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William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: Warren Ashby

INTERVIEWER: William Chafe

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WILLIAM CHAFE: We had really begun to skim the surface of some of the many things that you were involved in, and, of course, I guess we had talked a little bit about the ethos of Greensboro, and one of the experiences was your friend—maybe it was Burgess himself—coming down and meeting with the [Guilford County] School Board?

WARREN ASHBY: [unclear] The Southern Regional Council.

WC: And your having concluded those comments about Ben[jamin] Smith and Ed[ward] Hudgins.

WA: Oh, I just recall the—I'm positive those [unclear]. I don't know who the co-editor was at that time.

WC: [H. A. "Slim"] Kendall?

WA: I think maybe it was Kendall.

WC: Yes, I think Kendall still was there. Did you have a feeling back then—did you have children at school age at that point?

WA: Yes.

WC: Did you have a feeling—I may have asked this before—but that things were really going to break loose [and] a major kind of change was going to come to Greensboro?

WA: Yes. I didn't think it was going to come very fast. I haven't had a chance to think much since last week either. One thing I did mean to do—I remember not long after the Supreme Court [*Brown v. Board of Education*] decision. Some group we met over at A&T [North Carolina A&T State University] had a meeting on the future of schools in the South. I wish I could find my notes because that could confirm whether my memory is accurate or not. But my memory and feeling was that some of the people at that time felt that the Supreme Court decision was going to be suddenly different. I really thought it was going to change, and I [unclear] [first?] hand opposition, which was all it got, but I [thought] it was going to change that rapidly and that was the one thing that I remembered talking to you about at that time with the blacks at that time. I thought it was going to be very complex, and that it was going to be slow, and sure thought it was [unclear]. I thought it was going to begin right away. It began I don't know how many years later.

WC: It was three years later that the first token desegregation [occurred].

WA: But then it was just token for an awful long time.

WC: No more than seven students per year any one year for six—I mean seven years, actually, until '63, and then the minimum was not much more than that. And, of course, it's at that point that the [Greensboro] Community Fellowship started.

WA: I would suppose too that most of people would have thought it would be much more steady progress right away, or otherwise—you see, looking back now, you would see people taking action much more quickly than they did. They must have kept hoping that the goodwill was there and that people were going—

WC: I think that one of the things that was there was the kind of confidence that as long as Smith was superintendent, they believed that Smith meant to follow through on it.

WA: Yes.

WC: And his presence, I think, was to some extent the core of the feeling of good faith and that it might work out. But when he left, of course, but I think, I've gotten the impression that by the time the token desegregation took place, most people who were active in the black community sort of almost viewed that as a defeat rather than any kind of victory.

WA: Yes.

WC: What kind of organizations were you active in at this point in the period ‘55 to ‘60?

WA: No. I[‘m] not even sure I can remember, other than the Fellowship. There was a Greensboro community organization, too, that predated the 1960 group, but it was pretty interested in ideas that—it was not at all an action group at that time, and I can recall that because Vance Chavis and I got interested in housing. [unclear] it was more an educational get-together interracial group. Informative at that, and I was active in that. I was active in the [Fellowship of] Southern Churchmen business. I can’t remember. There were certain things taking place on the state level, but they were sort of ad hoc kinds of things.

WC: When did you come in contact on a regular basis with the McNeill Smiths?

WA: It was in—through that conversation club, whenever that was organized, I don’t know. But I got to know McNeill fairly well at that time, partly through my wife who got to know Louise Smith fairly well, but we were not close. And I suppose it would have been through the sit-ins, but whether it was the sit-ins of ‘61 [sic, 1960] or the sit-ins of ‘63—

WC: [Nineteen] sixty-three?

WA: I tend to think it was the former, but we got very much involved. Is that the one that [Edward] Zane was in, or was he in both?

WC: Zane was chairman of the [Greensboro] City Council mostly the first one, very little of the second one.

WA: I had no particular connection with Zane at that time. It would have been the first because he was working a certain side of the street, and McNeill and I were first one thing then another.

WC: Would you explain that a little bit?

WA: Not that I can. I can’t possibly give you details. I[‘m] not sure that I know. McNeill might remember, but I can be quite certain nobody took notes or minutes about it. Some of us got together, a group, and it was namely the persons in the conversation club, though it was not the conversation club. And that group then went over and talked and had sessions with some of the faculty and administrators at A&T and with—[was] Jesse Jackson in the first?

WC: He was in the second.

WA: A lot of them who were predecessors in the first, who were taking the lead in that—if indeed it was the first, I don't recall about the first. And we met at the—as I recall, of course, that section of town has changed very much—but we met in the area of—where the [unclear] is now. There was a church there at the time. I would say it was the Episcopal church, and it has since been rebuilt. And McNeill took a great deal of the lead in that, in trying—[*Greensboro Daily News* editor] Bill Snider was involved, but I say that McNeill was more important in trying to negotiate demands and trying to keep open the communication. I really don't remember the details.

WC: I guess you say—

WA: But I remember, after it was all over, I was really very much impressed with the stands that he took and by giving [a] certain kind of, on the one, openness and, on the other hand, he was very firm. That is all around on both sides. He was very concerned for what happened with a violation of the law if a person wasn't willing to accept the due process of the law. I can recall giving to him *The Man for All Seasons* because there is a lot of stuff in there about the due process.

WC: Do you remember anyone else besides yourself and McNeill?

WA: With the exception of Bill Snider, I don't, and he wasn't in all the sessions. It was possible that Ed Hudgins was in some of the informal discussion sessions.

WC: Who would these have been with?

WA: It would have been with the student leadership. I think that there was some adult leadership, too. But now I just can't track down.

WC: Would [A&T chaplain] Cleo McCoy have been there?

WA: Cleo would have been there.

WC: Would the administrators at A&T have been [Warmoth T.] Gibbs—?

WA: He was not involved.

WC: [A&T dean William H.] Gamble?

WA: I don't remember Gamble being involved, as I recall. I'll have to think back.

WC: John [Marshall] Stevenson [now Kilimanjaro] by any chance?

WA: I don't think he was in town at that time. I think he came to town subsequently.

WC: He was here and out for awhile and back again. And you said that Ed Zane was working the other side of the street?

WA: Yes, and I don't remember; I['m] not exactly sure it was the other side of the street. I'm sure that McNeill had contact with Ed Zane and communicated with Ed Zane with some of the things that were occurring. I thought that McNeill showed great finesse and had real strength. In some ways he may have been, at the time, more conservative in terms of the due process of law business, but still he was very understanding and he kept searching for what he called [unclear], and he kept searching for this. What—if the city or authority can do this, what then would you give? I don't think he ever got any credit, to my knowledge [unclear]. But I would say that search for [unclear] was what he kept pushing for in terms of what was the blacks, how far were they going. If they go this far, then what will this mean?

WC: I doubt very much whether he wanted public notice.

WA: I think that's right, too. It's conceivable that this was the second one, but I really think it was not. I really think it was more likely that we got involved in the second one; that's quite in a different way. In a different sense it was a large group that got involved in the second one.

WC: How did that happen?

WA: There again I don't have any idea how it happened. I don't know how Mac Smith and I got involved in the first place. I really don't. It could have been—I remember him talking one time [about] having been downtown at the time of the demonstrations, and I had not been down there at that time. And he was somewhat upset by the reaction he felt they would produce, whether it was right or wrong. He's been concerned about expressing [unclear]. I think the second time, whatever else was going to work out, I think I simply called a few people together—Bill Snider, Hudgins, McNeill, and I'm sure several others—and arranged to have a session with I some of the blacks down at [unclear]. It was a more open, and I didn't have anything except for that one or maybe two sessions they carried on everything that happened.

WC: Was Jesse Jackson there?

WA: Yes, I would say that he was, and I would also say another person that would have been involved in that very much would have been John Taylor. Was this the one that Louis Dowdy was involved in, or did he come later? Was he dean of students then?

WC: He was dean of students at that point, and he was involved to the point where he had initially made some kind of statement—

WA: Forbidding certain action.

WC: Yes.

WA: Yes, he took it and flaunted it and he pulled back, that's the same time. This was the time when [James] Farmer was down, too, remember.

WC: Yes.

WA: I may have mentioned this last week: the Taylors' had him to dinner when Farmer was here and right in the midst of all of this. He had the speech [unclear], and Ben had him out to dinner. I don't think anyone else was there; [I'm] pretty sure Jackson wasn't there. But I remember that he then had a meeting with one of the black churches, and Taylor and I went over, and he made an excellent speech that night. It was really very good. He did make some comments about Greensboro, about how [of] all the places he had been, he'd rather live in Greensboro in terms of what the possibilities for the future were. How much of that, I think—I wondered how much of that was for John Taylor, having John having invited him into his home. It was open. John wasn't trying to con him. He was not trying to do that to him, but you go out to somebody's home, have a nice dinner and people talk off the record, talk pretty straight about what they do and don't do, and then there are not many white people in the audience, you may say you would have much more subtle motives [unclear]

WC: That's interesting.

WA: You asked about the groups. There was another one. This was sort of a new ship. I don't think I mentioned it the last time, did I, about the cooperation of State College [North Carolina State University] and Greensboro [College] and UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro], then Woman's College, and the University of North Carolina [at Chapel Hill] in getting resolutions passed?

WC: No.

WA: This was before ‘54. I would say it was about the time of the law cases, which would have been in ’51.

WC: Right.

WA: [unclear] And Greg [N. L. Gregg?] was very quiet and didn’t like to participate in public debates very much, pretty [unclear], and I think a very superb artist [unclear], in my judgment, and he somehow—one time when we were having lunch together—and he said, “The university ought to take a stand and ought to go on record as being in favor of desegregation. This talking about court cases is absolutely absurd. If the administration won’t do it, then the faculty ought to.” And we talked about it, and we felt that we couldn’t do it. We felt that we would never get anything. There was Woman’s College; 60% of the faculty was probably women. And this would show how we misjudged, I think, women in this whole issue.

So it was his notion or somebody’s notion that we should get together with some people in Chapel Hill. And I don’t remember who all was involved in Chapel Hill. Alexander Heard, who was then—I think he was then writing his doctoral dissertation at that time. I would meet him in the library often and we talked about it, and he may have been teaching, too. And the head of the philosophy department, Stanley Hall, I think—I would have to check back. And I can’t remember. And there are several others. There were people from both campuses [who] got their own people together. I’m not sure that Anne Queen had yet gone; otherwise I would have thought that she would have been in, except that they may have been limiting it just to faculty. I can’t remember who was there from State. I would think the head of political science, probably, [and] maybe the man that subsequently became chancellor, and I’m not sure about that.

Well, we got the group together and we talked about it, about what could be done, and we plotted out over a period of weeks and months. We were sorting, planning how we could get each of the campuses to an appropriate faculty body to pass a resolution. And we had it planned so that State and Chapel Hill would come first. I think State probably had a percentage body, and Chapel Hill may have had a whole faculty group such as we did. So we thought that we needed them to help to pass this in order for us to then pass it. Well, he introduced it first, because the other guys just didn’t like to talk. And maybe because I liked to talk, maybe I was the front man. I mean there was no ring leader. I had an initial idea, other people picked up, and it really became a group activity, but I was the one who presented it. And we [would] present something and table it for a month until the people could confer on it.

This I'm not very proud of. The very time it was presented we said we want this to keep within the family. They told them what everybody was doing, what they were doing in Chapel Hill, what they were doing in State, so that usually it was a concretive effort. At the same time, we said we would rather not have any publicity about this in the newspaper. We said, "Let's keep this in the family for the time being." And then after we had a chance to vote on it, of course, it was open publicity, but it would give us a chance to debate over it with the people in an executive session. And the next day, I heard it was going to get into the newspaper. Somebody called me, and I was really upset. [unclear] it may reflect how tense these little things—and I can recall the students, one of the girls, Joyce Long, was talking to me at the time of the telephone call, and when I came back, she left right away. And she told me later that she had never seen me that way, and she was glad she had seen me. I must have been [unclear]. And I immediately went and called the newspaper. I asked if I could come down and talk to them. I asked them if they couldn't keep quiet. And they [said] no, they couldn't. And I guess they were right.

Subsequently what happened was—I cannot remember the exact details. I remember the conclusion very well. What happened was one of the other campuses, I think it was State, tabled the motion, and that was the first flaw. And the second campus—and I think maybe Chapel Hill passed the motion, and they watered it down so much that it just didn't say anything. We felt it didn't [unclear], and those reasons were very simple ones, of course. I don't remember the wording, but it was simply that the university exists to serve the needs of the state. And Woman's College is a part of the university and should admit students solely on the basis of qualification, regardless of race or creed or the other stuff that you put in. We were helped somewhat by it because coincidently—and to my knowledge it was coincidence, so it was possible that it may have been able to hide itself, but I don't think it was. I think it was somehow the students learned that we were doing something, so I think the students took it up [unclear]. And again, I don't know whose judgment it was. It could have very well been [unclear]. "You're taking up yours, we are taking up ours. We'll have nothing to do with it. We're not even going to tell you what our motion is."

Well, just a few days before the students [it down?] what their resolution was [unclear], and I think as it was to sort of put us on the spot. When the vote came out it was ninety-five to twenty votes in favor of the resolution. Some of the women—it was the women, of course, who passed it. I became convinced, at that time—whether you think true to it or not—between Chapel Hill and State they didn't have enough women on the faculty. I think the women wouldn't have done it the first time. Several of them really got very angry with me and told me after it was all over that they voted for it, and that it was an absurd thing to do, and that we shouldn't have done it, and that it didn't do anybody any good. And then they went on to say that they did vote for it, but I think it just came down that they felt a certain way and they had to live with their conscience. And it got quite a bit of reverse publicity in the press.

WC: Was your wife active in the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] during this time?

WA: Yes, she was active.

WC: I may have asked you this last week: when did you first meet Dr. [George] Simkins?

WA: I['m] not sure that I know. I would imagine it might have been in that informal group that met at the Y, that interracial group. I may have met him at Bennett College. [Bennett president David D.] Jones invited me over fairly frequently to speak on Sunday afternoons. I don't remember. It could have very well been our values were simply community-programmed, dealing with the school situation, because that was the predominant issue at that time. It may have been through Julius Douglas. George probably was a member of Julius' church [St. James Presbyterian Church], I imagine. I don't know whether he's active in it or not. It could have been through his wife and my wife, but he's never been a close relation, I'm sorry to say.

WC: I don't get the impression—well I'm not sure. I guess Taylor is probably closer in a sense.

WA: I would say that is more with his wife more than George. He's probably much more independent and doesn't want to compromise himself or to be compromised.

WC: How about [unclear] when would you have gotten involved with—

WA: I would say with [Otis] Hairston, it would have been through the Fellowship. That is the Greensboro Community Fellowship. He was in that from the very start and took a very major lead in that.

WC: That began in '63 didn't it?

WA: Yes.

WC: Why did that start? What did that come out of?

WA: I would have thought—and you would have the question of three of four different people—you would have to ask Cleo McCoy, Taylor [unclear], maybe Hairston—but I have the idea that he wasn't directly the very first time the idea came. I think it came simply through individuals not having conference in the way that officials and Harold Fosters of

the community were going to handle the problems. A real—discussed the way that they were handled. Who was mayor at the time? The life insurance man. He was a fairly decent fellow.

WC: [George] Roach.

WA: Was it Roach?

WC: No, [David] Schenck was the—

WA: Yes, Schenck. There was a real lack of confidence that anyone anywhere was trying to resolve the problems. And it probably came out of some sense of guilt, too. We hadn't really done very much through all these years, just sort of drifting and letting things go. I could have very well at—some stimulus might have even well have come from very unusual sources. It could have well come from Kay Troxler. Erwin [unclear] might have been. He was a minister of the Presbyterian, white minister of a church, a Presbyterian church. I remember them having a meeting at this particular place.

WC: He seems to have been fairly active.

WA: That's right. But he may have been involved in it, too.

WC: Would he for any reason be associated with this activism?

WA: No, I would say not. He hadn't done it. The opportunity—

WC: Yes. I had something of the impression that the Community Fellowship was, at least in part, an outgrowth of this women's group which had been working in education.

WA: There was a fusion, I would say, if not the outgrowth of it. And you are bringing it back now that they had been. Kay Troxler and I bet Mrs. [Anna] Simkins was in there.

WC: Is it Anita or Anna?

WA: Anna Simkins, that's right. Probably [the] Barnes woman, too [Mrs. Milton H.?], I think may have been involved. There were a number of women in the YW whom Helen [Ashby] would know and I would know if I saw them again. Kay Troxler was really the force in that [unclear] and they were really close in that. The other began independently, and very quickly they were fused. Another interesting [thing] happened with it—it was the Kay Troxler group—it appears to have come in through Kay Troxler; I don't know—

where Kay Troxler, in coming through Hairston, as it were—but that became one of the most active groups—Community Fellowship—it did more.

WC: It became the Education Committee, in effect.

WA: That's right. They linked with the Fellowship.

WC: And started White Oaks? Is that when the White Oaks steering thing started?

WA: This is where Kay, she's just a one-man reform movement. And I suppose to come into the Fellowship, not because she needed fellowship in the sense of friendship, she saw this as a chance to involve more people in projects that she was interested in. And my guess is that it wasn't too long before she became somewhat disappointed in the Fellowship, though I didn't know that she never told me that.

WC: Do you recall [A&T faculty member] Dr. Gladys Royal?

WA: Yes. She was—Gladys I recall. I don't remember her husband [George]. They were both chemists, weren't they?

WC: I'm not sure.

WA: She was very active and very insistent. And she was in with Kay, too; she was at that meeting, and that may have been the fusion meeting. We met out at [unclear] church. I can remember being upset at that time, too. You look back and you are not very proud about [?], and yet I think the very memory of it communicates something of the real intensity of feeling of what we thought—I thought was intensity of feeling. I remember a newspaper reporter came to that meeting. [unclear] said something about his being at that meeting. It hadn't been announced as being a public meeting, and I can't remember how we resolved it. I think we talked about what we would say or what we wouldn't say, and I think it was some sort of agreement to stay for awhile, and when we got to business, and if he was not out to divulge or deal or let out a story, for the sake of a story. I can remember—and I was not an acute person—I think my being upset about it expressed what everybody else was upset about, but they wanted to work quietly, didn't want the newspaper to spread the assumption.

WC: It seems to me that that may have been the meeting in which there was a kind of a slight protest about the failure of the school board to ever let anyone know it was possible for students to enroll in the school of their choice when they started the first grade. Do you recall if that was that meeting?

WA: It was that meeting I'm sure because I think the school board—I believe the history of it will show that the school board did make a decision, but it was never known and there was no way for people to know it, and it simply was irresponsible. Was [Phil] Weaver superintendent at that time?

WC: Yes. What was your feeling about Weaver?

WA: I thought he was a fairly decent person but he wouldn't take leadership in this. I think—I thought he saw what happened to [Ben] Smith and for whatever reason, whether he thought it hadn't gotten anywhere or whether there was too much individual suffering on his part, he would not stick his neck out. I think it is also fair to say that he simply did not have the support of the community. And I'm surprised what people may think of his powers in the community [didn't even tell him?] [unclear]. And I would certainly say that he didn't have any courage with the newspapers.

I think the newspaper went through the whole school board. There has been a great disappointment in memory, maybe. It seems to me that every step the newspaper has had pictured a conservative liberal. I would say "we need the Pearsall Plan, we need the safety valve, we—if we don't, the schools will be destroyed," and there wasn't anything to it. This put in the minds of everybody that you needed a safety valve, a self-opening [unclear] and with every step, and when the thing was done. They would say if you do this or you do that, it's going to destroy the school system. And even at the very last, with the busing, they would say this. And even subsequently, I think the newspaper, and I think so many people can confuse an issue as to what desegregation or what the Supreme Court decision was all about, at least as I see. I don't know—claimed that desegregation was going to improve the public schools or make everything better, but the issue was simply to have the equality of opportunity. And the paper, I think, should have taken a stand all these years.

We've had such degrees of differences in the public schools. We are not claim[ing] that it's worked because the schools are better. We are not out to say it's failed because we had problems. But it has always produced that kind of self-fulfilling, defeatist [unclear]. And when things happen and the schools don't fall apart, it moves to another defense position.

WC: I think that the [editorial?] policy has been incredibly consistent over the last—

WA: The what?

WC: The editorial policy has been incredibly consistent over the last years.

WA: I don't know how much of that—you may not mention this at all. I have serious doubt [as] to whether—how much influence it had. And I'm positive that it had an enormous influence [unclear]. I think that's where it's influenced. The newspaper people might disagree with me very much.

WC: Well, it defies—

WA: I think it says to the business community, and it says to the churches, the middle class, from a white standpoint, that you can't do anything. And it does defeat. It's almost like a football coach the very first day telling you that you have a season, and that you got to play, but you just can't win. And just keep drilling it in, telling the players that you can't win. You may not be able to produce a winning team by saying the opposite, but it will sure produce a losing team. It has a kind of negative [unclear], I think.

WC: I think that that's a good point. One of the things the paper does is define the parameters of the issue. It defines the parameters in such a way that is something is not an option.

WA: That's exactly right.

WC: Then you're in trouble. That, I think, would prove interesting. Well, how did you feel about Hairston when you got to know him more?

WA: [unclear] Like I don't remember when he came back to Greensboro.

WC: [Nineteen] fifty-eight.

WA: So his father has been here all along?

WC: Yes.

WA: I had known his father. A southern gentleman, I think, from the start. Probably not true [unclear] Hairston. He was rather young when he came back. He still seems like a very young man to me. I think he has had extraordinary strength all along. I think he made an extraordinary contribution; it's been quieter than that of some of the ministers. At least to my knowledge, he hasn't been on open crusades. [unclear] I don't know to what extent. Up until recently he was really active on community boards but certainly [unclear]. I think he did remarkably in holding to his principles and probably in moving his people along, too, probably keeping alive some kind of hope. In fact, I don't know how a black person would have done on the one hand to keep the line of hope and be honest about all the fears that have passed [unclear].

WC: What was your hope for the Greensboro Community Fellowship?

WA: I don't know that I can answer that question honestly. I guess I sort of always believed that I could just be true with the colored persons who sort of shared some of the beliefs; sometimes we didn't on some things. You are so convinced that you are right about things that you must—out there [are] an enormous number of people who would believe that, too. I think I hoped that it was [not?] going to solve the immediate problems or be of some help in that. And I think that it probably was, and I'm not sure was directly, in the sense of certainly not being power. It may have been there were some very exciting meetings during that time. It did get into the city people, for example. Some very interesting, various people would come to those meetings. It was subsequently, because if they were too busy with other things when [unclear]. I think that it's much more than that. I hope that over a long period of time there would be a large group of people that would come together.

My guess is also, in some strange way, some people wanted to be a substitute church; not to turn into a church. There was talk of that about certain persons, various persons talk would be about that. The Taylors' did [unclear] did and various people. You know, "Let's do this, let's do that." That never got anywhere, to my knowledge. [unclear] got somewhere, but it came out in different angles. But I don't think anybody intended to become a church, and I'm sure the blacks would never have wanted it. But I do think that there were a number of persons so dissatisfied with the position that the church was taking that they hope to be a large body of fellow hope believers, whether Christian, Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, or none of these, but persons who came out of some sort of deeper motivation.

WC: Were you at all surprised at the response to the Fellowship?

WA: I can't remember that I was.

WC: What were some of these meetings where you had important people come in and you mentioned that you thought was really doing something?

WA: Taylor was the—he could probably tell you more. He became president very shortly. I think [unclear] probably shared the first sessions. [unclear] and the others began to try and pull in some of the white persons like McNeill Smith, Bill Snider, [Ed] Hudgins. Zane came to some of those meetings.

WC: Did Snider ever join?

WA: Snider, I would never say he joined. He came to some of those meeting. [In] fact, I'm not sure for a long time there was not even a membership group.

WC: By '64 it was, because one of the things you gave me was a membership list and—

WA: Snider continued to come. There was a man named [Edward] Lowenstein, who was an architect, who was very active. He meant a great deal to it.

WC: And Rabbi [Fred] Rypins.

WA: Rabbi Rypins, Monsignor [Hugh] Dolan.

WC: Is he still around?

WA: To my knowledge he is. I haven't seen him in some time. The fact is there is a story about Sydney and Rabbi Rippins and Julius Douglas. [unclear] about race but it does have to do in a sense with race and with labor. Some group of seminary students from Yale [University] came down. I think it was about the time of the Billy Graham crusade—it was after. They were interested in the response of the community to it. And so they talked to a big many ministers in the community, and they said that they found only three persons who they thought were Christians, and one of them was Julius Douglas, of course, who is black, the other was Monsignor Dolan, and the third one was Rabbi Rypins.

WC: [laughs]

WA: Douglas would come to those meetings, too, and he was somebody who affected a lot of us trying to do something.

WC: So what would those meetings be on which would generate so much—?

WA: The first ones dealt with—I'm sure with the issues and the demands of the marchers, which, at that time, had to do with theaters and restaurants. Therefore the group immediately organized and began visiting restaurants owners. I can't recall; I think we visited both in terms of biracial restaurant owners and sometimes depending upon the person who were towers in the community and communicated the real dissatisfaction with the lack of affirmative—of quick affirmative response to what was going on, the fear that the leadership was just paying for time, holding off in the supposition that this would all die away. And I guess that rules out double conviction: one that it wasn't going to die away, and the second conviction was that it shouldn't die away.

I can't recall that the group did anything about the arrests. I'm sure there were others that began to meet with—that came out of Taylor's meeting with Farmer. They discovered that Farmer was going to be in town, who he was speaking with, and how things were going to operate. I can't recall that the group did anything in terms of the large number of students who were arrested. I would be surprised if they didn't do something, and who did this something, I don't know.

WC: Paid bail money or bond money?

WA: Yes, or there may have been some of that and some dissatisfaction with the way that they were being questioned, about the way that they were being treated.

WC: Did the group—I'm sorry.

WA: Things telescoped in terms of the first time and the second time. I can't remember what then became—it had been not cerebral palsy, but polio hospital—it was the place where they were kept as an overflow jail. I can't remember if that was both times or just—

WC: It was the second time. The first time there was really no arrests.

WA: The second time. This is rather interesting. The first time there was a slight potentiality about student movement, and it really was pretty much student the first time. Later I think more adults got into it. The first time there was a real chance of this becoming a cooperative with other colleges being involved. How much of a chance, I really couldn't say. But I do know that Gordon Blackwell, who was then president of the students [at Woman's College], went down the second day of the sit-in, and he apparently became very vibrant. Some Woman's College students were there, as a matter of fact, at that time, wearing the jackets.

He then had a meeting of the whole student body—or it was a regular meeting that they perhaps had once a week; I don't know which it was—and he told the students not to take part, and certainly if they did not to wear their jackets. I'm sure that there would be much more from his side to say about this. This upset a number of us very much. Some of the students continued to do it, but it sort of scared them off. There were a few who were very much upset about it. I believe one of them was, as I recall, the daughter of the manager of Woolworth's. It's a rather interesting story. There were two girls and I think they had the same name. They borrowed my car one time, which was fine, to go to a meeting [unclear]. In the black community, things like stores—the groups would get together in the back of the stores. I was concerned [that] he might be hurt.

WC: I'm trying to think if—yes, Harris. Yes, C[larence] L. ["Curly"] Harris.

WA: The manager of Woolworth's. That was his daughter. And you know, whether—and again I would have to look back and see when there was a Bertha Harris and another Harris, I think—whether she graduated just that time. They were both very good students. They were not in my class, but they were good students.

WC: That's interesting. That's fascinating.

WA: And we had some students the second time that were—some of our black students were involved the second time. I know one of them finished her exam while she was [unclear].

WC: Did any of the people of the Fellowship march?

WA: Yes. I say yes; I'm not sure, but I'll be pretty sure that they did. There was a strange thing happening then, too; and I'm really not positive because I can remember going to mass meetings with some friends—their church is not there now, I'm sure—and they had a march right after and I didn't march. At least I'm sure I didn't, not at that time. And I don't remember if any other whites did or not. I think the lines had already been drawn pretty fast. As I recall there were few, very few whites involved, maybe some [American] Friends Service Committee people. Do you remember when that was active?

WC: I think so. I think that one of the issues was I think that the demonstrations were being talked about as if they were simply radical black students. And that the reason for the meeting and the march, I think, was to demonstrate that this [was] the entire black community, the adult black community.

WA: That's right, that's exactly right. That part I remember. Why there weren't more whites involved, I don't know. I can't remember. We certainly weren't asked to. That's an interesting thing. No, to my knowledge no black person let alone never asked, never even hinted, and why I'm not sure. There could have been a real distrust of whites already. It could have been a feeling that they didn't have a right to.

WA: I'm interested to know if they ever asked John Taylor. It was different much later with the Poor People's March, whenever that was. It was a lot easier to march then. I can't even remember when that was.

WC: That was '68.

WA: Sixty-eight. There were very few whites in that march [unclear].

WC: That's interesting. Well, I think—

WA: Already there were certain polarizations coming.

WC: And yet the Community Fellowship went on for four more years at least?

WA: That's right.

WC: Or maybe five?

WA: I don't know. That would make an interesting theory about why it happened but also why it ceased. I have some feeling about the latter one, but I guess I would think that the Community Fellowship never had any radical blacks, blacks who were [unclear] very active in [unclear] and white, too. We had blacks who were pretty straight in their beliefs, but basically middle class in their behavior. And that could have provided them a kind of resource, too. And I guess it really went on too because for a long time there were some people who really believed the integration was the only way. And yet at the same time, we accepted the polarizations that we never pressed.

WC: Were these meetings—I noticed that from the minutes that a lot of these meetings took place at the Holiday Inn, North or South. Were either one of those owned by John Taylor?

WA: They were, both of them.

WC: Both of them were owned by John Taylor.

WA: Yes. We began meeting at the Y, and I don't know why we moved from there, maybe because of the problem of having meals served. It was [unclear], and therefore he proposed that we meet at the Holiday Inn North and give us a cut-rate price for the dinner. And so we met there for the longest period of time. I was away from '64-'66, and something had happened very much to the spring and spirit of the Fellowship, I felt, when I came back. The professionals had come in. Particular with the [unclear]. I think it's fairly important, and it doesn't touch upon me at all. In particular, the national council [unclear] the Southern Regional—not the Southern Regional, the North Carolina Human Relations [Commission]—Will—

WC: Will [unclear]

WA: No, Will Aldridge[?], and there may have been several other people, professionally, social welfare people came in. And apart from something having happened to the ethos and spirit at the time, they in a sense took over. I don't think they intended to, in the sense that there was no plot to do it, but I think the volunteers let them. We felt [they] let them pick up. And I think another thing happened as far as the demise, and that is somehow people got dissatisfied with meeting at the Holiday Inn. It was far out for the Negroes. Then they stopped being Negroes and started being black; it was about that time. And they proposed to [unclear] Hayes-Taylor Y, which of course [unclear], and that worked pretty well for awhile. But the reason that it didn't continue to work, I don't know. I mean there could have been subtle reasons, and I believe that could have been hidden racist reasons. I don't think it was that, but it could have more to do with some of the [unclear].

I think I want to mention this book—changing the subject. I think if you don't have it, I think it's a very interesting story. And I think in terms of polarization, you may ought to have it. [It's] about the student groups that met and when it stopped meeting. I won't be able to find the time. I would have to call to find the time. But there had been an interracial student group at one of the colleges of Greensboro that went back to the twenties that met, I would say, met regularly every month. By my guess is that it was [unclear] that started it; that I don't know. [unclear] I used to attend the meetings, but I was never—I mean as a faculty member. It just took students, and I was faculty. In fact, I'm not sure that there was anybody who was the power in it. Raymond [Smith?] would call it together at the beginning of each year and just move. It had some real vitality. It was not an action group [and] did not intend to be. But they did take up serious matters, and they would have open debates during the time I was in there; open debates and controversy and discussion. And there was no, to my knowledge, no mention of words. It wasn't just a nice tea party.

We had a meeting, and I can't remember when it was, but I would have said it—I think probably just before desegregation. I sure wish I knew because the timing would be very interesting. And I think it was the meeting over at Greensboro College and I think [unclear] spoke. I don't know whether that name is familiar with you are not. Forbes is the National Conference of Christians and Jews, and he was not the one that I was talking about with labor. [unclear] was the one who came in. He had real influence. He's an organizational man. Lovejoy was great in his work, particularly in terms of communicating and being aware of some forward movements in our society. And he was quite aware on [the] national scene that the time was coming when there was this polarization and that blacks were no longer willing to sit down and talk, but they were out to get what they wanted. He had a group that was going and had been going for thirty years; had a real history, had a real tradition, very informal. And he told that group—he made a speech and he talked about the climate of the times and how things don't [unclear] in a group like this [unclear]. Now maybe it was—I don't know that, but I think

[background noise] I was feeling so badly about it when I went home, I could just see that it was Raymond Smith who had put his effort into it and was very open and direct about this stuff, how discouraging that would be and how discouraging to the youth that that would be. And that polarization would surely come, but it was too bad that he hadn't had the self-fulfilling [unclear], so the group was destroyed very shortly, it disappeared. Whereas if he would have had the potentiality for shifting it into an action group—particularly because of the number of students from Bennett [College] in it, and the Bennett students were not an action group.

In fact, their president, Jones, did not want them to be an action group. And that would have been true of Willa Player [Jones' successor]. She would have not wanted that. But something happened to Willa Player when the students took the lead and went out. I don't know what happened to her, but I know she became very impatient. She may have been impatient in her own light all along; it may have been simply that front that she was putting up. But then she no longer put that front up. Previously she had discouraged the students from participating in the community program affairs. But now if you had such a group in, the Bennett students then had become active they could have pulled UNCG students, Greensboro [College] students, and Guilford College students. And just another example, I think, interestingly to me, the universities and colleges here are sort on the [unclear] as a community.

WC: I've gotten that sense. A lot of people don't have that sense, but I've certainly gotten that sense.

WA: Oh, I think, talking about these matters, there's nobody in the community that looks to the universities to do things.

WC: In going over this membership list I came across the name of William Thomas. Was William Thomas a black young man who worked in the demonstrations in '63, by any chance?

WA: Probably, [unclear]. He probably was brought by some of the A&T faculty.

WC: That's interesting because he was [unclear] and I think somewhat contemptuous—not contemptuous perhaps, but somewhat rebellious against the older blacks leadership. But the name was the same and I just wondered whether that—

WA: That could be the same, but I do know that a number of black students came during that time, and naturally there was a certain response to them. I can understand how they would be contemptuous and the white leadership, too, and they may have come just to see. I'd like to think that they came not to compromise themselves and put their energies

into such a group but because they believed that they almost lost, and here are people who at least would listen to them—and not respond just as they would like, but at least wouldn't reject it.

WC: Do you recall having any contact with or any reaction to the feelings about the [Greensboro] Chamber of Commerce and the kinds of things that they might have been doing at this time?

WA: I don't know. You have to tell me when the chamber of commerce started developing sensitivity groups.

WC: [Nineteen] sixty-six. Bill Little was head of it before that. What was your feeling about those sensitivity groups?

WA: Of course, this has to do less with racial situations and more with other matters. I guess I thought it was incompetent. You know how things in the chamber of commerce are. But I think it would have been a real option to get persons who were interested in social problems into moving into sensitivity groups.

You asked about my feelings about the chamber of commerce, and I really think it is not pretentious at all, to my knowledge. I had good feelings toward Bill Little, good feelings toward John [unclear], and I used to attend regularly [unclear] was in. [unclear] I didn't know Bill Little as well, but I didn't consider that they were the chamber of commerce. And I guess I would have to say that I had absolutely no confidence in the business leadership of Greensboro as represented in the chamber of commerce. I think the chamber was sort of [unclear] toward nineteenth century.

WC: [laughs] Nineteenth century?

WA: I remember when we used to have polio epidemics and kids used to just scream and scream, and they would be inoculated, and after it's over, it's all okay. I think this is what happened in the chamber. I think they resisted, and they did everything they could. [I] think I have some of my feelings about this because Helen [unclear]. She was president of the board at the Y, and she can tell you about those stories about years ago. They had a black secretary at the front desk at the Y. It wasn't long before she didn't show up, and she called and said she was employed at A&T. And I don't know that anybody ever really dug and found the facts, but I do know that the suspicion was that a white person got in touch with A&T and said, "Give her a job and give her a better job." And I do know that they fought. It seems to me that they fought everything the Y stood for and that none of them—there may have been an isolated individual here and there. You know Taylor was a member of the chamber [unclear].

WC: I get the impression that the Cone family is not too popular—well Emily Cone, I guess. Is Emily Cone someone who did some of these things?

WA: I don't know that.

WC: Clarence Cone, she's [unclear].

WA: I don't know Clarence Cone at all. I know his wife. It is hard for me to believe that her views haven't been the same from way back and that would have been very inconsistent [unclear] and in-humanist. She's that kind of person. And that would be true of Mrs. Julius Cone [Laura Weil], too, who was on the board at Bennett for a long time. [unclear] was her son-in-law, and Mrs. Julius Cone was not in the chamber and did not take active part in this kind of thing. Her weight would he thrown in the right direction. I don't [know] the Cones' relationship to the chamber [unclear].

WC: I take it from what you said about the transitivity sessions that you were not one of those people who think that Hal Sieber came in and saved Greensboro?

WA: No, and the chamber did not see him—if anybody did, I'd say the blacks did. What they did—maybe sensitivity was the perfect thing for them—provided the means for the people, for the forces already at work, to come into a polite middle-class area, maybe at very serious cost. But Hal did a good job and he stuck his neck out. And he may have been very cagey. That I don't know. I just don't know Hal well enough to know just how much of it was tactics and how much of it was his certain own predilections. I guess I would feel—I don't know how you would get that story. But once more, I think they had the same prejudices on the board than [unclear] my wife had. I think mine sort of came independent of hers [unclear]. I don't see the chamber [unclear].

But you can't have a community where you have segregated businesses, segregated services, and therefore it is to business interest. [unclear] have credit for that kind of intelligence and what national organization told them coming here or not. I tend to think that you are going to look for the chamber as being the one to save Greensboro. I start looking forward and wondering what national words that came down from industries. "We're moving south because we are having labor trouble up here, and we don't want black-white trouble, so therefore let's move in this area." I'm reasoning; nobody has told me that. [tape interrupted] But it included [unclear].

And Mark Friedlander, who had this very beautiful home out in Hamilton Lakes, invited a very small group of persons together not too long, I would say, after the Pearsall Plan first came out. Mark, of independent moral convictions, had invited [unclear]. And I remember I was there, and I think probably Ed Hudgins and [unclear]. He just had dinner

for a group of men. And we did some planning for that time, opposing the Pearsall Plan. But I think—I can't remember where it went. Some of it went to Raleigh, of course, for public hearing. I remember a group of us went over there, and how we tied in with the anti-Pearsall Plan I don't know. I don't believe [Irving] Carlyle spoke against the Pearsall Plan that year. I remember a Duke [University] Divinity School man, Smith, he took the lead. If I'm right, Robert Morgan was a very strong proponent for the Pearsall Plan.

WC: I'm sure he was.

WA: And at that particular session of the public hearing of the [unclear]. I can't remember what we did locally from that meeting at Mark's. I remember Irving Carlyle. I don't recall that I had met him before. He subsequently had some of us over for [unclear] again to compare notes.

WC: I must go see his widow because he undoubtedly left some papers.

WA: He would, of course. His coming out right after the Supreme Court decision the following Saturday, as I remember, cooked his goose as senator, as I understand.

WC: Really?

WA: I was told by some people in town that he should have known. They said it was simply a fact that he had been promised [by] the former governor who had just died, [William] Umstead—I'm not sure—but anyway a seat was open, a Senate seat was open. I don't know who was governor at the time. They claimed that he had been promised a seat, but that after that speech the promise was rescinded. This was fifth hand information, as far as I'm concerned.

WC: It would make sense because he keynoted that convention, and one would assume that anyone chosen to keynote the convention would have been in that kind of position to become senator.

WA: I don't know.

WC: Of course, North Carolina has this terrible habit of—

WA: Exiling.

WC: Not only that, but also of getting senators in Washington [D.C.] or getting picked because someone died and they get re-elected. They never get elected in the first place. I think

there are three or four of our recent senators. But Carlyle did write a lengthy—printed a series of articles on the Pearsall Plan, pro and con. And Carlyle did have a very, very intelligent good article in there on that. And I think that any detached observer—I'm not detached, but the logic of his article and the position—there were only about one or two papers in the entire state that were against the Pearsall Plan. One was the *Southern [Pines] Pilot*.

WA: Was it the Smithfield Paper?

WC: Yes, the Smithfield *Herald*.

WA: Tom Watson was involved with us in some way. I got to know him during this period. It could have been—as a matter of fact, it probably was over the Pearsall Plan. Some of us went down and talked to him [unclear].

WC: The *Raleigh Times*.

WA: It would make an interesting story sometime about what's happened to some of the persons. Nothing happened to me—well, I think it's a matter of fact in terms of the university. A lot of things happened because—but that's neither here nor there. [unclear] It seems to me that Raymond Smith—never had any real great friendship with him—it seems to me that Raymond Smith told me at one time, "The worse thing about the whole thing [is] that some terrible breaks of some close friends in top positions did take." He didn't take [unclear]. I guess the regret for me is that certain friends sort of disappeared, friendships especially along black/white lines. There were many people in the white community that never had a chance to develop into friendships, and I guess at the university certain potentialities collapsed because of that. [unclear]

[End of Interview]