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INTERVIEWEE: Reverend Prince Graves

INTERVIEWER: Kathy Hoke

DATE: June 18, 1990

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

KATHY HOKE: This is Kathy Hoke speaking and I am here with Reverend Prince Graves in his church office. And how about if we just start--I'll ask you to just tell me a little bit about where you were born, when you were born, where you grew up.

PRINCE GRAVES: I was born in Greensboro sixty-nine years ago, Cathy, and I'll be seventy next year. I've been in school here all my life. Only been absent for forty-two months when I was away in Germany in the army for the United States.

KH: World War II?

PG: World War II, yes.

KH: Okay. Tell me about growing up here during that time, during the time that you grew up. Tell me something about your family. I believe you--

PG: A very religious family. It has a--very rich family. When I say rich, I, I--as it means to love and understanding. And the old man ran--something unusual--my daddy ran his own house. He was the law of the house. And I didn't have to have no social workers to come out to keep order. Nor did he have to take a warrant out to make me do right. He was judge and jury in his house. And taught us respect and respect of others. I think we were rich in our heritage in our family.

KH: How many--

PG: He died early. There was nine of us, and he died as a young man of forty-seven. But we were, we were just about, then, all big then, you know. We--he had us well, well trained,

and I think we helped raise each other. We're that way now, those of us that remain, we're close-knit.
I married a local girl, I married a girl next door forty-five years ago. I've been in Greensboro long enough to see then and now.

KH: What did your father do?

PG: My father was just a mill worker at the Cone Mill[s]. And my mother was, as you know with nine children, was just a housewife. But we, we started working early.

KH: When did you start working?

PG: Well, actually, I started working when he died in '39. That was my last year in high school. And the year he died, I quit and took a job, too. I became father of the house. I'm not the oldest but I was the one who, I reckon the one that talked the most ought to do the most. So I was the breadwinner of the house basically, you know, for the younger ones.

KH: What did you do for--as a breadwinner, what kind of job did you--

PG: I worked at a junkyard up there on Washington Street. And when my uncles and those, I went--I started laying brick at a young age. And so that's what I was doing, I was a brick mason. And I was making big money, Cathy. I was making--I got up to--oh, one time I got up to sixty cents an hour.

And then when I--then, you know, I became a grown man, I married. I worked in the army before I married, till World War II. I came out laying brick, and I was making ninety cents an hour. And then I moved up to a dollar and ten cents, and I was going to be a black Donald Trump with all that money. But the man--but, you know, everything keeps--everything is relevant. If you make more, it takes more.

But I've always felt this richness inside. I've always--was my own best cheerleader of what I could accomplish, you know. I married, I got three children, I began to preach. And then I was in the marches of the civil--they called it civil rights, or civil disobedience, or whatever you want to say it was.

I was in the ministry then, and I was president--not president, but treasurer of the Pulpit Forum that led marches and the church rallies and all. I was a part of that. And then I--

KH: Could we go back just a little bit?

PG: Go ahead.

KH: Tell about how you became a minister. At what point did you start preaching? What year was that?

PG: I would always be a preacher, since I was little. I knew that, you know. So certain things, like you said, "I know this will happen in my life." My grandfather was a minister. And it was just always on me because I, I've always wanted to help people.

Now when I said we were rich, that means I was rich without having shoes. I was rich sometimes without having food. Because when my daddy died early, we would frequent the places where they would dump food, produce. You've seen produce dumped by the whole blocks. And we would take it, and wash it off, and carry it home. And mother would wash it, and she'd cook it, and heck, we never thought about any, what you call the Hepatitis A or what. No, we just ate. I reckon the prayers she had kept the disease away. But we were always being a brave type of family that believed we could do it.

I remember, Cathy, once, when my father died, people moved in to say to my momma, "Elsie, I'll take these two, I'll take these." But she wanted us together. And I've seen her pray to old lady Sissman [?] that owned the house. She wasn't a realtor, but she was the owner. When we were evicted, our mother prayed us back into that house. And I promised God, Cathy, that if I'd ever become a man, I would try to, you know, correct some of the things that hurt me.

Mostly I just got bad feet, because that which crippled him, he declares war. So I declared war on poverty all of my life. And that's why we have a full house, and projects, and a nursing home and all of this. And mothers come for checks for their children. We've got, we buy so many foods and things a month, and vouchers. And I really love what I do. And I've been on the city council, I've been chairman of the Human Relations [Commission] of the city, and I'm, I'm always running my mouth everywhere. But I love what I do. And you see, in my life, Cathy, God is very real.

KH: Tell me about the housing projects and, and when and how they got started.

PG: Well, here, as you know--you will find when I start pastoring--there's my church on the wall up there. You see that church up there?

KH: There's a little bit of glare, I can't see it.

PG: You see it now?

KH: Oh yes. Yes.

PG: That's where I came to here on the hill. You'll find a group of people who actually--see, religion without education turns out to be superstitions, because you, you're depending

on God for the things that he's already supplied you with. You have to cultivate your mind and all. He's given you right mind, given you healthy bodies. But what else did God do for you? Did God get you a leader?

As you know, the inspectors will be here at the start of school. I'm jumping around because--but on this we're concerned with the total person. Yesterday we gave scholarships, as you know, for those who are going off to college. And when I first came on this hill with thirty-five people, hardly three of them could read nor write. But now we've got those children who've finished college. Even my granddaughter's in college, at A&T [North Carolina A&T State University], in accounting.

And so this has been a beautiful trip with the Lord. You know, as a partner. The Lord ain't going to do nothing by himself. He said we'll work us together. So this is what we are about. We've got kids--you should have been here yesterday as they marched down. I think they filmed it. And we have over two-thousand members.

KH: So when you arrived at this church there were thirty-five members.

PG: That's counting those dead too, I reckon. But, you know--

KH: That was 1953, is that right?

PG: That's right. But you don't need a whole lot of people. All you need's an idea. If you can't--see, actually some people, some preachers are not as fortunate. They go into a church that's already established, the policies already made, you know. And the only thing he has to do is just carry out somebody else's thoughts. Nothing creative about that.

You take the little boy who had to make his own wagon, you know. I used to make my wagon. Something creative with my mind. But what's creative about somebody calling this--you go to a seminary, and then they call you to this beautiful church. And then, "Here, Reverend, here's our program. And we've already had all of this, something or the other. You just preach." No joy. He can't make no mistakes. He can't even create a thing. You know, he don't know the people. He was trained by other people who were, more than likely, failures. They taught him that two and two was four, always will be four, and so he doesn't rock the boat. I didn't have a boat, so I would just build my own little boat. And I make two and two be five if that's what I need at the time, you know, speaking as to, to--see, because the needs were different, you know.

And, see, I'm not an integrationist, if I make sense. I'm an interracial man. See, you don't have to integrate me to make me feel proud of me, or come and rescue this little black fellow and train him. I've got as much to offer them as they got to offer me. I remain me, see. If they can be European-American, Dutch-American, I can be Afro-American, and still be a citizen of the United States. I never did like the word integration. Only thing it's done is made the curriculums equal. When I look at my books and--we

used to get a little book in my school. And when I turn to page five it wasn't in there, because the book been handed down to me from another school. I detest that. You know how--you don't know how it is, but I know how it is. When all the school books we had would go by the white schools, and then they would come to us. And the teacher said, "Turn to page twelve." I'd say, "Page twelve isn't in my book." But now, that's what I want equal.

I don't mind that Jews [are] going back to the synagogue when the sun go down, and the whites go here and the blacks go there. That doesn't bother me. That which we all share together and with our tax dollars should be equally dispersed and available to all of us. I don't have no problem. Never had a problem, but I dislike being segregated against just because--

You know the whole world, not just America, is black and white. The reason we so dang far behind the Japanese is because of the fact we dealing in--we've had enough extra bathrooms and, and drinking fountains. And they took the stuff that we throw away--a little tin can. We're over there drinking beer, throwing down the tin cans, and they picked them up and made little soldiers. And sent them over here and selling them for Christmas. And now we're borrowing money from them. Why is it? Because we still live in a black/white world. And don't you forget it. We think that way.

Harvey Gantt's running [for U.S. Senate]. You can't find a better qualified person than Harvey Gantt [African American mayor of Charlotte]. But, but Jesse Helms can--for eighteen years, Jesse has just got all of his votes and money by aligning himself with anything that--as you know, say black, black this, that, and the other, and he's, he's got rich on it. And he done it when he was in--

KH: Raleigh.

PG: --he done it before your day. Yes.

KH: WRAL [Raleigh TV station].

PG: Yes, that's the truth. And we love it. And because some whites think if the blacks would disappear they wouldn't be poor.

KH: What do you remember about Jesse Helm's career in the fifties and sixties?

PG: Well, actually, I've used Jesse. I've used him because of the fact when--one thing about him, I respect him, because he's going to be the same Tuesday as he is Monday. He's not a hypocrite, he's Jesse Helms. And I can--I, I like that. If I know who you are--I don't like a hole covered with something, and I haul off and fall in it. And say, Jesse, you know, where you're coming from. And you know, I dealt with him on my last project.

And I've got a project up here named Prince Edward Graves Homes, you probably know about that. And I--and this black woman was secretary of housing, Patricia Harris. You remember Patricia Harris?

KH: Oh, yes.

PG: You remember Proxy Meyer told Patricia Harris that she--when she went before the committee that she couldn't qualify because she'd never been poor, she knew nothing about black poverty. Her daddy was a porter, which in his day was a top scale job for Negro men and blah-blah-blah, and she argued. And they passed Patricia Harris.

I tried to build this project, and I couldn't get it to fly because of the inflationary taxes. I wrote, had my lawyer to write--what's the--Jordan, Bob Jordan, little short one. Write Bob Jordan, tell him about my problem. First I wrote [L. Richardson] Preyer. He was in the sixth district Congress. And Preyer wrote me back, "Prince, I make it my business not to meddle in the federal government's affairs," or whatever affairs it was. And although he's the one when I got the loan passed, he [said], "I can't announce it, it must be announced through your congressman of your district."

When I left Washington, I knew I had it, but I couldn't announce it because they called my congressman. That gives him clout. But when I needed him for three hundred thousand dollars to make it fly, he told me that he did not love to meddle into that. I said, "That's okay. Let me write Jordon." I wrote Jordan. Jordan wrote me back the cutest little letter you've ever seen, "Received your letter. Keep up the good work," signed Jordan. I asked him for help.

[I] called Jesse Helms. And I reminded Jesse Helms, as I did the rest of them, about what I couldn't get from Patricia Harris. First of all, I knew Jesse to the extent to know that he's not going to let this black woman stand in the way. I told him about what we was trying to do here for the elderly, that's a home for the elderly and handicapped. But this black woman whom the--whom the governor, the councilmen said, Proxy Meyer said that was not sensible to the needs of minority poor, because she'd never been [poor]. And, yes sir, we are trying to do this, and I've got this, that, and the other and I need this for that and that.

I had that money in ten days. And Jesse sent me a copy of his letter to her, what you call this mailagram [sic] or something he sent her that he wanted this, he wanted that, he wanted that. And he got it done. And I sent Jesse a big "Thank you." I'd rather have a man like Jesse who would talk, because I couldn't get Silent Sam, because he never knew what he--why he was there, no way. If you--you can interview him, poor fellow.

KH: Samuel Pierce [Secretary of Housing and Urban Development]?

PG: Yeah. Silent Sam we called him, because of the fact the woman ran the place. Sam was

just sitting there as a black figure not knowing what--being responsible for what somebody else was doing. I don't think he knew what happened. I don't think if you read him the newspaper, he don't know what happened.

But this is what I've done. We built four like that.

KH: So you have respect for Jesse Helms because he, he gets things done?

PG: Yeah, if he wants to. Yes, but he makes the money by using hate tactics, you know, like Hughie Long. Remember the life of Huey Long?

KH: In Louisiana?

PG: Yes, when he wanted to get black nurses and he couldn't get the money. What he said? Do you remember what he said?

KH: I'm not sure.

PG: He couldn't get the money for the black nurses, so he went to the House and said he needed some money. [He told them] he saw a beautiful little white nurse handling a great big black nigger, trying to wait on him when we need black nurses. And he got that bill passed before twelve o'clock. He used what he had--what was available.

And I know, and I've been through, I've been to places where I couldn't go in the front door. I couldn't even--I have been boss of jobs laying brick, after knuckles, where the men who I work, my laborers, the white labor that I work, would have to go and get my meal because it was a segregated institution. And I was the boss. I stayed in the truck or went around the back.

It's always been a black/white world. Ever since creation it's been there, so don't put it on the American South. If you read your books, it's always been that way. But we'll have to make it a better world.

KH: Tell me about politics here in Greensboro in the early 1950s. What was the city council like at that time?

PG: Actually, I inherited my place. You know, I didn't win an election, never won one yet. I was beaten both times. But I was picked by the authorities to serve out the term of Barber, Jimmie I. Barber.

KH: That was in 1981?

PG: Whatever. I've got it over there on my wall, my big trophy. But I was a disappointment to

them, you know, those who picked me. ’Course my personal friend picked me. I was his choice. I got a personal friend downtown, Jim Melvin. Jim was reared over here on Asheboro Street at his daddy’s service station. A boy of this church, a brother, killed his father on Asheboro Street. And we hate that, but that, that’s the way life goes. But then when we got arguing about ward systems, I was a big-mouth. In Jim’s absence I got it passed for the count--for us to put it on the referendum. I just couldn’t be a “me too.” I can’t be loyal to wrong.

Now, we know that Jim Melvin isn’t a born citizen of this town, I don’t care what you say. Backed by Joe [Joseph] Bryan, which is another great philanthropist, who sat there that night and, and made the motion that the building be named Melvin Municipal Building and didn’t get a dissention. But I often wondered what would have happened if I’d have voted nay just for the fun of it.

But somebody’s got to run a town. The poor folks can’t run it, they have no know-how. They argue about these various things of art and things they build downtown. Thank God for it, you can’t have everything going, you need that. They’re the ones that worked their butts off for, for others. Like I started--you know Urban Ministry? I started in this town the shelter. Did you know that?

KH: No. I wasn’t aware that you--

PG: The shelter that they’re arguing about now was started here, one cold winter about six years ago by an African church with a mission to take them in when they couldn’t sleep in the--what’s the name of the shelter up here?

KH: The one on Lee Street?

PG: No, it wasn’t that. There was one on, well, wherever it is. What you call it, Lou[?] [William Booth?] started it, the Salvation Army. They couldn’t sleep in the Salvation Army, so they were sleeping outside of it. On the warm side of the building, if there’s such a thing as the warm side of the building when the temperature is two above zero. So I asked the church’s permission. And we cleaned the rear rooms, and bought cots and things, and brought them in. Fed them that whole winter.

And then I’ve got another friend downtown, named, oh, very good, friendly fella, named Mike Weaver. Mike owned that property on Asheboro Street which is now Martin Luther King Boulevard.

Mike, he gave that to Urban Ministries so they could--we could move it, move them over there. And that’s where--then I was asked, I used to be on the board long ago, but I was board-bound so much that I wasn’t even functional. You can be on so many of those boards you spend all of your time going from meeting to meeting, you never would get nothing done. So I’m back on the Urban Ministries board now. But it started here.

KH: Okay, let's go back to the 1950s again, about the time that you started serving here at St. James Baptist Church. What, what was it like here in Greensboro? How did the black community get anything that it wanted from the city government. How did things work?

PG: [laughs] You--it didn't. You got what was allotted to you. And, you see, you can't kick a lion on the foot, honey, if you've got your hand in his mouth. And we had--the only free-speakers was the Baptist church, the black Baptist church. The black Methodist church could not speak. They have a bishop, as you know, and the bishop--and then when they would, they would hush their mouth.

And a lot of the things that I said in town that was accredited to me--and I told people publicly--they weren't my ideas. It was ideas of some people who were--of some teachers who couldn't say it working in the public schools. And, you know, the Bible says we can't live by bread alone, but it never did say we didn't have to have it. And you've got your kids in school and you can't be but so vocal, unless you are some stupid Baptist preacher sitting up on Florida Street, you know, thinking that can't nobody touch him economically, you know. And so he just say it.

It was rough. But I don't know. You can get, you can get a backdoor mentality. You can come up so long that you're trained into it. We were trained Negroes then, like you train a dog. The little dog wet in the house, the woman open the, the window and threw him out. And so the dog was--when he got grown and he was outdoors, he'd just come in the house, and wet, and jump out the window. You know, they train you. The Negroes were trained, and handed down to you [was] "Stay in your place." That's what happened.

But God has never made anything that didn't want to be free. Deep down in the inner parts of you, you wanted to be liberated. But how can you? Education may help liberate you because, you see, you can not fight a battle, honey, when you don't--you young people, and old guys like [me]--when you don't know. You go to inferior schools. You don't know the constitutional rights, so you can't beat them in the court of law unless you get some young guys who can stand up and represent you. You're no stronger than whoever's representing you. So this second grade education we had, this inferior education we had, would not allow but so much.

But as you start working and start educating your children--and if integration has done anything, they started reading the same books--and, and so that way. And then you got television come in. God put that on while you can look at what's going on. They were telling me this wasn't going on, a lot of things that went on in China. You know, by the time it got here it never would have happened if we weren't looking right at it. It made the world so much smaller that we've got to make room for each other. How could I speak up way back in the thirties or fifties even, when the sheriff had a sheet on, so to speak, and nightriders riding around intimidating. We couldn't, until we got above that.

Here's a man laughing on television about Medgar Evers, the other night. I thought that--on *60 Minutes*--I thought that was the most humiliating thing. Yet, he's still laughing now. He better be glad the nigger got killed, because the man spoke up for rights.

This happened. I've been denied things as a young boy. Particularly when I left to go to town, I was told how to act.

KH: When you were a young boy?

PG: When you're young, you're told that.

KH: What were you told about how to act?

PG: You know, "Stay in your place." You knew where your place was. "Don't try to be white." Because, you know, I was a little--I never liked it, but I knew what the consequences would be. It's true. I was clean--I used to caddy as a little ole fellow, but they liked me because I was mannered and very polite. I was clean. If I was barefooted, my feet was washed. And I took the golf bags for people, and old man Yates. And then--and [his daughter?] Jean and I were the same age. Well, when Jean turned about fourteen, he told me what to call her. Mr. Yates taught me that. [He said], "Come here." I would say, "Yes, sir."

He kept calling that herself [?], saying "Miss Jean." Can you caddy for Miss Jean when she comes, you know, because she's learning golf. She's pretty good at times. But I don't care where she play, he wanted me to caddy for "Miss Jean." Because some of the old caddies, they still called her Jean. He didn't want that, you know. I was trained. So the [unclear] start hearing me say "Miss Jean," so they started liking me. I would get little things from them. I stayed in my place, as I was told.

But education of these students came along. As if to say, "Preachers, why in the hell don't you practice what you preach."

KH: Tell me about that, once the sit-ins got started and, and young people had a big role in what was going on. How, how did--

PG: I was asked to go downtown by Johns, Johns started this in town, nobody gives him credit for it. He's out on Market Street, they call him Cuz.

KH: Who's John?

PG: Ralph Johns.

KH: Oh, Ralph Johns, okay.

PG: Yes, Cuz we called him. And Cuz worked on the students, you know, in the store. He had a clothing store down there. And he knew me, and we talked a lot. And he knew what I was about. And he asked me about someone going down, having dinner down at the lunch counter. That's a bit far for me. That just wasn't mine to do. Probably because I've been in the social ministry, the building person, and I am a licensed builder. I built this church, and I built other things. But that just wasn't mine to do.

But when these students who been listening at you preach, taking stands, you know. We could really take a stand behind these, you know, colored windows, and talk about Jesus walking the waters, and the lion's den, and the fiery furnaces. But when we say "amen," and we sing, "God be with you until we meet again," no action. But these students got sick of looking at it, so they practice what we preach, that's all. Until they made us start practicing. And we had to take the lead, because it wouldn't go nowhere without the church, without the ministers.

After all, we do have the only--the Negro has one organization in the world, and that's his church. Everything that he has started in his church his party life, his NAACP life, started in the black church. And education, after the, you know about the funds[?] that used to come over when that was exalted[?] the Negro church. The old black preacher took it up and started educating the Negro. St. Benedicts, St. This, all these church schools were started basically by the Methodist. I'm not talking about many years ago when the Presbyterians, you know, Northern Presbyterians, got sick of what we call respectability and came down in Virginia and all this. And start teaching blacks Christian ethics instead of just respectable ethics, you know, that which was respectable. You can be respectable and still not be vertical with your ethics, you know. And so this is what happened.

KH: So--

PG: Go ahead.

KH: --so, in the early 1960s, after the four A&T students had the sit-in at Woolworth's, and Jesse Jackson became a student leader at A&T and, and led at least one major march, were you finding a--

PG: This was long before Jesse. This started right before Jesse, the president before Jesse started it--Thompson, [William 'Bill'] Thomas rather.

KH: Right, Jesse Jackson came along a few years after, after 1960. Well, were you finding that, that a generation gap of sorts between, you know, the younger people and the older

people who were, you know, had--

PG: At ease, as I am. That's what your talking about?

KH: Yeah.

PG: Yes, because they were told to hush. Hush. Just hush. That's it.

KH: They, meaning the younger people or the older people?

PG: You see, that which we call religion was nothing but fear. And we depended on God to do everything. And we want the young black to hush up and be quiet, and listen at your leaders. In that respect, we can look back now and we were not their leaders, because we were hypocrites, preaching one thing and practicing another.

KH: Can you explain preaching--

PG: One thing and practicing another? Yes, because trying--you see, Jesus Christ himself was a radical. And if you, and if you're going to follow the teachings of Christ, there's nothing cowardly about him. But there was about the ministry. I think we were preaching to be well thought of. And we--we'd dwell upon--we became so heavenly-minded that we were no earthly good. Dismissed realities would get in the pulpit. See, the minister can become opium. Just give them a shot of opium to last them to next Sunday. And come back on Wednesday night, and give them just a little more. And then Sunday give them the big dose of opium. Dismissed realities. And you can't do that, no. And this is what we were giving. Now this--

KH: Did you change as a minister during that time?

PG: Not changed. You don't change your mission, you just change your method. No, I never changed. I knew. I knew that when the time was right for me--God always had somebody. He had a Lincoln, he had a Martin Luther King, he had--when God gets ready for some big change, when the nation is ready for it, it'll happen, without the Prince Graveses or anybody. But when the time comes, apply yourself.

You know, I've watched every turn, I've been a part of every move. But sometimes you can, you can do the right thing at a wrong time, you know. And the Bible always used this thing when Christ came, said, "in the fullness of time." You have trouble with premature babies or premature anything. But when the time was right you couldn't stop it.

It's a joke now. Not only am I riding in the front of the bus, hell, I'm driving the

bus. Black women driving the bus. Hell, we own some bus lines. Things happen. But if you look far enough back--and I know you've done great research, and you're working on your master's--this hadn't always been so. Do you remember when blacks were in power? Does your history go back far enough to remember them rascals when they were in power? Who was that that came across the Alps into--attack in Italy? When Africa came over the Alps and captured this, my God. So is this civil rights? This black/white fight's been going on for a long time.

KH: Well, getting back to Greensboro, let's talk a little bit about school integration and the politics of, of that. What were your thoughts back in '54 when the school board passed a resolution saying that it, it would move toward integrating schools? Were you optimistic at that point that something would happen?

PG: In a sense that it was going to be some pain, but it was worth it, because of how unequal it was. It had to be, you know. It had to have it's birth pain like anything else.

But I think, and it's proven, that it has helped in the schools. You going to have some flare-ups anywhere--in an all-white school, but we just paint it--it looks greater when it's on a black canvas. It's always been white on white. You don't see that like you can black on white, you see. A few arguments and things. But these are tri[vial]—it'll work out. It's a good thing.

KH: At the time, did you believe that it would happen within a year or so, as the school board seemed to indicate?

PG: It didn't.

KH: Well, obviously it didn't. I mean what, what's your recollection of how sincere the school board was when it adopted that resolution?

PG: Well, the school board was helpless. It was handed down to them because, you know, they didn't have no control over that. That became mandatory. The federal court did give them the options concerning the how-to.

KH: That, that's way up in 1971. I, I was talking about 1954 when, when Ben Smith, the superintendent, urged the school board to adopt a resolution.

PG: To do what?

KH: For integrating the schools. And the implication was it would be quickly.

PG: For the how-to, not the will-to. Because it had been handed down that way. It was going to be a law of the land.

KH: Right, the Brown [*v. Board of Education*] decision in '54.

PG: Yes, yes. So he didn't--it was no part of him. He just happened to be the superintendent when it happened, because he loved it like it was.

KH: Ben Smith did?

PG: Yes, he loved it like it was. Ben Smith hasn't--maybe I was asleep--he hasn't come on board saying--without the federal government passing it first. He was not one of the what you call the instigators, originators, and said that "I'm sick and tired of being superintendent in an all-white school, and these schools need to be--." No, this was handed down, you know, and then.

KH: You don't think Ben Smith took a big step--

PG: For the how-to.

KH: --by pushing his school board to adopt this resolution? It was--

PG: Well, the thing is inevitable. You know, it's how-to. When a, when a baby--when a woman becomes impregnated, it's, "How are we going to do this thing?" Now, she's going to have a child. You can speed it up or you can do this, that, or the other, but you know. But when law passed down, baby, wasn't--am I right?

KH: I'm sorry, what are you--

PG: What do you think that he done? Ben Smith?

KH: He pushed a resolution and the school board adopted it. The--what I'm getting at is that, you know, there was a seventeen year gap between that resolution and the reality of what happened. Why do you suppose it took so long in Greensboro, given that early resolution, where other cities in the South integrated or desegregated their schools much, much sooner than Greensboro did? Why this huge gap in time?

PG: Never studied that, baby, because there are some that didn't, if you look at it pretty close. There were some that were slow as we are. Some that were--

KH: Not many. Greensboro was one of the very last school systems to desegregate.

PG: To implement integration in a school.

KH: Yes. Why, why do you suppose that happened in a city whose white leaders primarily called it a progressive city that was on the move and had great race relations?

PG: [laughs]

KH: Why did it take so long?

PG: Wow, race relationships, that, that's kind of a relative term. We've got good relationships as long as who's in charge, you know. Like the big fellow says, "We've got the amendment. We've got good relationships, haven't we?" You know, yeah.

KH: Are you saying that as long as you and Jim Melvin get along, race relations are great or, or--

PG: As long as Jim leads, yes. And I don't rock the boat. There's good race relationships. You know, like *Hee Haw*. You ever look at [TV variety show] *Hee Haw*?

KH: Not very often.

PG: There's a good message in there. Roy Clark, he says now, "I'm a pickin' and I'm a grinnin'." But if you start pickin' and I don't grin, if I challenge, then this is a bad relationship. But that could be good relationships. You see, there's something wrong when I have to agree to have good race relationships. I should be able to disagree without being, you know, kind of, you know, disagreeable. So Greensboro's not a bad town.

We sit still up here doing nothing. Yet, you know, a few years ago the federal government had to make us do right on city council. We got an all-white council and a quarter of our citizens are black, are minorities. We done that in the name of progress. And now we sit right here doing nothing. And voting to whether or not we're going to close the coliseum. That's stupid leadership. Like gonna vote whether you're going to cut your head off.

KH: Well, I guess I'm less interested in what's happening in 1990. But back to the issue of school integration and desegregation. Why do you suppose it took so long, why was Greensboro one of the last cities?

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

KH: Maybe I can bring up an issue that might, might help. Have you read William Chafe's book *Civilities and Civil Rights*? In that book--it came out in 1980--he argues that Greensboro had a, an elite system where the business leaders, the white business leaders, had this idea that things were fine. There is a lot of communication, white people and black people--white leaders and black leaders were talking to each other and things are fine. This is a city on the move, a progressive Southern city.

And Chafe argues that this attitude, while it encouraged people to talk to each other, kept things from really changing. That there was a civility about the way that people talk to each other, but there was no commitment to civil rights. And in fact, the civility got in the way of people of color gaining civil rights. What, what do you think of that, and how did that play into the school desegregation issue?

PG: It always plays into--in this respect. If I, you can get enough big people, what we call "big Negroes," to agree, the masses suffer. You know, they're speaking for. And they're, they're the ones who write the papers and talk about how beautiful you're getting along.

But the masses who need it have to demonstrate. That's what had to happen, see. Because you have Negroes. See, Negroes--let me tell you one thing, and you will probably already know it. See, they've done a good job on Negroes, you know. Even a Negro don't want to be a Negro. There's a few of them. They'll move right now. He doesn't care nothing about his community like, he's not community-minded. He's ready to move--every Negro in our district is ready to move to Irving Park. The hell with their little one behind him. He's going to get out of that community as quick as he can.

I put a doctor in Lincoln Grove. You know where that is, there in southeast Greensboro. He didn't have a dime. I went to carry him to the bank, where I'm going in a few minutes, and got him a loan. Built his place, we did, and the little black shop, in accustom to his needs. And then we added that on to his rent, that he'd just pay one check a month. That doctor is going to move now. He's trying to get out of his contract of ten years because of the noise and because of the blacks. He wants to move, he wants to move over here on--bought an old house up here on Summit Avenue, downtown. And he wants to get away from around Negroes. And he bought this house out here where the big preacher, the church on [Highway] 29 North used to be the--how long you been in town?

KH: Oh, a year or so.

PG: No, you wouldn't know. A great big church going up 29, about six or seven miles up the road above the Prince Graves Homes. He bought back up in the woods in there now. And his wife can't stand those drunks and the people. A drunk man staggered in there every other day in the doctor's office, and they're so deplorable. Even Negroes don't want to be Negroes. I don't blame them for trying to want to live in respectable places. But nobody

wants to help make the place respectable, you know.

KH: Is that a change from twenty years ago? Your observation of that attitude, have you seen any change?

PG: Well, actually, you see, now he can go where the others are, you know. Years ago he was trapped. So we were--if you were a big Negro, then you could live on Benbow Road, or you lived on Dudley Street. Now things have changed since the integration. Now you can live in Irving Park. And every Negro's ambition is to be, and every poor man wanted to be a Donald Trump until here lately. Now he's not talking too much about Donald; Donald's going through trials and tribulations.

But what I'm saying is, honey, it has changed. And these things are preordained, I reckon. But I've enjoyed every step of it, even that which didn't like, because I know it's going to come out all right, you know. You got to have some pains, you got to have some Jesse Helms, you've got to have some of everything.

KH: Why is it--you've supported some rather conservative candidates over the years--lieutenant governor candidate Jimmy Green, for example. Why is it that you are--

PG: That was a personal thing.

KH: --kind of a lone ranger in the black community in a number of areas in terms of who you back?

PG: You studied my record, right?

KH: A little, yeah, yeah. Why, why would you back someone like Jimmy Green?

PG: That's not the worst candidate I've had, is it? If it is, I've got a pretty good record.

KH: Well, let's just talk about him.

PG: Let's see. Actually, you can call me a maverick in my thinking if you want to. But sometimes if I want something for the people that I serve, I make deals instead of just going along with something because it's popular but not functional. I seem to think they're popular. But after the hoo-ha was over, the person who we put in wasn't even effective. He was just popular, and we couldn't get nothing. And when they go down, you can use me. And you say, "Let's go down, tell them Prince is out here."

"Prince who?"

All of a sudden I become a "Prince who?" And I'm careful about that. I had

made--I supported, yes, the last loosing lieutenant governor, you know that, right? Rand?

KH: Yes, Tony Rand.

PG: Yes, I did. I got some commitments from Tony on housing. And sometime I get commitments on using some young blacks as pages. I make them give me some verbal commitments. But there are some moneys that I haven't been able to get my hands on, because I'm not so able to lobby like some of the bigger housing folks. And when I get there, the cupboard's bare. And I said, "I need your candidate for this reason. I need your help in housing." Nothing personal, I've never asked none of them for personal money. I get a good salary here. More than the--I don't quite, make quite as much as the tax folks think I make, but I make a fair salary.

But mine is deal making. And all the whites pulled deals. I'm just doing what--I learned it from them. They're convenient Republicans. And, you know, before Martin Luther King--Martin Luther King made more Republicans. You know it used to be religious--irreligious to be a Republican in the Deep South.

KH: Yeah.

PG: Next to God was the Democratic party. And since we marched and said, "I have a dream", the South then became Republican.

KH: Are you a Republican?

PG: I'm, I'm a Negro. Conveniently, I'm a Democrat right now, and I'm a Republican if the right man is in the--that's going to do something for the people. Never voted Republican now. But then, most of us, most whites are just convenient. You ever seen it--you ever thought that the South would go Republican? But it did. It's a black/white world. And conservatism is, is the talk of the town. Being a conservative. Don't rock the boat, turn back the clock. And this is what has happened--well, they want to happen, but the clock won't go back. It's a good world we live in. Exciting, the world we live in.

KH: I suppose so. I think we'll wrap it up here, unless there's something else you want to add that, events or--

PG: No, I want to thank you for having the nerve to come. To answer your own questions that you've already known. No, no reporter would ever come to anybody without having the facts on him. I think you told me--you know me about as well--you knew me more before you came.

I get interviewed quite a lot. Yes, I look out for my--I hope I've housed them, I've

clothed them, I used to have the breakfast program before it embarrassed the legislators. So we got it passed so that every child could have it in school. They're unpopular to some, but I'm--but where else could you get a Prince Graves? There's room for me, and I never bothered no one else. I wouldn't care what he thought. I just figure that's just perfect. Either I support it or I don't, you know. So I enjoy working with them.

Going to a bank merger in a few minutes, we're going to merge our bank. It won't be no longer American Federal.

KH: American Federal Savings and Loan?

PG: That's right. It's going to be Mutual Savings and Loan. And you know what caused it? At the top, the big S&L. And those boys took all the money out of it, and so they heist your reserve amount that every bank must have. And the little banks got to merger to survive. It's as simple as that.

KH: Yes. Okay, well, thank you very much.