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William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: Ben Smith Jr.

INTERVIEWER: William Chafe

DATE: June 6, 1973

BEN SMITH: I was just taking the liberty here—as you sort of briefed me on technical facts of the time—I was just noting down what you have been doing in this area, and as ideas popped in my mind that I think might be worthwhile, I've been noting them here. As I understand this, you have pretty thoroughly exhausted every bit of information from the news media, the written reports, and so forth. I think they are basically in conjunction, particularly with the [U.S.] Supreme Court ruling and the action that the Greensboro school board took as a result of this. I think the reporting of this is reasonably accurate, as I recall at this time. Unfortunately, news reporters, even though they are accredited with being rather skilled in their ability, sometimes do not fully comprehend the events that they are reporting on. I find this true in my own work, and I'm sure you do, too, that although you are recognized as an expert in certain areas of sociological history, that sort of thing, that there are times when a person, in attempting to report this, does not really perceive the underlying facts in the case.

Perhaps maybe as an area of background, let me tell you just a bit about my father and his activity here, which of course you know from the records anyway. We moved to Greensboro in 1936 from a small but very fine community in Shelby, in western North Carolina.

WILLIAM CHAFE: You grew up with Clint Newton[?], didn't you?

BS: Yeah, I grew up with Clint.

WC: I knew Clint fairly well.

BS: Yes, Gene and J.C. as we knew them, the two boys. They lived just a city block from us. We went to school together.

I came to Greensboro after having one year of high school in Shelby. My father stepped into what he considered the finest public school position in the state of North Carolina. Not from a selfish point of view, but from the standpoint of opportunity for

service. He recognized the, dare I say, fertility of the Greensboro community as an area for service, and he was truly a dedicated man in the area of public school education. He had previously turned down far more lucrative positions. He had turned down the highest paying job in one of our larger cities of North Carolina in favor of going to an area where he might truly be of service. He had also turned down jobs in the administrative area of higher education and instruction, although he had done teaching at Duke [University] and in the summer at Appalachian [State University], when his work was only during the school year. But he elected to come to Greensboro, as I recall, primarily because he thought it to be the finest place where he could serve. To my knowledge, if my father ever had an ulterior motive in his life, I never knew of it. He was a truly dedicated and I think was recognized in this area.

We came to Greensboro and I entered my first year of high school here, because we had only the ninth, tenth, and eleventh grades. We had a very pleasant relationship. We were warmly received. At that time I think the city school system had slightly over three hundred teachers, and I believe that before we had been there three months, my father had met and knew them all by name, reputation, and qualification. He had a fantastic memory in this area, and as a result, was very warmly received. He was a good administrator, although I think his basic claim to fame was not in the area of administration, of school management, as much as in the motivation and the encouragement and personal relationship with his employees.

This seemed to develop, as I recall, prior to World War II in a rapidly accelerating manner. The school system grew tremendously. The corporate limits of Greensboro expanded tremendously. The responsibilities grew, but my father—perhaps through the efforts of the many dedicated people with which he surrounded himself—was able to build a system that seemed to be highly effective. He was respected not only by the teachers, but by the janitors and the maintenance forces as well. I can remember a person; I used to go fishing sometimes with some of the maintenance men, the colored men, as we knew them in those days, the blacks of the community. They served effectively out of, I think, respect and some feeling of motivation of the need to be the best in trimming shrubbery or teaching history or what have you. As a result, I think, perhaps your earlier comment that Greensboro was perhaps a sort of a non-typical Southern community, and one in which there was considerable sensitivity of need and perhaps desirability for change, it’s very appropriate. It’s very apropos to the times in which the integration program developed.

I have very little recollection of what immediately preceded the rather tremendous statement of policy by the Supreme Court, or ruling, as it is referred to. But I do know, in my father's personal make-up—he, of course, was a Christian man in every sense of the word. He respected the rights and the dignity of all people. He was not naïve to the fact, however, that you don't simply suddenly throw out the baby with the bath water [phone

rings], and I think was actually trying to program the general transition even before this momentous decision. Pardon.

[Recording paused]

BS: Sorry for the interruption. But I think we were trying to setting the stage, the background, to the fact that the Greensboro school system had already on its own been a leader in the recognition of the rights and privileges of all people. We had a fairly large black community here, although it is predominately a white city. It was segregated geographically to a very large degree. There was very little blockbusting or integration or infiltrating at that time. And as a result, the schools tended to be either black or white. There was really not much mixture, but where it was possible, there didn't seem to be any serious problem. I recall simply that the students, the parents, the teachers, of course, tended to be solidly—and as well as the community—behind the school's position in this sort of thing.

I recall, in regard to the reporting of technical matters by the news media, that on occasions—I think primarily because of the lack of technical qualifications on the part of some of the reporters—that the school board on occasions became rather frustrated with the fact that they would give a technical release, an agenda, of their projected session to the media. They would sit through the thing together, and then the reports would come out so drastically different from what actually occurred that this became a troublesome point. And I do know that on occasions my father actually, by direct approach to the news media, told them that if they could not report the minutes and the actions and so forth of the board as they actually happened, that they would not be welcomed. This was not—it might be really misunderstood—any effort to conceal anything at all. Greensboro was blessed, from as long as I can remember, with having outstanding leaders from the community involved in the school board's operation. They were anxious and willing to cooperate, so far as we know, with the media, but they didn't want their actions misconstrued. They didn't want them to be edited to sound like something other than what they actually intended.

I guess of all the reports that ever came out of the thing, perhaps the most exciting, or the one that made the biggest splash at the time of course was the immediate action that the school board took following the Supreme Court decision *[Brown v. Board of Education]* in May of ’54. At that time, as I recall, and I—and this is been a long time back—but as I recall, the decision was that, in so many words, that we would fully integrate in all areas. This meant not only the public schools, but in business and society in general. The thing may have been more specific than that, I simply do not recall. This created, I think, some serious concern in the minds of the school board members at that time. But they met, as I recall, very, very quickly after the decision was rendered, and they voted unanimously, I think, to abide by the law of the land. I feel sure that in that

session there were considerable misgivings about the side effects, the repercussions that could come from this.

But basically, my father was always a believer in the fact that right would prevail, and he had no fear of any repercussions against him. He felt that when it became a matter of moral or Christian concern, that the right was the only position that you could take, regardless of any consequences that you might personally suffer. He was a very powerful man in the sense that although he was recognized as being extremely gentle, he was a man of tremendous courage, moral fiber, and strength, as well as tremendous physical strength. This was a surprise to many people. But he would be extremely considerate in evaluating the advantages and disadvantages of most situations. But in this particular area, I do not think that either he or the board hesitated one minute in establishing the fact that although there were concerns about possible difficulties that this action might create, that they felt that this was not only the right thing to do, but that it was the only legal course they could take.

Now, as a result of this, several things happened rather quickly. Although the general public had a reaction of sorts to the decision made by the Supreme Court itself, it was sort of a remote, disassociated thing from the local society. It didn't really affect them. But the decision that was made by the school board and publically announced as a policy statement sort of hit home very—in a rather tender spot, because now they're not talking about the law of the land, they're talking about my neighbors and me. And this became then at the personal level, and I think perhaps resulted in some active thinking about, well, what happens now? Will our supposedly high middle class, rather affluent, for the time, society be affected by this? Are we going to be dragged down, literally, into a lower level of the public function—the schools, the city government, that sort of thing?

There was however, on the opposite hand of this, a very strong surging forth of support for this action. Surprisingly enough, this came from many sources: the recognized community leaders, both in government and in the churches, in the—perhaps the recognized normal Southern community leadership, but it also came from rather strange sources, as I recall. There was a meeting held in the black community shortly after this. This is, I think, perhaps hearsay to some degree. I don't know that it could be reconstructed factually. I don't know the nature of this get-together. But I do know that a large segment of the responsible black community—either through a formal get-together or perhaps by informal discussion among themselves—elected to support this position to the extent that they would not only be law-abiding participants in the thing—after all, it was more to their benefit, seemingly, than to anyone else's—but that they would do all in their power to assist in a normal, simple transition through a difficult series of circumstances. The—I tend to revert to the word "colored"—the black leadership of this community certainly indicated their tremendous abilities and dignity as human beings in this effort on their part. It was very quiet. There was no demonstration at all in this area.

And it appeared that we would have a very orderly transition as the law and the rulings and so forth were gradually interpreted.

The period, however, was not entirely quiet. As a matter of fact, it was rather difficult for my father and the school administrators—not only those on the board, but the school principals and the teachers themselves. I think to some degree everyone involved was harassed by a certain element of society. Fortunately, I don't think this element could be categorized. They did not represent an organized movement. I don't think there was a vicious attack by ethnic or church or fraternal or any particular group of people, but there was resentment. There was active resistance, verbal abuse, that sort of thing, rather flagrant for a period of time.

As far as my family's involvement in this was concerned, as I have said before, my father simply stood on the side of what he considered right, and he—long, long before the Supreme Court thought of it—recognized the rights and dignity and privileges that should be enjoyed by all people. As a result, he was very often attacked, perhaps not physically, but verbally, sometimes through the press, particularly through the unofficial press, the letters to the editor type of thing. In general, the attack was always concealed. There were very few people who chose to oppose the school board's position openly. Largely it was done by anonymous writers, by telephone calls at all hours of the night. I think at one time there was an organized program of personal harassment of my father and the board chairmen of that era—both Ed Hudgins and John Foster, who followed him—even a year or so later. They would call the home sometimes a dozen times at night. My father was always in control of his emotions and did the very best that he could to answer the complaints, although they were vulgar, abusive in nature, and to my mother often times frightening. I do not believe that my father ever felt fear for his personal well-being during this entire period, but it did affect my mother and other members of the family and the neighbors. They were concerned not for the stand which the board was taking or the position that my father chose to follow, but they were concerned about his physical well-being.

There were numerous incidents of violence. These were largely kept quiet. But, for example, we had a picture window in a reception room entering into our living room at home which was broken out on three of four occasions. You know, somebody whizzing by in a car and they throw a brick through it, sometimes with a note. At one time the damage was rather extensive. It damaged a piano on the other side of the room from the window. But even with all this going on, and with the concern of the police for my father and the board members' personal safety, this I don't think deferred them one iota from their intended program of doing what they genuinely considered to be the right thing.

We had some rather interesting underlying incidents in connection with this violence. At one time the chief of police here, who was a strong supporter of law and order in all areas, became concerned about the malicious damage to our home and

actually posted a twenty-four hour guard to keep the property under surveillance. This was only fairly effective. Because of the geographic nature of the property, it was just not possible to protect it very well. But they made a very, very strong effort in this behalf.

There was a rather unusual incidence, though, of a group of, let's say, overly zealous supporters of my father who wanted to take action on their own to combat those who were doing the harassing. And this, of course, would have been disastrous had this been permitted to happen. And I went to some of these folks; they were community leaders of surprising wide economic and social backgrounds, but they were people that were bound to protect those that they felt were leading them in the right direction, regardless of consequences. It had the connotation almost of a vigilante type effort. And this, of course, would obviously have destroyed any progress that was possible, or any good that could come as a result of the action, no matter whether the action itself was good or bad.

WC: Do you remember who some of these people were?

BS: The names of the individuals either for or against this thing are quite vague in my memory now. At the time they were obvious. I can remember of the group who was most adamant in their attack on the action that they varied from people who might be considered of a low economic background, but at the same time they also ranged to the very wealthy to the "church leaders." One of the most active opponents of this whole program was a recognized leader in my father's church.

WC: Mr. [Stark] Dillard?

BS: No. Frankly, I believe it would be somewhat academic for me to criticize, because—and I don't do this for desire to conceal the facts, but I think the names are superfluous to the point involved. I do remember some of the names, frankly. I remember them very well. And as a matter of fact, I—perhaps because I had less moral integrity myself or less Christian attitude—I may have had feelings against some of these people at that time that my father never really shared. His feeling was that if a person genuinely opposed this, there's always the possibility that he had a side also, and that that side should be recognized. That although the attack might be vicious in nature, that in reality it might be the result of an underlying dedication or desire to accomplish something good but through a different method.

Many people felt—and this has been evident throughout the South since—that a gradual process would solve this. And, of course, we have been at a gradual process since the Civil War and it's unworkable. There must be a movement forward or there's no movement at all. And I think, although there was no intent on the part of the school board to create a shockwave, they did agree that a gradual transition presented certain obstacles

that would be difficult in a community like Greensboro—a community even like Greensboro, perhaps more difficult in a more radically divided or segregated community in the area. But I think that the opposition was from sources which as their opinions and objections were voiced became recognized as coming from areas in which the people were less informed. I don't think it was as much a case of opposition to social progress as it was a simple fact that they were not advised that blacks and Indians and other foreign elements of our community could truly live together and go to school together in harmony.

I think my father did have considerable misgivings about the timing and the manner in which certain announcements, certain decisions, were handed down. The Supreme Court, perhaps on purpose or perhaps without intent, did create a rather catastrophic situation in the speed at which their edict was handed out. The timing was very bad during the calendar year, coming in the early summer. This gave the community weeks and months to either adjust or become more upset prior to the start of school. It put a rather burdensome task before the school board to spend one full summer deciding "What do we do now?"

I think one thing that the decision—it did not leave a great deal of latitude in how the thing was to be accomplished as usual. I think the federal government—without meaning to sound overly critical—I think they tend to make broad decisions without considering how you implement the intent. But I think their decision put the school board at a rather difficult position of determining how do we accomplish it. At that time, of course, it had never been any consideration to forced busing to accomplish this. This was a later development that had some interesting side effects also.

But I think that my father, although openly his stand, and that of the other board members, was simply, to the best of their ability, the announcement of the intent to comply with the law and to make the intent workable, I think they had serious misgivings about how this could be accomplished. For instance, recognizing the fact—and this was my father's position—that all men are truly created equal under God and have, under our form of government and our Constitution, certain government, as well as God-given, rights. I think even though he recognized this, he also anticipated that a sudden assertion of rights, even though they are morally and legally and otherwise correct and proper, could create a side-effect which might tend to destroy any good intended.

For instance, although my father never stated this to my knowledge, I believe that he personally was of the opinion that the best way to accomplish integration was to begin with children before they became opinionated against each other—which never happens unless they are helped in this feeling—perhaps through a gradual process of integration at the kindergarten level, at the elementary school level, and let them grow in age and in respect for each other in an environment in which they would not be disturbed by the influence of other members of society.

I did not have any personal feelings strongly for or against it. I had grown up and some of my best playmates, living in a semi-rural area as a child, were blacks. Surprisingly enough, we didn't know that we were black or white, and I think this is typical when people aren't led into a feeling of contest between ethnic or sociological groups. But as I grew up, I think that I was blessed in the fact that my family truly respected people for what they were, not for color or social standing or background or anything like that.

But in the effective management of direction of the school program, I'm sure that there were many times when our local authorities were deeply concerned about not the what to do but how to accomplish it. I think also, to give credit where it's due, not only should the school leaders be commended, but the community in general. No matter how good a decision is made by our leaders, it's always necessary that the people themselves, the community, be sufficiently fertile to accept the idea for it to grow and to create a progressive, effective result.

I think particular credit should be given to the black element of the community, because, after all, this could have been a freeing-of-the-slave-type reaction in which you had all sorts of by-products after the Civil War, or it could be a gradual involvement of the two elements of society. And the support of the outstanding leaders here—and again I can't remember all of the names—but Greensboro did have some tremendously respected and vital leadership in the black community. They had a radical element there, too, just as they had a radical element in the white community. But the predominate support of the thinking leadership I think made possible the joint development of an environment of a system, if you please, in which the best could prevail. Now, I'm afraid I've rambled at length and not in a very orderly fashion.

WC: That's not true.

BS: Perhaps, could you ask me some specific questions?

WC: Yes, I would love to ask some specific questions. You have indicated that your father was a very religious man. Would you say that this had as much to do with anything with his personal view of the racial issue?

BS: I think the personal makeup of an individual, particularly in a moral or religious connotation, obviously spills over into all that they do. But I can't say that—I would not describe my father as a fanatic in this area. I think that on the other hand, what he did was pure and simply from the standpoint of his interest in the schools. It's impossible to disassociate the human characteristics from the actions resulting in a person's business or personal life. And I think without a strong moral or religious faith, that the decision

would perhaps have been considerably more difficult. I do, however, credit this makeup in my father's personality for his total lack of fear of personal harm in the situation.

WC: Did he find Dr. [Charles] Bowles to be an important supporting figure? Did he talk to Dr. Bowles a lot about this issue, do you know?

BS: I think perhaps they discussed it. I do not recall the fact that Dr. Bowles and/or West Market Street Methodist Church took a very strong stand either for or against it. I would—from memory, and I don't want to do anybody a disservice in this area—but I feel that the church—the churches in general tended to moralize rather than consider the specifics of the case. I think it was—to them it was the first two commandment approach; the responsibility to God, and then, of course, love to your fellow man. And they tended to moralize extensively on that, sermonize in that area. I don't really feel that they became actively involved in the issues facing the school board.

WC: You mentioned earlier that your father and other members of the school board were concerned with the problem of a gradual transition, and I wasn't quite sure whether you meant that they saw the necessity of acting to control opposition and act decisively, or whether they were—this is 1954—looking toward a long-term, gradual transition.

BS: No, I think perhaps my remarks may have led you in the wrong direction. I really believed that they welcomed the change in the law to the extent that it did have an urgency to it, that it would bring about the necessity for change. I mentioned only their feelings toward gradual change in that they recognized that this was what should come. They were not concerned about the ultimate right or the ultimate outcome. They were simply concerned about the method of accomplishing it. There was no reservation on their part. It was not a token response. It was not a desire to evade. To my knowledge, there's no one on the school board or on the staff or even among the teachers themselves, with very rare exceptions, who had any reluctance to comply with the decision. Their concern, of course, was that you not destroy all that had been built in a sudden wave in which the—I don't recall the word exactly—but the counter-reaction might overcome the good that was being done.

Surprisingly enough, there seemed to be very little follow-up reaction after the initial shock of this thing. There was the violence which generally tailed off after awhile. There was the outspoken criticism, sometimes in public. There were occasionally people who appeared before the board to voice opposition, not a great deal unlike the more recent things involving the rulings regarding busing, the sort of forced integration. There was some of that, but to a large degree this subsided rather quickly, because I think the better element of society—and I hesitate to judge anyone—but the element which was

most prone to support, both in the black and the white community, made this transition as workable as could be made under the circumstances.

Now I suppose that members of your divinity school, your sociologists, your historians, could analyze this forever. You could say, “Well, this represented an unusual community of Christians, an unusual community of individuals with above-normal intellect.” There are many ways you could explain it. Frankly, I think that it is pure and simply an overall example of dedicated people who are truly trying to serve this segment of the public through public education, trying the best that they knew how with what they had to work with to do what was right for all people. And to oppose this might be the most obvious pattern at the moment, but in the long run, when you analyze this from any point of view, it is the only thing that is truly workable in a society such as ours.

WC: Would your father, do you think—do you think that he envisioned, in those months after the ‘54 decision, an immediate start on desegregation?

BS: Oh, I not only think he envisioned an immediate start, I think both he and the board had actually anticipated the necessity and the desirability of this before the decision was ever made. I don't think the decision came as a surprise to them, nor do I think it generally preceded their own feeling of need that something be done.

WC: There was a three-year delay between the resolution of the board to comply and the actual implementation of some desegregation in 1957. And this is a very interesting period, I think, for me, because so many things are going on during this period. You've alluded to many of them. Do you recall that your father was at all frustrated by this three-year transition period, or that he felt in some way that things were not moving as quickly as he would have liked them to have?

BS: I don't know what his reaction would have been regarding the speed at which the transition took place. I do recall that both he and other dedicated community leaders—not just in the area of public education, but in government, in the news media itself—were concerned. They perhaps had feelings of frustration, of inadequacy, of just total inability on occasions to cope with so momentous a problem. This, after all, was perhaps one of the most dramatic, sudden changes in the law that we have seen in modern times.

I never cease to be amazed—not being a student of government or history—I never ceased to be amazed at the fantastic job that our forefathers in this country did in providing a workable Constitution and basis for government. To me it’s so burdensome that it’s miraculous that it functions at all. But it does, in spite of inertia, seem to serve our citizens very effectively. But this change was perhaps one of the most dramatic that I can recall. I'm sure the decisions regarding prohibition [of alcohol] were exciting in their

time. But this, after all, affected all men in one way or another, and I think it was a decision which was unavoidable at some point in history.

WC: Your father was one of the very few people in Greensboro who opposed the Pearsall Plan. I wonder whether you recall any of his feelings about the action taken by the state which eventuated in the Pearsall Plan?

BS: You know, up to this point, I have given you a great deal of generalization and impression and personal feelings as I recall from some nearly twenty years ago. Brief me quickly. I recall that the Pearsall Plan was a program instituted, I believe, through the Department of Public Instruction of the State of North Carolina. Is that correct?

WC: Well, it was a piece of legislation, actually, which involved two Constitutional amendments.

BS: State Constitution?

WC: State constitutional amendments, which Governor [Luther] Hodges advocated in the summer of 1956. And these two constitutional amendments provided for A) the closing of a school district of a public school system by popular referendum if a 15% proportion of any school district petitioned for a referendum. In other words, it provided for local school districts to close their schools in the event that—

[End Tape 1, Side A—Begin Tape 2, Side B]

WC: —what it did in effect was to provide what were called the time safety-valves, in the event that desegregation were to take place. And this came just about two years after the Supreme Court decision, and it won an 85% vote from the general electorate.

BS: This was voted on by the general public?

WC: That's right.

BS: In a special referendum?

WC: That's right, in September—

BS: In the fall of ‘56?

WC: That's right. And the state legislature had previously voted on these amendments and passed them with only two dissenting votes, and they then went for ratification. And a great many people supported them with the idea that this was the only way to save the public school system, that any kind of significant desegregation would lead to withdrawal of support for the public schools by the white legislature acting under the pressure of parents. And there were very few people—Irving Carlyle was one and your dad was another—who opposed the Pearsall Plan, viewing it as a real threat, potentially, to the whole system of public education. And I just wondered whether you could recall any discussion by your father concerning his feeling of perhaps being undercut in his own and in Greensboro's effort to comply with the decision by this state action coming out of Raleigh?

BS: Frankly, I have very little recollection of the specifics either related to the Pearsall Plan itself or my father's reaction to it. Let me answer—or let me comment on your question in this regard. Let me tell you what I think my father's position would have been without actually knowing it, based on my personal relationship, my feelings, [and] our joint understanding of each other as individuals. I would say, without fear of contradiction, that if my father felt that the Pearsall Plan was in effect a safety valve, a mechanism to soften the intent of what he thought was right, he would have actively opposed it. I recall, although my father has been very close to Governor Hodges—and I don't even recall the dates in which he served us so ably in the state—but I do recall that on some occasion I had overheard some comment wherein my father had actively spoken to Governor Hodges in opposition to a stand that he had taken, or a position of leadership that he had exerted over the legislature in this area. I do not recall the specifics, but I rather suspect from your suggestion that it may have very well been over the Pearsall Plan.

I would say this: that if the Pearsall Plan was intended to accomplish what I suspect today that it may have been, I truly—to simply permit a certain segment of white community to in effect withdraw, yet receive financial aid, either in support of a private school program, that it would be in direct contradiction to the intent of the Supreme Court decision and to the intent expressed by the school board to comply. I firmly believe that at the risk of considerable personal discrimination, at the risk of harassment, the risk of evoking outward opposition to their total program, that the school board elected to abide by what they considered not only the law, but the right of mankind. And in that connotation, I would say that although the popular vote was overwhelming in support of the Pearsall Plan, that I suspect that my father and others of his era and of his feeling would have opposed this because it would tend to restrict the time, the necessity, the desirability of getting on with what they were dedicated to do. I regret that I know so little about the exact content of this act. I do not recall actually voting for or against the Pearsall Plan, but from what you tell me, I'm reasonably sure that I would personally have opposed it as a delaying mechanism.

As a sort of a side-light to that, I think this type of action in other communities—and I hesitate to single-out an individual city where I'm not advised of the true facts—but I suspect that delaying or tactics of opposition of this type have done a tremendous disservice to getting on with it. I think that the situation that has occurred—and I say this without much knowledge of the case—but I think that the conflict which has occurred in the Virginia area—both the central portion of the state and the tidewater areas—in which their public school system has apparently been at least changed, if not destroyed, to some extent by the advent of private education, of tutors, of that sort of approach, I think that would have been the result had the Pearsall Plan been widely implemented or accepted by a private group.

WC: What happened, really, with the Pearsall Plan, its provisions were never used, but that was largely because they didn't have to be used. The Pearsall Plan really had a devastating effect upon the state's progress.

BS: I wish I could recall the nature of the personal conflict that my father may have had with the public school administrators and with the legislature itself in this area. I think this would be a very interesting side-light because it probably more clearly indicates the conviction and the courage of their convictions that our local folks expressed.

WC: Right. Yeah, I think so.

BS: I do know this: that my father was never a controversial man in the sense of stirring up trouble. He had a manner of handling controversy so that it tended to simply disappear. I think this was a result of his stand that he took on regular occasions. And he commanded so much respect from all elements of society, from the top legislative area to the youngest child involved, that a great deal of this was avoided. But I can assure you he never held back in the idea of taking a middle-of-the-road approach. When he was convinced of something, that was his stand.

WC: Right. Just one or two more questions, if I may. I know that your father—I guess he died the year after he retired from the school board in 1958.

BS: Yes, he did.

WC: Do you recall that he was disturbed at the difficulties which ensued after 1957 or with the direction that the school board was taking after his leaving the post as superintendent?

BS: Not at all. I think my father sort of handpicked his successor, Phil Weaver, who died a rather untimely death. I think Phil was as near of the same moral and personal character

as my father as any two men could be. I don't think my father picked Phil necessarily for his technical skill, although he was a very splendid administrator. He was truly loved by his teachers and his students, as well as my father was. But I think that my father picked Phil from all of the public school people who were available at that time to come in and work with him during these difficult years. And I believe that of all the jobs he did, I think he probably considered the selection, or his minor part in the selection, of Phil Weaver—and there were others who were instrumental also—I think he considered that one of his best efforts in behalf of the continuing education. My father never attempted, to my knowledge, to direct or to influence any operations after his retirement. Phil did a magnificent job, in my opinion, in this area. He had the same qualities of leadership, the same recognized ability to motivate and to direct even discordant segments of the community in the right direction that my dad had. And I think that it was with a feeling of total confidence that he was able to turn the administration over to his successor.

My father lived a very, very happy, a very active life, after his retirement. I do not think—although my mother feels perhaps somewhat to the contrary—I do not feel that my father's death a short time thereafter was in any way the result of any emotional stress or what have you. He did go through a period of tremendous taxation on his physical facilities during this whole period, but I think this he accepted this as a part of the job. And I don't think it really affected his rather early death.

WC: Do you recall that—there were a number of black community leaders at the time; Dr. [William] Hampton being one, Vance Chavis being another, Dr. George Simkins being a third, perhaps. Do you recall what the nature of your father's relationship with those people would have been, and whether he had any particular feelings about leadership in the black community?

BS: In answer to the first part of your question, I cannot directly tie his relationship to any specific individuals. I recall, I think, Dr. Simkins was the first black member of the school board, perhaps.

WC: That was Dr. Hampton.

BS: Dr. Hampton. Excuse me, Dr. Hampton. And as I recall, this was a choice which was welcomed by the school board. Now, the appointment of a black man to the school board could conceivably have come as a token means of appeasement, but I can assure you that regardless of how he came to be a member of the board that he was welcomed by the membership and performed an outstanding function in that regard.

Vance Chavis I have known for many years personally. I don't recall the time involved, but Vance was a member of the school staff here, I believe a principal of one of the schools. Unfortunately, I don't know whether this was prior to, during, or subsequent

to these years. But I do know that he was one of the black leaders who apparently was most influential in his community in seeing that the proper evolution of things came about. He has served the community in many areas, both as a public school educator and also on the [Greensboro] City Council more recently, and I'm sure was among those, although I cannot remember the specific times and instances involved.

There were many, many outstanding black leaders here at that time at our various black institutions here. Alice Freeman Palmer [Memorial Institute] was a very highly respected school, Bennett College, [North Carolina] A&T State University. Greensboro is blessed with outstanding leadership in the educational and professional and other areas of the black community. I think the progress that this segment of our society has made not only in connection with social integration, but in personal and public involvement in community life, is indicative of the true capabilities that they possess and their desirability to be an active part of the true leadership.

WC: One last question.

BS: Yes, sir.

WC: It would seem on the basis of my research that companies like Burlington Mills and Cone Mills are very important in the community and have a fair amount of influence. I just wonder what your recollection is of any role they might have played during this period, and anything which might stand out in your memory in terms of their relationship to your father during this time.

BS: You know, although at that time I worked in the engineering department of Cone Mills, I don't have any strong feelings one way or the other as to their position publicly with relat[ion] to this issue. I do know that one of the leaders of our community in whom my father had greatest confidence in, and who he considered one of his truly strongest supporters, was Mr. Herman Cone, who at that time was president of Cone Mills. He was a gentleman, a scholar. He was a businessman of outstanding reputation, and I think was respected by every member of society. You hesitate to refer to an ethnic situation at a time like this, but Mr. Cone possessed every attribute of [a] truly God-fearing, dedicated, public businessman. While I was employed at Cone, there was no discrimination of any type between races insofar as the law permitted in those days. There were inequities in the law—separate facilities, for example. That sort of thing was not right. Mr. Cone felt that. But he, I'm sure, was a strong supporter of what is basically right for our community. His brother, Mr. Ben Cone, served as our mayor; I'm not sure of the exact dates. He was—His participation in community affairs was outstanding through the [Greensboro] Chamber of Commerce and our governmental institutions, and I'm sure rendered valuable support.

Burlington Industries has been an outstanding leader in our community, as have many other businesses. I think Mr. Spencer Love was not only a brilliant industrialist, a financier, an organizer, a leader of the highest caliber, but I think he was a man who proposed to develop business based on a very fine personal and moral relationship with his entire group of associates. I do not remember specific instances at that time, but I do know of subsequent cases in which Burlington has rendered outstanding leadership in furthering the development of various segments of our society, not only in economic areas, but in the black community, particularly. They have, through the Spencer Love Foundation, I am sure, funded tremendous programs for the development. There are many other individuals and companies here.

Greensboro is a—as we said in the beginning—is a remarkable community. We are not in the Deep South, but it has all the attributes of Southern society. But in addition, it has something special. There's an environment, a capacity for adjustment, a—I think a genuine concern for all mankind here that have never seen in communities of this size elsewhere.

WC: Well, I've taken up a great—

[End of Interview]