

CIVIL RIGHTS GREENSBORO DIGITAL ARCHIVE PROJECT

William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: John and Betsy Taylor

INTERVIEWER: William H. Chafe

DATE: July 7, 1973

WILLIAM CHAFE: When were—you've been in Greensboro all of your lives?

JOHN TAYLOR: I'm a Chinaman. I was born and raised in China. My folks were missionaries over there. Betsy was born and raised here. This is her hometown.

WC: And you—how long have you lived here?

JT: Since the war.

Betsy Taylor: You want to know how old I am? [laughter] He says I'm born and raised here, and immediately you ask how long have I been here. I'm not going to say.

WC: I meant the two of you together.

JT: We've been here since '46.

BT: I was here through college. I graduated from UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro]. And then we were away for about ten years and then we came back over here.

WC: As someone who grew up in Greensboro, how would you characterize the general attitude of politics of the city toward the issue of race in those earlier years?

BT: Oh, I think we were a typical southern city. As far as politics is concerned, it was very definitely a segregated community. I think that there are several things that I remember that might be of interest to you. One of them dates back to 1933 when a group came to UNCG—which was then NCCW [North Carolina College for Women], before it became WC-UNC [Woman's College of the University of North Carolina]—it was an interracial group connected with a missionary movement, and it was supposed to meet at the Church

of the Covenant. When the group appeared, there were two blacks in the group, and they were not allowed in the church and not allowed to be served. And we lived in the neighborhood, and took them in and they ate at our house and stayed at our house. That was the beginning of an interracial experience, as far as I was concerned.

JT: Had [unclear] with your family, your mother, and father?

BT: That was my first experience, I think, of meeting blacks in the home. But it was not a forced thing; it was a case of needing to be done. And we, a southern family, there was never a minute's hesitation. I've been reminded of that several times since by people who thought it was remarkable, but actually, at the time, I can't remember thinking it was very remarkable at all.

WC: And there were no comment made by your neighbors or anything like that?

BT: Not that I remember, no. But it was interesting that even then, which was—the churches were not allowing any blacks to participate in anything. It was very unexpected that these two black students showed up.

The next thing I can remember—this was before John really became too involved—it was the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] participation in racial affairs. I think if you're going to do an accurate history of what happened in the Greensboro, the YWCA really would be one of the prime organizations, particularly back in the forties when nobody was doing anything. They were serving interracial meals, they were having interracial meetings, the board became interracial and lost several of its prominent board members in the process.

WC: Was there a moving spirit in that enterprise?

BT: Our executive director then was Mary Frances Lacy, who felt very strongly that all people were important and there should be no discrimination. But she found ready response from a good many members of the board. Mrs. Leon Ellis[?] might be a person you'd want to get in touch with. She's been out of everything for years, but she was prime mover in that period about in nineteen—now these dates are wrong—but approximately 1946 or maybe '45. The YWCA put an ad in the paper for a secretary-receptionist, and a black woman answered and was by far the best qualified of a number of applicants that they got, and she was employed. And the roof was nearly blown off the Y. We were threatened by the head of the Community [Unity] Fund with expulsion. Several of the board members resigned. I can remember meeting after meeting that we had. Letters to the editor. I could name the names of some of the prominent people in Greensboro who resisted. [phone rings]

WC: If you could, I would appreciate that if you could. I don't want to pressure you to do so. If it's not—

[recording paused]

WC: If you felt free to mention some of those names of people who were very upset about that hiring, it would—

BT: McDaniel Lewis, who is a stock broker here, was one of our most avid opponents, very vocal with letters to the editor, threats to the YWCA, to see that we got what was coming to us. Even Bill Preyer, Richardson's Preyer's father, who was then president of the United Fund [now United Way of Greater Greensboro], was very critical of what we were doing. He thought this was—in a gentle way, but he came and talked to me, for an example, begged me to see what we were doing to the United Fund and how we were alienating people and that we had made our point and we'd kept the woman for a few weeks. But we were adamant and we did not let her go. And the president of the Y resigned and nobody else would take it. And I had been president before, and did take it again under pressure. I had a new house and a baby and the presidency Y all in one year. We got calls that time that were pretty awful. We finally had to have our telephone—we learned how to disconnect it so it wouldn't ring. This was pretty traumatic. But we kept the woman, and she stayed with us for maybe eight months, and then the president of [North Carolina] A&T College offered her a job as his secretary at about double the salary we were able to pay. And it was with real reluctance that she went and that we let her go, but this was why she did go.

WC: Was there a lot of tension—I assume there was—within the Y, at that time? In other words, there was an internal division as to whether to keep this woman or not, I suppose.

BT: Some, but not as much as you'd expect. There was a real commitment at that time. Our board was interracial, the only interracial board in Greensboro that I know of. I'm sure at that time we were the only interracial. We were the only place in town where interracial groups could be served meals.

WC: Do you remember who was on the board at that time?

BT: Oh, that we could find out very easily. In fact, I could get it for you.

WC: The YWCA minutes would have that, yeah.

BT: Yes.

WC: Now this was the late forties or right after the war?

BT: Another thing happened, then I'll stop talking. The YWCA at that time passed a resolution, which was a new thing for its day, saying that the Greensboro Community Council, which called itself a council representing Greensboro, should become interracial or the YWCA would withdraw from it because it was not a representative group of the entire community. And their report was—it has always been a luncheon meeting, and they couldn't possibly have blacks on it and serve a meal. And the YWCA called its bluff by saying that we would be glad to serve the group, and this was how the Community Council became interracial.

WC: And they often went to the YWCA for lunch.

BT: They did it for years. It was the only place that blacks could eat.

WC: Do you recall what impression either of you had at that time of the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] in terms of its strength, its impact on the community?

BT: Well, we both knew George Simkins well. I felt that he was—[unclear].

JT: As I remember, we didn't have too much contact with the NAACP back then. George Simkins had been the president for as long as we've been here. And there have been times when people thought he was an "Uncle Tom" and wasn't pushing hard enough, and that he had it made so he didn't have to stick his neck out. The younger radicals felt that. This was later on. Back in the late forties I don't remember any particular contact with the NAACP.

WC: Mr. [Edwin] Edmonds was the head of it before Dr. Simkins.

BT: I don't even know.

WC: Back in the thirties, do you have any recollection at all of a Garvey group?

BT: Garvey?

WC: Marcus Garvey group?

BT: No, now I graduated from college in '37 and did not come back again until '44, so that may have been the period when I was away.

WC: I'm just—I've heard this from one source, and I'm just trying to see if there's any corroborating information on this and I just thought I'd raise that.

So you were very actively involved in the YWCA in the late forties and the YWCA was really the cutting edge of white and black, I suppose, interracial activities?

BT: Don't you think it was, John?

JT: Oh, I think it was no question about that in this community.

BT: I think it was the pioneer.

JT: You see, when Betsy left college she went to work for the Y as a professional, and then when we came back here to live, she became very active in the Y and served on committees in Greensboro and became its president for one term, too.

WC: What was your feeling about the effectiveness of the Y and its activities? I mean, how did you—were you optimistic, frustrated, either of you?

BT: I was very optimistic. We went ahead and plunged ahead and did things that nobody believed could be possible. We were young and stubborn and bull-headed and we did it. Now when the board became interracial—in the beginning when I came back to Greensboro, the board was all white except that the chairman of the black branch was invited after lunch to come in and sit down at the meeting. Well, immediately when I came back, and this coincided with Mary Frances Lacy's appointment and Polly Ellis' real commitment, and commitment of the part of some other whites in the community that it was high time that we began to do something. We said the board must really not be tokenly representative of the black branch. Incidentally, the YWCA now is one association with no branches. It's completely integrated, but at that time, there was a black branch and a white branch. We said unless it became an integrated board with integrated committees, we did not care to continue to work with it, which was a threat, and several of the board members resigned. Mrs. Howard Holderness [Adelaide], for example, whose husband was president of Jefferson Standard [Life Insurance Company] and one of the power structure, resigned with a great deal of reservation.

JT: That's a very conservative family.

WC: Yes, I've gathered that.

BT: And there were others equally influential in the community, who meant a great deal to the YWCA as far as prestige and financial support were concerned, who also resigned at that time. But there was a great deal of support, too. And at that time the board became completely interracial. And since that time, we have had a black president, black officers. And we began to meet alternately at one building and then at the other. And believe it or not—you're too young to remember—this was really something. I can remember the first night I went to the black branch of the YWCA to a meeting. To me it was something that we ought to do and that we must do and I had no hesitation, but I still remember it. But we plowed right ahead, and every time we thought of something we ought to do, we just went ahead and did it. And as I look back at it now, it was really quite amazing, I think, what we did accomplish.

WC: What were some of the programs which you—some of the objectives that you sought to achieve?

BT: I think the main objective at that time was to get to know each other. We did not know each other. And we found real leadership in the black group, and I think it was the first time the black group had known the white group in a parallel sort of way. And there were some real close friendships made. Helen Wright for example, her husband was head of ROTC [Reserve Officers Training Corps] at A&T, she became one of our close friends. We had dinner at their home, and they came to our home. They've since moved to Massachusetts by the way, and our Harvard boy has seen them. It was a very close friendship which did not—I mean this type of thing, I think, was new during those days. But we sort of went full steam ahead.

JT: He may not have been—for the record, he may not have been head of ROTC, but he was connected with ROTC at the college.

WC: Who were some of the other black people that were very active at that time on the board or in this interracial group?

BT: I could get those names for you. You're asking me on the spur of the moment. I can tell you Mrs. Barnes, Dr—what's Dr. Barnes' first name [Milton H.]? He's a dentist; Milton Barnes [Jr.] is his son. Mrs. Barnes was very active. Mrs. [Angeline?] Smith, whose husband was the administrator at [L.] Richardson [Memorial] Hospital; he's just retiring this week, I think—was chairman of the board. Mrs. Walter Hughes, whose husband was a doctor here, was very active. Margaret Headen, whose husband is at A&T. We had a pretty good cross section, too, not only of the power structure of the black community,

but we had domestics represented. I could give you—if I just had a minute to sit down with a pencil, I could give you a list of twelve to fourteen names.

WC: Great, at some point I would love for you to do that, if you could. There was, I guess—you had one campaign to eliminate the segregated drinking fountains in the department stores and government buildings. That came out of the Y, didn't it, initially?

BT: You know, all of this is so long ago. And it's funny, we don't talk about it anymore or even really think about it particularly. So I would have to sit down and sort of pick my brain, unless John remembers.

JT: I remember it was an issue. I think the Y was involved. I don't remember.

WC: Were there other things like political campaigns that you got involved in at all? For example, when Dr. [William] Hampton was running for City Council, did your group do anything?

BT: I can't remember that we did anything specific. Of course, we were all for it. Do you remember, John?

JT: No.

BT: I think you ought to tell him about your Community Council [sic, Fellowship] that got started just shortly after then.

JT: He knows about that.

WC: I'd like to know more about it. I'm sort of being a little chronological here but—

JT: Right, right.

BT: I cannot remember that the YWCA went out really and campaigned. Now they may have. I can't remember that they didn't.

JT: Didn't they do something about toilet facilities downtown? You remember anything about that?

BT: I honestly cannot remember. I remember when that was done, but I can't remember what group we were working with then.

WC: What year was the [Greensboro] Community Fellowship started?

JT: This is where I can't help you. You could go back into the minutes, probably.

WC: Right.

JT: It's not very active now, I don't think. There hasn't been a meeting in a good while. I don't even know who is the president now. But there are minutes somewhere, and rather than trust the memory, that would be something you could delve back into. George—Dr. George Evans, Cleo McCoy, myself, and Dr. Ashby, Warren Ashby, were sort of the originators of that thing. We got the thing going.

And at that time, we were pretty active in calling on people in town, working with the [Greensboro] Chamber of Commerce, trying to get restaurants opened up. That was our specific goal at one time. Didn't we run a full page ad, which you can probably find in the newspaper. Warren was very active. And we sort of split the city up and called on different people trying to get commitments.

WC: Didn't this more or less coincide with the sit-in movement?

JT: Yeah. Yeah, a little after the sit-in movement.

WC: Yeah, I think it was '63. What if any relationship do you see between the creation of the Community Fellowship and the early history of desegregation in Greensboro?

JT: The Community Fellowship was a direct outgrowth and feeling of some black and whites that we ought to create more dialogue, and that by operating together in an integrated group that—

[Recording paused]

[Interview interrupted—Sounds of children playing]

JT: That particular period the calls weren't bad and it didn't bother us much. We just kept right on going and it was sort of accepted. I did it, I had a commitment, but it wasn't a big deal. We did it and we were way ahead of everybody else and nothing bad happened. It wasn't used much, but if they did come in [to the Holiday Inn owned by the Taylors], why, we served them, so that was all there was to it.

WC: This was the dining room as well as—

JT: The dining room as well as the motel. We later on changed the all-black motel. We closed it down and reopened it under the name of [Kitt?] Court. And it was an integrated facility, black or whites, but it tended to go black because it was right next to A&T College. Subsequently, I sold the property to A&T. But for a while there, several years, outside of the Y, we were probably the only place in this whole part of the South where blacks and whites could sit down and eat together.

WC: You talked about the power structure awhile back, and I wonder what your feeling was about, well, first of all, who the power structure might be, and then what attitude you felt they had toward your activities or to any push for change. I guess I'm asking two questions at the same time. Who would you identify, say, as the power structure in Greensboro?

JT: The power structure would be your money people. There would be some of the people in politics or your business executives. We mentioned the Holdernesses, that type, the head of Jefferson Standard, the head of Cone Mills. I think Cones have been fairly—they've opened up. You know how they stood back in those days on integration?

BT: I always remember Caesar Cone in the Y meetings.

WC: Was he not supportive at that time?

BT: They were very philanthropic and were glad to give to the blacks, but they were segregated facilities. He gave a YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association] to the black community and wanted it used by men and women, and the Y, with its integrated policy, could not go along with its completely segregationist policy, which it has been up to the last three or four years. I mean the YMCA was, in my opinion, one of the last strong holds of segregation. And we had a real blow-up about that. I think the Cones have not been—they've been very generous with their money, and very generous to the black community, but I don't think their ideas of integration are very—

JT: I think our chamber of commerce has been a liberal organization.

BT: Well, now that's sort of Johnny-come-lately, too.

JT: That might be. In fact, back during the sit-ins, the chamber held some meetings—of course there was still a predominate liberal force in the—I mean conservative force in the community. And you ask the question, "What do other people think of us?" I don't know. I think we were considered as liberals and radicals, probably.

BT: We're not the kind that kid that much.

JT: I had to be careful. I got to the point where I was sort of—if I was for something, it was sort of the kiss of death idea, you know, because I was the radical, we were the radicals. In fact, when things got into place, I sort of made a point to not to have my name necessarily associated with it, because it helped, it wouldn't help it because I was so far out.

I was raised in China with Chinese, blacks, whites, and my folks were very liberal. And there was never—and that's the way we raised our kids—there was just never any—it didn't matter whether their skin was black, yellow, white, whatever it was.

[Redacted conversation with guests]

BT: I'll give you to two things, while I'm thinking of them, that might be interesting to follow up on. One of them was when the Greensboro Community Fellowship was doing this ad in the paper saying that the Supreme Court has said that all facilities should be open. "We need the support of the community. If you support it, will you sign this—" what was it? Sort of a—

JT: Coupon.

BT: Coupon, yeah. "Send it back and we will print your name." Well, we got good response. And two other groups I think we ought to mention right now are the Bahá'ís. Are you familiar with the Bahá'ís? It's a religious group.

WC: The religious organization, yeah.

BT: Yes, they were an interracial group who met out here for picnics, interracially—I think almost as soon as we got here, wasn't it—in the early forties. They were interracial almost before anybody. It's a very small group, but I think they wielded some influence. And the other was the Unitarian [Universalist] Church. Those were the two religious groups that we got support from. Well, this particular time we decided it would be good to go around to the various churches and see if these coupons could be placed in the vestibule after the service. This was not saying "we favor segregation" but we—

JT: Not the coupons, baby, but a petition, a statement for them to sign.

BT: But it was the same statement that the coupons had. It did not say that we favor segregation or anything but, "We will obey the law of the land and we will support

restaurants who do obey the law of the land.” We thought it was very innocuous, and the resistance we got from that—Warren could tell you about, too—was amazing.

WC: From the ministers or the church people themselves?

BT: Well, the ministers, too. We got no support, practically.

JT: The First Presbyterian Church that we belonged to, I requested permission to pass these things out at the end of a church service. The session would not allow it.

WC: So the session would not allow it.

BT: Not only that, they told him if he ever brought another request like that, not to bring it directly to the session, but to have it cleared first, because this was not the type thing the session ought even to discuss.

JT: But Dr. Redhead, [John A.] Jack Redhead, was a well-known pastor of the First Presbyterian Church. We had quite an interesting experience with him over the years. And he was very, very slow in coming around, and he excused himself by saying, “You know I came from Mississippi and this is the way I was raised on a plantation,” and all this stuff. And so he was for the—I don’t know what the word I want is—but as far as the church was concerned, it was an evangelism and—

BT: Spirituality.

JT: Spirituality is the word I want, spirituality. But as far as any social action, that was not it. It took him many years. He was way Johnny-come-lately to finally—and I think he agonized over it—to come around to where there was more just spirituality, that the church had a social function. And we were real disturbed over the years that the church, that our church, the Presbyterian church, was sort of the last stronghold of segregation.

WC: He's not here any longer, is he?

JT: He's here, but not active. He's retired. To think about names, when we came out with the Greensboro Community Fellowship, there was a small splinter group against it. I forget what the name is, but they ran a little ad, but the group died. The name Bill Long[?]-would it be? Bill Long who was a local—I don't know whether it's that name or not—but he was a local business consultant.

BT: Still is. He writes letters to the editor all the time.

JT: He has been quite vocal from the liberal stance, and so he and I are on two opposite poles.

BT: You mean from a conservative.

JT: He's very conservative—oh, conservative I meant. I mean conservative.

WC: Right.

JT: And they tried—

BT: The other was Eugene Hood. He wrote an awful lot of letters to the editor.

JT: They tried to start a little something to counteract the Greensboro Community Fellowship's push for obeying the law and trying to get some force behind it. [phone rings]

BT: You better turn it off again. I'm sorry about this. This is [unclear]

WC: It's okay.

BT: The other thing I was going to tell you, and then I'll stop this, was another little thing that happened with the Greensboro Community Fellowship. When the schools were integrated, before the first year, the Greensboro Community Fellowship said, "These children ought to get to know each other." Black children and white children literally had never had any contact. I think that there was much more spirit of goodwill than anybody even dreamed, but there had been no opportunity. So the Greensboro Community Fellowship said, "Let's get the children, the black children who are going to the white schools," which is what happened that first year, "together with the leadership from those white schools together for a recreational get-together." We said, "They can certainly come to Lakewood."

And so we invited the principals—I say we, this is the Community Fellowship—and the counselors, the officers of the student body, and the black children who were going into the white schools. The turnout was amazing. Word got around; we got an awful lot of calls—this was another time we had to take our phone off the hook—from people who had heard what was going to happen. And for blacks and whites to go swimming then had just never been done. But the principals came, the counselors came, and the children and their parents came. We asked for the student government officers

and their parents and the black children and their parents to come, and the turnout was very good.

But one interesting little thing happened. The phone rang one day and one of our boys answered the phone and they said, "Is this the place that's going to have that picnic?"

And he said, "Yes, it is,"

"Well, let me speak to your mother."

So Rick, I think it was, answered the phone. He said, "Mother, it's another one of those calls."

So I answered the phone and I said— he said, "Are you having that picnic? Are you going to have that picnic out there?"

And I said, "Yes, we are."

And he said, "Well, my daughter goes to Page High School and she doesn't know any of those blacks and it's time she did. Could we come?"

WC: Wow.

BT: And he did come and he was from the White Oak Community. Actually, he was a minister of one of the evangelical churches. His voice didn't sound like a—but we asked him to ask the blessing, and he came with his daughter. So it wasn't all negative. Every now and then something like that happened that was interesting.

WC: This particular episode was in the early sixties, wasn't it, '60-'61?

BT: Right after the 1954 [*Brown v. Board of Education*] decision.

WC: No.

BT: Okay, my—

WC: Because Greensboro took three years—

BT: Well, whenever the first group—

WC: They were all junior high—they were all Gillespie [Park Elementary] students. They weren't—in other words the—

BT: Well, this was the first year that they were going into various schools. We had Page and Aycock—

WC: Yes. Up to that point, you see, until '62, Gillespie was the only desegregated school. So the first time it went beyond that is—because Page didn't really exist until after—Page, I think, was built as a high school after everyone went to Senior High [now Grimsley High School] or Dudley [High School].

BT: We're terrible about dates. I think if we sat down and really thought back we could remember.

WC: But that's very interesting, that that took place when it did and that there was that kind of response from that individual. Do you recall when—of course, when the Supreme Court's decision came down, Dr. Benjamin Smith was head of the school board and Mr. Ed Hudgins was superintendent of the schools. Do you recall having any feelings about the intentions of those people? What kind of trust or confidence you might have had in their leadership?

JT: Who was Ben Smith? He wasn't—?

BT: We were very concerned about them as individuals during that time. Terrifically sympathetic, I think, and several times we wrote letters to them supporting them. We got it from both sides, because we got the criticism of the group with which we were most actively associated, I guess, who were very critical of the slowness of it, but also, I think, we could identify with a man in a leadership position who was getting kind of flack from conservative community that we knew he was. I don't think we ever felt any bitterness. I think we were critical sometimes when we thought they should have moved faster. I thought Ben Smith was a man of goodwill whose tradition had been very conservative, but he saw he had a job to do, and he probably moved slower than we wished he would. But I remember several times writing him a note saying, "Thank you for taking this step." We were not avidly critical as many of our friends were. That right, John?

JT: I think so.

WC: Of course, he retired and died very shortly after the first—

JT: Right.

WC: —desegregation took place. And then do you think there was a change of attitude toward subsequent administrations, a more critical attitude on the part of yourselves and your friends?

JT: You mean critical of the school board?

WC: Yeah.

JT: You mean Phil Weaver and—?

WC: Yeah.

BT: We're sort of funny. We don't get uptight. I think maybe it's because we're southerners. We see what they are up against. It's not the way we would do it. I think we were more critical of Phil Weaver maybe because he was younger and we thought he should move faster and been a little more—

JT: We attended a couple of school board meetings—I don't know when it was—and were trying to follow what was going on, and we had Greensboro Community Fellowship people attend. But I have no—

BT: We just feel like if they move at all, we're still in there, just keep—

WC: Right.

BT: I think we were more critical of Phil Weaver than we were of Ben Smith, but were never up that tight about it.

WC: Yeah. Were you at all active in the first sit-ins in 1960 when the four A&T boys went down to Woolworth's?

BT: Well, I might have been, but I wasn't. I was in New York when it happened. And McNeill Smith called me in New York and said—it was a terrific snowstorm in New York at that time—he said, “Will you go over to Woolworth's, as a native of Greensboro who has lived there all your life, and say to Woolworth's ‘this is something that the community would not blow up about and that it needs to be done’?” And I went over there and sat in the anteroom, trying to talk to the president of Woolworth's and never got anywhere. And I went back again the next day. I remember the snowstorm because it was hard as the dickens to get there. So nothing ever happened. But other than that we didn't [unclear].

WC: Was he playing an important role behind the scenes?

JT: McNeill?

WC: Yes.

JT: Not any more than some of the other natives. I think Smith has always been a liberal, been sort of an oddball character, but back in those days he said he couldn't run for dogcatcher—this was before he went into politics—because he thought he was so liberal there wouldn't be anyone to back him. He'd be one of the people that if you haven't talked to, you should go talk to.

WC: I've talked to his wife. He's been so busy in the legislature I haven't been able to get to him, but I do intend to. That first sit-in, of course, was resolved after a period of time and didn't really extend beyond the five-and-tens.

JT: True, true.

WC: Did you think that there would be further progress, naturally, at that point? Did the liberal community, you think, believe that once that had been broken down that other things would happen?

JT: Well, we hoped so, but see this was—we take all these things for granted now, but that was a terrific change. See all of a sudden just one day blacks sat down and they were served. So there was lots of opposition to it and nowhere near the acceptance that we hoped or felt that there ought to be. The Greensboro Community Fellowship divided up and went around and called and talked to people. And, boy, they were just flat turned down. They said they just couldn't afford to do it. Boyd Morris, who was the mayor and ran the Mayfair Cafeteria, stood right at the door and said, "Over my dead—

BT: Most dramatic [unclear]

JT: He said, "You cannot come in." And he was an elder at the Presbyterian church, and so was I. I went up to see him several times and tried to get him persuaded, but he was adamant. He just actually wouldn't do it. It's sort of hard to go back and think about those days, because everything is so easy and wide open now.

BT: I think the thing that may have affected us the most was the picketing at S&W [Cafeteria] which went on for quite awhile. That was a very definite demonstration on the part of people, and John was going to march in that, and they asked him not to. They said, "Once you do that"—the blacks said no—"we've lost what contact we have through you to Boyd Morris and some of the others." But I think we had a terrific feeling during that time that we should be down there, but we weren't.

WC: That's interesting that that was the perception that they had. In other words—

BT: Otis Hairston, he's the one who—he's the one that [unclear]. He's the one that said that to John, I remember very clearly.

WC: Now these were the seconds sit-ins in '63, I think.

JT: Probably.

BT: This was the S&W.

WC: Yeah, the S&W. And the theater was involved there, too, wasn't it? There was the question of integrating the theaters.

JT: Right, and the bowling alleys. There were several recreational facilities that we were trying to open up then. We had several meetings that the chamber of commerce would probably has some good records about.

BT: You know it's funny how you can erase that really. That was the most important part of our lives, and you just don't want to think about it. I can remember standing in a checkout line in the supermarket and feeling very conspicuous, and probably nobody knew who I was and cared less. But I was just wondering, you know, who's going to—

JT: [unclear]

BT: I just remember that as a reflection of mine, being with people I didn't know and wondering how many of them did know, and who was going to say something, if I could get through without an encounter. You know you never think about it anymore.

WC: Did you go hear Dr. [Martin Luther] King when he came to Greensboro to speak?

JT: No.

BT: I don't know why we didn't. We must not have been here. I don't even remember that he was here.

WC: It was—I think it was in '63, and they wouldn't let him speak anywhere. He finally spoke at Bennett College in the Bennett College chapel. And there was a big problem about letting him speak, something like that.

There were a number of groups active in the black community. The [Greensboro] Citizens Association, Men's Club, the NAACP. Did you have—do you recall having

dealings with one of these more than any others, or were they all interchangeable as far as you remember?

JT: I think we had more of a kind of individual, rather than somebody representing a group, because the liberals from the black community belonged to these various groups. What was the name of the group that Ben Smith belonged to that was sort of before the—was that before the North Carolina Council of Human Relations[?] What was the group that Dr. Barnes used to talk about? It was Southern something. It was before the North Carolina Council of Human Relations.

WC: There's an interracial commission.

BT: John was chairman of the State Interracial [unclear].

JT: The North Carolina Council of Human Relations was active back in—maybe not quite that early. But it included other members of the Community Fellowship Committee and people of like-mind on a state basis. [Bill Aldridge? Bill Aldridge was a detective out here for a while?] No, I don't remember.

WC: Yeah.

BT: Another thing that happened interracially here that you may not have heard about was the impact of the Poor People's March.

WC: No, I haven't heard about that.

BT: When the Poor People's March—

[Tape interrupted]

BT: —some of the black women I met there, I had never met before. And I see now and we have rapport, but it was the first time for a lot of black women they'd ever seen white women with their sleeves rolled up really doing manual labor. We were scrubbing and cleaning and cooking and serving, and it was a tremendous experience for some of us to have met with an interracial group in this kind of capacity.

[Unclear]

WC: Did you notice in your personal relationships with the blacks that you had frequent contact with, did you notice any changes? That's a hard question to ask, maybe an even harder question to answer, because there's no kind of direct, probably, experience. I'm

just wondering whether you can recall having noticed a shift in attitude of their willingness to sort of be expressive of one's feeling as opposed to playing a role.

JT: I think it was definite progression and change. It started off by being very formal with these people. You called him Dr. Barnes because—then it got to the place where, “Look, John,” or, “Look, Mr. Taylor. We're good friends, and you call your good friends by their first names. Why don't you call me by my first name?” You were sort of on pins and needles, and you didn't want to be familiar because everybody called him George or Frank or Harry or whatever it was, so you called him by—if he was a doctor, you called him a doctor. Here's a guy you have known over the years and you still called him doctor. You get my point?

WC: Yes.

JT: So then you get, “Call me John.” “Call me George, and I'll call you John.” So you got to that stage; that was a step. Then I think there was another change later on where the blacks wanted to do their own thing and they didn't want you connected with it at all. They didn't want your help. It was a question about these white liberals, you know, whether they resented them, resented us, or what, but I got the feeling towards the latter stages of this thing that they had to go through a period of doing it on their own without any outside help. This was part of the backlash or part of the regular process of development, the way everything has to go. This was just one of the natural elements that has to take place before things can sort of settle down to a naturalness again.

BT: I think we almost got to the point where we felt a definite antagonism from some of the young militants. I mean almost as if they hated us. We were very aware of this.

WC: Have you had much contact with people like that?

JT: Yeah. This may be off the subject, but this really shook me up. We own some apartments here in town and they were predominately black in this one location. They singled me out, and I think it was because I was the liberal one. But Nelson Johnson and—what was the other guy's name?

BT: Ferguson.

JT: Ferguson, a guy named Ferguson. They were both students at A&T.

BT: Horace Ferguson.

JT: Horace Ferguson. And they wanted to rewrite the rental agreement. They were going to call rent strikes and they were going to organize and all this stuff. Through that particular period I went through a pretty rough time personally. I had calls at night saying they were going to kill me and all this kind of stuff. I met with them—one white person and these militant blacks—and we went over word by word the rental agreements to redraw the contract. They were feeling their oats back in those days. Here I was the most liberal one, I thought, but then I was subjected to this—

[Redacted conversation with guest]

JT: But I'll never forget and subsequently I sold the place because I felt life is just too short. I wasn't going to be harassed the rest of my life and be subjected to this. But that was the latter stages of where they had to do their thing. I think they resented—even though we had been fairly outspoken and part of the leadership in the liberal movement, they got to the point where I think they resented us.

BT: This is not true of the friends we made during that period. We still have very close black friends. This is the young group who did not know us until then, and I think resented us terrifically, and we understood this. I think I would have reacted the same way if I had been them, but it didn't make it any easier.

WC: Reverend Hairston had told me of this incident, and he clearly feels very bad about that particular episode and feels that you were wronged at that time.

JT: I don't know what the dynamics were behind it. I think I was picked out because I was the liberal and they figured they wouldn't pick out the hard guys like, AAA Realty or some of the others that were outspoken in being harsh. Here I was trying to run an integrated ship. I was trying to run a few things like anybody else, and they jumped on me with four feet. I resented it, but I can see why they did it, I think.

WC: It would seem that there has been a generation gap which was across racial lines as well as along racial lines. But there is a great difference between clearly someone like Howard Fuller and Vance Chavis. I'm not sure Howard Fuller [aka Owusu Sadauki]—he's not using that name here with the Malcolm X [Liberation] University.

JT: Right.

[discussion of time]

WC: Do you find that there is a difference also in the white community along generational lines? That is to say, the children of not so much yourselves, but the children of other people who have previously been very hostile towards racial progress, did they have a different attitude?

JT: If you have to make a generalization, I would say yes, but that would be a hard thing to prove because you're trying to make a—percentagewise, and you're talking about 52 percent, 60 percent. My snap judgment would be its naturally—I think that as a rule, the kids are more liberal than their parents. Would you say that?

BT: Yeah, and I think what has happened in the last ten or fifteen years is the fact of integrating the schools, giving the children the opportunity to know other children. This is new. But I think there are also some reactionary kids in the younger generation, which is the most depressing thing I know.

WC: Yeah, yeah. What role do you think A&T has played during all these years? Has it been at the center of things, you think, or more on the edge of things? You know some people at A&T—

JT: Here again, I would say I think of individuals rather than institutions, because the individuals who do things aren't institutions. It may be individuals from institutions. Cleo McCoy at A&T, Joe Shaw—there's another person that impacted it at A&T. Who else could you think of?

BT: I can think of the wives of some of the people at A&T, but not many of the men.

JT: Now the presidents, Dr. [Lewis] Dowdy and some of the others, I can't think of them as being—maybe I just didn't have any personal contact with them. I mean I knew them and they knew me. But it was individuals, certain individuals who took a—see, a lot of those people didn't have contacts across. These blacks that came across, they took me the first or we made the first major contacts through the Greensboro Community Fellowship or through the Y. Betsy got to meet certain wives. But as an institution, I wouldn't say A&T has taken a leading role at all.

WC: The same thing would be true of UNCG, that there too, individuals would be the exception of the institution itself.

JT: Right.

WC: Warren Ashby and Dick Bardolph, were there other people who were particularly active over at UNCG?

BT: I can't think of anybody.

JT: No, I can't. No, Warren was outstanding. He stood out. He used to be very active. He spent hours at the sit-ins and working.

BT: Warren would be invaluable.

WC: Yes. He probably would know who would have the minutes of the Greensboro Community Fellowship.

JT: I tell you, the last—Joe Shaw might. That might be interesting to go back and check on some dates and things.

BT: Another person you might talk to, whose name you may not have gotten is Mary Taft Smith. Have you talked to her?

WC: No.

JT: Yes, she would be good.

BT: She is an older woman, probably in her eighties, whose husband was the head of the department of religion at Greensboro College. He's never been very active, but she's been active in liberal, particularly in interracial movements for years.

WC: Mary Taft Smith?

BT: Her father was Loreda Smith the sculptor—I mean it was Loreda Taft. And she would be very helpful to you. She lives on [Hobbs?] Road. And her husband is Dr. Raymond Smith.

WC: Yes, now he was on the school board for a while.

BT: Yeah, but he never has been very outspoken. He's a good man but a little quiet.

WC: Yes, I definitely would like to talk to her. Does the name Sarah Mendenhall Brown—

BT: Oh, yeah. She was YWCA.

WC: She was YWCA as well as vice chairman of the school board.

BT: And I think her racial attitudes really were nurtured in the YWCA. She went on to the school board after that. I think she would be a very good person to talk to.

WC: Do you know where she lives? I can't get her phone number.

BT: Yes, she lives on Dover Road.

WC: Where?

BT: It's Mrs. David M. Brown on Dover Road.

WC: Dover Road, David M. Brown. Because I've been trying to get her number and I haven't been able to get it. That gives me the clue I needed. [chuckles]

BT: She would be very helpful.

WC: Yes, yes. Well, that's very good. As far as the churches are concerned, you've already indicated that there was a lot of resistance in the churches. Were there any churches which were out front?

BT: Yeah.

JT: [unclear].

WC: West Market [Street]?

BT: The Presbyterian Church of the Cross on Phillips Avenue has done interracial things, and that's a funny little church you really ought to know about. It's a church made up of firemen and filling station operators and the working group of people who moved on Phillips Avenue before that area began to integrate. And instead of running, which every other church I know about has, they've stayed there. And this type of person—

JT: What's the name of the church on South Greensboro? McCann?

BT: Yeah, Jerry McCann's church [St. Paul Presbyterian Church].

JT: Jerry McCann is somebody that you ought to—he's the minister of a little church down in south Greensboro, Presbyterian Church.

BT: There's a Baptist church on the High Point Road that really has done things. John and I visited them there, very evangelical and really turned us off theologically.

JT: With black foreign students.

BT: But blacks all over the place.

JT: Most unusual for a Baptist church, too. Most unusual Baptist church, this particular one.

BT: They worked with Indians, too.

JT: But by and large the churches, I think you could say, were the last stronghold of segregation. But there were these few that I can think of. First Presbyterian Church was one of the last.

BT: The West Market Street Methodist has had people in it like Mrs. Kay Troxler, who's Mrs. [unclear] Troxler, who have been very good. But the church as a unit, I feel, had not. That may be over critical.

JT: In the Presbyterian Church there was the—Fellowship—what was—the Concerned—

BT: The Fellowship of the Concerned.

JT: The Fellowship of the Concerned which was a southern group. It was the liberal wing of the Southern Presbyterian Church, and it didn't do much. It was another liberal group that contrasted with Concerned Presbyterian—this was the Fellowship of the Concerned. They rather unfortunately had the same name. But the Concerned Presbyterians have gone ahead and are in the process of being split off, and it's because of conservative views on integration, I think. The First Church's now stated policy is to accept anybody, but there hasn't been the first black to be accepted by the session. Joe Ford[?], I mentioned, was assistant pastor of the First Church. He was liberal. And he worked under Jack Redhead and felt the pressure. He wanted to be a lot more liberal, the church to take a much more liberal stand than it did. But he was held back by Jack Redhead.

WC: Right, right. I know the experience. [laughs] I was once an assistance minister in a church myself.

BT: Joe is now a minister to students at UNCG. If you want to follow up on the churches, he would be a good one to contact.

WC: Yes. That's good.

BT: I think the Bahá'ís and the Unitarians do that almost without exception of who needs support. You can call either one of those two groups. They're both small groups, but they were willing to stick their necks way out anytime.

JT: There was a guy named—was it Johns? What was that guy's name?

WC: Ralph Johns?

JT: Ralph Johns. I think he's out in California now. He was a real oddball. He was very vocal and sort of had guts, but he was—he claimed he had done the whole thing single-handed by himself. I think you'll run into that name, Ralph Johns.

WC: Right, yeah. Let me just ask you one or two more questions. Do you think that Burlington Industries is perhaps the most decisive influence in Greensboro? That's a leading question, I realize.

JT: I don't know how to answer that. But Charlie Myers [I would believe was one?]. He was an elder at the First Presbyterian Church. I don't know how to answer that. It is so hard to—here again, you talk about people as a corporation; you've got the Burlington Foundation and this and that. How would you answer that, Betsy?

BT: I don't know. We don't react much to the power structure, you know. We analyze it [unclear].

JT: [unclear] We sort of never have been. Not that we're exclusive, but we don't belong to the Greensboro Country Club, we don't get into the social stuff in Greensboro. We never felt the need for it. We're sort of out here by ourselves. We raised our kids out here. We just filled social obligations, but we didn't have the political contacts and in on all the small talk round the golf tees and the country club and stuff, so we wouldn't be very good people to answer that question.

WC: Let me rephrase it better. If back in 1965 you were keenly interested in getting something accomplished, who would you think was most important to go to to get it accomplished?

BT: I don't think we would go to anybody. We would just try to do it. I can't remember.

JT: You got the city council and you got the chamber of commerce; that would be two groups. We'd certainly try to work through committees and through the chamber of commerce. We certainly wouldn't go through your churches. And I wouldn't think of going to a corporation. You might go to an individual who was a known liberal. You might work through groups like we did with the Greensboro Community Fellowship.

WC: I was just thinking in terms of—let's say the Greensboro Community Fellowship did have a program. Would they have a strategy for accomplishing that program? And as they would, would particular people have an assignment to go and talk to different key figures in the community—

JT: Oh, yeah.

WC: —try to mobilize the coalition of support?

JT: That was done on a limited basis. “Do you know So-and-so? Do you know So-and-so?” “Why, sure, I know So-and-so. I'll go and talk to him.” It wasn't necessarily a question of—it may be a member of the school board, they might be a member of the city council, but it wasn't because he was an officer from Burlington Mills or Sears Roebuck or Cone.

BT: I think we were pretty naive in that.

JT: Power structure is such a—

WC: A terrible word.

JT: It would be who runs the place, see, and who are the [king?] makers? Is it the city council? Now Cone Mills has been very active, has been very, as Betsy said, very liberal with their funds, and they've always had somebody on the city council. [Jackie Newman?] was at Cone Mills for years. Ben Cone was mayor, so they've been very active. They threw a lot of weight. Caesar threw a lot of weight, very dictatorial. If he gave money, he wanted it done this way.

Just as a sidelight, he wanted the YW and the YMCA to be one. And the YW fought it like crazy, because the YW was liberal and the YM was conservative. And they didn't want—the YW didn't want the YM to swallow them up because they had this—they felt they were following this liberal stance and doing something different in the community, and they felt that if they followed Caesar Cone's recommendation and they merged with the YM where he had been putting his money, that the YW would just lose its whole force and just disintegrate into nothing. So that's why they—

BT: We had a real lock in the horns. But it was interesting, we won. We weren't about to back down. And it was a confrontation face-to-face. I called Caesar a name to his face even, and this worked out.

JT: See, that was the power structure. People with all the money, when one of these government bond things came up, they all subscribed a million dollars. It was just fantastic. These were three and four generations of people here who were fine Jewish families. But when they were fought, they didn't always win. They were the power, because they were the people that had the money and gave the money and were all on the city council and all this.

BT: This is why I say I think we were naïve. It wasn't a case of accepting that this was the way it was going to go. If we had real commitment, if this wasn't the way we wanted it, we just fought.

WC: Just fought it, yeah. That particular episode took place in the 1950s, I think. Was there a concern about integrating the downtown pool and so a separate black Y pool was constructed?

BT: I don't think it had anything to do with integration. Do you think? I don't think it did.

JT: I don't know why Caesar wanted the two to come together. He had given the Hayes-Taylor Y a lot of money.

BT: You see, Hayes was a woman and Taylor was a man or vice versa, and his idea was that this was to serve the total community.

JT: See he didn't know anything much about the program much in my opinion. He just had an idea—I don't know why—that the two would be more effective if they were together.

BT: And actually Caesar and I are good friends now. John says every time he sees him he says, "How is Betsy?" So it ended all right. But it was just an interesting confrontation. I don't think that that had anything to do with the pool. We had that later. But we stuck by our guns. There were Cerebral Palsy children coming to the Y to swim and there were black children in the group, and there was resistance. We said this is the way it's going to be, and it turned out it was.

WC: I never confirmed that story. I just heard from someone that both Spencer Love and Caesar Cone had put in money to build this black Y—

BT: They did.

WC: —as a means of avoiding a confrontation over integrating the downtown Y.

BT: This may have been their motivation, but again, we were too naive to know, I guess.

WC: As I said, I don't know. That was an off-hand story, and I'm just trying to see if there was anything to it.

BT: And I may have forgotten. Maybe that's what it was, but I don't think so.

WC: Well, sounds very—sounds like those years were very, very exciting.

BT: They were. I'm just glad I don't have to live through them again, aren't you?

JT: Yeah.

WC: You probably recall them as somewhat the best or the most rewarding years.

BT: Nope! [laughter] I'll take what we've got now. It was interesting with our children though. I think it was a good experience for them.

WC: They were all teenagers or younger than teenagers really then?

BT: Our youngest will be a senior at Yale [University] next year, which means he's—how old is he, twenty-one?

JT: Must be.

WC: So they were—

BT: And our oldest is thirty.

WC: Now were they going to Greensboro schools at that time?

BT: Yes, they all were.

JT: Rusty was in that first class at Page. Sylvester went to Page.

BT: We had five of them in five different schools one year.

WC: Did Reed know Waldo Martin? No, Waldo went to Dudley. Waldo is a student of mine who just graduated from Duke [University], and he would have been in the same class as your son Reed. But if your son went to Page, and Waldo went to Dudley, then they wouldn't have known each other.

BT: He might at the very easily have known him.

WC: Waldo is a fine young man. He's going to go to [University of California,] Berkeley to do graduate work in history. He's told me a fair amount about Greensboro, too, which is amazing, having gone to school here all his life and lived here.

BT: That would be very helpful, and that from a young black's point of view.

WC: Yes. Right, right. John Marshall Stevenson [now Kilimanjaro], have you had any contact with him at all?

BT: We take the *Carolina Peacemaker* every week and read his "Ole Nosey" column which he writes, I understand, though he claims not to. I've known Mrs. Stevenson in the Y on committees. I've actually have not known him very well. Have you known him?

JT: No, but I know who he is.

BT: He's busy as heck.

WC: He sure is.

BT: You know, he's editor of the paper, he teaches, and he does all the drama at A&T. I don't know how on earth he has time to do anything.

WC: He's too busy. I've seen him a couple of times, and he's just been frazzled from trying to do too much. Well, I'm sure that I can think of a lot more questions. Perhaps I can think of them and come back another day when I have been more—

BT: I think a lot of that is very inaccurate as far as time is concerned. Like I said, we don't talk about it much anymore—

[End of Interview]