WC: Okay. Were you there when—the day the demonstrations at Dudley, when—

TB: No.

WC: —when those kids were beaten up and arrested?

TB: No. I had gotten a phone call from FCD, and the phone call was—well, the statement was, “Do not go to Greensboro, period.” So I didn't go.

WC: And this was sort of like—that was the day that the high school kids got arrested and beaten up.

TB: Right.

WC: And Nelson went on campus that day, right, to Dudley?

TB: Right.

WC: Along with Vincent McCullough, I think.

TB: Right.

WC: And you get two different versions of that: one version which says that they incited the demonstration, the other which says that they were trying to cool it off.

TB: Yeah, my understanding was that was the intent. I don't—you know, during that time, while the notion was to put as much pressure on people as you could, okay, but not to be insane. And, "We need to start thinking about a lot of people's lives, and let's not delude ourselves. The police and other folk, FBI included, would be very happy to pull out their pieces and blow your brains out." That's the bottom line. So that [snaps]. It was always our orientation [that] you have to put pressure on people, but not to get innocent people into a position where they could possibly get hurt.

WC: And the school board, at that point—do you know anything about their sort of refusing to allow [Franklin] Brown, the principal, to meet with the parents?

TB: Okay. Now the details on that situation I really don't know. I talked about it afterwards with Nelson and some of the other folk, but I don't really know the details of it.

WC: But you had left by the time the guard came in and the police did their number?

TB: Well—

WC: Or were you still around?

TB: Yeah. I had left. My involvement had been—I was around when King was assassinated, when they turned over all the police cars, and when they tried to cordon off the campus, okay, and when the shooting was going on, but I had gone by the time of the major Dudley situation.

WC: By the time Willie Grimes was killed?

TB: Right.

WC: I wish I knew—I guess I need to talk to some people who were there at that time, but it sounds—I guess there was a set of hearings held which concluded that—I'm not sure if they ever—did they ever conclude that in fact Grimes had been killed by the National Guard?

TB: No, no.

WC: And there were students on campus who did have guns and who were—

TB: It's my understanding that that was the case.

WC: —sniping, so that there was cross-firing going on.

TB: Well, they didn't have any firing pins, because after the '68 situation with the ROTC weapons, they had virtually eliminated that as a possible source. So they weren't using any large pieces.

WC: But the—I'm trying to think. Does SOBU [Student Organization for Black Unity] start before, or is SOBU an outgrowth, partly an outgrowth of the Dudley/A&T thing in '69?

TB: Well, actually it started before that. Well, its forerunner started long before that, as a matter of fact. People—the movement in Greensboro, the activity, was not isolated, and Owusu was moving around the country, so we began to interact with people all over the country. And it was concluded then that through the various student governments that a new organization was to come about to take SNCC's [Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee] place. And in fact, the first meeting of that was held at Shaw, the historical meeting place for SNCC, at what was called a cub's conference. And everybody came from Ron [Everett—now Maulana] Karenga—let's see—

WC: Is that Ron from New York?

TB: No, Ron Karenga is from California.

WC: California? I thought it brung—that's—wasn't there—

TB: No, US [Organization] started in California, okay. New York/New Jersey you're thinking about [Emombila Mire Miraca?].

WC: I had Karenga mixed up with Malcolm X's bodyguard, who was Charles Kenyatta.

TB: Okay, okay. That—yeah, okay.

WC: Right.

TB: Charles Kenyatta. I haven't seen or heard from him in a long time.

Anyway, so that was—the impetus began at that meeting to organize a new student group, and, of course, Cleveland Sellers—who was in jail, and his wife was in, and a whole bunch of other people—but nothing really happened, so that the impetus, again, was really a function of Owusu at Malcolm X [Liberation University]. Because what had happened, blacks through—the black student movement was the entity that was the parent of SOBU. What happened was Malcolm X was formed as a result of the

students over at Duke [University] walking out, and from that then the student movement in this state began and people began to sit down and try to come up with a way of operating, a modus operandi, a set of ideas, an ideology, those kinds of things. And it was out of that that SOBU came into existence.

WC: Now you come back to Greensboro in November '69, and what—you are assistant director of OEO? What is—?

TB: Well, I was director of community development.

WC: Director of community development.

TB: Right.

WC: You were walking into a kind of—that operation was pretty conflicted at that point, wasn't it?

TB: It was—it wasn't bad at that point. The problems began to develop shortly thereafter. When I got there they were operating in High Point, in Greensboro, and out in someplace else out in the county. There were a lot of people but they weren't doing anything.

WC: A lot of people on the staff?

TB: Right. And so that what I had come there basically to do was to help develop a community organization staff that could begin to work on the various issues that were in the community. They had had some conflict with GAPP, and it was my intent to try and forge a relationship between the two.

WC: What are the conflicts dealing with GAPP?

TB: Well, OEO by that time had begun to acquire a reputation of a do-nothing, big salary paying kind of entity so that—and they would tell people not to go to GAPP's meetings, and they were competing for the people in the community, and that was the nature of the conflict. And it was my argument that there was no need for any conflict, particularly since there were a lot of problems in Greensboro—High Point as well—that needed to be dealt with, and that what we needed was to develop a consciousness of what community organization was really all about.

WC: Did—you knew all about the conflict around Davis' appointment when you came and the fact that they first appointed a white guy from Connecticut?

TB: That was another level. That was B. J. Battle and Simpson[?] and all of that. I didn't know anything about that. I just—

WC: Did that have an impact on what you were about?

TB: It did later; it had not at that point. It developed later when it got to be clear that Charlie and I were going in two different directions, and that's when the trouble started.

WC: Could you just talk about that a little bit?

TB: Yeah, well, what happened was—see, I had the responsibility of writing the major portion of the grant proposal. So I wrote it along the lines of, one, incentive grants, as well as community development. You couldn't say community organization at that point. That was a no, no. And the idea was to organize communities. Well, the chairman of the board was a guy from Xerox and he was an administrator, so he started to question, which was then the Form 81, the Cap 81, something; I don't know. And he was saying, "What are you saying? Organize communities, for what? You know, we are doing well." So I had to rewrite it four times, okay. And Charlie, for whatever reason, had to take a different position, which was in effect their position. So I was out there by myself.

And along—about that same time, there were some other people in the community who worked for the program, but who didn't work. And I had said that I wasn't going to sign their checks, because if I didn't know what they were doing, then I wouldn't sign them, period. So they had organized a little group, and they had come into the board meeting one night, and they had coalesced with the other side—the white people, basically, because that's what it came down to, black folks and white folks, period. I think the board had become quite polarized. They were arguing for jobs. Well, I knew, okay, fine, everybody needs a job to make two dollars an hour—I think that was the big issue at that point in time—but the fact of the matter was unless the private sector was going to give up some jobs, OEO had no way of providing people with jobs.

WC: Yeah, on a permanent basis, especially.

TB: Right, right. And what we had done was establish a list of priorities based on interviews and community meetings for the agency, so that I felt comfortable with the priorities. And it included a Neighborhood Youth Corps. It included the whole concept of new careers and all of that, at that point in time. But there were no real guarantees in it all for people. I knew that, and a lot of other people knew it. But what they did was they used that as a wedge, so you're talking about spending money on this stuff when people ain't

got jobs. So a conflict developed, conflict between me and one staff person in particular, which—

WC: Herman Gist?

TB: Yes—which later emerged into sort of the shootout at the O.K. Corral. It was my contention then, and it's my contention today, that Herman and about seven of his guys came into the federal building where we were located with guns, right, and stopped me in the hall. And I'm walking down the hall with my hands up.

WC: And they get their guns out?

TB: Right. And I back into a room where there were some people from IRS [Internal Revenue Service], and when they saw the gun, right, they split. And something happened; Herman drops his gun. I split out the door and I call the police and tell them what happened. And the FBI is on the third floor; we're on the fourth floor. By the time the FBI got there, Herman and them were long gone, right. And the—so I tell the FBI, I said, "Look, my wife and kids are at home. I don't care what the hell y'all do, y'all go over there."

Well, I stayed there with the FBI for about an hour, and when I got home, the police had not gotten there yet. So when the captain or whoever it was showed up, I told him to go straight to hell, just to leave. And I pulled out my .30-.30 [Winchester rifle] and I said, "I can handle this," and he split. So, in any event, for a couple of weeks it was real tight.

WC: Now is Gist the guy who was part of this faction that you wouldn't sign the checks for?

TB: Yes.

WC: And he's the guy who aligned himself with the white people on the board, and who was making the noise about jobs first and not the other priorities?

TB: Right, right.

WC: Okay.

TB: And saying that I was a crazy, wild nigger and all kinds of other stuff. But at the same time, what Herman had done was he had gone to the bank, the American Federal [Savings & Loan], to Dr. [George] Simpkins' office, and had threatened everybody in the black community. So the [Carolina] Peacemaker came out with the thing about "Bloodbath."

WC: Right.

TB: So then that night there was supposed to be a meeting of some of the Guilford County Economic Opportunity Council [EOC] board members, the black members, over at the GAPP office. Because, see, what we were saying was the white folks were playing a game, okay, and we were trying to set up this meeting to lay out to them in very clear terms what was really going on and what position they needed to take. We understood that Charlie was in a no-win position, and that we were going to try to take the pressure off him, and in turn get something out of it for the community. Well, Gist and them knew about the meeting, so they broke in there with their guns, right. And you're talking about some little old ladies and some teachers from the university; they didn't know what in the world was going on. So that Brandon was the only one in the office, so they were brandishing their guns at him and a lady by the name of Dock[?], who was an organizer at that time for GAPP. So I drive up, and then Dock comes down. She pulls out her piece out of her bosom and she tells me, "Hey, man, do not go in there, okay." So they have this Mexican stand-off for a while. In the meantime, the meeting is obviously lost, and Gist and his boys leave.

For a couple of weeks things are pretty tight in the community. But we hold a series of meetings with people laying out what had really happened and what that was all about, and so the sentiment of the community shifted to our side and left them out there by themselves. Well, what finally happened was half the people in the gang with him got put in jail by the police, and it had nothing to do with that. They got put in jail for various sundry other things [like] robbing stores; they just went on a wild rampage. I will believe to this day that somebody was supplying them with dope.

WC: Really. Gist, too?

TB: Gist, too.

WC: Gist, too.

TB: I don't know, okay.

WC: But then there's this kind of peacemaking that goes on. I mean, Gist and Nelson Johnson write letters to the *Peacemaker* and sort of say that there is no problem. There really has never been any kind of gun fight at the O.K. Corral. [chuckles]

TB: Right.

WC: And it all sounds like it's being—but that it never does get—

TB: Resolved.

WC: —resolved.

TB: Right, and in fact the conflict continues for a long time, for a very long time.

WC: And Gist stays on staff and you stay on staff.

TB: Well, yeah, up until the cafeteria workers' strike. And what happened was it was an ill-timed strike. I admit that. It was bad news, near the end of the year. But we went out on strike, and almost all of the black cafeteria workers in Greensboro's city school system split, okay. And we were picketing in front of the board of education, of the superintendent's office. And I was standing across the street on the corner just watching, because some other staff members were really involved in it; a lady by the name of Anne Flowers was working with that. But the newspaper, right, picks me up and begins to deal with the question of [unclear] and the fact that here I am out there inciting demonstrations and such and such and such, and just a bunch of inflammatory bullshit.

So that becomes a straw—yeah, it ends up becoming the straw that breaks the camel's back, in the sense that I'm called in by Charlie and the board, and they point out point blank that that can't happen, and in fact decides to give me another job to remove me from that one, so I resign.

WC: And it's at that point you go to GAPP?

TB: Right. And from that point on, the EOC, the different county thing, just out the window.

WC: Now that cafeteria workers' strike is a year later than the A&T cafeteria workers' strike, right?

TB: Right.

WC: Because there's an A&T thing which is—yeah.

TB: Right, right.

WC: Yeah, okay. So that cafeteria workers strike that you're just talking about, the citywide school of education, board of education strike is like in 1970, right, May of 1970, something like that?

TB: Right, right.

WC: And it's after that that you resign from OEO and go to GAPP. And does Gist stay on at OEO?

TB: Yeah. What happened was we had to go to court, all right, because it was a federal—it was in a federal building where it occurred. I didn't take out any warrant; the district attorney took out the warrant against them. Okay, we go to court and his lawyer outwits the government's lawyer, and so they proved that he didn't have no gun, and, in fact, proved that he didn't do nothing. So I go up to the district attorney's office, and he says to me, "Well, I know that you did not want to put your black brother in jail."

So I said, "Uh-huh. I know what that means," so I tell him to go straight to hell. And that was it.

WC: What kinds of things was Gist doing in the OEO? What was his job?

TB: Who knows? He was supposed to be an organizer.

WC: Supposed to be under you?

TB: Right.

WC: Working under you as a—in the community organization program.

TB: Right. I never saw him except when it was time to pick up his check.

WC: The name just keeps on coming up, you know. He runs for [Greensboro] City Council at some point, and does a lot of stuff.

TB: There was obviously some support some place at some point in time. Hal Sieber was around working for the [Greensboro] Chamber [of Commerce], and he was a cunning, devious kind of person, and I don't know, but there was some connection there.

WC: With Gist and Sieber?

TB: Yeah.

WC: Now Sieber originally comes out of the North Carolina Fund.

TB: I didn't know that.

WC: You didn't know that?

TB: I really didn't. I didn't know where he came from.

WC: He comes from the North Carolina Fund to the Chamber in '66. There were—the Lord works his ways in mysterious—[laughter]

TB: Well, I'll be darned. I don't think anybody knew.

WC: Really? Yeah, it's an interesting story. So you're going to GAPP in the summer of '70, and Nelson Johnson is full-time national organizer for SOBU?

TB: Right, and getting ready to go to jail.

WC: And getting ready to go to jail, right.

TB: In fact, national chairman of SOBU.

WC: Yeah, yeah. And what's happening with GAPP at that point?

TB: Well, GAPP has no money.

WC: Right.

TB: So for two years, at least until 1972, we ran GAPP with nothing, absolutely nothing. Malcolm X Liberation University, by this time, is moving to Greensboro, so that Greensboro in effect becomes the seat of leftist power in the state, and it enjoys the support of a large field of those persons who initially developed some relationship with GAPP and some people outside of GAPP that were actually a support group for Malcolm X.

WC: Can I stop you at that point and ask you a bunch of questions which relate to that, since I'm interested really in both the long-range story of Greensboro but also movement politics as it develops during the sixties? From what you just say, I get the impression that you—well, was the established black leadership in Greensboro generally supportive of GAPP, of Malcolm X Liberation University?

TB: Yes. They represented tools that could be used to get things done that those persons could not have ordinarily done themselves, okay. And in turn—[the horse brought you the carrot?]-their payoff for that was it enhanced their credibility in the community.

WC: Right. Now was that ever—of course, that wasn't explicit, but there was a kind of a tacit of understanding that that was the kind of thing that was going on?

TB: Yes.

WC: Now who would have been part of that? Would Vance Chavis have been part of that?

TB: Yeah.

WC: George Simkins?

TB: Yeah.

WC: Cecil Bishop?

TB: Yeah.

WC: Otis Hairston?

TB: Yeah.

WC: Okay. How about Jimmy Barber?

TB: No.

WC: He was outside of that kind of thing?

TB: Going back to Chavis, you know, he wasn't really a part of it either.

WC: Okay.

TB: Mostly the ministers in the community.

WC: The [Greensboro] Citizens Association?

TB: Right.

WC: The black forum of ministers [sic—Black Ministers Forum]?

TB: Right, and some of the people in the bank.

WC: [A. S.] Webb?

TB: Webb and B. J. Battle.

WC: So the “middle-class black establishment” was, as much as it could be, identifying itself with you?

TB: Yeah.

WC: So that all those meetings, all those appearances of unity in which GAPP and SOBU and the Greensboro Citizens Association all appeared jointly, were not just a façade for the press?

TB: No, they were real.

WC: They were for real, okay. Obviously there were some tensions there. There would have to be tensions there.

TB: Yeah, yeah. And we fell out with different people at different times for different reasons. I think some of them were quite frank, though. They would say, “Okay, I can’t support this for XYZ.” We had—it was our basic intent—to again, going back to the idea of molding the black community. We began to run into problems because we’re moving into black separatism, and that is clearly our orientation. But somewhere along the line, we at GAPP take a position against white people, okay, and white involvement in our activities, and take the position basically that it is the responsibility of black people to watch and to support the development of the black community. And that we, to some extent, early on take the position against black capitalism, too, and see that as basically a negative influence in the community, primarily because capitalism in and of itself is a function of the existing society, and to that extent is not in the interest of liberation. And in effect, we were “revolutionaries”, whatever that is, so we didn’t see that. Nor did we view, by that time, the electoral process as having any real meaning, okay. But nevertheless, we would work with Dr. Simkins and all of those folks when it came time for voter registration and all of that. But later on we even stopped doing that, and that’s when we started coming into a lot of conflict with people.

WC: Did a lot of that happen over the busing program?

TB: Yes.

WC: Was that kind of a—

TB: Yeah, we took different positions on that.

WC: Was that the key question on which you would break with the black establishment?

TB: Yeah, yeah. We were opposed to it. Some elements of the establishment, quite frankly, understood it.

WC: Yeah, understood why you were opposed, and they themselves might be opposed under different circumstances.

TB: Right. They were in fact opposed, okay, but could not—

WC: Publicly—

TB: —deal with it.

WC: Yeah. Who were some of those people who were?

TB: I would imagine that B. J. and Webb would be among the people. Cecil Bishop, Reverend George Gay; they understood very clearly what was going on.

WC: Yeah, sure. But up until that time, would that have been the major question on which the split—the tension would have developed?

TB: Well, I think the split was coming before that, but that sort of brought people out. Certainly the academic community and those more affluent people were saying, “What are you all talking about? You don’t want to integrate? And you’re going against it?” And in the final analysis we ended up acquiescing to some extent in order to maintain some relationship. Well, why? They were our survival, because our base really was not strong enough to survive without them, and it became more and more apparent to us that that was the case.

WC: Yeah. One of the things—and I guess I sort of see, as I look over this period, is a generational—you know, the ‘69 Dudley and A&T situation is really a question of real

generational conflict in which young black students and non-students are fighting against many of the encrusted patterns of the older generation. And it really is almost an out and out young versus old kind of question within the black community.

TB: Well, yes and no. The truth of the matter is, Nelson and maybe most of us would be in jail today were it not for them. I think that those men and women who were involved from the established community were able to make the jump, okay, and understood very clearly at that point that it is the entire black community versus the established order, okay, because—well, otherwise we would not have survived. You know, that Dudley situation, the Herman Gist situation, the cafeteria workers, the sanitation workers, did a couple of things: one, it proved our credibility with respect to dealing with the real problems, and two, the problems that we dealt with were community problems to the extent that people could see and feel, you know, what was going on. And it was literally very little question in anybody's mind as to why those things occurred. You know, we didn't just make them up. They didn't come out of the sky. They were very real. And it was for that reason that those groups would come together, sit down, hold press conferences, and try and either organize—for example, in the case of the sanitation workers, food and ways of getting them their jobs back—because we couldn't do that by ourselves.

WC: Right. Yeah. I was going to say that I don't think that—in looking at that that initial generational thing, I don't think, from my perspective, looking at it from the outside, didn't last very long. And I think that there was a rapid kind of reconsolidation, which is interesting because it really was a question, it seems to me, of the young people redefining the parameters and then the older people accepting those new parameters as simply an extension of what they had been doing themselves all this time.

TB: All along, right. Because you know we got involved with the sanitation workers, the cafeteria workers, and the blind workers at Industries of the Blind, and the major rent strike that went on in Greensboro.

WC: AAA [Realty]?

TB: Yeah, Triple A. And that was a lot happened in that strike, a lot of concessions were won, and it could not have been done had there not have been a strong relationship between the so-called activist community and the established community, black community. And, you know, we always had to sit down and lay out to them what was going on, why we were doing it, and basically went to them for support, okay. But as a general rule—

[End of Interview]