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INTERVIEWEE: Sol M. Jacobs

INTERVIEWER: William Link

DATE: December 9, 1986

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

WILLIAM LINK: Okay, this is an interview with Mr. Sol Jacobs. It's December 9, 1986, and this is the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. I wonder, Mr. Jacobs, if you could just give us a little bit of personal information. Your full name is?

SOL JACOBS: Sol Max Jacobs, actually.

WL: And you were born in?

SJ: Pittsburgh, in 1910.

WL: And you came to Greensboro in?

SJ: 1949.

WL: And your employment history, you began in Greensboro in 1949--

SJ: I operated a delicatessen from '49 to, actually, '76.

WL: This was, is this in downtown Greensboro?

SJ: Yes, on the periphery of downtown, in Friendly Shopping Center, actually. Ten, ten years on North Elm Street in Fisher Park area and twenty years in Friendly Shopping Center.

WL: And then you--are you retired now?

SJ: Yes, sir.

WL: Okay. What I'm interested in first, I suppose, is your memory of the 1950s, and your recollections of race relations under Jim Crow, under the segregated system, say from when you first came in 1949--well, when you first came in 1949, did you have any impressions of differences, say, between what you had left and what you found in Greensboro?

SJ: Well, I was extremely interested in race relations because, first, I had come out of over five years in the service in World War II where I observed what the, what race relations were in the Army. And I had stationed down here in Fort Jackson, [Fort] Bragg, and [Camp] Butner before going overseas. And having been raised--well, I dropped out of school at fifteen--raised in an extremely anti-Semitic neighborhood, lived through the Depression, became aware of the racial conflict up North, and I understood that it was much more intense down here. [I] found that it was to a certain extent because--but there was an extremely close relationships between blacks and whites who knew each other, as contrasted the condition that existed in the North. And I found the same thing true in the military. I mean, the guys from the South hated blacks except those who they knew closely. And then they established a very close relationship with them, much more quickly than people from the North did.

When I came down here I found--well, I operated a delicatessen in Fisher, the Fisher Park area, which was in a church area. First Presbyterian Church was across the street, the First Christian Church, the Catholic church [St. Pius X] was up the street. Father [Hugh] Dolan was the minister up there, Dr. [John A.] Redhead was the minister at the First Presbyterian Church. And we were open till midnight every night, seven days a week. We were the only place where respectable people could come in and drink beer, and we had an extreme variety of customers, from the Cones to the ministers to the working people.

And of course, I was interested in stimulating conversation about race there, and found that was so strong there that it's given me warm and friendly relationships with all the blacks whom they knew who weren't generally involved in household work, but really regarded as part of the family. But the concept of equality was interesting. Everybody appeared to be against it when any mention of it was made, and I found it would appear that opinion was unanimous till I took an opposite point of view. And then I found customers came up and supported my position that we had to get to some sort of racial equality. And I found that condition existed.

Now a significant person during that period, well, Bill Caffrey was a young--had just come as a young schoolteacher. He was teaching at Aycock [Middle] School. He was one of the people at that point who had, I think, a real awareness of the forces that were in motion. Also, Bob King, Jr., who had been a mayor in the early days and subsequently was drafted as a councilman, was also aware. Those are the only two people during that period who I--who really appeared to be aware of what was happening and what was

going to happen, and of the need to do something to make it happen smoothly and effectively.

WL: You mention that contacts between whites and blacks on certain levels were very warm. What sorts of situations would they be warm and what cases would--was there hostility at all between whites and blacks?

SJ: There was extreme hostility towards any black whom they did not know. There was suspicion of blacks who came into the neighborhood whom they didn't know. But I noticed those who were most adamant against the blacks would defend them; when one of the blacks whom they knew were attacked in any manner, they jumped to their defense immediately. I mean, the concept was that [if] they were in their place they were great, as long as they remained in their place. That seemed to be the general feeling.

WL: What was your perception of the way blacks regarded this system? Segregation, we're talking about segregation.

SJ: Well, those that I knew--and I had very limited contact. I had young fellows from A&T [North Carolina A&T State University] who worked part-time, and those whom I knew in the neighborhood were surprisingly docile. I was really amazed that after the experience in the World War II that they didn't react more violently. I just couldn't understand why they didn't. I was unaware that, of course, there was that ferment cooking in the black community. But the only ones that we had contact with were actually those that worked in that area, that I lived and where my business was in.

WL: So you think that Bill Chafe's characterization [in his book *Civilities and Civil Rights*] of race relations in the forties and fifties--at least white perceptions about them being generally good--and the sort of paternalism that--

SJ: Oh yeah, I think it was extremely strong. I had one--I was taken up by somebody--Bill Stern[?] who was president. He insisted that I go to a meeting of ADL [Anti-Defamation League], which was held in Irving Park at Bill--at Sidney Stern's[?] home. I was--really felt out of place in that very elaborate place. And Caesar Cone [CEO of Cone Mills] was there, and representatives from the ADL had come down to urge the Jewish community here to assist in the transition process. And Caesar Cone got up and said it was Yankees like them that caused all the trouble, that he had blacks work for him for many, many years. He'd talked to them about this and they didn't want any of that sort of thing. They were happy with where they were. And that was the general concept among the so-called leadership in the community.

WL: And there was a strong degree of solidarity on that question, among the leadership?

SJ: Oh yeah, extremely strong. I found very few people in positions of leadership who had a different point of view.

WL: I wonder if you ever saw any actual challenges to, or testing of taboos, or testing of the rules of segregation?

SJ: Not till the sit-ins. That was the first real evidence of the testing process that I was aware of. I was quite shocked in ’54 after--really, now, during that period it was quite interesting. Ben L. Smith, who was superintendent of schools, when he was asked what they were going to do with the rulings made, his statement was that, “We’ve always lived within the law, we will continue to live within the law.” And I knew through Bill Caffrey, a teacher, they had prepared to train teachers to operate in a [de]segregated manner. And the concept was that he issued the statement that in ’55 school year, no child in Greensboro would have to go past a school in order to go to school.

And Bill Caffrey was made principal of Caldwell School, which was the key school. It was right in between the poor black and poor white areas, and would have been the most segregated, and was the poorest school in the community at the time. And Bill was put there in order to handle the integration, which was supposedly going to take place.

But then through the [Ku Klux] Klan, Klanmen showed up when the school board met to make pupil assignments for the next year. They were within a block and a half of where my store was. And the paper come out, said the Klan would appear there, so right after lunch I went over there to give them [the board] some moral support. And when I walked in, it was a very small room. And the Klan was not in uniform, but they’re a rough looking lot. There was only one chair open in the middle and I went and sat down in it. And they intimidated the school board so much that they called off the meeting. And then, of course, subsequently the governor [Luther H. Hodges] issued the Pearsall Plan, which made it impossible to implement.

But Smith was really harassed with calls, broken windows, rocks through those. Well, he died of a heart attack not too long after that, and I’m sure the trauma was the reason for that. But he was one of the members--and I think other members of the school board--who were prepared to implement the integration.

WL: Implementation in that case would mean making any school open to--

SJ: Yeah, the actual--no, the real issue was that no child would have to go past a school in order to go to school.

WL: Right, yeah. Which is a far cry from, you know, massive busing.

SJ: Oh, absolutely. I know Bill Caffrey, that's where I got my information, from him, and he kept me apprised of the things that went on. That really made it--there was enough retraining of teachers. And of course, everybody there at that time knew that the schools were separate but unequal, and they knew that would be a problem. That carried on to the point where Phil Weaver was superintendent of schools, and he knew that would be a major problem. At that point I think Caffrey was assistant district--assistant school attorney. And he worked with Phil, and one of the things they did was implement the Head Start Program and bring it into the school system in order to try to make up for that differentiation.

WL: Well, I'd like to get back a little bit, to before *Brown* [*v. Board of Education*], and, since you've raised the question of schools, what sort of recollections or perceptions you had about the black schools in Greensboro, segregated schools in Greensboro, before 1954, Dudley High School in Greensboro.

SJ: Well, I have no direct knowledge of them except what Caffrey told me, and I talked to some of the young fellows who were working part-time for me and going to A&T. And obviously, I mean, you could tell from their conversation in talking to them that they were not at the level of college people who were going to UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro] or Guilford College at the time whom we knew. And I talked to them about conditions in the schools, which were found that obviously were much inferior.

Really did not become aware of that till I started working with the [Greensboro] Chamber of Commerce in '68 and then went into some of the schools and met some blacks, including Abe Peeler, and then became aware of what a tremendous differentiation there was in the plant, in the equipment, in teacher training, that sort of thing.

WL: How much visibility did the black middle class in Greensboro have, say, in this period?

SJ: I was, I really wasn't aware of any. The newspapers carried, actually carried very little about, blacks, black community, except crime, of course, and that sort of thing. But we were, in the area I was, why you really had no access to the black middle class or no contact with them.

WL: So it was very segregated in that sense, contact between white and black middle class?

SJ: Oh yeah.

WL: Why don't we move on to the--before we talk about the *Brown* decision and the impact of *Brown* a little bit more fully, discuss the, let's discuss the way politics worked when you first came to Greensboro in 1949. What sort of impressions did you have of the political system here? You're right in the middle of downtown--

SJ: Well, of course, at that point my source of information was Bob King, Jr., R[obert] R[uffin] King, Jr. He was, I guess, in his sixties at the time. [He] lived around the corner from the store, hung around there, and liked to talk and was really knowledgeable about the history. And I learned a tremendous amount about the history from him. And, of course, what I became aware of, that politically Greensboro was run by a very small clique who met at the Merchants and Manufacturers Club, which was at the bottom, the basement of the old O. Henry Hotel. And a decision would be made informally at that point as to who would be mayor and who would run for council.

WL: Who would be some of the people in this group?

SJ: Well, as I recall, Pierce Rucker and Stark Dillard, and two other people who worked for Jefferson Standard whose names I--I forget the name of the founder [Julian Price]. But they would meet informally there and discuss those things and decide. It was interesting for a while, of course, the community leaders--this is according to King--who held the position of mayor. And then afterwards they would pick out the people who--for instance, I guess the first one, let's see, what was his name--name slipped away from me. Carson Bain, for instance. Carson Bain was a very bright young man. He caught the attention of the Cones. They promoted him, they set him up in business. And he was the mayor [1967-1969] and then went on to be county commissioner, and made the circle of things like that.

And eventually it got to the point--now this was later on, of course, in the period you're talking about it--that actually it was through the Jaycee [United States Junior Chamber] leadership. They would--the people who came up through the Jaycees were eventually picked up and sponsored, become councilman and mayor in a period of time. And the group exercised informal control by these people who knew what their philosophy was and operated very effectively.

But there was always a resistance to any change. I mean, there was always an effort to maintain the status quo. And this was particularly true of black participation. They were always, you know, making the minimal participation, token representation. Like Jimmie Barber was councilman for a period of years, a really sad creature. And at every level, they would make a token representation in order to live within the law, and to maintain a sort of peace in the community.

WL: You say they were resistant to change. Were they, in the fifties, in a defensive posture do you think? I mean were they attempting to resist--

SJ: Oh absolutely, oh absolutely. It was always a--the really first significant change--I mean, Dave Schenck [mayor, 1961-1965] attempted to institute change. Before the passage of the Civil Rights Act [of 1964], you know, when there was a lot of turmoil in the community, he called all the restaurant owners in together for several meetings. And he could not get a city councilman to sit in with them, not one of them would sit in.

But he asked them all to open their doors to everybody. And they jumped up and down and said there'd be bloodshed, their waitresses would quit, and so forth and so on. But he was the one who attempted to make that sort of change, but really could not get any support from any community leadership.

As a matter of fact, during that period, the White Citizens' Council was formed. You know, as I recall, Pierce Rucker and Stark Dillard were two of the leaders in that, and they actively promoted any resistance to integration of the schools. And--

WL: So they were actively involved in a form of activism which was designed to thwart integration?

SJ: Yeah, that's right.

WL: --by the fifties, White Citizens' Council. You mention blacks had very little political power, but on the other hand, there were blacks who voted in the fifties--is that correct?

SJ: Well, it was an extremely small voting pattern. [unclear]. When the Voting Rights Act [of 1965] was passed--let's see what was her name--Register? Even though it wasn't Register at the time, she was in charge of the county board of elections.

WL: Margaret Register. Yeah. She was something else at that point.

SJ: Yes, well, her name was Margaret Schechter at that time. She was divorced and married Bob Register. But she went out and actively started registering blacks in the community.

WL: This was after '65, after Voting Rights Act.

SJ: Yeah, that's right, and there was so much resistance to that that she was actually forced out of that position.

WL: Resistance on the part of--

SJ: The powers that be. I mean, they objected to registering blacks. There was always that fear of lack of control--lack of pol[itical]--losing political control by black registration. And she was eventually transferred to another department in the county government, retired just a couple years ago. But with that type of thing was done, it was actually definite resistance to any blacks participating in non-traditional areas, work or anything else.

Actually, that--the only real break came about in the Chamber of Commerce, when Hal Sieber came to the Chamber of Commerce and actively promoted integration of the chamber, opening it, work opportunities. And that was the only thing, the fact that the chamber became actively involved in the integration process. It's the only thing that made the smooth transition that took place possible.

WL: What was the chamber's role during the fifties, before--

SJ: Well, I mean, on the surface they were strictly a business organization. I didn't know it at the time, but they were actively--I mean, some of the chamber leadership was the same as the White Citizens' Council leadership. And the power of the chamber was in the halfway resistance to change through this small clique of people.

WL: So the same cast of characters, essentially?

SJ: Pardon?

WL: It was the same cast of characters as you had had in the city council?

SJ: Yeah, that's right. This small group that actually is--King told me would meet informally, play cards, eat, drink down there, and they'd discuss those things. There was pretty much a general agreement among them on how to handle the threat that was developing.

WL: Would you say their style was consensual, in terms of--I mean they did things by consensus, by agreement, common agreement, rather than disagreement and--within themselves?

SJ: Well, I think it was by agreement, generally, during that period of the fifties and early sixties. I think they became panic-stricken when it appeared to get out of hand, and that's when they more or less permitted Hal Sieber [Chamber of Commerce public relations director] to take over and organize. It was a pretty radical plan that he pursued. And he pursued it very effectively, and of course, it had very extremely positive results.

But then when things quieted down afterwards, why, they went back to the same thing. They got rid of him in the Council on Community Unity, which had been formed

in 1968, which changed to be the Community Business Council. And the role was changed and the--actually, when the chamber got out of hand and endorsed the district system with the chamber board, then we had the resignations of four major corporations from the chamber, and eventually getting rid of the chamber staff and revising chamber policy completely.

It was quite interesting in the process. I mean, they dissolved the Council on Community Unity in October of ’79. In November of ’79, when the crisis came up, the Klan-Nazi confrontation, they revived it, very quickly, and had it meet. And when that crisis finally resolved itself they then dissolved it permanently, and changed it to the Business Community Council. And the chamber’s right back where it was before as far as community involvement is concerned.

WL: Now the Council on Community Unity was formed in the seventies?

SJ: Sixty-eight.

WL: Sixty-eight. And then was in existence until the late seventies. And then was transformed into?

SJ: Business Community. I was a member from the very beginning, till, well in October of ’79, when Al Lineberry [president of the chamber] came in to a small meeting and announced that the role of the chamber had been fulfilled. I moved to dissolve it, which is what they wanted. And I told them if that’s what they want, then they dissolve it. And then I was called back in when it reformed right after that [unclear]. And I met till they changed it--changed the name, and then I did resign.

WL: Was the--the Council for Community Unity was formed in response to what in 1968?

SJ: Oh, I mean, there were continued demonstrations by [unclear] and threatened by [unclear]

WL: Black power movement.

SJ: Oh yeah. That’s really it. And Jesse Jackson came to the fore during that period.

WL: Since we’re on the subject, why don’t we pursue the topic of the proposed changes and actual changes that came to city government by the 1980s--the ward plan, the various ward plans that were proposed. When was the first, when were the first discussions of changing the--

SJ: In ’69. That’s when George Simkins, who had been agitating for it--we weren’t even aware of it. I was a member of the Chamber Council on Community Unity and wasn’t aware that there was a movement in the black community. But he found this Plan B, which was a plan of the 1800s of Raleigh, in the--Raleigh--that enabled him by getting a sufficient petition to force a referendum. And he proposed that and had the signatures. And we looked at the plan. It was for twelve wards and the city manager form of government, a specified salary, which was a salary of the 1800s, was actually ridiculous.

And of course, that panicked the chamber. And I was among those who worked against it. And the chamber pledged that they would examine the thing and see if there was any inequity, and if there was, propose a better plan. And we defeated the, of course, the Simkins plan. And then the chamber formed a blue ribbon committee, chaired by Bland Worley, who was a prominent citizen, and they did a very extensive study. I have the--their report here. And they came through with--

WL: The report was when? Do you remember when, the year?

SJ: Let’s see if I have it here. May 16, 1968. And in it, of course, the conclusion was that--unanimously--that the present at-large form of government no longer meets the needs of contemporary democracy. And they came through with a recommendation for a four district plan and divided as closely as possible by Elm and Market Streets, in which each of the districts would elect one council person. Three would be elected at large and the mayor at large.

And they turned that over to the Council on Community Unity to sell to the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] and the other individual groups who had become interested in it. And I worked with, on the committee which checked it out. And we found very quickly that there was no way you could divide the city in four down Elm, and if you did that you would divide the black community in two and each one would be a minority in its area. And of course, the NAACP would not accept that sort of thing, it was meaningless.

And so we finally figured that six was the smallest number of districts where each significant area of the community would be represented. And we presented that to a subcommittee, chaired by Herb Reese[?], which was charged with going out and meeting with other groups. And they sold that concept to all of the other groups, except the NAACP refused to accept it. It was submitted to the board of the chamber, and they refused to accept it. They insisted on hanging with a four district system.

And at that point, those of us who had been active with different organizations, were not from the chamber, formed a group called Citizens for Representative Government and started to promote the district system.

WL: This was at about what point, what year?

SJ: Let's see, the end of '68.

WL: Still in '68. Yeah, okay.

SJ: Yeah, that's right. Well, in '69 this group insisted on an eight district system, which the NAACP agreed to. Got the proper petition, filed it, it was defeated. And of course the primary opposition came from the Chamber of Commerce. [E.S. "Jim"] Melvin, [who] was the mayor pro tem at the time, led the opposition, with the promise to come up with a better plan once again. And of course, when it was defeated, they did for years. We agitated and finally got another petition for a six district system. And once again it was defeated, opposition from the same source. They then formed the Save Our City Committee, which was very well funded by the same people from the chamber, actually worked from the chamber itself, and defeated that thing. And after--let's see--am I wandering too much?

WL: No, no. No, no. This--we're still talking about, say '68, '69. And that's hard to--

SJ: Well, it went on from there. I should probably refresh my memory here.

WL: Okay. Let's pause here a second anyway. I want to--

[recorder paused]

SJ: --formed the Save Our City Committee, and finally the NAACP started to push a seven district system. And they were getting fairly well along on their petition when the--I was called to the chamber and the--by some people in the chamber, asking me what was going on, and I told them. And they said, "Well, suppose we support the six district system." I says, "I'm sure we can talk them into dropping their petition, if the chamber will support it."

And we had a meeting with Dr. Simkins and other people and told them that. And he said he didn't believe they would support it, but if they would, why, they would drop their petition. Well, the chamber board had a meeting and voted unanimously to support the 6/3/1 system as originally proposed. Simkins dropped the petition and that was--we wanted to have more time. They insisted on having it the next primary election and we thought they ought to have more time, but they insisted on that.

Well, anyway, it was scheduled for the next primary election, whereupon the chamber board was called together in their traditional manner. They called a different group together and tried to get them to rescind their endorsement. The vote was not unanimous, but they once again voted to support it by a majority. And right after that we

had the resignation of four major corporations and the withdrawal of significant funding to maintain the chamber, whereupon they called a meeting and they began to get rid of the chamber staff, which they did effectively.

And then once again Al Lineberry was appointed to this committee to study restructuring the chamber. And I have that report. He recommended restructuring, shrinking the size of the board of directors, changing the various things. And that was voted upon. And then when the chamber had agreed to support it, they withdrew--they didn't do anything. And the Save Our City Committee was supplemented by Keep Greensboro Greensboro Committee, which was the same group, which was operated out of the chamber.

WL: Who were the, who were some of the people involved in it? Do you remember?

SJ: Well, I mean, it was a traditional thing. Jim Melvin, of course, was one of them, and Al Lineberry, and Carson Bain, and--I mean, those were the primary people who actually went out and worked against it. And the referendum was put at the extreme end of an extremely long ballot where a lot of people missed it, you know. And it was defeated by 300 votes. And of course then it was continued. I was patient after that and tried to get it back on. Then they insisted on putting the four district system on the ballot and nobody was for that. The only precinct voted--one precinct voted for it by a very small amount.

And then the agitation lingered on until the city prepared to go through the annexation, which they had planned for a long time in the northwest section. And when the Justice Department ruled that they could not annex because that would dilute the black votes, why, then the whole group reversed themselves and picked the five district system. They took black leadership who had not been involved in the thing to go out and work for the five district system.

I was part of the committee who met with Melvin and representatives of that group pushing the five district system. The president of the chamber and one of the people from Burlington Industries were with Melvin. I served with Herman Fox [original member of Citizens Association] and Carolyn Allen [councilwoman, mayor 1993-1999]. And after several meetings we five of us were ready to support a six district system--3/2/1, or 4/2/1 if they wanted it, just so we got the six.

[knock at door]

They were supposed to bring additional information to the next meeting. When we got to the room where the council was going to elect to adopt the five district system--by ordinance, without referendum--I suggested that we had heard that. They said that absolutely never happened. But after that, the meeting was not held, council did adopt it with Melvin speaking for it. And the whole crew on the Save Our City Committee came up and spoke for the five system, and it was adopted by ordinance. And it was a positive thing.

The purpose of that, of course, was the fact that it was happening--it was beginning to be an environment where you had blacks and white, poor, in the northeast and southwest. By adopting the five district system they divided the northeast section--which was the Cone Mill area and rural area--between the affluent white area in the northwest and the blacks, disenfranchising that group. And the alliance which began to develop was broken up, because the whites, who for the first time were working with blacks, felt they were sold out by the black community.

WL: In order to get the, a ward plan, they sold them out?

SJ: Well, they had to have a ward plan in order to proceed with the annexation. The annexation was the important thing to this group. And they made the minimal change necessary in order to get that annexation. Of course, I mean, the five district system did become a very positive thing. And I think everybody now, even--well, most of the people on the city council are more aware of the fact that it is a healthier form for the community. And I think eventually--it might take some time, but eventually go to the six district system. A move was made in that direction for a while but it wasn't strong enough.

Actually, [Earl] Jones, who was one of the black city council people, has been one of the ones who went over and supported the five district system. Subsequently he came to me and told me it was a mistake and he would support six districts. Anyway, I think we're in a relatively good position as a community now as a result of that switchover.

WL: Was the conflict over the ward plan--this begins about 1968, '69--it's finally adopted in, well, '83?

SJ: It was '83, the time of the switch, that's right.

WL: Would you characterize this as the major political battle of, say, race-related episodes?

SJ: Oh, no question about it, because the result of that [is] you did get two black council people on there who really represented their community. And Katie Dorsett [first black woman elected to council] was really competent, sophisticated, and was able to present her plan in such a manner that she gained respect. They changed representatives of various bureaus. They gave more attention to needs of the black community--basic needs of the black community, and very quietly changed the policy. And I think it's been a very wholesome influence on the community.

I think we're--race relations now are much, much better as a result of that political change. And, of course, it's gone on now where they've got a district system that's just been implemented in the county, which is not all positive but it does give positive black

representation. Katie Dorsett now has gone over to that. And think it will help the county considerably and I think will help resolve this prospect for school consolidation, which will undoubtedly come, and which will be difficult, but in the long run will be like integration generally, will be a very positive factor as far as education at that level in the community. Well, I think we're--really I'm quite optimistic about the potential for real positive race relationships and real progress in the community.

WL: Why don't we shift tack dramatically here and go back into the 1950s again. I wanted to talk about, you know, there's lines of continuity between city council politics in the fifties, obviously, and the district system that was recently adopted--and turn back to 1954, to the *Brown* decision, which we've talked about briefly already. But what was the reaction to *Brown* in Greensboro? The initial reaction is compliance, at least on the part of the school board.

SJ: On the part of the school board. There's no question in my mind at that time, if community leadership had gotten behind the school board, the community would have gone along with it. As in my experience, the community follows the recognized and accepted leadership and will follow in their path, as they did when the schools were finally integrated. But you had to have that expression of leadership, and when it was negative, why, then there was no grounds for support at all.

WL: So, Superintendent Smith was acting one way and leadership was acting another way.

SJ: Oh, absolutely.

WL: Was that nearly unanimous in terms of leadership's reaction?

SJ: Well, I didn't know all the individuals involved, but all of those whom I knew and talked to--and I made an effort to talk to them--it was generally unanimous. I mean a lot of them felt, you know, well, you know, theoretically it would be nice if we could do that, but it's impossible to do because the people won't follow. Always blamed the people. And actually the people will follow and did follow, whenever constructive change was made.

WL: I'm interested in this fear of what the popular reaction was going to be. I wonder if you could elaborate on that, at least the leadership's justification for opposing integration in the fifties as being a fear that there would be a popular backlash. Is this a--do you think this was a rationalization on their part or is it, is there--

SJ: Well, I think they really felt that way. I think they had the fear and they translated it as--

WL: Yeah, it was a real fear.

SJ: Yeah, I think they really did have a fear that they--I mean that they would lose control or that things would get out of hand. I think they really felt that people would respond violently to any attempt at change of that sort. I think it was just the picture of how they themselves felt. I don't think--I think history's proven right along that, in this area particularly, that you have people who are in roles of leadership. And when they take a stand, why, people--no matter how radical it is--people do rally behind them and follow in their footsteps. And we simply did not have that type of leadership during that period. It was a hold-the-line leadership.

I think that's one of the weaknesses of our system, that people are not trained. There's on-the-job training when they achieve--are elected to public office. And generally they reflect the feelings of the people whom they know, who are responsible for putting them in and keeping them in office. And the so-called community leaders really had no perception of the, really the ongoing process that was taking place.

They found a situation--one of the reasons it's been so difficult to make changes in Greensboro is because it has been generally such a good place to live, and mostly the things were upward--upward bound for almost everybody in the community for such a long period. Especially when the black middle class--when non-traditional roles were opened up for them and they were able to go out and get jobs and work in areas that they had not had access to. And once again they concentrated on getting themselves a step further, rather than assisting the mass of blacks, who really, even at this point, I think, are worse off--the low end of the totem pole.

WL: Getting back to *Brown*, the *Brown* decision. Was there a, say, between 1954 and about five or six years later--do attitudes harden on the question? That is, do they become more rigid in terms of white leadership in Greensboro, or--

SJ: Well, what they did, I mean, first of all, when they succeeded in not implementing the thing in '54, then the school board was--it was an appointed board, and I think people were appointed who had that state of mind, "Well, we've beaten this thing. All we got to do is maintain the same thing," and they did. They made only token changes along the way in order to--it would be interesting to get a real line on this from Caffrey, who during that period--I forget exactly when he went off to Duke [University] law school, got his law degree, came back here and joined one of the prestige law firms, and then became assistant to the school board attorney, and eventually took over. I think it would be interesting to get his timing on that thing, because I do know that he was extremely influential on the school board chairmen, attempting to get movement in that area. And when it came, I mean, made a lot of changes in Phil Weaver's thinking, and in the--what's his [name], the school board superintendent who just gave up, but for a long

period was really instrumental, incidentally.

WL: Newbold [?].

SJ: What was his name?

WL: Newbold.

SJ: Newbold. Newbold, which came out in the National Guard when they came in and shot up the A&T [on May 22, 1969] [unclear], and was a very conservative guy when he came in after Caffrey--really steered him right. And he was aware [unclear] and implemented a lot of the changes that were helpful in making the transition smooth as it was.

WL: So he was, he was school board attorney from the sixties to the present? Caffrey?

SJ: Yeah, that's right. He was assistant first, and then I think he took over--actually, he took over even when he was assistant, because I think the school board attorney was quite ill during that period.

WL: Getting back to *Brown,* was the *Brown* decision greeted universally with hostility? Superintendent Smith supports it, or at least favors compliance. We've talked about this already, but if you could elaborate on the extent of support for *Brown*.

SJ: Well, very little, and actually, before, we used to talk a lot about it at the deli, had quite a few people in there. And actually when it first come out, there it was unanimous opposition to it. I mean, everybody had spoke up, and you felt that everybody was opposed to it. But I spoke in favor of it. Then you'd find people would come out and say, "Yeah, that's right," you know.

WL: Right.

SJ: But people were hesitant to become involved in it. Especially those who were for it, because the people who were against it, especially the Klan, were very outspoken about it, received a lot of publicity. And later I think the idea was spread that there was a lot more opposition than really existed. I think the mass of the people were looking for some direction and some leadership which they didn't get.

WL: How would you characterize--you've mentioned the Klan and the White Citizens' Councils--how would you characterize--I wonder if we could talk a little bit more about the Citizens' Councils and the Klan. They emerge pretty much in response to *Brown*, or

emerge in the post-1954 period. Is that your recollection?

SJ: Yeah, that's it. From my perception, yeah, that's what happened. Well, I think the last real appearance of the--this section of the Klan, I understood, was in northwest--rural area of northeast Greensboro. And I think that was the last official appearance of this group, was in the school board meeting in 1954. After that, any Klan influences, demonstrations, came from out of the Greensboro area. And I think the White Citizens' Council emerged after the Klan went into the background. They were the respectable part of the opposition.

WL: Right. Did they persist--how long did they exist? Or is it a--what kind of an organization is it, as it operated in Greensboro?

SJ: Well, apparently very informal. I could never really get a line on it. I knew that they did meet at the M&M [Merchants and Manufacturers] Club. And it was that type, where the recognized leaders of the community did meet informally. And there was a split there, I understand. Bob King told me that they split off from the group. They were the activists. Most of them were simply not activists. Even those called leaders and sub-leaders who met there were not involved, just didn't pay any attention to it, didn't want to have anything to do with it. But that persisted for a long time.

I think the transition came from that, the same group, to the Save Our City Committee and subsequently to the Keep Greensboro Greensboro Committee. That evolved when we--in the primary election--we and some of our candidates ran way ahead. And the Keep Greensboro Greensboro Committee panicked, got the Jaycees active, they were hauling old women and cripples out to the polls to vote, to keep Greensboro Greensboro, which they did successfully.

WL: So White Citizens' Councils, back in the fifties, were pretty much composed of the same leadership group that--

SJ: Well, I think it's the same group who were activists, and it's amazing how few people at any level were really involved, or interested, or aware of what was going on.

WL: Yeah, that's the tendency of most people, they don't want to become involved. Aside from these two groups, the Klan which you--pretty much is gone out of existence in Greensboro after about 1955, Citizens' Councils, which are sort of shadowy and also go out of existence by the end of the fifties--is that correct to say that?

SJ: Well, I think the White Citizens' Council--I think when the, the last I became aware of any activity on their part was when the Civil Rights Act was passed.

WL: Oh, okay.

SJ: And I don't think there was any newspaper reference to them or anything after that point. I think they dropped as a group then.

WL: About '64, then, about ten years--

SJ: Yeah, I think so, somewhere in that area. And I think the revival came from the same group in '68 when the proposed change in the district system came to the fore.

WL: Okay. I'd like to turn now, I guess, to talk about the period of rather intense black activism, about 1960 to say '63 in Greensboro, and talk first about 1960--whether there was any indication in the white community in Greensboro, downtown Greensboro in 1960, about the degree of frustration that Bill Chafe so well describes in his book by 1960--you know, which made the sit-ins at Woolworth's so successful, in a sense that they had some support. Did whites realize that things were that bad?

SJ: I don't think there was any awareness at all until the sit-ins. I really don't think--and I talked with a lot of people, and they thought that it was something--that it was just glossing over, you know, that things had been resolved. Things were quiet. And then as the agitation started then, and the sit-ins particularly--I was operating in the Friendly Shopping Center at the time and I served anybody that came in. And people generally--I was really--we had a lunch counter there, and blacks were testing at the time. And they'd come in and be served. And apparently, see, there were never empty seats alongside of them. People sat down, and people came to me afterward and thanked me for doing that. And people said they would rather eat with the blacks than with the whites who were picketing Woolworth's at the time. It was that kind of feeling.

And of course we had a lot of Guilford College--people from that area who were really for it, exercised leadership in all movements in that direction. But at that time then there was more white awareness. There was--then people began to organize among the whites. The YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] was very active during that period in attempting to educate people on the discrepancies, the problems, and the need for change. I think we had a positive response, I thought, on the part of the white community and sub-leadership.

WL: So there was a moderate white group, at least, a liberal white group by the early sixties?

SJ: Oh yeah. Oh, there was, and--but it was never activated till this came to the fore. I mean, I think individuals spoke up, but I don't think there was any organization that actively

moved to do anything about it.

WL: The YW[CA] was interracial in the fifties, was it not?

SJ: Yeah, that's right.

WL: It was the only, I guess, major interracial group in the city.

SJ: And their influence was confined to that, their activity was confined to that. They would talk among their people, and produced some--I mean, more and more people, women particularly, became involved with it, became aware, and finally became active when the movement started. We got a lot of support from the YW on the district system. That was one of the few places we could meet to start out with. And more and more people became involved, you know.

I found it real interesting. I went out debating with Melvin and several of the others. We would meet in church groups, and we went to the church groups all over the northwest. And after we talked we'd get a--they'd take a referendum. We always had a big majority in favor of the district system, so I was sure we were going to win. But obviously it was only the people who we were reaching and heard it was very tenable to do. And the others responded to Save Our City and that sort of thing.

WL: The appeal of the leadership. Your--so your delicatessen was integrated. What did--at what point did you--was this a conscious decision? To integrate, or to serve?

SJ: You mean of mine?

WL: Yeah.

SJ: Well, I felt badly about what I knew about race relations in Pittsburgh. I really felt badly as a result of the experience in the service.

WL: Which was?

SJ: Well, we were completely segregated when we came in. It was interesting. I was an instructor in the Motor Transport School for a while, and I had the first so-called "integrated" class. I was called in and asked how I felt about blacks. And we had twenty guys in our section. They held two seats open and they brought two blacks in. We were retraining National Guard at the time. And guys came up to me and said, "You know, we're from the South. We don't associate with niggers." And I told them they weren't associating with them, they were--

Well, anyway, after a while, those blacks were good mechanics and went out working, and I think they found the whites floating around them, and very--the whites accept them, the blacks didn't accept me or them. They were very suspicious of me and the other guys.

But I found the same thing true when we went overseas, tremendous tension on the ship going over. In fact, we had to gather up weapons, take weapons away for fear of a race riot. And coming back, we went on the ship by number of points, inter[mingled]--completely intermingled, and no sign of any tension at all. In fact, this was some of the highest seas. In our cabin, I had [unclear] our first three graduates [unclear], ten whites and fourteen blacks. And somebody went out, got four quarts of liquor from the major and the--passed around, everybody drinking from the bottle. And when we landed, why, we threw our arms around each other, buddy-buddy.

WL: Black and white?

SJ: Black and white. And they were primarily southern people, you know. And that was typical, that. And so I found in every case where they were thrown together--as long as they were separated there were tensions and trouble, and thrown together they adjusted very quickly.

WL: And in your deli--so, getting back to your delicatessen, the, this experience had what sort of effect on you and your own--

SJ: Well, I felt then that progress was possible, that it could be done. I was aware then that there was a failure of leadership, not of the people themselves. And Hal Sieber demonstrated that very quickly when he integrated the chamber very quickly, when they had cell [sell?] meetings, so to speak, all over the community, with people coming together, when they opened up employment opportunities. I mean, that--it smoothed over. It was tension at first, it smoothed over. I mean, now I see restaurants and restaurant owners are glad to get the blacks in there.

WL: Sure. So your delicatessen desegregated, or never actually made a decision, just--

SJ: Well, on Elm Street I was asked about that, and I think it was only twice that blacks came in. They were traveling through and I served them. And it was against the law, actually. I was told that, but nobody made an issue of it. Now in, of course, Friendly Shopping Center--I opened up there in '58. [I] had no blacks come in even to buy at all--it was in the northwest section. And it was only at the sit-ins that they began to move out and probe. And Boyd Morris had the restaurant next door [the Mayfair Cafeteria]--he was the ex-mayor--he stood out there and barred blacks from coming into his restaurant. And they

came in and I had no problem at all, from any source.

I remember one old-time customer came in and heard that I was serving blacks. He came in every Saturday, and he told me, said, “Don’t you ever serve them when I’m here, when me and my wife are here.” I laughed at him. Sure as heck, he came in the next Saturday and we had a group sitting at the table, you know. And I saw him come in. I was busy. I leaned forward to see if there was any trouble. His wife walked on back and sat down at a table. And he sort of looked and hesitated, went over, sat down, pointed his finger, “What kind of Indians are those?” [laughs] That was the only threat of violence that ever happened.

But, I mean, it really amazed me at how smooth the transition was. And same thing in the schools. Now, we knew that it wasn’t that smooth, because when you threw the kids from the blacks in at the same level as the whites, they were not educated at the same level. The leadership there were physical leaders, and they exercised their physical leadership, but there was a lot of trouble to start off with. But that was smoothed over.

And I was so damn pleased--I had occasion to go over to Dudley High School and we were given the opportunity to speak to the seniors. And we were doing the Voter Registration Education Act prior to the next previous election. And four of us were registrars. Went over there and they brought all the seniors into the auditorium. In order to do that they postponed the football rally which they had scheduled there, which was something I’d never heard of before.

And anyway, I was real shocked when I looked out and saw practically a hundred percent blacks, because it’s rated 88 percent. But anyway, we talked to them, and afterwards, this tall, handsome, blond, white boy came up and thanked us for coming there, and said it was a very good program and so forth and so on, and introduced himself as president of the school. When you’ve got a predominately black group like that, that has a white boy as president--we found out the school within the school, which is the open high school, is predominately white. That’s how they get dropped down to 88 percent of the total thing.

But the difference in Dudley High School--we knew it before--the discipline in the school, the cleanliness, the teacher levels in the classroom. We got the opportunity to go to each senior class to talk to them, give a demonstration about the voting process--we had a voting device--talk to them about the ward system. And I mean it was--

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

SJ: --Mrs. Simkins being appointed to city council to replace Katie Dorsett, because in my opinion, once again, Katie Dorsett is very--I mean one of the new breed of women. I think Mrs. Simkins has been dominated by George [Simkins] through the years. I know them both. She’s a very intelligent woman, there’s no question about it. But I think she will make no decisions unless they’re approved by George. I think that’s been a pattern. I

think that's a good thing, but I think it's ironic that she achieves that position--or George achieves that position of political power, which he could never get personally.

WL: Let's turn back to 1960 and get back to Woolworth's, the Woolworth's sit-ins. You suggested, I think, in our conversation so far that very quickly whites begin to accept the notion of integrated restaurants.

SJ: Very quickly.

WL: Woolworth's sit-ins begin in February and then by, I suppose, by summer of 1960, Woolworth's is integrated. Is there much momentum created by Woolworth's sit-ins in terms of other restaurants acting similarly?

SJ: Well, now, there's a tremendous amount of resistance on the part of other restaurants, but--and it was fostered, once again, by the failure of the leadership to say this is the thing to do. And managers and owners were really afraid because, I mean, you get--one vocal opponent thing would create a rumpus in the place, you know.

WL: You lose business.

SJ: And they were hesitant [because of] the fear of loss of business. But gradually, I mean, I don't know how long it took, I really didn't give much thought to it. But I know I don't know of any violence that actually took place, and gradually became aware that the people, the owners, were welcoming black business. But I was never aware of any real violence in any--but for somebody raising, some individual coming in, hollering "nigger" or something of that sort, and then being ejected by the restaurant owner. But I think the transition was amazingly quick, because this was now the law, and the leaders said this has to be this way, so it was.

WL: So the opposition in the early sixties comes from the restaurant managers?

SJ: Oh yeah, primarily from managers and owners. That's right.

WL: What about the demonstrations of 1963? You were more or less an observer or witness, obviously, to a lot of things that went on.

SJ: Yeah, well of course there was a tremendous amount of fear in the community. I know Schenck was extremely upset and really wanted to do something dramatic and significant about it. I know he appealed to the fellow council members and to some of the community leaders. And their advice was hold the line. You know, if you give them this

much they'll continue to want more, so you've got to take a stand here. And of course, it kept building up and building up.

I think one of the interesting sidelines to me during those demonstrations--it was during that period that Jesse Jackson then became the nominal leader of the thing. I know I was in the office of Lt. [William] Jackson who was in charge of the police at that time. He and Jesse--Jesse Jackson actually was a paid informer during that period.

WL: Of whom, the police?

SJ: Yeah, of Lt. Jackson. There was no question about it. I mean, I heard that in the mayor's office when I was there visiting. But it was then that he--he had to be dragged out by the real student leaders and dragged out of bed later. But he had the gift of gab, and he became aware that he was able to control this group. So Jackson would meet with him before a demonstration and say, "Here's where you go, and you don't go past here," and so forth and so on, the time element. And Jesse kept it under control.

WL: To what extent was he an informer? What was he providing? What kind of information?

SJ: Well, in other words--

WL: Where they were going to be?

SJ: Where they were going to be. I mean, they would lay out the route of where they were going to go, where they would be, and what was off limits. And--

WL: And Jesse Jackson would observe the limits?

SJ: Yeah, he would push the limits, and a couple times it got out of hand, you know. And then I think he became aware of the fact that--how much power there was behind it and how much control he had over it. But the thing was really resolved before it really got completely out of hand.

WL: Was this--this was a much more radical, obviously, troubling crisis in 1963 than in 1960.

SJ: Oh yeah. It was so widespread. There was massive involvement just from the few people in--living through the area, you know. But there were violent marches, demonstrations, threats, and actual violence, to the point where it did threaten the leadership.

WL: Violence from both sides or from whites?

SJ: Well, what was publicized was black violence. Now I assume that came from them during that period. I think they instigated it. They moved into areas that they weren't supposed to be in, and once they got in there, why, the only response was to work things up and make noise. I--

WL: Was there white--what was the character of white opposition in 1963?

SJ: Well, I was--I mean, I think generally it was really the people in the northwest turned everything over to the police. And the authorities said, "You handle this--this is your responsibility." People just didn't want to become involved and wanted to be protected from. And I didn't have direct contact, but I assume in the normal manner it was the usual, like the young group that were bothering whites who were demonstrating at Woolworth's, the same ones who rode through the black community and made threats. There was an interplay. I think the blacks had to instigate the violence in order to get things going, and there was a limited response on the part of the white community. Official response was by the police, and the unofficial, I think, was very minor.

WL: You mentioned before that in 1960, by 1960 there was a moderate group in Greensboro, a liberal group, willing to accommodate change and willing to perhaps even support integration. What's the response of this group to developments, say, up--well, especially in 1963? Are moderates and liberals isolated as a result of these developments or--

SJ: Well, I think there were small group meetings who appealed to the mayor and the city council to do something more about it. But that's all. It was a, more or less, an intellectual approach to the thing. There was no avenue that they felt that they could actually do anything that was constructive except to appeal to leadership. And the appeal was ineffectual.

WL: So in assessing the results of this period of black activism, how--what would say were the results of it, the accomplishments of it?

SJ: Well, I think what they did, they built more mass support in the black community where--and to the point where they had enough so they could go out and really conduct a major demonstration and frighten the powers that be into some sort of action. And I think that's what it was, an organizing period.

WL: Did it take the Civil Rights Act in 1964 to bring real change, or did black activism bring change in Greensboro?

SJ: Well, I think--no, I think really the Civil Rights Act was the real thing that caused

leadership here to say, “This is the law and we ought to enforce the law.” I think that was the significant thing. And then the black activism, any pockets of resistance to that, they were going to force the issue, because then they had the legal ground to stand on.

WL: So just as was the case with the district plan, activism forces the issue.

SJ: Yeah, that’s right.

WL: Real change, in a sense, comes from the federal government.

SJ: Yeah, but the whole thing is, over a period of time you did create a state of mind in the white community. They were prepared to accept it if leadership would. I think that’s what happened. So I think leaders were quite surprised when people accepted it, albeit docilely, because there, they were, “We can’t do it because they will react violently,” and they did.

WL: I’ve heard several people tell me that the--just in offhand comments, not, you know, in anything direct or formal--but they’ve commented that the Greensboro downtown went into decline following changes in the--civil rights changes, civil rights revolution in the mid-1960s. What’s your reaction to this kind of thing?

SJ: I think it was related to a certain extent because downtown marked its leaders in extremely--poor blacks were right on the edge of the downtown area, and it was a place for them to demonstrate and so easy for them to come into the downtown to be visible there. But there was this transition that took place all over the shopping centers, which that expedited. I think people moved more rapidly.

But there is no question about it, one of the factors in hastening it was--I think it would have happened anyway--but one of the factors in hastening it was the black presence downtown. They were frightened at night, frightened by potential for violence. Then, of course, those who wanted to be violent had their opportunity there and felt, you know, that they were justified in any action they might take.

WL: So there was some reality behind this?

SJ: Yeah, I think there was. But I think--I say the timing. I think the way things have happened, it would have happened anyway, movement of the retail section out of the downtown. It’s happening all over the country.

WL: Yeah, I was going to say any city the size of Greensboro, the same thing happened, whether they had a civil rights movement or not.

Just briefly, we've talked about this all through the conversation, but you're an optimist on the passage of time and the change in race relations over, say, three decades, since, say, 1960--the last twenty-six years. Is that correct? You would characterize it that real change has occurred?

SJ: Oh. absolutely. I mean, if anybody had told me in '49 when I came here that race relations would have reached the level they are now, I would have said it was impossible. It's one of these things about getting older--you're around long enough to see the tremendously significant change, which is, really, I think, just at the beginning. I think when these kids who now have gone through the school from grade one and proceeded along, they will have a completely different concept of race relations than the kids who were thrown together, separate but unequal.

And I really am pessimistic about the economic potential of the system the way it is now, with providing opportunities for jobs and producing housing. But I think it's becoming less and less a race factor. The people who are dropping out are white and black, and black still with greater percentage-wise. But I think the big factor now is to provide opportunity, or at least in housing and decent jobs and that sort of thing. I wish I could be optimistic about that.

WL: Do you think that--what areas of life would you say there's little change, in terms of race relations?

SJ: Try that again?

WL: Are there any, are there any aspects of race relations which are unchanged?

SJ: Well, yeah. I mean the attitude towards the poorest element of the black community. I mean there's still the concept that blacks are judged by the lowest common denominator. And the fact that they're violent, that they're judged by the people in the housing projects, by their reaction. I think there is still that attitude where these blacks are all right, the ones we know, but those are violent and have to be repressed and aren't capable of doing anything, you know.

In fact, some of these middle-class blacks have that same response. I mean, I heard it in a hearing, you know, where there was--one of the problems in the black ghetto there, and wanted to move out a section to one of the integrated sections in a scattered site public housing. And blacks and whites came out to testify against it.

They asked one of the blacks, "What do we do with these people?" You know, I mean--he says, "You build a wall around them and guard them and keep them in there." This is the black response. And the black response, or those that have been successful, have worked hard, even against affirmative action--I made it without, you know, it's not

a good thing.

So it's, you know, less and less a racial factor, really, behind it all. Now, I don't think our community leadership was really anti-black. I think it's the age-old thing between what I understood [Alexander] Hamilton and [Thomas] Jefferson were labeling. There is an elite who is--only the elite who is capable of governing for the benefit of all, and the people themselves are not capable of governing so we will do the best for them. I think that's the concept of our present leadership. I think Melvin's a good Christian gentleman, I really do. I think that he's one of the hardest working people I've ever met. But I think his concept of history, his knowledge of [unclear] is so narrow. He's locked in in that concept, We will do for them.

WL: And behind all of it is sort of a notion of class?

SJ: That's right, a class and race.

[End of Interview]