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**William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection**

INTERVIEWEE: John Foster

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WILLIAM CHAFE: I wonder if we could go back and talk—sort of build up to 1957 again, only with some more specific questions. When the school board voted that six to one to comply with that decision and then set up the committee, you were in that committee, weren't you, that they set up to see means—seek means of—study means of complying?

JOHN FOSTER: Yes, yes. However, I don't think that committee was extremely accurate—I mean active. Some of these things, now, I'm not wanting to be quoted on.

WC: Whenever you say that, that's off the record then.

JF: Actually, and perhaps this better stay off the record.

[Off-the-record comments on the committee redacted.]

JF: No. Of course, along came the Pearsall Plan, which, had it stood, would have eliminated the necessity for any committee in the first place, because that was what we felt was a solution to the local problem as well as satisfying the edict of the court.

WC: Maybe just go back to that May 18 meeting. You knew in advance, didn't you, that [Edward] Hudgins was going to introduce this resolution?

JF: No, I didn't.

WC: You didn't?

JF: No.

WC: In other words, there had been no informal caucus before the meeting?

JF: No. I don't think [Howard] "Chick" [Holderness] knew it either. As a matter of fact, I'm pretty—I bet that he didn't know it.

WC: So in other words, it was something which Smith and Hudgins came in with?

JF: Well, Hudgins, of course, was a legal—an Oxford graduate and a legal eagle.

WC: That's interesting. In reading the minutes, I more or less got the impression that it had been something—

JF: No. There were—

WC: —as most of these things are.

JF: —subsequent meetings that were behind closed doors prior to the open meetings. Oh, yes, many of them.

WC: But this was not one of them. So the committee was established after you took that six to one vote, but did it meet very often, or more or less exist in name only?

JF: It may have met once, possibly twice. But again, the Pearsall Plan came and that served as a guideline to channel us in. Now, we attended meetings in Raleigh and Kernersville and so on, trying to get adapted to the Pearsall Plan.

WC: Did you—what was your—before the Pearsall Plan came out—the referendum of the Pearsall Plan wasn't until '56, and so there was a two year interim there. What was your reaction to, or your feeling about, the position taken by the higher-ups in the state: the governor, the legislature? What did you—

JF: Well, I told you what I tried to do later with the governor. Of course, in the intervening period of '54 to '56, I think most of us, at any level in North Carolina, felt that we had a sleeping dog and the best thing to do was to let the sleeping dog lie. And nobody had defined "deliberate speed."

WC: Did you see that phrase immediately as an important phrase—the "deliberate speed" phrase—or is that something that came out later? Do you recall?

JF: That came out later. That came out later, because, you see, there was no appreciable activity. The deliberate speed came after the thing began to pop up and the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and these minority

interests began to demand some attention to the thing, and that's when the court came along with its "deliberate speed" phrase. That's also mentioned in this Lou Bell's[?] book, the fact that we all just sort of sat quietly by.

WC: Right. So in other words, would it be fair to say that you had taken a position which put you in compliance with the law, but you were really also waiting to see what was going to happen.

JF: That's right. That's right.

WC: Did you feel that the state was responsive enough? That is, did you feel that you were getting enough support at this time—we'll go back to '57 later on—but at this time that you were getting enough support from Governor [William] Umstead and the state board of education, the commissioner of education, and people like that?

JF: Well, until the Pearsall Plan became law, or shortly prior to its enactment, at the time it was being formulated, we had very little contact with any one of the three agencies that you mentioned—the governor's office, the board of education. I think every unit was just more or less operating just on a somewhat novel basis.

WC: One of the things that—When the Pearsall Plan came out, was there any disagreement on the school board about that?

JF: Not that I recall.

WC: Didn't [school superintendent] Ben Smith oppose the Pearsall Plan? It just struck me that I saw that somewhere.

JF: I don't recall if he did. Of course, Ben saw the obvious. I don't think there's any question about that. Many of us—more of us saw it than are willing to admit it.

WC: Would you elaborate on that just a little bit?

JF: The fact that these minority groups became more vocal and more demanding—of course, there were incidents. Particularly we didn't get helped a bit by Alabama, Mississippi, Arkansas. Those things we felt were accelerating and going to eventually force some action, which, of course, they did. It's a little bit hard to recall just what your feelings were in that period of time. As a matter of fact, I had forgotten a lot of things, and I've thought since we talked of several things that might have been—might be pertinent.

I remember one that is pretty well in line with what we are talking about right now. There was a restaurant right here in Greensboro, Bliss Restaurant, a very fine eating place at that time, out where the Janis Theatre[?] is now on Battleground Avenue. And Ben called a meeting. This restaurant had a few little meeting rooms, and Tom Gorsuch[?] and his wife, who were managing—who owned Bliss at that time—Ben had made reservations for a meeting of the board, not in a formal session, but to discuss some various and a sundry plans. And Tom Gorsuch, whom I had known a very long, long time, called me very excitedly about four o'clock one afternoon. And he says, "What the hell! Ben Smith is about to ruin me."

I said, "What's the matter, Tom?"

He said, "I gave him a reservation for a meeting here at my restaurant, and I overlooked the fact that there's a Negro on the board!"

"Oh," I said, "Tom, I wouldn't pay any attention to that. We'll be in a private room."

He said, "But he'll have to come through the dining room—the main dining room to get to the room! There's no way to get in and out otherwise."

I said, "Well, don't worry about it." I said, "I'll tell you what: I'll make it point to walk in with Dr. [William] Hampton and walk out with him, if you want me to. I won't shield him or disguise him, but I have no hesitancy about doing that," which I did, but nothing ever came of it.

Tom and Mary, his wife, were—oh my, they were excited. And Tom came over to me and said, "Well, you got him in all right. Do you think you can get him out?"

WC: [laughs] Interesting. Did you have any—did the school board have any input to the—were they consulted about the Pearsall Plan before it was formulated?

JF: Yes. Yes. Of course, at the professional level, that is the superintendent, particularly. I think they were—I know that they were better schooled in the progress of the Pearsall Plan than we as individual board members were. There were several meetings. I remember one held at the Carolina Hotel in Raleigh. They were held in Raleigh. The governor, Colonel [William] Joyner, Tom Pearsall, and quite a number of other people from throughout the state who were interested in the Pearsall Plan, and a lot of board of education local boards' members were there.

WC: Did you approve—did the board and yourself personally approve of all aspects of the Pearsall Plan? Do you recall having any questions about its specific provisions?

JF: No, as a matter of fact. Again—and I think I'm speaking pretty well the temper of the board—we felt, well, here is something that was a big umbrella. And while we were thoroughly familiar with the feeling of the people east of Raleigh especially, we also

were familiar with the people in the larger cities—Greensboro, Charlotte, Winston-Salem, particularly. And we thought "Well, this will solve the problem. The east can pretty well handle their end, and we can carry on here. We can have a freedom of choice."

WC: Do you recall much bitterness during that debate here in Greensboro or elsewhere? Was there much division over the Pearsall Plan, do you think?

JF: No, I really—I can't recall too much difference of opinion. Wasn't it along about that time—I'm trying to reconcile the time—was Mr. [Dwight D.] Eisenhower president?

WC: Yes.

JF: Didn't Mr. Eisenhower—yes, I know he said essentially this to the NAACP—of course, his position was a little bit unusual, shall we say, too. I remember a quotation of his that, "You've come a long way, now don't overdo it. Don't try to go too far too soon." I don't remember his exact quote, but I know that was the essence of it.

WC: Well, the Pearsall Plan gets passed. I guess one of the things which is most interesting to me is after the Pearsall Plan is passed, how did—what were the factors which went into the school board's decision, with the Pearsall Plan on the books, to go ahead and desegregate in '57?

JF: Well, of course, we did make an effort—and Dr. Hampton was quite valuable in this—by trying to see to it that the applicants for transfer were of superior academic ability. As a matter of fact, a little girl that went to [Greensboro, now Grimsley] Senior High School—she was in the class with my son, incidentally—she darn near made the top. She was about to be the valedictorian of the class, one Negro girl in the whole high school. She was very capable.

On the other hand, we had some of the Herrings. [We took?] two of those boys, one who couldn't even pass—I think I mentioned this perhaps to you before—who couldn't even pass in the colored school. I know we tried awfully hard. Dr. Hampton tried hard to convince him—his father; he was a barber, I believe. And he tried to convince him that he might be doing the wrong thing. No, Sir. He was determined and did put the children in Gillespie [Park Elementary] School, and one of them still just couldn't make the grade.

WC: He dropped out the next year, didn't he?

JF: Yeah.

WC: Well, the thing that somewhat puzzles me is that the Pearsall Plan in effect gave—did give Greensboro a way out if it wanted a way out. In other words, under the Pearsall Plan you didn't have to desegregate.

JF: That's right.

WC: So I'm really wondering why it was—what were the reasons or forces which caused you to nevertheless go ahead and desegregate in that August of '57?

JF: I think we felt that the Pearsall Plan—we hoped at least—would be effective and legal. We still have felt that in the larger cities, especially in the central and western part of North Carolina, would have to lead the way. And our position—I know it in talking a number of times with the governor when he would get me over in the corner and whisper to me—our position was that maybe we should try to take the leadership in this thing. I think that Charlotte felt that way particularly, and Winston eventually did come around. They didn't feel as strongly as Greensboro and Charlotte, though, that maybe we would be protecting the whole state by utilizing Pearsall Plan.

You see, also a provision of the Pearsall Plan was that the private school situation—the $210 or whatever it was that they would be—the parents or the parents in loco parentis—I'll never forget that phrase either—could get $210. Well, of course, that was nothing. Another phrase that I remember was criticized to me a good bit. I believe it was Ed Hudgins' boy was in a private school. I don't even recall which school—one of these semi-military things, as I recall it. But there was a lot of criticism of that. You know, "If my children have to go with the Negroes, why don't yours?"

WC: So that—I suppose that having all ready gone on record in '54 as voting to comply, that this created some pressure to do something.

JF: Yes, and I think you have to say that Ben may have leaned a little bit pro, and by pro I mean toward integration. Of course, Mrs. [Sara Mendenhall] Brown being, as I explained to you, a Quaker, and Ben a dyed-in-the-wool Methodist, both of those philosophies of Christianity lean—the Quakers particularly—lean in that direction. And Ben was serious. He was seriously conscientious about the thing.

WC: So he wasn't going to let it die, in other words?

JF: No, I don't think. No, by no stretch of the imagination do I think that he was going to let it die as such.

WC: And he was working closely with you at that point, since you were the head of the school board.

JF: That's right.

WC: And you felt that it was—

JF: I felt that it had to come. And there was no sense in trying to dodge—we could have carried—no doubt have carried on cases six, eight, maybe ten years through various courts and maneuvering, but it would have been terribly expensive and terribly foolish.

WC: Would you go back and talk a little more about what you saw the relationship being between your role in the state—that is, as the role of Greensboro and Charlotte—and what was happening in the rest of the state?

JF: Are you speaking now of the Greensboro system, the Charlotte system?

WC: Yeah.

JF: Well, as I said, we all knew the situation down east. Most of those counties—as you no doubt know—were in excess of 50% Negro population. At that time, too, the Negro in eastern North Carolina particularly was becoming more and more overcome by machinery and larger farms, and this business of the tenant farmer was fading rapidly. The entire structure of the tenant farmer—the big merchants, you know, that carried the accounts, fertilizer accounts, and they settled up at the end of the year and nobody had anything except the guy carrying them on the books—that whole philosophy changed.

The Negro came more and more into the larger cities. We had a number of Negroes here in Greensboro who had immigrated from either eastern Carolina or South Carolina, particularly. They wanted no part. They didn't come because of the possibility of integration; they came for economic reasons.

WC: Now—

JF: We knew that some of the eastern Carolina counties and cities would do everything in the world to put this thing off as long as it was possible to do so. We knew too—one of the things we talked about so much, both at the state level and at the local level here in Greensboro, was class action. We were scared to death of that. Because that really would have popped things loose.

WC: Didn't the Pupil Assignment Act take care of that?

JF: The Pearsall Plan?

WC: Yes, and then the act before that, the Pupil Assignment Act?

JF: Yes, we thought so. We thought so, yes.

WC: But you still thought it was a possibility they could bring a class action?

JF: Yes, and I still think they could today, if they had approached it in that manner. You see, [J.J.] Shields was coming mighty close to class action situation when he filed for that group that I gave you.

WC: Right, right. Now at what point did the school board decide to desegregate in the fall of ‘57? Do you recall just when it was? I don’t think it appears in the minutes, but I suspect it was an informal decision.

JF: Do you recall the dates of those copies of applications I gave you? I think it was in June or July.

WC: June or May—

JF: It was in the summer, I remember that. I remember that we went ahead and had the principals informed of the manner in which they were to go—if they had a person applying for a change of school—the various things that were involved: closeness to the school and four or five of those things that we did set forth as being requirements for making an application. That was questionable, too, from a legal standpoint, but we did that thinking, again, that we could fairly well control. And we’d been foolish in those days, before the days of busing, to send a Negro child from down here to Buffalo Creek over to this end of town. There was no transportation available to them.

WC: Did the board have—the board had more than seven applications, didn’t it?

JF: Oh, yes, yes.

WC: What you did, in fact, was to choose the seven. I guess what I’m interested in is whether there was any division over that decision to choose those seven and things like that.

JF: No, I don’t believe so. There were some rejections, and those rejections were based on these four or five rules that we had set forth to qualify the application in the first place.

Their opposition was that if we receive an application and it isn't qualified under these restrictive regulations, then we won't even consider it to be an application.

WC: Now, your public meeting took place in August, wasn't it? Or no, it was July—the July meeting, I guess.

JF: There was a special—

WC: [Clarence Leroy] Shuping and some other people came and spoke against the—

JF: That was the one that was simultaneously timed, for the three boards to meet at the same time.

WC: Right, right. Can you just talk a little bit more about your role there? I know that you've talked about it generally, but if you could maybe just—

JF: Well, that's—of course, I don't object to what you eventually would come out with, but I certainly think it would be unfair, in consideration of the Greensboro situation, not to give considerable credit to Bill Snider, who is now editor of the *Greensboro Daily News*, and to Lane Carr[?], who at that time was a reporter for the *News* and did a tremendous job in helping, and he's the guy that we could trust. You could talk to him off the record, and you'd never hear of it until it became a fact.

Incidentally, another little interesting thing happened. This was one of the last meetings. We held several meetings. We'd go to Winston-Salem, Charlotte would come to Winston, then we'd meet in Charlotte and then we'd meet here in Greensboro. The last meeting that we had here in Greensboro was set up in the King Cotton Hotel. Well, of course, nobody was supposed to know about it. And I told my office I was going out of town. Charlotte came over, several of them—three or four from Charlotte, three or four from Winston. We met down at King Cotton.

WC: How many of them were there from Greensboro?

JF: How many were present?

WC: How many of you were there from Greensboro.

JF: I believe there were four. Ben was there, of course. I believe there were four of us—three and Ben. When I got back to my office, there was a call from Lane, so I returned it. And Lane says, "What the hell are you doing to me?"

"What's the matter, Lane?"

He said "You know what I'm talking about."

I said, "No, I don't really, Lane."

"The hell you don't. What about that meeting you just came from?"

I said, "How did you know about that?"

And here's what had happened. These newspaper boys are tough when they get on the trail. He had called Charlotte. One of these members of the Charlotte board at that time I believe was in the real estate business. He had called Charlotte, and he just happened to pick this one member of the board. He called him, and of course he wasn't in his office. And his secretary, of all foolish things, said he was in a meeting in Greensboro. Well, immediately that tipped Lane off.

I said "Lane, you know I wouldn't—"

He said, "Just let me in on these things."

And I probably did make a mistake because he was so trustworthy. But at that time we were, I mean we were awfully cautious about the slightest little leak. But those guys helped an awful lot. I did feel—as I've mentioned to you, I believe, before—that in my argument with the other three, that to give them one shot instead of three separate shots, they might get one big story but they wouldn't get three big stories.

And Lane incidentally was the—oh, he was the liaison between *Life* magazine and *Newsweek* and several of those news-type magazines. I know *Life*—he was with those photographers and reporters all the time they were here.

WC: Do you think Greensboro would have gone ahead had it not been in solidarity or in alliance with Charlotte and Winston?

JF: Yes.

WC: So you would have gone ahead anyway?

JF: I felt that we would have been foolish to delay. Every day of delay just accelerated the animosity, the feelings. People were getting pretty upset at that time.

WC: How did you sense their being upset?

JF: Of course, the integrationists were the ones who were upset. And again, I have to refer to the fact that we had the five colleges, and particularly at A&T College [now North Carolina A&T State University], you had a very high-class, a lot of them were high-class, intelligent Negroes who wanted to push, push, push, as I explained to you before. Many of them felt that if they gave an inch here, they were losing the cause. They were the ones of course that pushed hardest.

Then we had the group—old man Shuping and a fellow McDowell, and a lot of that group that felt that we should do everything possible to escape it. Old man Shuping even argued that he knew the Constitution well enough to know that the guys that wrote the Constitution didn't intend.

He asked a question too about the feeling of industry. This is an interesting little story that happened. I may be getting a little—wandering around a bit, but these things pop in my mind. You can edit later. Stark Dillard, the president of Dillard Paper Co. here in Greensboro, he was at one time a member of the Greensboro School Board. Stark was rather strong in his feeling that God didn't make white and Negro separately. He didn't intend to keep them separate and so on. He bred horses, and he knew that the horses had to have the strains and so on and all that kind stuff. Not that Stark was rabid, but you knew where he stood. And he even today is the type of guy that will let you know right quick where he stands. And I talked to Stark, not trying to convince him, but just trying to show him where we had no choice. I didn't like it particularly, any better than he did maybe. Anyhow, he was against it, not vehemently so. But some years later, I was on the board of Wesley Long Hospital here, and Stark was on the board, and Ernest McLean[?], who was a banker here in town, was also on the board. And Ernest was of the old school, and he was pretty well segregated in his thinking. We were sitting around one day before a luncheon meeting of the hospital board and Earnest said to me—shortly after these Negroes were admitted—said, "Well, I see that you've let some niggers in the schools—in white schools."

And I said, "Yeah, Ernest. We didn't have much choice."

And Stark—I'll never forget him—even knowing how he felt, Stark turned to Ernest and said, "Ernest, now look, this thing is all over now. John couldn't help it. I know how he feels, I know how you feel, and I know how I feel. Let's just forget it." Of all people, for Stark Dillard to come to my rescue when somebody was needling me, it impressed me.

WC: So tell me if I'm being accurate here in paraphrasing what you've said. You felt that with delay, you were just getting more polarization.

JF: That's right.

WC: That both sides were getting more aggravated—

JF: And it wasn't going to go to sleep on either side.

WC: —and the only way to control the situation, in effect, was through action of some kind. That's fair?

JF: Yes, and again constantly bearing in mind this class action possibility.

WC: So this was really the minimal way, in a sense, of keeping the situation under control.

JF: That's what I figured, and I told so many people down east. My wife's aunt—her two aunts, as a matter of fact, were principals of a school in Tarboro, North Carolina. Matter of fact, the school is named after them. They had their feelings, of course, in the matter. They lived all their lives—at that time they were beginning to approach the latter stages of their lives—and they knew it was coming. The private school, they figured would come. But I knew that they were not going to make any move down there, either they or the board. I have a copy of a speech by a physician, Bass, Dr. Bass[?], in Tarboro, who was chairman of the Tarboro School Board. Quite a speech he made against—no, siree, he wanted no part of it. But in that climate, that was generally what prevailed throughout that area. And it's pretty readily understandable when you take into consideration the fact that 50, up as high as 70% of the population in some of those counties were Negro.

And there were two things that they feared most: one, of course, was possible marriage, intermarriage, and two—I would say almost 1A, sub-A—was that—let me see how best to express it—that they would in effect have political control. In other words, you would have a Negro mayor, a Negro—so on down the line. Of course, in later periods, we have had. But at that time, I don't think the Negroes in that part of the state—and some other locations, especially in South Carolina—they were either one of two things: they either didn't recognize the political power that they actually could have had, or they weren't sufficiently organized to take care of it. You take Precinct 5—and that also is mentioned in Lou Bell's book here—that he gives the percentage that voted for Eisenhower in Precinct 5—predominantly Negro, of course—and then the percentage that went—same precinct—that went for [John F.] Kennedy. Quite astounding figures, really. But in those instances where you could easily identify the black and the white vote, it was very evident. They were learning more and more of their political strength.

WC: Just a sort of digression for a second. I'm interested that Raleigh and Durham weren't part of this coalition of Greensboro, Charlotte, and Winston. Were they approached or were they just—

JF: Yes. Yes, they were approached. Durham came awfully close. Raleigh was pretty adamant in their position. I'm speaking now, of course, of the boards. That's the only criterion that I had. As I say, Durham came awfully close to joining us. As a matter of fact, I believe at one time that Durham had essentially agreed.

WC: I guess they got cold feet?

JF: I suppose that would describe it pretty accurately. [laughter]

WC: That's interesting because, of course, Durham had—I was reminded of that by the Durham Committee of Negro Affairs is a very, very powerful political organization.

JF: How long ago, though, are you talking about their power?

WC: Well, they've been powerful since the forties—I mean, in terms of wielding a block vote.

JF: But as—I've forgotten who it was who said it. It was so true. I believe it was Eisenhower who also said that the Negroes were definitely a political factor. But the Negroes, in and of themselves, could not elect a Negro. They had to have a white to go along with it. And we certainly recognize that and still do. Dr. Hampton, I think, recognized that about as strongly as any person I've ever talked to. He knew that Negro people couldn't elect him.

WC: Was Dr. Hampton the first black man on the school board? I think he was.

JF: I think that's right. The record—I wouldn't want—

WC: He had been a city councilman before that.

JF: Yes, he was on the city council. Later on, as a matter of fact, he led the ticket.

WC: And when he left the city council, there was—Waldo Falkener was elected in his place, I guess. There has been a black city councilman, I think, since the fifties?

JF: You mean on the council—city council?

WC: Yeah.

JF: Yeah. Waldo came in, and of course we have two now.

WC: Did people like Falkener have much to do with this whole—did anyone consult with him?

JF: We're way off the record now.

WC: Okay.

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

[Off-the-record comments redacted.]

JF: The two we have now I think are a considerable improvement.

WC: Who is—who are they?

JF: Vance Chavis, who—

WC: Chavis, right.

JF: —is former principal of the school.

WC: He was principal of Lincoln [Junior High School]—

JF: Lincoln.

WC: —and Dudley [High School]?

JF: Lincoln, that's right, and Dudley.

WC: He's no longer in the school system.

JF: He's retired.

WC: He's retired and now on the council.

JF: Right. And Jimmie Barber.

WC: Right. And Barber's from A&T, right?

JF: Yes.

WC: Yeah. I knew I'd read about them, but I just wanted to get their names—recall their names to my mind again. Now, you must have had a lot of dealings with Chavis in your—he was principal of Lincoln at the time you were president of the school board, wasn't he?

JF: Yes, that's right. Right. No, as a matter of fact, most of my dealings—and I think most of the dealings relating to this, except for what Dr. Hampton was doing more or less sub

rosa—was with Dr. [John] Tarpley, who was in effect the superintendent of the black sector. He's the man who adjourned the meeting.

WC: [laughs] Now, he was head of Dudley, is that correct? He was principal of Dudley?

JF: Dr. Tarpley?

WC: Yeah.

JF: Well, I think it was staged beyond that. He was almost what you'd refer to strictly as an assistant superintendent. Ben depended on him to look after the Negro group, subject, of course, always to the board's policy and Ben's administration.

WC: How did that work out? How—I mean, you said you had a lot of dealings with Tarpley.

JF: It worked out very good, very good, because Tarpley was not violently integrationist. He was needled, of course, a lot, just like in the meeting that I recited the facts. But Dr. Tarpley was not, and didn't—he obviously made up his mind he was not going to get involved in this issue to a point of having to say, "Yes, we will," or "No, we won't." He was almost of the caliber of Dr. Hampton, so far as that phase was concerned. He was never as smart, nor as understanding, as Dr. Hampton, but he was not going to take the responsibility.

WC: So was he pretty much a person who you could depend on to communicate what black parents and others in the community were interested in, without necessarily becoming an advocate himself?

JF: Yes, I think he kept us pretty well informed as to the approaches he had from the various people, most of which really were the redneck crowd, the crowd that was just constantly pushing. I don't think he had half the problem with the moderate Negro that he did with this element, mainly the A&T element, the lunch counter boys.

WC: Well, coming back to this situation in '57, you had clearly done a very thorough job of preparing for this and had tried to minimize the dangers. What—now, perhaps we can go back and talk a little bit about what we spoke of at the end of our last session. If you could just talk a little bit about Governor [Luther] Hodges and your relationship with him and how you saw his position in this whole situation.

JF: That would have to go back a long way. You see, being associated with the business involved heavily in the textile industry, I'd known Luther Hodges for years and years

prior to the time he became president of Fieldcrest—what is now Fieldcrest Mills, the old Marshall Field [& Co.] group. I'd also known him in Rotary as a Rotarian. Ever since I first knew Hodges—and he is still this way—he was for Luther Hodges. If it was a political thing, he always had his nest pretty well feathered. I know that at one time he was slated to be head of Rotary internationally. And I was told that he was told by some of the major interests in Marshall Field that if he wanted to work for Marshall Field, that was very good, but if he wanted to spend his time with Rotary, then he couldn't do both. He didn't become international president, I know that, but he did become a member of the board, the international Rotary board.

Of course, I think Luther more or less fell into the governorship by a fluke, really. I don't think there's any—of course, it would be a natural thing not to anticipate that the lieutenant governor, at the time of his election, eventually is going to become governor, without running himself independently for it. But he fell into that. I think be told me one time he'd spent $25,000 when he finally did run for governor.

Anything that might have been damaging to his political strength, he would not have a part in. And of course, anybody with any knowledge at all of North Carolina politics knows that eastern Carolina is the vote. And Hodges, as did anybody else knowledgeable of North Carolina, knew that eastern Carolina was what you had to have if you were going to be elected governor. So he was not going to jeopardize his position with eastern Carolina. And he was not going to condone or express an opinion in support of central North Carolina or western North Carolina.

WC: Had you spoken to him before your—before the summer of '57 about the issue and about what you and Greensboro were going to do? Had you briefed him or made him aware of what was going to come here?

JF: The governor?

WC: Yes.

JF: Of the action we were going to take?

WC: Right.

JF: Yes.

WC: In other words—

JF: We kept him pretty well informed. If I didn't see him at one of these meetings, where he would get me in the corner, he was in close relationship with [Hoke McPherson?]. And

Hoke and I were pretty close—heck of a great guy, Hoke McPherson. And a number of times Hodges, through Hoke—you see, Hodges again was afraid that if he associated too much with me, that it would jeopardize his position.

Another thing that happened that was—and I could roam on and on and on. I may be digressing a bit, but I'm trying to recall the—not in sequence, but just recall certain things that pop into my mind. I know Dr. Guy Phillips, who was at the University of North Carolina and established in the North Carolina School Boards Association. I was pretty active in that organization, and Dr. Guy asked me to take the presidency of it. I said, "Doctor, look you sweat blood getting this dang thing set up. You've got eastern Carolina coming along pretty well. If I should go in there as president, I can see many, many people—maybe some of my friends in eastern Carolina—saying that the move was to put me in that position to foster, promote, or force integration in their area, and I just won't do it out of respect to you." And he understood. He still tried to talk me into it, but he finally got to the point where he wasn't too—didn't try to be too convincing. That too was a Hodges contact.

WC: Now, had he tried to—in this process of being informed about what you were going to do here and what was going to happen in Charlotte and in Winston—had he tried to discourage this at all?

JF: No. Not to my knowledge, never. As a matter of fact, I think deep down in his heart he realized that it was inevitable that this thing was coming, perhaps not as strongly as it eventually did. I don't think anybody anticipated it to the busing stage, for example. But deep down he knew. He's a practical person with it all, and he knew darn well it had to come. Of course, the university—one of the crazy—several of the crazy things here—in Arkansas, at the military base, it had been integrated for years and years and years, and schools. The University of North Carolina had Negro students in it. It was nothing really so unusual.

WC: When you finally reached him that night before schools opened on a desegregated basis, what did he say to you when you asked him to—

JF: He said he would—well, in effect, he said let him think it over. Of course, that's a good way of saying, "Let's forget it." He intimated, of course, that his position—he didn't want to jeopardize his position, his political position. My contention was, I said, "Governor, you maybe strengthening your position." I said, "I've tried to tell these people down east that, damn it, we're holding a big umbrella over them. We're protecting them, really, because we're at least getting into a position where the State of North Carolina can't be forced into integrating." We have got some integration. And that, incidentally, is the thing I can't understand now: why North Carolina has just, in the past week or so, has

been cited by HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] as not having proper coverage of the integration problem at the university level. Hell, the university—UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro], you know it as well as I do. I don't see what more we can do.

WC: That wasn't HEW so much as it was the federal court judge.

JF: Well, yes, that's true. But the HEW I believe was supposed to enforce it or check into it, but now there's no HEW so—[laughs]

WC: How true. So in other words, when you talked to him, he just indicated his reluctance to even make an innocuous statement. As you described before, all you wanted him to say was—

JF: Just—

WC: —there was nothing wrong with this or something like that?

JF: If he'd just say "Good morning." I remember telling him, I said, "If you just say, 'Good morning.'" But no, he wouldn't do it. And there was no way that I could force him to do it, and as a matter of fact, wouldn't have if there had been. And I certainly never used it in a political manner or in a manner degrading to him. As a matter of fact, I don't think I've ever told that story to anyone else. Hoke McPherson knew it, but very few people knew that he was even contacted.

WC: Do you think it would have made a difference if he had—not so much difference for Greensboro, but a difference for the state, perhaps, if he had thrown some of his weight in support of this kind of thing?

JF: [chuckles] I'll have to get out my crystal ball. [pause] I would say it might have been a negative reaction. I was thinking in terms, perhaps, of overexposure. Maybe the press there in Greensboro gave us overexposure. I think perhaps they did—too damn much of it. I think Skipper Bowles suffered from the same thing, of overexposure. Then there was just the people, particularly the press, local press—and I think pretty generally true, *Charlotte Observer*, WS—*Winston-Salem Journal*—that they all were not wild integrationists, but they were sensible enough to see that there was no alternative. We did have a wonderful press, there was no question about that, and the other two cities did, too. But I think perhaps we had a little too much at times.

WC: I was just thinking in terms of Hodges, by not saying anything, in some ways cast himself in the role of the enemy, from the point of view of the Left, let's say.

JF: Well, I think this: I think that your thought might have some merit, had anyone at that time who was for following the laws, the verdict of the Supreme Court, had made a real issue of pointing out that here was a governor who had taken an oath, just as we had taken an oath, not only to support the laws of the State of North Carolina, but the laws of the State of North Carolina not inconsistent with the federal law. He took basically the same oath that we did.

WC: Well, when the schools were desegregated and those seven black students went in the fall of '57, were you pleased with the response, with how things went?

JF: When we finally—

WC: When they went to school and—

JF: When the session finally opened?

WC: Yes.

JF: Well, I remember that day very well. I went down to Gillespie School. There was only the one student at the high school. [Robert] "Lody" Glenn met her. But I went down to Gillespie after the—I didn't go right during the opening bell, but I went down there after school—actually, they'd gone into classes. I happened to get there just about a little break, recreational break. And I was talking to the principal, and these children were going out into the yard to take a little break. And in back of the school they had a row of, oh, possibly eight or ten swings, and I looked out there and observed a little bit. And here was one little Negro girl, and she—they were standing up—little Negro girl and a little white girl standing up pumping this swing, just having the biggest time in the world. I still say it wasn't the children, it was the parents. Those kids were having a wonderful time. They didn't make any issue of it. The biggest thing, I think, in the average person's thinking—as in Stark Dillard—was the fear of intermarriage. That seemed to be the real core.

WC: I think it could start back [unclear]

JF: What?

WC: I said it could start back in the third grade.

JF: [laughs] Where are you from, incidentally?

WC: I'm originally from Boston.

JF: The Harvard [University] area.

WC: [laughs] I went to school there and then I went to New York.

JF: Boston U[niversity]?

WC: No, I went to school at Harvard.

JF: At Harvard.

WC: And then I went to Columbia [University] for my PhD, and this is my second year in North Carolina. I'm a very provincial boy. [laughter]

JF: You seem to have the experience of the—

WC: I keep on—I've never been west of Chicago, and I have been pretty far south, but this is a brand new experience for me, you see, having spent all my time in New York and Boston, the terrible northeastern [access route?]

JF: You'll get de-Yankeeized [sic].

WC: I think I've become de-Yankeeized a little bit. We go around defending the South now when we go home. We go home for Christmas.

JF: That's pretty characteristic.

WC: We go around defending the South and telling people they really don't know what they're talking about. [laughs] Oh, dear.

I guess Josephine Boyd probably had the hardest time, didn't she, of any of these students who—

JF: Now, hard you mean in what respect?

WC: Well, difficult in terms of she was the only one at the high school and she was old enough so that—

JF: Socially?

WC: Yeah, socially initially—

JF: I'm talking about academically. You're talking about socially.

WC: Right, right.

JF: Yes, I suspect that's true. But the parents seemed to pick more at the Gillespie Park School than they did the high school.

WC: I guess because she was the only one there?

JF: But I'll tell you another thing, at Gillespie, which is down—you may or may not know—it's south of town, an old, old neighborhood of the early 1910-15, fine houses, and the area the Negroes began to encroach. And the Negroes were coming. They had their blockbusters, they called them, and they were coming into the area. And of course those people who lived next door to a house that was sold to a Negro knew that their value had gone, pop! And that had the—was underlying all of this feeling at the adult level. The children at that age didn't particularly give a damn whether the house was sold or wasn't sold, whether was in a good neighborhood or in a Negro neighborhood. It didn't matter to them. But those people who were affected economically were the basis. And we didn't have that similar situation in the high school area or the area where Josephine came from.

WC: Why was it that Gillespie was the only school which—I guess, for what, five or six years, eight years maybe, Gillespie was the only school which had black children?

JF: Of any consequence. Other schools had some, but that was—and, of course, it was because of the—

WC: Because of the living area?

JF: The area, yes. You take Asheboro Street, I can remember—as a matter of fact, I was born on Arlington Street, which is a couple of blocks off of Asheboro. I went to the old Caldwell School. And there were a few Negroes along Vance Street, which was a couple of blocks off of Asheboro. But all the Negroes were back farther south and southeast. And these people who came into the Asheboro Street area, as I said, were fairly modestly wealthy. As a matter of fact, Greensboro's first millionaire had a house down on Asheboro Street—E. P. Horton, the first acknowledged millionaire in Greensboro. And

there are many—you can still see many of those fine old houses still standing. Many of them have been torn down.

I know one of our employees had a house on Asheboro Street, which was right next to what then was the manse of the Baptist church, Asheboro Street Baptist Church—right across the street from the church. And he was a member of that church. Well, he got a pretty fancy offer, and he took it. Man, I'm telling you, he didn't attend that church anymore. As a matter of fact, he finally moved to Wilmington. They gave him a fit because he had—they thought he sold them out. The minister, of course, couldn't express too much. I'm sure he felt it. But everything around there began—in that particular area, then—began to develop more and more into Negro neighborhoods. Now, today you ride down there and you hardly see a white family—a few Indians maybe, but mostly Negro.

WC: Now, at Gillespie I take it there were not—were there many social problems at Gillespie with the students who were there?

JF: No, they were too young—I would say mainly too young to be faced with any particular social problems.

WC: One story I'd heard had to do with Josephine Boyd's father, his job or his business. Did he get harassed?

JF: I have—I'm not intimately familiar. I have heard that there was a harassment. And I know Lody Glenn, who is now principal of Grimsely School—used to be Senior High. I kidded him a lot. Have you ever met Lody?

WC: No, I haven't. No. How do you spell that first name?

JF: L-o-d-i [sic].

WC: L-o-d-i. That's an interesting name.

JF: He's a former Marine, great big guy, and a swell, grand fellow. Lody was assistant principal, assistant to [A. P.] "Red" Routh. And when Routh retired, Lody became principal. And I was talking to Lody not long ago, kidding him again. The morning that they drove Josephine to Senior High, Lody Glenn, he said, just happened to be right where the car stopped to let this little girl out. And he more or less just casually walked with her to the school. I said, "Lody, what's all that damn stuff about how you just happened to be there? Don't give me that." He just laughed. [laughs] "You couldn't have possibly known the exact second they were going to drive up with that girl." Of course, they drove her to school a good bit of the—all the time.

WC: That's an interesting story. I'm sure that his bigness and his—

JF: Those little kids knew—they all respected him, they all loved him, but they knew he was—when he said something, that's what he meant. Because his students used to bother him—my boy used to be in one of his classes, and typically the students would do their best and quite frequently succeeded, according to what he told Bob—told me, getting Lody to talking about his Marine—his experiences in the Marines, you know. Gosh, the time would be up before Lody got around to the lesson. [laughter]

WC: That's the oldest tactic in students'—

JF: It's still in existence. That's true.

WC: I tell you, there's nothing like the ego.

JF: What is your subject, by the way?

WC: Twentieth century U.S. history. I used to teach high school. Before I went to graduate school, I taught in high school in New York. Same thing used to happen all the time. They'd find out what you were interested in and they'd get you on to that, and you get so wrapped up that you'd forget about what you're supposed to be doing.

JF: Just like I—in talking to you here, I find myself digressing. As I said, when things pop into my head, I let myself roam.

WC: That's the way to do it. Why don't we just take a look at some of these names here on the school board? You've mentioned that Mrs. Brown was a Quaker and her religious feeling pretty much determined her position on this issue, at least.

JF: Yes. She was a former school teacher. She was Sarah Mendenhall. One of the schools here now is named for one of her forbearers. She is Mrs. Sarah Mendenhall Brown now. Incidentally, I had Doris, Ben Smith's secretary, when I submitted my resignation—we'd had a lot of stink here. A former mayor was raising sin about the fact that a lot of his commissions and boards were not attending meetings and all that sort of thing. So I had Doris go back and make a resumé. Out of 120 board meetings, during my term of office—and I was always chairman—I missed ten meetings. And Sarah—the majority of those meetings, Sarah presided.

Now, Thornton Brooks is—Let me tell you one more thing about Hodges before we get away from that. We had a terrific polio epidemic here in 1948. This is getting a

little bit prior to the—but we had a terrible time. It was quite a story. And we decided the only thing to do was build a hospital, which we did and it was an amazing thing, ninety-two to ninety-three days of hell, a 120 bed unit, and we were working night and day and everything else, donations and various things. After we got occupied, a very prominent attorney—are we off the record now?

WC: Go ahead, off the record.

[Off-the-record comments redacted.]

WC: We were talking about these—

JF: Thornton Brooks.

WC: He succeeded you, didn't he, as chairman?

JF: Yes, for a short period. Thornton's a very successful lawyer, a corporation lawyer. His father was a very successful corporation lawyer, primarily counsel for Jefferson Standard Life [Insurance Company] from the early days until the lush days. Very prominent and highly respected and a fairly wealthy man. J.C. Cowan Jr.—J.C. was vice chairman of the board of Burlington Industries. He's now retired. Dr. Hampton, you know about him. Howard Holderness was president of the Jefferson Standard Life Insurance Company. He's presently retired. Dr. Raymond Smith, there's an interesting story. That connection, too, I'll try to remember. Dr. Raymond Smith is dean of the school of religion at Greensboro College. His wife—

WC: Is he still alive?

JF: Beg your pardon?

WC: Is Dr. Raymond Smith still alive?

JF: Yeah, to the best of my knowledge, he is. I know their house has been for sale. As far as I—I'm pretty sure he is. But his wife is a sister of Senator [Paul] Douglas from Illinois.

WC: Oh, really?

JF: And of course you know Senator Douglas. And Dr. Smith definitely was—saw the light, shall we say. Now an interesting thing about Dr. Smith—or the Smiths—[calls to another room] Jen!

Jen: Yeah?

JF: Raymond Smith's still—Dr. Smith's still living, isn't he?

Jen: From Greensboro College?

JF: What?

Jen: Greensboro College?

JF: Yes.

Jen: Yes, he's still—

JF: Yes, out on Hobbs Road. Their son was in the school system, and he was the first to want to go to Gillespie School where the Negro students were, and he did. [pause]

Let's see, Dr. Hampton, you know all about him. J.C. Cowan—

WC: Were any of these—I'm sorry, go ahead.

JF: No, go ahead.

WC: You were going to say something about Cowan. I was wondering whether others of them had characteristics which might have affected their point of view on this issue? Mrs. Brown—

JF: Well, Dr. Smith would have.

WC: —and Dr. Smith's religious backgrounds certainly were—

JF: Chick was from Tarboro, North Carolina—Howard Holderness was from Tarboro. And he's the negative vote on the original, even though he—when the chips were down, he did come along. And he still had eastern Carolina on, just like my wife, had eastern Carolina on her heels. You just couldn't take a lifetime of association and social consciousness—

Dr. Hampton, you know about that. Mr. Cowan, he was an interesting man—he's still living—who came up with Spencer Love. Spencer got to him back in the old days of Burlington when it was one little old beat down plant. After he left—after Spencer left Gastonia, J.C. came with him back in the old Burlington, North Carolina, days and grew

up with the company. J.C.'s forte was terrifically effective. He was the—again, off the record—

[Off-the-record comments redacted.]

WC: I was just noticing that what—you said Chick Holderness was with Jefferson Standard Life?

JF: He was president of Jefferson, yes.

WC: Yeah, and—

JF: When Ralph Price turned down the chairmanship of the board down, they elected Chick president, and was president up until just a few—very short time ago, just a few years ago.

WC: Actually, it looks like all the people on this board are—

JF: Well, don't get me started on that, because it already is becoming an issue, especially in High Point, and it's also here—elective versus appointive school boards. Now, other boards, I won't go into them. But I still say that there has never been a more capable, competent board—with one exception, of course—than this group right here. And not a damn one of them, with the possible exception of Dr. Hampton, would have gotten into the political situation to run for the office. But yet they were all conscientious, hard-working people for the schools. You couldn't have gotten people like that.

WC: How about Bob Mosley, the attorney? I—Was he an important influence?

JF: Yes, and I'll tell you why. He just recently died, by the way. Mr. Mosley came up through Rocky Mount. He was, as best I recall, a teacher in the Rocky Mount system. He then went over to Tarboro. As a matter of fact, my wife was in school in Tarboro when Mr. Mosley was superintendent of schools in Tarboro. And then when he obtained his law degree—like a lot of the fellows you know, students that are working on their masters or doctorates or legal degrees—started out school teaching. You said you did yourself.

And Mr. Mosley was—as a matter of fact, he got more votes in the Guilford County House of Representatives election than any man who ever ran. He was recognized as capable, honest, and sort of tight-lipped. But his specialty—ever since the days of his school teaching in Rocky Mount, his specialty had been school laws. Even in the legislature, he wrote many of our laws in existence today. Mr. Mosley fathered them.

And he knew the North Carolina law. He just—I think maybe I've asked him no more than three questions that he couldn't give me out of his head. Very rarely did he have to pull that statute book. He knew them. And I think he wielded considerable influence with his calm and capable manner of seeing through. He and [L.] Rich[ardson] Preyer reminded me a good bit in the manner in which they—the gentle manner in which they tried to coax. And more or less the cheerleaders, the silent cheerleaders. Mosley—a great, great gentleman.

WC: And I take it he advised the school board to go along with this, to proceed with desegregation, rather than resort to—

JF: Yes. And you see, when—I've forgotten whether—I'm pretty sure it's mentioned in there because that was one of the points in the case—J.J. Shields. Mr. Mosley never—he said, "Now, I'm not a courtroom lawyer." And this was when the suit was—Shields came in with his suit. And he said, "There's no use kidding yourself. I'm just not a courtroom lawyer, and I would suggest that you employ another lawyer."

I said, "I'm always said if I ever got into any trouble or shot somebody or something, the first guy I'd go to would be Welch Jordan."

So we did. We employed Welch Jordan, and Mr. Mosley worked along with him along with him on the legal aspects, and the ballyhoo side. And we paid—as best I recall, we paid Welch a fee of five thousand dollars. Well, that was the first thing that J.J. Shields jumped on, the fact that we were spending public money to employ an attorney to kill his people. But Mr. Mosley had advised us, prior to the employment of Welsh, that definitely—and it still is in the law—that a public body has that right to employ counsel. But Jay, he didn't know that until I told him.

WC: [laughs] Is he still around?

JF: Yeah. As far as I know he is.

WC: There all—as you can see, there are hundreds of people I have to see or I want to see, but I've always felt that it's important to see the right people at the right time and to not go over all the lot. It's more important to see the people who are most important to see than to see everybody and not necessarily get the kind of concerted focus on the thing.

JF: I was very pleased to learn that I had at least one thing that I'd mentioned to you corroborated.

WC: Well, more than that, [laughs] but that's one that just came to my mind. No, much of what you've said I've heard some similar things from other people.

JF: I never could quite, in my own mind, quite understand why we here weren't the target of more bricks, crosses, and all that kind of crap. They never bothered us. Like I said, I had a dog about the size of a cow. I never had any fear.

WC: Did you—you expected more? Did you expect more than what came?

JF: Well, when Bill Snider and Bob Mosley and Ben Smith were getting it periodically, I thought maybe I, theoretically at least, would be a target. I remember one time one night—I'd usually get calls. I'd take them. And my line—usually calls would come in fairly late, and anywhere from a cocktail or two and inebriation you could usually identify. My pet line: "Okay, you obviously know who I am and where I am. Now I'll be happy to talk to you, if you'll tell me who you are." And only about one out of ten would ever tell. And one night I remember one guy belligerently called up, and he was coming out. I said, "Okay, come on out." I said "Until you tell me who you are—I'd be happy to see you if you identify yourself, because I'm going to be sitting with a double barrel shotgun on my back porch, and if you set foot on my property—"

[End of Interview]