GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Jo J. Spivey

INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff

DATE: May 30, 1979

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

JO SPIVEY: Nineteen fifty-five?

EUGENE PFAFF: Well, my first questions involve background, so we could go back as far as you like--

JS: Okay.

EP: --to set the stage.

This is an interview with Jo Spivey, reporter for the *Greensboro Record,* as part of the Greensboro Public Library Oral History Program concerning the 1963 demonstrations--civil rights demonstrations in Greensboro. It's being taped in the boardroom of the Greensboro Public Library on May 30, 1979.

I'd like to ask, what was the nature of race relations in Greensboro in the late fifties and the early sixties?

JS: There, there was not an awful lot of interchanges, as I recall it. There had been for a good ten years, I would assume, some effort on the part of members of the black community to integrate facilities in the city. I, in--I got here in '51. I understand prior to that time, and in the early 1950s, that from time to time, groups, small groups would go to restaurants or places of this sort and sit down, and then no one would come and wait on them, and then they would leave.

EP: Were these just in--spontaneous or were they sponsored by the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People]?

JS: I do not know. I heard that these had happened. I had a feeling that they probably were spontaneous; however, most leaders in the black community did belong to the NAACP.

Because the NAACP was not looked upon too favorably in the white community, there was another organization, the [Greensboro] Citizens Association [a group of African-American professional men] that was organized. But when you got into it, you would find that the membership of the two organizations were generally the same.

EP: Was this more or less just a way of getting around the resentment in the white community of the NAACP?

JS: I would, I would assume so. My first detailed association with any of the, of the civil rights movement was in 1955 when six black men with Dr. George Simkins, Jr.--who later became, and is today president of the Greensboro branch of the NAACP; he was a leader in this group--played nine holes of golf at Gillespie Park Golf Course. Subsequently, a professor at a university, I believe in Louisiana, Dr. Amy Gist, went to Lindley Park Swimming Pool and asked to be admitted to, to swim. And she was turned away. There had also been some efforts to get the libraries integrated. There was a black library here called the Carnegie Library for Negroes.

In the aftermath of all these activities, the city closed down the golf courses, sold the swimming pools, integrated the libraries, and there were a few other things. The stadium at Greensboro High School, now Grimsley--the Dudley High School, the black high school then, the teams were allowed to play there. I believe those were the major concessions. Then, of course, that was followed by probably the most famous activity that began in Greensboro, and that was on February 1, 1960--the, when the four young men went to Woolworth and sat down at the lunch counter and asked to be served. That, of course, sparked sit-ins through--in many other cities in the South. However, I understand that there was a move in other cities to do likewise. But Greensboro just happened to do it first.

EP: These efforts at integration, such as the police force, the public library, the airport and bus terminal I believe, do you think they were, as several historians and writers have, have characterized, done as reluctant expediency to avoid court orders in Greensboro? Or do you think Greensboro was progressive or at least moderate in its racial policies and attitude?

JS: I think undoubtedly there would have been court cases if it had not been done. Now, I, I, I can’t say what was in the minds of these people when they did integrate. I think a lot of it had to do with economics. Woolworth’s and Kress, for example, are national chains, and there was pressure put elsewhere in the United States on these places. There undoubtedly were other establishments that the same situation existed.

EP: One reason for their early concession of the sit-ins of 1960, as suggested by Miles Wolff

in his book, *Lunch at the 5 & 10,* was the strength of the black boycott and their economic impact. They were 26 percent of the population of Greensboro at that time. Do you think that that was a significant factor in reaching a compromise with the store managers and owners?

JS: It could have been, but I would imagine that there was a good deal of pressure put from a national angle on the local Kress and Woolworth to integrate.

EP: Did you cover the sit-ins in 1960?

JS: Yes, I covered--Dorothy Benjamin did most of the school coverage, which would date back to the *Brown* [*v. Board of* Education] decision of ’54. I did not get in on a great deal of that, although I did some periphery stuff. But from ’55 on, I was pretty solidly involved in, in coverage of the whole thing.

EP: What was your reaction to the situation of the sit-ins that lasted, according to the paper, from February first through the end of July?

JS: Well, not, not quite. As the colleges closed, it died down a bit. And there also, from February first, there, there was a period, a grace period in there at some point where they tried to settle things. And on April first, as I recall it, it seems that they negotiated through most of March. And Feb[ruary]--April first, as I recall it, of 1960, the sit-ins were resumed full-scale. And then they died down when the colleges closed. And then it was at the end of July that the integration took place.

EP: Did the counters remain closed after the students left?

JS: I don’t recall.

EP: Was the activity continued by the area high school students?

JS: To no, to no extent that I recall.

EP: Was there much involvement by the black community at this time?

JS: Yes.

EP: The sit-ins are popularly characterized as being pretty much student involvement--

JS: But there was a good deal of adult behind-the-scenes backing. The various churches

served as, as meeting places, and of course all churches are filled with adults. I think that the students had solid backing.

EP: Did you interview any of the students that sat-in?

JS: Yes.

EP: Were--what were, what was their stated goals and purpose? Was it just to desegregate the targeted stores such as Kress and Woolworth's, or was it for uniform desegregation of all places serving the public in Greensboro?

JS: I think that these young people had reached a point that they were a little bit weary of there being two standards. Now these, of course, were the children of men and women who had been in World War II. And I think that they had a different outlook, possibly, from that that their parents had had. And I think some of them wondered why this had not been done long before, why they were having to do it. Now there were, of course, in the black community some persons who were opposed to the movement by the students. But by and large--

EP: What was their feeling? What was their reason for opposing overt efforts of integration?

JS: I think they feared, I think they feared for their children. And I think that they may have felt we shouldn't rock the boat. And they may have been--this was the type of thing they had been brought up with, and they--that was all they knew, and they had no desire to change things. But as I say, I think that this was the minority rather than the majority, because I think the majority of parents and adults did support their children.

EP: What--who, who or what organizations in the black community had the real power and exerted genuine influence in the black community in the early sixties?

JS: Well, there's always the churches, the sch[ools]--the colleges. There was a group formed to help the students if they got in, in any difficulty. And I cannot remember the names of all these organizations. There was a, a ministers' forum. There was a ministers group that was totally of black ministers. And it seems to me that the Citizens Association was involved in that.

EP: I'd like to ask you--

JS: There were four, but I can't remember what the other two were.

EP: Well, after the sit-ins died down and Woolworth's and Kress's desegregated, was there continued activity in, in the black community?

JS: Yes.

EP: Was there continuous--

JS: Yes.

EP: --movement?

JS: Yes. There was a move one, one year to desegregate the movie houses. That didn't ever amount to very much. Then in '63, when--well, at the end of '62 there was some picketing of places that still remained deseg[regated]--still remained segregated.

Then the demonstrations, of course, of '63 when CORE, Congress of Racial Equality, got into it, and this was during the massive arrests. And this was when many of these adult groups banded together to, to help the students, possibly more than even they had had to in 1960. They--the NAACP, in particular, provided bond for the kids who were arrested.

EP: But they maintained, basically, their traditional role of going through the courts, is that correct? They did not get involved in overt demonstrations to the extent that CORE did?

JS: Well, you--again, you must realize that the Citizens Association and the NAACP and other organizations all had almost the same membership. So you might be doing a certain act as a member of one organization, but you weren't involved as the other organization.

EP: Was there a strong black middle class in Greensboro at this time?

JS: Well, it depends on what you refer to as middle class. By white standards, if you do it economically, no. You found persons with college educations running elevators, things of this sort. But in the black community itself, there was a very strong across-the-board, just as there is in the white community. There were some--there was a group of educators, there were the doctors, people of, of this sort, who were sort of top echelon. And then there were the persons who [were] mostly domestics or in custodial jobs, but still they were a strong middle class. They were well-educated. Then, of course, you had your, your laborers, who would be your lower class. But from white standards, there was the upper class and the lower class, if you did it economically.

EP: Would you say that the majority of the black population were in menial jobs?

JS: Yes. Even if they had college educations.

EP: In many cases, it's been stated that once there's a certain level of success in the black community, in the black middle class, that they turn away from the black community. Was that the case in Greensboro, or did this class of, of black professionals and white collar jobs, such as existed at that time, exert any influence in the black community?

JS: Oh, yes. I think so. I don't know what they did in their social structure, the black social structure. But I know black persons who are still fighting the fight.

EP: What was the interaction between the city government and these black leaders? Was there much interaction between the two races, or did they exist as pretty much two separate societies?

JS: I think it was pretty much two separate societies. I think that they felt that the blacks should not be doing this.

EP: Do you think they had a very naive idea of black aspirations?

JS: Possibly. This is, this is particularly a hard thing for me to assess. Most of the people in, in government were older, they'd been brought up in Southern traditions. And they were not of the type that would go out and, and beat up a black person with a tire chain, as there--as some of the persons involved in the counter-demonstrations would. They were always very polite and kind, but they still felt that blacks had their place, in my opinion.

EP: Do you think it was the traditional white patrician attitude toward blacks that, that there were "good" and bad" blacks. And that "good" blacks observed the traditional standards of segregation, and that the "bad" blacks were the activists and the malcontents, that kind of thing?

JS: Yes.

EP: What was the reaction of white office-seekers? There's been, in the *Greensboro Record*, for instance, there has just been a series of articles commemorating the twenty-first anniversary--the twenty-fifth anniversary of the *Brown* decision, stating that it was understood to be a common practice that white aspirants to office would go down to the black community and spread money around--and liquor--to the black leaders in, in the hopes of buying votes. Do you think there was much of that?

JS: Well, I think that this was before, actually before I arrived on the scene. I understand that that was the case for a time. And I think this was one of the reasons for the rise of the Citizens Association, which I mentioned earlier—

EP: To try and stop--

JS: --to try to stop this. The Citizens Association continues to be active today on the political scene, and interviews all candidates, and does come out with a slate which it encourages the members of the black community to, to support.

EP: How long did they practice this tradition of endorsing a slate of candidates?

JS: I, I think it goes back as long as I've been here, which would be the early fifties.

EP: At least 1951?

JS: Now, I could, I could be mistaken about when it started. But I, I think it started in the early fifties sometime.

EP: There's been a charge that the Greensboro Citizens Association exercises bossism in the black community. In effect, that this is one reason why they would advocate and seek a ward system, which currently doesn't exist in Greensboro. Do you think there's any substance to this charge? That they come and control the political shots in the black community? That they influence, in effect, block voting in the black community?

JS: Well, I think most of the slates, at least in recent years, have, have had a full slate or nearly a full slate of, of candidates endorsed. From time to time, I think they have exercised block voting. I don't know. I think you'd have to define bossism a little, little more.

EP: Oh, going down into the--almost breaking it down block by block, and going in and making yourself well-known to the individuals that live on that block. And you--either by directly saying, "You're going to vote for so-and-so," or maybe a more bland approach like, "Come on, we really need such-and-such on the city council or in this or that office, and why don't you vote this way?"

JS: Well, have you ever seen one of the slates?

EP: No.

JS: Well, they generally point out that these persons have been interviewed by the, by the Citizens Association and selected. And they think that these persons are in the best interest of the black community and their goals. And then they'll list them and then they'll, you know, encourage everybody to vote, no matter for whom they vote. And then they will give a number where they will, will take people to the polls.

EP: Do you think that there was unity in the black community in the early--late fifties, early sixties as to movement against segregation, and unity in the civil rights movement at that time?

JS: Yes, except for the parents that I mentioned who were afraid or, or who didn't want their children to get hurt, or whose tradition was such that they did not believe that this should happen. I think most of them--

EP: In other words, there wasn't the feeling like, "Well, we've, we've moved slowly and we've gotten these benefits. We've gotten a certain number of these desegregated. We're doing better economically now than we have before. Don't rock the boat. Don't get these things taken away from us."

JS: No, I think they're still fighting. Because even after that, see, there was this move and so on to get better jobs. There was the landmark case, the hospital case, which benefited not only the blacks, but all minorities.

EP: What was the outcome of the various appeals on the trespassing charge against Dr. Simkins and the other five men that played golf?

JS: It went all the way to the Supreme Court. And as I recall it, the Supreme Court said that there--anyway, it did not--the Supreme Court, as I recall, was going to review it. The problem was that the attorneys for the--I think there were five by then, because I believe one of them had died. The attorneys failed to get some pertinent fact about a case that had been brought in the meantime to desegregate some of these facilities.

The attorneys failed to get this point into the record, and so the five remaining in that trespassing [case] were ready to go to jail. And then Luther Hodges--Governor Hodges pardoned--no, what did he do? Anyway, he did something that they, they were freed. I don't remember whether it was--I think it was pardoned them. But he took some action that they did not have to go to jail.

EP: What was this hospital, "landmark hospital case" to which you referred?

JS: That was about 1963-'64, somewhere in there, and it was--Dr. Simkins was again

involved in this. And it was to open up the traditionally white hospitals to practice by black physicians, dentists, admission of black patients. Previously, the only way that a, a black patient could get into Moses Cone or Wesley Long would be if L. Richardson [Memorial Hospital] did not offer the service that that patient needed. So, in, in this particular case, it was ruled that the hospitals, which had drawn on the Hill-Burton Act funds, had to provide the services and had to desegregate staffs.

EP: What was the Pearsall Plan?

JS: The Pearsall Plan, as I recall it, gave freedom of choice. In other words, if you went to Dudley High School and you wanted to go to Greensboro High School, which is now Grimsley, then you had the freedom of choice so to do.

EP: Now when was this struck down as being unconstitutional?

JS: When was what?

EP: When was it declared unconstitutional? Was that as a result in ’71 and then the plan went to busing, or was this earlier?

JS: These, these are things that I have not covered. And I, I don’t have those--I have vague memories in my mind of what, but I did not write on these subjects.

EP: There were--several of the leaders of CORE have mentioned that the reason they went to overt picketing and later mass demonstrations in ’63 was that they were awaiting the result of a report that was supposed to come out by the Greensboro Citizens Association [sic-Human Relations Commission], as I understand. And that this, the association did release a report, but they stopped short of advocating desegregation of public facilities. And at this point, the CORE leadership decided to go to active demonstrations. Are you aware of this report or anything like that?

JS: There have been so many reports over the years that I don’t recall which one you are talking about. Let’s see, ’63 would have been--this was at the time that the first Human Relations Commission was named, and, let’s see, who would have been mayor at that time?

EP: David Schenck.

JS: No, I don’t recall the report that you’re talking about.

EP: When did you first--

JS: My, my--to my knowledge, CORE came in here to desegregate the rest of, of the facilities.

EP: When did you first become aware of the demonstrations in 1963? Did you have any advance knowledge of the demonstrations?

JS: Probably. Probably.

EP: Were you contacted--for instance, CORE, everyday, contacted police departments so they'd be sure to be there, and prevent trouble, and to cooperate with the police department. Did they follow the same procedure with the local press?

JS: No, but I usually took the initiative on that and found out where they were--what they were going to do and where they were going to be.

EP: Did you have contacts in the black community.

JS: Yes. And as a matter of fact, sometimes I have been to their meetings and things of this sort.

EP: Did you ever interview any of the leaders such as William [Bill] Thomas and Jesse Jackson? Do you recall any of these conversations or interviews with them?

JS: No [laughter].

EP: Were, were you aware of any--for instance, in the initial stages in the early--first week of May, they demonstrated against McDonald's on Summit Avenue, and within four days, McDonald's desegregated. And the shift of the emphasis moved to the downtown area to the--

JS: Now the Hot Shoppe--they, they were at the Hot Shoppe as I recalled it, which was across the street from McDonald's.

EP: Is that right?

JS: And they did do some picketing at McDonald's, but CORE--because I went to the Hot Shoppe everyday during the--while they sat there.

EP: Oh, did they practice sit-ins?

JS: They had, they had training sessions for the youngsters on how to conduct sit-ins. A thing that concerned me was that, particularly some of the young women in the picketing and marches and things might be injured. And so they explained to me how they positioned the young women between the young men. And I watched the next time and saw that if anybody had tried to, you know, hit or kick or anything, some of the young women, that they would have immediately been surrounded.

EP: Were there any, were there any attacks on the demonstrators?

JS: Yes, there--in 1960, as I recall it, there was some rock throwing. And as I recall there was a young lady [who] got her teeth all knocked out. Then there was--

EP: Was that at Woolworth's?

JS: No, as I recall it was down by the old King Cotton Hotel. It was on a Saturday and everybody was off. And there were people, counter-demonstrators and demonstrators, and people who very foolishly--I don't know why anybody would bring children downtown to watch, but they did, you know, to see it.

EP: Was there a large number of spectators?

JS: Yeah, there were a large number that particular day.

EP: Do you think that the police did a very effective job of protecting them?

JS: Yes, I think they did. Particularly in view of the fact that at that stage of the game, many police were segregationists. And I think they did a very good job, considering. Now, I think a lot of the credit must go to Bill Jackson--Captain Jackson. You asked about attacks, I'm sure you'll recall, if you have seen any films or anything, the night--

[End Tape 1, Side A--Begin Tape 1, Side B]

JS: --the knife was in the stomach of the leader. And Jackson spun that man around so fast and you could [snaps fingers] blink an eye. And the, the man later maintained, as I recall it, that he was just, you know, cleaning his fingernails with his penknife [laughter]. That one's always stuck with me.

No, Bill Thomas, of course, was the president of CORE in, in '63. And I talked with Bill not too long ago in preparation for this thing that we did for--on the newspaper.

He is an attorney now in, I believe it's Elizabeth, New Jersey. Now, he, he was really the leader in that more so than Jesse, but Bill had had a problem with his legs and he was--it was difficult for him to march. He would be brought uptown in--by automobile and they'd park around the corner on Davie Street. And then he would walk around and join in the march and things uptown.

EP: Do you know what was wrong with his legs?

JS: No. He's had an operation since then, and he is doing fine. Jesse was very--was a very good-looking young man. And very personable, charisma, all that sort of thing. And he led many of the marches. He was, I believe, president of the student body [at A&T] at that time. He was in the four who integrated the S&W [Cafeteria]. And it was--I don't know, it was sort of ironic, I suppose. A photographer and I went to cover the integration. We knew it was going to take place. And, so we were thrown out and they went on in to eat. Of course, I understood, they couldn't have us bother their guests.

EP: Was this after the marches and all died down after June seventh, was this later on in the summer?

JS: No, I think it was in the spring at some time of '63 when--as I told you earlier, I don't recall dates on all these.

EP: But Jesse Jackson and three other students did sit down--

JS: No, I think it was a professor in the group. And I believe [CORE leader] Tony Stanley was in the group, and Jesse, and I don't remember who the others were. And then from time to time, others during that time period would come up and they'd eat at the S&W.

EP: So there wasn't this shift of emphasis from Jesse--away from Bill Thomas to Jesse Jackson, [it] was not the result of a power struggle in CORE or in the leadership?

JS: No, I don't think so, because I, I don't recall that, that Jesse ever held any particular office in CORE. Bill was succeeded by a younger brother, Al, subsequently, and I don't remember how long Bill was president of CORE. Bill, as I recall it, spent some time--I, I think he went to A&T maybe three years, and then he spent a year at a college somewhere in the North. And then he came back and finished up a last semester at A&T, and then worked somewhere, and then subsequently got his law degree.

He was a very--I always got along well with Bill. I was very surprised--you know, I did the story on the leaders, you know, what has ever happened to the particular leaders, and many of them got cut out of the story. But I didn't know whether any of them would,

would remember me or not. But I was very pleased that they all remembered me. And the four who started the sit-ins are all gung-ho about coming back on the first of February in ’80, which will be twenty years. We’re going to have lunch at the Woolworth counter if they get here. [laughter] I hope they do. I’d like to see them again.

EP: What was your impression of Bill Thomas?

JS: Bill, I suppose because of his--the problem with his legs, I think he had a good deal of discomfort--had something of a dour look about his face, and often appeared as if he was angry. He wasn’t. Al was a much more outgoing, personable young man than Bill, but Bill was very smart, and he--I liked him very much. We, we had a good relationship. And he’s always very frank. Tony Stanley was the advisor for CORE. And he and Bill, I think, had a good, good relationship.

EP: How about Jesse Jackson? What was your impression of him?

JS: Well, I think he made a very good appearance, and he certainly had charisma, and he, and he was smart. I think he, intentionally or unintentionally, was an opportunist, because he did, I think--it was probably unintentional. Because Bill couldn’t march, they had to have somebody. So it was probably unintentional that, that he was an opportunist.

EP: Do you have any knowledge of how he got into CORE? Because for a long time he was not a member of CORE, certainly not on the leadership, on the, on the, on the council or the board.

JS: I did not know him as well as I did Thomas.

EP: How about the adult members of the, of the leadership? Principally, the, the various ministers. You’ve mentioned Tony Stanley. How about Reverend [Richard L.] Hicks or Reverend [Otis] Hairston? Did, did you speak frequently with them?

JS: Yes.

EP: Now, what were their--what was their input into the [unclear, both speaking at once]?

JS: Well, they were, they were supportive. And they were members of the ministers forum, or whatever the name of that organization was. I think it’s the Ministers Pulpit Forum. Father Hicks’ church, being located where it was, was close to the campus and was a good place for a headquarters.

EP: Was this the AME Trinity Zion?

JS: No, no. This was the Episcopal Church of the Redeemer. And Cecil Bishop. Cecil came, I think, probably in the late sixties or maybe in ’61, but he was very active and he offered a place [Trinity AME Zion] for the young people to meet.

Otis Hairston [pastor of Shiloh Baptist Church] was in there from the beginning. He, he was there to--but Otis always is very unassuming and quiet, and is more a behind-the-scenes person.

EP: Do you--are you saying that they served more in a supportive role than an active policy-making role?

JS: That is my--was my impression. And, of course, they were in the, in the marches from time to time and all that. But they did everything they could to help and encourage the young people.

EP: Well, then who made the decisions: what nature the demonstrations would take, whether it would be quiet or whether it’d be noisy, whether they’d be sit-ins, or whether they’d be just token demonstrations?

JS: Well, I don’t recall any noisy demonstrations.

EP: Well I’m thinking specifically of--

JS: They were all very, very quiet and well-behaved and--have you ever seen--and I don’t know whether I have it or not--but have you ever seen the sheets of instructions about how they were to behave?

EP: No. What--could you tell me about them?

JS: Well, they were to dress in their very best. They were always to conduct themselves as ladies and gentlemen. They were always to look their best. They were not to engage, you know, in any fisticuffs. That wasn’t exactly the way that it was, was stated, I’m sure, but they were not to, you know, get physically involved. And I never, I never recall a demonstration where there was any--

EP: Was there ever any evidence or did you ever get wind of, as a reporter, any kind of factionalism within the leadership? A disagreement as to the nature of the protests, the scope of the demands, that kind of thing?

JS: No, I did not.

EP: How about the list of demands that were presented to the city council? One of the principal demands was, one, release of all the people that had been arrested to that point, and secondly, a city ordinance declaring desegregation. Now, this was before the ’64 Civil Rights Act or anything that was on the books of that nature, declaring desegregation of all facilities that serve the public in Greensboro. Do you think these were, given the atmosphere in Greensboro and the nature of the leadership of the city administration, do you think these were practical demands? Did they have any chance of, of being put into practice?

JS: [pauses to think] I, I think on the surface, yes, they could be put into practice and were in many, many cases. But I regretfully say that I, I think that a lot of the things that have happened have, have been cosmetic, and that down underneath it, a lot of people have not really changed.

EP: What was the nature of the city council and the city administrative leadership at this time?

JS: Well, let’s see--’64 are we talking about? Sixty-three?

EP: Sixty-three.

JS: David Schenck, David Schenck was a very personable, kindly, well-educated, gentle person, who I think sometimes had difficulty dealing with this whole thing, or understanding it. David was a very nice person, very nice, and would never have hurt anybody. But I think he may have had, had difficulty, or he may have had an awful lot of pressures put upon him by the people in, in, you know, in his contemporaries and the people in his social strata.

EP: For instance, Miles Wolff [author of *Lunch at the 5& 10*], in talking about the nature of the city council in 1960 leading up to the sit-ins, says that by and large, traditionally, businessmen ran for the city council. That--also he says, perhaps somewhat ungraciously, that the best people were no longer running for office. He’s saying that it was largely smaller businessmen, lawyers. That the traditional leaders of the community--I guess by that he means the larger businessmen of those associated with the larger industries like Cone [Mills], Burlington [Industries], physicians who would characterize being the candidates earlier--were no longer running. Do you think that there is any substance to this analysis, or do you think it’s inaccurate?

JS: Well, I think that Greensboro has been so fragmented there really have not been any, you know, overall leaders here. Now, I came in ’51, as I told you, and since that time I have not--had never noticed any particular overall families or groups or anything that had a strangle-hold on the, on the city and, and dictated the way it should go. Now, I understand that years before, Cone was a very powerful force in, in the community. I was trying to--

EP: You say there’s no leadership elite, then, in Greensboro?

JS: Well, I think’s pretty fragmented.

EP: Well, given the fact that most of the members of the city council were businessmen, do you think that they showed--felt sympathy with the businessmen who were the targets of the demonstrations, and as such would not do anything that would break down the traditional rights of the private businessman to control his business and to select his customers?

JS: I doubt that. You see, there was a, there was a group appointed prior to the Human Relations Commission in ’63 that was, that--the ones that I recall that were on there, were, were Ed Zane [Burlington Industries executive] and Oscar Burnett [President, Bessemer Improvement Company], people of, of this sort, who were certainly leaders, and I think were, were good men. And I think that they did try to get a solution.

EP: Was this the commission--excuse me--was this the commission that was set up under Dr. George Evans?

JS: Dr. George Evans served on one somewhere along in there. Oscar Burnett was, was on that one. Now that may have been the one in ’63 prior to the Human Relations Commission.

EP: Well, in 1963, there were three committees that were set up over the course of the demonstrations. And there, there doesn’t seem to be any kind of stability to them until the one that was set up in--on, on July eleventh that was chaired by W.O. Conrad [Western Electric executive].

JS: Now that was the Human Relations Commission that was appointed by the city council. And the others, I believe, were maybe appointed by the mayor, whoever happened to be mayor at that time.

EP: Was there any question as to why there were so many of them? Why, why were they

being supplanted? [both speaking]

JS: I think that they were succeeded one by another, and they were named for a particular purpose. But as I recall it, one of, one of the demands that was made was this Human Relations Commission, which was subsequently set up.

EP: Well, the reason I ask is because there was no prominent committee at the time of the sit-ins in 1960 and--

JS: Now this was a committee that was named--that Ed Zane headed. And I think that one was appointed by [mayor] George Roach.

EP: Well now, my question is then, all right, that was an ad hoc committee to deal with a specific situation. Why was there not an ongoing committee, or was there an ongoing committee, to deal with just such problems such that there wouldn't be this--

JS: I don't think there was any ongoing committee, but you see, these things would, would spring up and they would die down. They, they sort of fluctuated with the arrival and departure of the students. They--undoubtedly, the weather had something to do with them too, because I believe during, you know, the very cold weather and during Christmas and that sort of thing, I don't recall that there were as many.

EP: Well, do you think it was a lack of planning on the part of the city council or the city administration, that there wasn't an ongoing dialogue with the black community to prevent these massive outbreaks of protest?

JS: Undoubtedly, but I--you know hindsight is always, always better [laughter]. I, I doubt seriously that they, they expected these things to keep going on and on and on. I doubt that they--if they really even thought about it. Because you see, we still have these--these things are going on in a different form today because--the, the school board election. The--Dr. Simkins is getting together a petition for another ward vote. These are all part and parcel of the same thing. So it's--

EP: In other words, it's not--

JS: --it hasn't stopped.

EP: It's kind of an ongoing movement with just periodic major outbursts, but it's not a sporadic type of thing.

JS: And we still--the majority of the black community lives in southeast Greensboro, up this way. We have, you know, token open housing in other areas of, of the city. Maybe some more than token, really. But still, the northwest is predominantly white. And there really hasn't been that much movement of one race or the other to, to integrate.

EP: Now we've had the '64 Civil Rights--there was the '60 civil rights act, the first one, that still predominantly dealt with voter registration. Then there was the '64 Civil Rights Act and the '65 Voting Registration [Rights] Act. Now, given the fact of all of these specific pieces of federal legislation, and then the private individual compromises worked out with the targeted businesses--the segregated businesses, why do you think that there--so little has been done of a substantive nature in Greensboro?

JS: Well, if, if you're speaking of doing it at the polls, 25 to 30 percent of Greensboro's population is black. They cannot, on their own, put anybody in office or, or so on. If, if all of the group voted a certain way, they could not alone put somebody in office to change anything. They can make--if you have two candidates who have equal support, and the black community were to throw its support to one of these, it could result in that person being elected and the other one defeated. But they could not, on their own, put anybody in office.

EP: In other words, they have to throw their support with some power faction or other to get anything accomplished?

JS: And that's what they do with--the Citizens Association interviews all these, these candidates, and on the basis of their responses--

EP: Well, do you think the people who have received the support of the black community have lived up to the expectations of the black voters, or do you think they've broken the either specifically stated or implied promises they made to them?

JS: Well, in some cases yes, some cases no. Where you find a white candidate back more than once, apparently he's satisfied, he satisfied the black community and he's kept his promises.

EP: Well, you know, the impression that I get is that, that there's a very ambivalent nature to the race relations in Greensboro. For instance, according to a report done by Anna Robinson in 1972 about school desegregation in Greensboro, she indicated that Greensboro was one of the first school systems to voluntarily, or at least express a willingness to voluntarily desegregate without the need of a, a specific court order, although it was three years before any black student was approved to go to one of the

white high schools, or that one could be found.

There have been very few black members to the city council, but very early in nineteen--early fifties, Dr. William Hampton was not only elected to the city council, but he received enough votes that if he had wanted to, he could have been mayor. Now this seems like a very ambivalent nature of, of race relations. Is--can you explain this?

JS: Well, Hampton is a little before my time. And I knew him, but I don't know all of the background there about his elections. But I think sometimes, for whatever reason, a black does gain some popularity in, in the white community and is supported by the whites. I think maybe sometimes, and I hate to say this, but I think maybe sometimes persons that are, are not really representative of the black community are elected to city council.

EP: Can you think of any specific examples?

JS: I could, but I'm not going to.

EP: Do you think Dr. Hampton represented it?

JS: I don't know. I really don't know. I, I was always impressed with Dr. Hampton, and I rather think that, that he may have had, like Henry Frye [Greensboro attorney elected to N.C. House in 1968], he may have had enough personality and backing to, to do it on his own abilities. I don't know that.

EP: It, it seems to me that--do you think that the fact that, as we've said that-- according to Miles Wolff anyway--that a large number of businessmen have traditionally served on the council, that whenever there was a racial disturbance, such as the sit-ins in '60, and the demonstrations and marches of '63, that the [Greensboro] Chamber of Commerce, once again predominantly, if not exclusively, businessmen, the Merchants Association very quickly suggested compromise and accommodation. Do you think that the reason that there had been this is just a pragmatic view of, "Let's don't disrupt the flow of business. Let's don't present an economically disastrous situation." Do you think that that is a significant part of the moderate reputation that Greensboro has in racial matters?

JS: [Laughter] We're getting awfully heavy here. I was trying to also, before I go into that, I was trying to think back of persons who have served on the council. And you keep using--you've said businessmen. There have been a number of businessmen, but I think there have been a goodly number of professional persons, too. I think a lot of attorneys--of course, if you want to consider them businessmen, too, but they were professional people. We've had a teacher that I think, I believe--of course, we've had a couple of women of recent vintage who were, I guess you would say, housewives. Well, we've had three

because Mary, Mary Seymour really had, had never done an awful lot professionally. She was qualified to be a, a legal secretary, I think.

EP: So you're saying that this premise that I have put forward is not true that it hasn't been [unclear--both speaking at once]--

JS: No, I'm not saying that it is not true. I'm trying to, to think of the people that I know who have served on there to see whether they were predominately businessmen.

EP: Well, one thing I had in mind were these, these special committees. For instance, back in 1960 it was chaired by Edward R. Zane.

JS: Ed Zane.

EP: He was a, a--

JS: He's an attorney and a CPA [Certified Public Accountant].

EP: And he was, at that time, vice president of Burlington [Industries].

JS: Yes. And he was a pretty forward--

EP: Oscar Burnett--

JS: Ed was a pretty forward-thinking individual. And I think that Spencer Love, who ran Burlington, was a pretty forward individual. Both had wide exposure nationally and internationally, and might have had a more cosmopolitan view than some others in Greensboro.

EP: Essentially what I am saying--forgive me, I didn't mean to interrupt.

JS: No, go ahead.

EP: Essentially, what I am saying is that miles Wolff says very bluntly in the final chapter--concluding chapter of his book, *Lunch at the 5 & 10,* that the reason why there was such a moderate response to the sit-ins and that the conclusion was reached so quickly was that the strength of the black boycott, the fact that 25 percent of the population was black, that they did present a strong economic force in, in the community and in the sales downtown. Would you agree with that or do you think that that's not a significant feature?

JS: I think that it, I think that it is economic, but I think that all these places that we're talking about, that there was pressure from outside of Greensboro, because they were chains. I was trying to think now, Meyer's, which is later Jordan Marsh, was a member of a chain that did not necessarily carry the, the name of, of the chain, but it seems like it was something like Allied [Stores] Industries or something of the sort that it was a member--a chain, a member of that chain.

EP: And I know that Marriott owned the S&W franchise, if I'm not mistaken.

JS: Now, I don't know about that. I, I do not know.

EP: I'm basing that on--

JS: S&W was a chain. Mayfair was owned by Boyd Morris. That was an independent. And--

EP: And he refused to integrate.

JS: Yeah. That was probably the hardest one. There was probably more soul-searches and difficulties and so on there. I was trying to think about Guilford Dairy. Now Guilford Dairy bar integrated. [General Manager] Mose Kiser was always a very forward-looking individual. But I, I don't know that you could designate him as a chain, although I assume that he must have had a number of black customers. He must also have bought milk from black farmers. So I, I don't know about him.

EP: You said you sat in on some of the planning sessions--

JS: I went to some of the meetings. I don't know if you'd call them "planning sessions" or not.

EP: Do you remember what was discussed? What kind of issues were suggested at that time?

JS: They were, they were discussing strategy mostly: where they would go and what they would do. I think there were two that I attended, one at A&T and one at, at Bennett [College]. And then there were, there were meetings at churches every night. I never went to any of those because I could always find out the next morning what had gone on.

EP: Was there much white involvement?

JS: There was some, but it was token.

EP: Do you remember the role played by Dr. Elizabeth Laizner?

JS: Yes.

EP: What was your impression of her?

JS: Dr. Laizner--do you know anything of her background?

EP: Not a great deal except that she was a language professor at Bennett.

JS: Well, I had, I had her in my story about "What ever happened to--?" and it got cut--she got cut.

Dr. Laizner had been born in Austria, I think. I believe it was Austria. Anyway, it was one of the middle European countries. She and her brother were very avidly against Hitler and participated in underground movements until finally they had to flee to Belgium. And her brother--she probably went along with her brother--he apparently was a leader in the anti-Hitler movement. And so he was evacuated and she came along with him to this country from Belgium. And I think this--I never really asked her, but I got the impression that this somewhat influenced her interest in, in this movement, which she felt probably paralleled the oppression of the Nazis.

EP: Was there ever any suggestion that she was--had left-wing or Communist connections?

JS: Not to my knowledge. I, I never asked her and I never, we never discussed philosophy.

EP: Well, I know that in the--the conservative, perhaps segregationist response to many of the whites involved in--

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

EP: --knowledge about her participation, except her involvement in the '63 demonstration?

JS: That's all that I know of.

EP: Do you think that--

JS: And she was in, also, in late '62, because, I think, as I recall it, she was arrested in late '62 with a group of students. And I think it maybe, it might have been picketing at the Mayfair.

EP: Well, I know that Reverend Hicks was arrested for leading a--

JS: Oh, everybody had been arrested.[both laugh]

EP: --prayer in front of the [S&W in November]. What was the--as a reporter observing the situation, what was the normal procedure for demonstrations in ’63?

JS: Well, they would generally meet, I think often they met at the library, or--

EP: Greensboro [Public] Library?

JS: --some central place, the student--student union or somewhere. Anyway, they would meet, and then they would march on their target.

EP: How did the word get spread around the black community to come in and become involved in the demonstrations? For instance, there were thousands of, of blacks involved in these demonstrations.

JS: Well, they did it everyday.

EP: Do you think the word passed through the various churches?

JS: Well, they’d generally have the meetings--have meetings the night before, and then they’d, they’d demonstrate each day. This went on for a long, long time.

EP: I know that the paper suggested that a--[30 second audio malfunction]--how many they planned to have arrested at each time, that--because sometimes this was done and sometimes arrests were actively sought, and sometimes it was not. Do you have any insight into this?

JS: No. I know that, I recall the circling and I recall the young people being on the sidewalk. But I don’t know of, of any plan before to have a certain number arrested.

EP: Was there ever any control in the--over your reporting of the situations, to form any kind of editorial or overall policy of the newspaper?

JS: Well, I think that the policy of the newspaper was to try not to inflame. But I don’t recall anybody ever stopping me from doing anything. I think possibly there were persons in editorial positions who were segregationists. But I think that their approach was enough

of a newsman approach that they felt that every side should be represented.

Now, let me say this, if a Ku Klux Klanner came to me and wanted me to write a story, I wrote it just as straight down the middle for him as I did anything else. Very few of those ever came to me. They have on occasion.

EP: Did you ever have any interviews or informal conversations with Klan members?

JS: Practically every night at, at twelve, two, four, and six.

EP: They were calling you up, or--

JS: Yeah.

EP: Were these threatening, abrasive?

JS: Yes.

EP: Well, obviously--

JS: [Laughter] Can you use language [on this tape]? Dorothy Benjamin was known to these people as the "nigger-lovin' slut" and I was the "nigger-lovin' bitch."

And I would get these calls and the person would say, would hiss "nigger-lovin' bitch", you know, into the phone and hang up. Sometimes they'd just call and breathe into the telephone.

One time they got my little girl on the phone and scared her so badly that she wouldn't sleep by herself for about a week. My husband and I never discussed, you know, one another's business because it just isn't practical, and so I didn't tell him what was going on. But he finally caught on, and got a gun and put it on the chest of drawers in the foyer. And this scared me worse than anything, because there were a bunch of little kids, you know, in and out of the house.

EP: Were you--were the--did it ever go beyond these telephone threats? Were there ever any overt threats to you?

JS: There, there was a car that would come up and pull in our driveway, turn around, go down the hill, come back up, turn in our driveway, go down the hill. That sort of thing.

EP: Any taunts tossed at you from, from these passing cars?

JS: No, I was in the house. [both laugh] Not, not that I was afraid of them or anything. But it

was always at night; they never did anything in the daytime.

EP: Were you ever given any police protection?

JS: When the counters were integrated in July, I talked to [city manager] General [James] Townsend, who was a very dear man, and told him that I needed some protection that night. Because, I don't know, these people had the idea that if you wrote it, you had something to do with it. And I was just reporting what was going on.

EP: Obviously, they didn't see you objectively--as writing it objectively.

JS: No, they thought that I had something to do with it.

EP: Did you ever talk with George Dorsett [Ku Klux Klan member]?

JS: Yes.

EP: What was his attitude towards the paper?

JS: You know, he was--I'm sure he hated us, but he, he was very evasive. I mean, he, he had one personality for, you know, face-to-face and then obviously had another personality underneath. Now, strange to say, the--I didn't, and I didn't know it at the time, but the harassment of me stopped about the mid-sixties. And later on--

EP: So this was an ongoing harassment?

JS: Oh, yes.

EP: Not just at the times of the demonstrations?

JS: Oh, yes, oh, yes. This went--well, it wasn't constant. The time that I was speaking about the breathing on the telephone, I think that went on for about three months. But--and we couldn't take our phone off the hook because my husband was a forester and was on call, and we couldn't take the phone off the hook.

But later, many years later, of course, I found out that this counter-Ku Klux Klan klavern was supposed to have been formed about the mid-1960s with Dorsett as, you know, the off-shoot head of this thing. And I--

EP: Could this, in the split of the Klan? Were they--

JS: And I think that if, if the stories that have been written about that were accurate, that somebody that I know that I had covered a lot, that I had been present and a lot of these things that I had covered, they told them to lay off of me. Because I never got any harassment after the mid-sixties, which was supposed to be at that time, I found out later, that this off-shoot klavern was, was formed.

EP: Now is this the one that was headed by Dorsett? I--he was more or less kicked out of the, the established Klan, is that correct?

JS: I'm not sure, but I know there was supposed to be a counter-Klan organized, and he was supposed to have been the head of it.

EP: How about when you were covering the '63 demonstrations. Were you ever singled out as a news representative on the street for abuse or threats or anything like that?

JS: No. Nothing ever happened to me in the daytime, it was always at night.

EP: Did you cover the demonstrations at night?

JS: No, because I had been to some night things from time to time, but our cycle was about 7:30 in the morning to about 4:30 in the afternoon. So, although I did do some at night, it was not a night-to-night thing. The ones that I covered were during the day because we could get the stories in the paper.

EP: Did many of the demonstrations occur during the afternoon?

JS: Usually they demonstrated about, you know, during the, the lunch hour, and then they would also have the night demonstrations. The one that I was talking about, you know where Bill Jackson swung the man with the knife around and arrested him, that was a night demonstration.

EP: What was the nature of these mid-day demonstrations? What, what would--?

JS: Very quiet, peaceful. Then, of course, they had the sit-ins at, at the Hot Shoppe out on, on Summit Avenue, and the picketing at, at, later at McDonald's across the street. They, they would sort of come in batches. I mean, one time they would, would picket, and then I don't recall if they were picketing at the time that the CORE was sitting-in at the Hot Shoppe.

EP: Reading over the news reports of the demonstrations, you get the sense as though there

was almost a military precision to them, that they would march down East Market Street and that one wing would go to the Mayfair and another would go to the Center Theatre, and then they'd go down to the Carolina [Theatre].

JS: But they didn't--

EP: Was this an accurate presentation?

JS: Yeah, they didn't--that, yeah, I think that was in '62. They, they never accomplished too much with that movie one, I don't think. I think that somebody must have felt there were so many more important things than going to the movies or something, because they really didn't do very much on that, that year.

EP: Well, in 1963, Dr. Evans says that the Human Relations Committee, or the mayor's special committee on human relations, was able to convince the theatre owners to--[audio fades out]--that the committee was in charge of distributing to the black community to make sure that there weren't too many at any one time, that they weren't firebrands, that they were people that, I guess, the black community could trust not to create disruptions. Do, do you recall that?

JS: Not independently. Now when you say tickets so many at a time, I recall something about that, but I don't recall independently about that.

EP: What was your attitude of the behavior of the police? And I'm talking about the '63 demonstrations.

JS: I, I think the police did pretty well. Now you remember, the, the sheriff's office got in there too, if you recall. The sheriff was Clayton Jones. I think the police, [faded recording] particularly in view of many of their backgrounds, did, did very well, because I, I sat vigil with a number of those police officers--

EP: At the Fire Training Center?

JS: No, no, at the Hot Shoppe, at, you know, some of the demonstrations, sit-ins, and Woolworth's here in '60. And I never really observed them to do anything that they shouldn't have. Now, they, they may have when I wasn't watching, maybe that's why they didn't.

EP: Do you think that there was a great deal of strain on them?

JS: Yes, because I, I don't think that--I mean I think that basically they probably were segregationists.

EP: Well, now, in the '63 demonstrations, the paper talks about as many as--well, several hundred or several thousand demonstrators--

JS: Yes.

EP: --and at least that many just spectators on the sidewalk. What, what do you recall about the actions or behavior of the, of the demon[strators]--spectators?

JS: Spectators? Well, they, they, their actions were more militant, it seemed to me, than, than many of the march--than the, than the marchers.

EP: And were, were most of these hecklers, or were they just--

JS: Sometimes they were hecklers--

EP: --passive observers?

JS: Sometimes they were hecklers, sometimes they were passive observers. As I said earlier, some of them brought their kids to see it, which I, I just couldn't see why anybody would, would do that, but they did.

EP: Did you see any examples of, of overt violence?

JS: Yes.

EP: Could you describe these?

JS: Mostly, you know, pushing, jostling by some of the spectators or counter-demonstrators or whatever you want to call. I particularly recall in 1960, this was not any--they didn't physically hurt these people. But these were some Bennett College girls and they were studying apparently. How they could study--or if they were studying, or just pretending to study--but I remember some persons that I believe were probably Ku Klux Klanners--I think they were identified to me as Ku Klux Klanners--said such things, you know, "Oh, look at that nigger, she thinks that she can read," and you know, things like that.

Then I recall there was a woman who everyday would come up and take a seat at the counter and would let white persons--you know, she'd get up and give the white person her seat. And then when the white person got ready to leave, why, she would sit

back down, that sort of thing.

EP: Do you recall in the sit-ins that, that Saturday, February sixth, after the demonstrations began on Monday, February first, it was very--the paper described it as a very explosive situation. I think right in the counter area there were six hundred people or something and there was a bomb threat phoned in.

JS: Oh, dear, I don't remember that. But that's, that's possible, because that was the day that, I believe, the girl got her teeth knocked in. There was somebody, I don't know who it was, was having a convention at the King Cotton Hotel and somebody thought it was a real big deal to drop bags of water off the top of the King Cotton down onto the demonstrators and the, and the people below. I think that was the Saturday that it got so bad and when there was some rock throwing and things of that sort.

EP: Well now, you know, the paper concentrates on the sit-ins at Woolworth's and at Kress. But are you, are you saying that there were periodic sit-ins at other places, like the Hot Shoppe and O. Henry [Hotel] and so forth?

JS: That was a part of the CORE training session. At the, at the where?

EP: Well, you've mentioned that, you said that it was at the O. Henry that this girl got her teeth knocked out.

JS: No, the King Cotton.

EP: King Cotton, excuse me. I'm sorry. Were these just occasional sit-ins, or were they a daily thing like at Woolworth's and at Kress?

JS: Well, these, these people had, had moved down the street. There were so many people [audio fades] that these were all part of that whole thing. They didn't all at Woolworth's or Kress. They were all over Jefferson Square and on down the block. Because there, there were, I don't know how many people, but there, there was enough people there to have made a parade. I mean, you know, it was like, like the crowds that would turn out for the Christmas parade, concentrated in that small area. Because I was standing, you know where that little--there's a little jewelry shop. Now I don't even know whether it was there or not at that time.

EP: The Jewel Box?

JS: No, it's not the Jewel Box. It's on Market [Street] across from, from Belk [Department

Store], the side of Belk. And I don't even know that it was a jewelry store at that time. But I was in a door, whatever the shop was there, I was there. And there was just--the whole street was just a mass of humanity. And I was just standing there watching. And I did not see the girl get hit. And I think there were some other people injured that day, but I was told about it later.

EP: And this was in 1960 or '63?

JS: It was a Saturday, and it probably was the sixth, since you mention that date, because it was right--it was early on. And then there was this sort of cooling-off period. It was either that Saturday or the next Saturday, because it seems to me that there was a cooling-off period after about two weeks.

EP: Did you ever go to the places, in 1963, where the students were incarcerated in large numbers, such as the old polio hospital and the national guard armory?

JS: I went out to the polio hospital. You know, we, we were pretty restricted sometimes.

EP: By the police?

JS: Yes. But I did go out to the polio hospital. And I don't recall whether it was just to see what it was like or whether I wrote something about it. But I recall going out there.

EP: What were the conditions like out there?

JS: Well, I thought they were pretty atrocious, because they, they had all of these people jammed in and, and--I don't know of anything that, that happened, but there were girls and boys and all that sort of stuff. And it, it sort of bothered me. And I think it bothered a lot of people, because the conditions were pretty bad. I mean, no sanitation and, and getting food in, and all that sort of stuff. It was pretty bad.

EP: Do you think that was just because the city police department and the sheriff's department were unprepared for the large number of demonstrators--

JS: Yes, yes.

EP: --or was it something they failed to do?

JS: Yes. I think that that probably was the whole, whole bit, just, you know, let it get so big that it'd have--they'd have to be recognized. Because I think that Willa Player, who was

president of Bennett at that time, I think that when they started letting them go, releasing them, I think there was some resistance to their being released, because she felt that this was as important a part of her girls' education as anything else.

EP: You mean she didn't want the tactic of releasing them en masse into the custody of A&T and Bennett?

JS: That was the impression that I got.

EP: In other words, she, she--

JS: Now how A&T--

EP:--was supporting their staying there, et cetera?

JS: She was giving them all the support possible, because--

EP: Was she in an awkward position?

JS: I don't think so for Dr. Player, because Dr. Player was a very strong individual. She was behind-the-scenes, but she was one of the ones, you know, that, that started sending back credit cards to Meyer's, for example, because they didn't integrate their garden room and fountain and that sort of thing at the same time.

EP: What, what was this, send--sending credit cards back?

JS: Well, there were--this was part of, of a boycott to--all, all the blacks, or many of the blacks, sent their credit cards back to, to Meyer's, because they--

EP: Was this in-between the '60 and '63 episodes, or was it while one or the other was going on?

JS: As I recall, it was in, in-between. It may have been '63, but I think it was sort of in-between.

EP: Now, one--

JS: I told you I couldn't remember all of these dates [laughs].

EP: One of the leaders of CORE indicated to me that she, Dr. Player, had been involved in an

attempt to desegregate the Meyer's Tea Room. Are you aware of anything like that?

JS: She may well have been. Hobart Jarrett, with whom I have maintained correspondence over the years and who was a--he was a professor of English. Let's see, if he was, he was '60, 1960, I think. Anyway, he was in the liaison committee. He was a member of the liaison committee--he was at Bennett--member the liaison committee that worked with the students and with the white community. These were--this was the black committee. Dr. W.L.T. Miller was the vice chairman. And--

EP: Was this the Greensboro Citizens Association or something completely different?

JS: Well, now he was, as I recall it, was, was chairman of the Citizens Association.

EP: Was he white or black?

JS: He was black. A very erudite man, and had published a number of articles and things of this sort. And poor Dr. Miller--poor Dr. Jarrett, as a result of the harassment he got, lost his hearing. And he subsequently, I think within--maybe even in '60, but '61 anyway, went to Brooklyn College in New York and is teaching there--

EP: You say he lost his hearing as a result of harassment? What could have happened?

JS: Well, I, I suppose so. He lost his hearing.

EP: Do you think [it was] just the strain, the tension?

JS: I wondered if it were not, because one morning I called him and he said, at home, and he said, "I can hear you and I don't have my hearing aid on." And he heard--I, I suppose--I just felt that he felt no threat from me and he could hear me. But whatever it was, he still doesn't have it back. I mean, he, he can hear to some extent, but he still wears a hearing aid.

EP: What was your working relationship with the national news media during these events? Was there--

JS: Not any.

EP: You worked completely separate from them?

JS: [gestures "yes"]

EP: Did they not try to coordinate their, their reporting with the local press?

JS: Well, we put it on the wire, of course, and I guess some of them came. I don't remember. I was just doing my own thing. I don't recall--I don't remember anybody coming here from the national papers. There may have been.

EP: What--

JS: Come to think of it, I believe Claude Sitton from *New York Times* was covering the South and he may have come here.

EP: What--did, did the members of CORE wait for you to contact them or did they seek you out as a member of the news media to, to get across what they were trying to do and to--

JS: Oh, I contacted them.

EP: You contacted them.

JS: Now there wasn't any problem, because I was always there.

EP: [laughs] Well, it's obvious that this couldn't have succeeded without a good working relationship with the news media and the law enforcement agencies. This is why I ask.

JS: Well, these, these were--now of course, there were some white people in CORE. I mean, those that had come in as organizers and so on.

EP: I know Gordon Carey was one of them.

JS: I don't recall that name for sure, but he may have been. These were, except for the color of their skin, they were just like any other college student. They were very well-behaved young people and they were fighting for a cause. I mean, some people swallowed goldfish and they were desegregating lunch counters. Is it all right to drink this water?

EP: Sure, that's what it's there for [laughs]. Sorry it couldn't be something stronger than water.

Do you think that the city officials negotiated in good faith? Or do you think that they could have done more in an active capacity to--than they did?

JS: Well, I guess they thought they were doing their best. I--

EP: From, from reading the news accounts, it sounds like the city administration and city council were playing a rather passive role, waiting for some compromise to be worked out privately by this special committee and the various store managers.

JS: Oh, I, I'm sure they were, but I am sure that they were kept abreast of what was going on. But I, I guess a good many of them didn't want to be involved.

EP: In other words, it would be an exclusively, privately worked out situation.

JS: Well, Ed, Ed Zane of the '60 committee, the committee that--whatever year it was that Dr. Evans and--

EP: Nineteen sixty-three.

JS: --and Oscar Burnett. I know, I know I went out to Oscar Burnett's office and they gave me the story on that. And I was the only news person there. And I don't remember whether I had called Oscar and asked him what they were going to do and I knew about it that way and nobody else called or, or what. But I was the only reporter that had the story that afternoon when they--whatever it was they did that day.

And I think several times that may have been, been the case, but it was because I was always there. Because I know the day that the counters were integrated, I had found out three or four days before when they were going to be integrated and had written my story. And the committee saw the story. I, I don't like to do this, but apparently the paper was so afraid of something inflammatory or something of the sort. And the committee had seen it. And so we went ahead and we had a, a streamer simultaneously with the desegregation of the counters. And I went to Woolworth and one of the other reporters went to, to Kress. And there was a black woman who worked behind the counter, you know, as sort of, I guess, I don't know, a dishwasher or, or something and they had--she was dressed up very nicely. And she was the one that was the first black to eat at the Woolworth counter.

EP: I remember Mayor Roach said that he was approached by Mr. [C.L. "Curly"] Harris, the manager at Woolworth's, and told that he should do something. And Mr. Roach said, "Well, my friend, it's up to you to do something." And then apparently, Mr. Zane's committee did work out the compromise that--

JS: Well, Hobart Jarrett was in on that, too. Hobart Jarrett was at that meeting that night. Let's see, there was, there was Zane, and Harris, and Jarrett, and I think George Aull, who was then a assistant to the city manager or something like that, so he was at that

meeting. And they decided--that was the meeting, the time they decided when they were going to integrate the counters.

EP: Do you remember the date of that meeting?

JS: No, it would have had to have been about mid-July because, it seems like--wasn't it about the twenty-third?

EP: July twenty-fifth--

JS: Twenty-fifth is when they--

EP: --is the date the paper came out--

JS: Yeah, okay, all right.

EP: --with the story.

JS: Then it would have been probably the Wednesday or Tuesday or something night before that, I would think. It would have been a week or ten days before that.

EP: Do you remember where it was held?

JS: In Woolworth's I think.

EP: How did you get wind of the meeting?

JS: Good heavens, I don't remember.

EP: [laughs] Okay. Did you have any special insights into these demonstrations by virtue of being a reporter, a trained observer, this sort of thing, inside sources of information, that sort of thing?

JS: Sure.

EP: Would you like to share them with me?

JS: No.

EP: Okay. [both laugh] How long did you continue to cover the demonstration or the racial

situation?

JS: Well, up through, up through Martin Luther King and the Willie Grimes incident[A&T student killed in riot of May 22, 1969], as far as they were related to the city government. Now, I did not cover police at, at that point. I was covering police back in mid ’55--mid-fifties. But I quit covering police along toward the end of the 1950s and was just covering city council and city government and things of this sort at that point on.

EP: Did you continue to monitor or cover the response of the black community after the demonstrations ended? What, what was the attitude of the black community?

JS: What do you mean, “what was the attitude”?

EP: Did they feel they really had accomplished something?

JS: Well, I think it was better than it was before. But I think that still, a lot of it’s cosmetic. Because as I mentioned before, the, the black people, still most of them live in southeast, and, you know, sort of like that in Greensboro, and northwest Greensboro continues to be virtually white. There’s--

Now, I have never covered the schools, so I can’t give you any--too much observation on that. But from what I read in the paper, there still seems to be an awful lot of, of unrest to the point of some persons, I suppose, for--because of old stereotypes, you know, don’t want their children to go to Dudley when, if you ever watch the Lee Kinard show, practically every week there is some honor that Dudley has won, and something--you know, they’ll have a program run about the things that they’re doing at Dudley.

The L. Richardson Hospital is in--is stereotyped much the same way, I think. And there’s nothing wrong with L. Richardson Hospital. That was one of the stories that I wrote for this twenty-five years thing, too, about, about L. Richardson.

EP: So you would say--some people might say there has been an amazingly rapid change in perhaps the more surface changes, the more legal aspects of it, but really there has been very little change in the attitudes of people or substantive changes in terms of housing, employment, and that kind of thing?

JS: Yes, yes. There’s been some changes in employment because there has to be. But there’s still--people don’t seem to want to move from one area to another, although there would be nothing that would keep them from doing it. But I guess there is still fear and prejudice and--and there are some blacks who are just as prejudiced, racist as, as whites.

EP: Do you think that some of this is a result of a resurgence of black awareness in the black

community, the desire to keep a kind of separate black identity?

JS: Some of it may be. But you must--I'm sure you--just look around. There are not many real blacks. Most all of them are, are light-skinned. You think, how many really black people do you know? But still, they, they have a great pride in their heritage.

EP: Did you cover the situation of the riots in '69, following the Dudley incident and the death of the, of the student?

JS: To some--somewhat.

EP: What sort of things resulted there? For instance, what was your feeling as a reporter about the death of the student, Grimes?

JS: Well, I don't know. I just felt like it was sort of unnecessary. As I understood it, Claude Barnes' grades were not good enough for him to go on the ballot [for Dudley student body president]. And for reasons of privacy, which I know is very important--but, still, my gosh, there were, there were five police officers injured--I think they were all police officers--one very seriously and Willie Grimes is dead. The National Guard came in and, you know, there was a lot of property damage. I don't know, it just seems to me like that something could have been done to let the students at Dudley know why Claude Barnes couldn't go on the, the ballot.

EP: Now, was he not one of the people that were interviewed in this, this, "Where are they now?" series? As I recall, his saying that really his election was not the prime issue, that it was their dissatisfaction with the fact that black, Afro-American history was not being given that much attention.

JS: That could have been part of it, but the, the, at least the obvious cause, the one that was being talked about at that point--now, there may be some other underlying things that, that I would not be aware of because I did not cover the schools--but I know, I do know that I did have an argument with a school official over why he did not disclose that that was the thing back of it. And he said, "Well, I'm telling you now." And I said "Okay". So then I wrote a story to that effect.

EP: Now, I know that Howard Fuller was one of the black militant activists at this time, and that also the president of the student body of A&T--

JS: Vincent McCullough.

EP: Vincent McCullough. Was he also an active militant in this?

JS: [gestures “Yes.”]

EP: And who was the other individual that you marked--remarked earlier was the only person who ever expressed to you any Communist leanings or left-wing leanings?

JS: Nelson Johnson.

EP: Johnson? Nelson. What was his connection with this?

JS: Well, now, didn’t he have some office at A&T, or wasn’t he--?

EP: Was he the vice president?

JS: Maybe, maybe so.

EP: I know the vice president of A&T was also involved.

JS: Yeah, ’cause I don’t, I--I got to know them along with just a continuing pattern of, of everything that went along. And I found they were very dependable too. If they said that they were going to do something or find out some information for me or something, they’d always do it.

EP: I know that in the coverage of this incident during this commemorative week, the *Daily News* on Sunday ran an article, and that some of the unresolved questions concerning Grimes’ death was that there was a car that pulled up. They’re not, they’re not sure whether the shots actually came from this car or not. Some members of the black community maintained this was an unmarked police car. Others said, no, this was a private citizen’s car. Did you investigate any of these conflicting charges concerning Grimes’ death?

JS: Insofar only as this commission--civil rights commission, I don’t remember what the exact name of it was [North Carolina State Advisory Commission on Civil Rights], under Dr. Somebody-King, conducted sort of a, an offshoot inquiry into it. You see, it wasn’t like Kent State or some place like that where they knew who’d fired the shot. There was no, there was no way of knowing who killed Willie Grimes.
So, have you seen that report of that commission?

EP: No, I haven’t.

JS: Let's see--it seemed like it was--the title of it was *Trouble in Greensboro*, or something of that sort. And Cecil Bishop was on that commission, and this Dr. King [Cheek?] who was--the chairman was Dr.--what was his name? He was president of Shaw or St. Augustine's or something university in Raleigh. And Cecil was the only one that I knew well on there.

EP: Why was there shift--this shift to militancy between the orderly, nonviolent demonstrations in 1963 and the shootout with the police in 1969? What, what occurred in those six years in Greensboro that--

JS: Well, I think that--

EP: --radicalized the black community?

JS: I think that they felt they weren't moving fast enough with the passive-type demonstration, and that maybe militancy was the only way. But I think there was more support for the passive than there, there was for the militancy.

EP: Does this indicate a loss of faith or leadership role of the various ministers that were involved in the leadership of the 1963 demonstrations? Or--

JS: I don't, I don't think so. I think that it was just a loss of faith in the white community.

EP: Does that mean that the students turned away from the leaders advocating nonviolence and turned toward the organizations like the [Black] Panthers?

JS: Well, I think, I think that you're talking about a very small number in, in the black community. I don't think that there were every anywhere near the number of Black Panthers, if indeed there were Black Panthers here, that there were demonstrators in '63. I mean, that's obvious. But I think that in--I think that the kids in '60 were really and truly convinced that the white community would, would open its arms and that we would be one people. And as the decade wore on, it was obvious that this wasn't going to happen.

EP: There was never the extent of black militancy as there was--for instance, in High Point, the police eventually raided the Black Panther headquarters, and--when there were reports of, of them sandbagging the headquarters and the collection of arms and everything. There--would--there was never that extent of militancy in Greensboro?

JS: Not to my knowledge.

EP: How would--in, in conclusion, how would you summarize the state of race relations in Greensboro from that time right down to the present day?

JS: Well, I think that there are some persons who are colorblind at this point, and who are really and truly--feel that we are all one people. And I think that there are others who, for whatever reason, economic or whatever, project an image that they are--that we are one people. But I think that most people avoid contact, that really and truly most of the people still feel the same way that they did.

EP: Do you think that there have been significant advances in terms of economic and educational opportunities for blacks in Greensboro?

JS: Oh, I think without a doubt. But it's all been formulated as the whites think education would be, and the blacks are having to learn as, as we learn. And, and I think possibly there hasn't been enough black history and, and that sort of thing.

EP: So there really hasn't been that much black input into the decision-making process?

JS: Well, I don't cover the schools. But my observation, and this may not even be valid, is that this is correct. I think Walter Johnson was a very good school board chairman. I think Otis Hairston is a very strong individual, but he, he just doesn't, you know, project himself too much.

EP: Is there unity of purpose in the black community from what you can observe as a reporter, or is it pretty much broken down into different factions, special interest groups, and that kind of thing?

JS: Oh, well, I think the blacks are just like the whites. They have various interest groups. I think you gravitate to the people with whom you have something in common. And I think those of us who, as a result of whatever happened--in my case, it was a result of, of covering all of this--I find that blacks are no different from, from whites. You learn to, to like the ones that have something in common with you, and the others you, you don't. I mean, I think it's based on mutual interest after you get to know somebody. But unfortunately, a lot of the people don't have the opportunity to, to do this. And I think eventually--it's going to take years though--as long as we have--

[End of Interview]