

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO CIVIL RIGHTS ORAL HISTORY
COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Dr. Hobart Jarrett

INTERVIEWER: William Link

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[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

WILLIAM LINK: I'd like to ask you first to tell me a little bit about yourself: where you were born, where you were educated, and how you came to eventually--how you came to North Carolina.

HOBART JARRETT: All right. I was born in Texas, in Arlington. And I was born in 1915. I'm now seventy-four. My family did not live in Texas. My mother was visiting and--visiting her sister. And I came rather unexpectedly. As soon as I was old enough to be carried and travel, my mother went to Oklahoma to join my father and I grew up there in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I'm a product of the school system there, which was a very good school system. It was--the high school was graded by the central--I forgot the name of it--but central agency, rather than the southwest agency--or the southern agency. And it was an A-rated school. Fortunately there was a fine principal who instilled in all of us who would listen at all that we were to be somebody. And it was a small school, as schools go now. I think in my high school class--my graduation class, I think there was something like ninety people, which was a large class.

WL: The schools were segregated?

HJ: Oh, definitely. Yes. There was no suggestion of an unsegregated school in those days. And not in that section of the country. From Tulsa, in the Depression years--I graduated in 1932, and there was no money, really, that was circulating. This was the era that Roosevelt was going to make his great social contributions into the work programs you may remember reading about.

And when I got to--on graduation I went to Wiley College, that's W-i-l-e-y, in Marshall, Texas. That's east Texas. That's very near the Louisiana state border. And Wiley College was, I guess, entertaining when I went there. It was very highly respected,

and, there again, though there was nobody who was telling, as the principal in Tulsa had constantly drilled into our minds, to be somebody, the faculty and president of Wiley illustrated by the roles that they themselves played and the expectation that was atmospheric. We knew that we were expected to do things. So this was a very fortunate experience for me.

In my freshmen year I took a course, the freshmen English course, under a man named Tolson, Melvin B. Tolson, who became really a profound poet. I did not know Mr. Tolson as a poet. I knew him as my teacher of English. And when I found out that the debate team was about to begin meeting, with Tolson as the coach, I was determined to join the group. And in this forensic society, in my freshmen year, I'm very proud of the fact that I was chosen by Tolson as a member of the team. It was a three-man team with an alternate, and we did a lot of debating to get to the experience that I remember with great joy and pride.

I was on the debate team, the varsity team, for four years, and that was rather odd. I'm not certain, but it seems to me that I have never encountered any information that said that Tolson, who was a hard task master, had had any one collegian on the team for four years. We debated all over, from Texas to California, and in these days of segregated and separated colleges, we debated largely white colleges. As a matter of fact, the only black college that I can remember that we debated was Morehouse college, and we made tours with Moorehouse College into Alabama and Georgia. That was the first time that I had seen Tuskegee Institute. We went to--I was wrong--we were debating Tuskegee itself when my team went to Tuskegee Institute.

I majored in English, with Tolson being my mentor all the way. And I've never regretted the major. And I've always appreciated the influence, the strong influence that Tolson had in shaping my life. In the--after I left Wiley, this man, Tolson, became known really as a poet, that he is now recognized as being. Among the--you understand that literature is my area--and among the American poets I suspect that Tolson is more like a combination of [T.S.] Eliot and [Ezra] Pound than--I can't think of any other poets that I would make the comparison with than those two, with Tolson. I went from Syracuse--from Wiley College to Syracuse. This was 1936, when I majored, of course, in English and graduated in the spring of--I graduated within one year. And in '37 I went to my first job, which was in Langston University, L-a-n-g-s-t-o-n, in Oklahoma. Shall I continue?

WL: Yes, by all means.

HJ: Okay. At Langston, I was there from '37 to '49. I was on the faculty from '37 to '49. I became a professor at Langston. I was chairing the Department of--what did we call it?--of Modern Languages, and then I became Dean of Personnel. And I was both professor of--chairman of Modern Languages and dean when I left Langston to go elsewhere. Meanwhile, at Langston I'd received a general education board fellowship, and I studied

for a year at Harvard and I--I had the fellowship for one year, and I spent another year at Harvard, successively.

Having run out of money, I returned--oh, having run out of money, I saw that I had to get back into the earning capacity. And I then--that's when I came to Bennett. That was in 1949. Meanwhile, I've married. I married an Oklahomanian--I married while I was working in Oklahoma. My wife had come to Langston from New York City at the same time that I had gone to Langston. She had come to Langston to teach Spanish and German. And interestingly enough, there were too few people, students, who were taking German for the German aspect of her life to continue. So she taught English--Spanish and English. And one of the ways we courted was our talking about English together, for she had never really had the experience of studying English grammar. And that's what she was largely teaching. She became quite good in her grammar. But we--as we were coming to know each other, we talked about nouns and objective compliments, and things of that sort. Are we coming along all right?

WL: Yes. So you arrived in Greensboro in 1949?

HJ: In 1949.

WL: What sort of place did you think Greensboro was when you first got here? Did you have any first impressions? Any early impressions about the city of Greensboro?

HJ: Well, I didn't know anything at all about Greensboro. But I had heard something about Bennett College and A&T College [North Carolina A&T State University]. I don't know that I knew--I think I had heard something about the Woman's College, but I knew nothing at all of Greensboro College and Guilford College. I came with some degree of wonderment, because in the Southwest--having grown up in the Southwest, I thought that North Carolina and South Carolina and Georgia were almost like Mississippi. This was all the South to me. And I came not expecting too much from the city.

But my experiences very early were quite contrary to what I might have held in reserve. First of all, I was very much impressed by Bennett College, of that manicured lawns, and a lot of greenery, and the classrooms were spotlessly clean. And the young women were eager.

David Jones, the president, who had interviewed me in New York, so I knew something about--something about his personality before I ever came. He influenced me very, very much. He was a first-rate administrator. He was a disciplinarian. He was perhaps a bit tyrannical, but he knew what he was doing, and he knew the goal that he wanted Bennett College to reach. And I remember him in his office, there was a framed statement on the wall that ran something like this: "We accept the girl where she is, and treat her as though she has arrived at the point we want her to attain." Now those were

not the exact words, but that was the meaning. And I was impressed by that.

I thoroughly enjoyed my tenure at Bennett during Mr. Jones' life. Meanwhile-- I'm trying to get back to what you said about my impressions of Greensboro. Meanwhile, I was encountering different experiences--that is, not experiences that were not academic, and I liked what I saw. The business places were courteous. I remember certain purchases that I made in stores on Elm Street. And I began banking with--partly with the Greensboro Bank and continued that until I left here. On the whole, it was quite nice.

WL: Was it quite segregated?

HJ: Huh?

WL: Greensboro was still segregated, wasn't it?

HJ: Greensboro was completely segregated. The only integrated institution unit of society in Greensboro that I knew anything about was Bennett College. Now, I came here as chairman of the Division of Humanities. That was the biggest of the four, I think, divisions that the college was under. And in my faculty, there were--immediately I can remember three whites. And there were two who were added to those three during the period that I was here. And though the school, I think in '49, was composed of a student body that was completely, as the word is now, African American, certainly by the next year, if not that first year, by the next year there were Orientals, and there was one white girl from America, and there were black girls from the Islands and African countries. So it was a nice mixture. There were some Orientals--I mentioned Orientals, they were students. Eventually there was an Indian scholar who had taught at Tulane for some time. I remember, his name was Chekiji[?]. And he joined our faculty. There was a Chinese mathematician who joined the faculty. Now I'm sure that at the other colleges there were non-native Americans, but I'm also sure that at the other colleges that there were no African Americans present at all.

WL: So you had a kind of an unusual situation of contact and conversation between faculty? Did faculty engage in--white and black faculty communicate a little bit more?

HJ: Do you mean within Bennett?

WL: Yes.

HJ: Oh, yes, there was a great deal of communication. And there were no problems. Sometimes there were problems in language, because I remember one person, a Mrs. Kudrick[?], who is a fine pianist, and was under my direction, had difficulty

communicating to her classes in English. So what this woman did was amazing--she wrote everything that she was going to say in an hour's instruction. How she did all of that, I don't know. But when she--I observed her teaching and she was looking at the students, but she was reading directly what she had written.

As far as faculty relationship is concerned, everything was delightful. It was coming up roses, all through the campus. There was a German refugee in the Social Sciences. And I won't try to name the various people. But it was a pleasant mixture of races here.

You mentioned segregation in Greensboro. It used to bother me tremendously that the Bennett girls, and faculty members at Bennett, and students from A&T, and faculty from A&T, and citizens, it bothered me that they went to the movies downtown. I never went, and I worked here twelve years and I never went to a movie. Basically, in my own make-up, I detested segregation, but I discovered that there were forms of segregation that were elected by black people. Going to a segregated movie was something that nobody had to do. And I taught my girls at Bennett a new aspect of looking at themselves as human beings, and I encouraged them not to do that which was a separate, segregated thing, when they did not have to.

And I remember in those days, some of the students complained to me, two or three girls complained to me about experiences that they had in the railroad station. There was a kind of a cage in the station that had on one side a great big waiting room that was for whites, and on the other side of this cage, a smaller waiting room for blacks. I think it was smaller. It was large enough. But the ticket agent had to serve both sides of the cage, whites and blacks, and one could easily see that what determined the agent's action was not based on priorities of appearance. He could be facing the blacks and the white would come up on the other side, and he would give his attention to the whites, though the white person was not in the line of--was not the first to be served, who should have been served. And it interested me that one girl told me that she detested this to the extent that she was actually going to go in the white waiting room to buy her ticket. And she did, so she told me, and there was no reaction at all that ever came about.

WL: They just ignored it? it was just ignored? Or nobody noticed?

HJ: Well, I don't know whether anybody--I'm sure that if people were there, they had to see this. But there was no to-do that was made of it. And that interested me. I didn't see it, but she told me about this. I even remember her name.

WL: There must have been a number of these kinds of incidences going on?

HJ: A number of what?

WL: A number of these kinds of incidence.

HJ: Yes.

WL: Like this.

HJ: Oh, yes.

WL: Little things where people are testing and seeing if they could break barriers, that way. For example, your student.

HJ: Well frankly, I don't know. I don't whether there were incidences like that. But I know that the college-trained kids were becoming more and more dissatisfied with what did exist. I don't know whether I'm following this chronologically or not, because in '49, when I came here, I discovered shortly thereafter that a local physician, whose name is Hampton, Dr. William Hampton--are you familiar with him?

WL: Yes.

HJ: Yes. Well, he was running for the city council, and there was an organization that was sponsoring him--I think he was actually president of it, and it was called the Greensboro Citizens Association. I heard about it, and my general interests in things of this sort caused me in my freshmen year at Bennett to go to the meetings, and I came to like Dr. Hampton and I came to work in the group toward doing what actually was the thing to do--we got him elected. You know that he was made *Time* magazine's cover? Well, he did. And this was big news throughout the United States, that in North Carolina a black man was elected to the city council for the first time. And *Time* magazine played it up very nicely. That impressed me about what the blacks were able to do, and what the whites were able to--I don't like to using the term but--accept, for Hampton did very well as a member of the council.

WL: What was the--tell me a little bit more about the Greensboro Citizens Association?

HJ: Okay.

WL: Am I interrupting--

HJ: After the Greensboro Citizens--well, let me see--after Hampton was elected, the Greensboro Citizens Association dissolved. Its purpose had been to get Hampton elected. Now, to the best of my knowledge, this is the truth, this is the fact. I know that I did not

go to any more meetings of the association, nor did I hear that the association was having any more meetings.

A few years later, in '59 [sic-1960], when the four A&T students sat-in, Kenneth Lee, the attorney, and Major High, an attorney, had their offices together on Benbow Road--very nice offices, new--and after the boys had sat-in, there was a great deal of talk around town about what was going to happen, because the boys had announced that they were coming back. And they had said they were coming back on a Saturday. And it was generally understood that not those four boys, period, but Bennett and A&T students were going to go to the Woolworth and sit down. So Kenneth Lee and Major High called together a group of about seven people, seven adults, all men, to talk about what was-- what had happened and what possibly could happen. And in that group of men were physicians, certainly a physician, a dentist, a minister, the two lawyers themselves, and a professor, and I was the professor.

What we did was to weigh the situation and to talk about it in its various ramifications. And the first thing that we decided was that letters must be wired to each member of the city council, then and there, and two of us, I think High and myself, were asked to go into an adjacent room and to write these letters and get the wires off.

When we came back, which was a matter of minutes, I had been designated by the group to serve as the liaison between the adults and the students. When we--I wasn't jumping for joy over this at all. I was quite busy in my work at Bennett, and I was not that familiar with the processes and strategies of the revolutionary--of a revolutionary measure. However, I accepted.

Now I know that one of the reasons that I was chosen is that I was the only faculty person who was in the group, and students knew me and I knew the students. But immediately thereafter, the group decided, with my sort of being the mover of the group, we decided to resurrect the Greensboro Citizens Association, that would now have a reason to exist again, and we did. I became the president, I was elected president of the association, and served for the period of time that I remained in Greensboro.

The constituency of the association was very, very interesting. It was really a congress of black people, black people who lived in Greensboro. I discovered that the old organization had been formed from a list of every known group of black people in the city. Now this meant usher boards, this meant garden clubs, bridge clubs--really a complete spectrum of social activities, and lodges, and fraternities, in this city.

So David Morehead, who is the executive director of the YMCA of Hayes-Taylor, had provided me with this list. And we went through--my "we" is wrongly put. I and another member of the Greensboro Citizens Association went through these lists and sent letters to every organization, inviting them to form again the Citizens Association. And when they came together that's when the election took place, and I was elected the president. Our goal was single: we were to support the students and protect the students. And the support actually turned out to be small financial support. The students

didn't need much money. The main thing that they got money from us for was to make placards, this kind of thing.

But we had good counsel, because of the structure of the association. There were housewives--there was one housewife who really impressed me, and I saw her last night, for the first time in thirty years. Her name was Feaster. I don't remember her first name--Marie [Minnie?], I think. But I'm not sure. Mrs. Feaster, F-e-a-s-t-e-r. And most of the counselors, most of the counseling that partly went on with the students was from professionals. Dr. George Simkins, who headed the NAACP, was a member of the Greensboro Citizens Association. Everybody was a member of the association before we got through.

I don't like to say this, but the truth is that the one group which can be designated in the city that was not strongly represented in the association was the ministers. And I never did really figure that out. Because Martin Luther King was already on the move. And the Baptist churches had responded very fully to what Martin Luther King was doing. But there were members of the organization who were ministers, but no leadership emerged from them. Actually, there was not too much continuation of meeting on the part of the ministers. Now this--I say I'm not pleased to say this, but it actually was the fact. There was one minister who was a born leader and a very highly informed man. I liked him very much. And I constantly try to get him to attend the meetings. He joined but he didn't come very much.

We meantime were operating in full swing, and a student who was from A&T was chosen by the students to meet with me whenever, to let me know--me, as the representative of the adults and president of this organization--know what was going on. To raise questions of me and so forth. And every time the association met, there were students who were represented from both colleges. I cannot say factually that in every meeting there was a Bennett student and an A&T student. But in every meeting there was a student. And sometimes there were more students than one.

And we worked up a system of operation which designated a difference between the association and the local NAACP. Most of the leaders of the association were members of the NAACP, and many of the non-leaders were members of the NAACP. George Simkins was the president, and the arrangement that we worked out was that the Citizens Association would handle everything that the students needed, short of legal--short of lawyer protection, and that the NAACP historically--which had many lawyers in it--would handle any legal matters. And that worked very well. Legal matters had to be handled eventually.

WL: So you had a division of labor? Division of responsibility?

HJ: Yes.

WL: Between the NAACP and Citizens Association?

HJ: Yes. And actually this meant, in some cases, changing the hat. Because the NAACP man was this, and I, the other man, was that. And many of them--you understand what I'm saying? Many of the members of the one group were members of the other. But technically, anything that involved courts of law was handled by the NAACP. Are we together?

WL: Right. Yeah.

HJ: We--George Simkins contacted the sources in the national organization that he should have contacted. And from Durham came two attorneys to meet with the students, to meet with a group of the students, and the--George Simkins and myself, and I think Dr. [W.L.T.] Miller, who was on my committee and who was my right-hand all the way through this whole process of the sitins. And the second of those lawyers was Floyd McKissick. I've forgotten--Conrad Pearson was the name of the older man.

And what the lawyers did in this meeting was to explain to the students how far they could go without the possibility of arrest and what could be entailed if an arrest were made, and things of this sort. The Bennett students who were present really enjoyed what Floyd McKissick had to say. And they invited him, I remember, to a chapel program that was held every week that was called Contemporary Affairs. And he made a fine presentation. The students asked him questions. And everything was going all right. Meanwhile, the students are in droves and protesting what caused them to begin a movement in the first place. Things were going along with some kind of progressive achievement--and please understand that the Woman's College, Guilford College, Greensboro College, seemed to be quite sympathetic with what these students were doing.

WL: On the part of their students, or the faculty, or the whole?

HJ: Well, the part of the students is what I'm thinking.

WL: Yeah.

HJ: I know that were interested faculty people throughout. There were no movements of faculty people, but--snowball is perhaps too strong a term, but what was happening is that not only were the students demonstrating--the black students demonstrating--but Greensboro citizens, including the college students, were staying away from the downtown area. There was dissatisfaction. There was fear that something was going to happen and so forth. And when I mentioned about meeting in Kenneth Lee's office, we

had to meet because word was out that chains and tire rods were going to be used on the students. That did not happen. There was police protection and everything went off all right. Turmoil, but it went over all right. Am I coming through?

WL: Yes, indeed. What was the attitude of the police through all of this? And how do you think the police behaved? Did they do a good job?

HJ: Well, I think they did a good job. I never saw them. The only time I personally saw anything in the demonstrations was on television. And everybody else saw that. I don't remember that any student ever complained about what we now complain about, any viciousness or overaction by the police against a student. They kept them out of the buildings, but--and they also saw to it that the students were not hurt. It may be their presence did that. But I never--I hadn't really thought about this too much, but I cannot remember having heard any student say that the police had been unkind to them. No, no.

In one instance, a young man at A&T who owned a car with a out-of-state license and who drove his car to carry students to the demonstration lines, this man was accused of indecent exposure in the car. And I'm assuming that the accusation came from the police. I do not know. I have never heard where the accusation came from. But I do know that there was police involvement, for a young woman came to my home, a minute woman came to my home, to tell me about this. And I immediately said, "Well, we'll have to get in touch with George Simkins, because this is involving some kind of legal action." And we did. And the outcome of that particular thing was arrived at quickly. He was not detained. And things were continuing to go on in this fashion.

You have to realize that so novel was the matter of black people going in and sitting where white people were sitting and eating, so unnatural, so unheard of was this, that the whole situation was explosive. It did not explode, but it was an explosive situation. You must realize that there were many adults in this city, in this section of the city, who had to be cynical and did very well was to instruct the citizenry about the meaning of what was going on and to give strong advice saying, "Stay away. Do not go into Woolworth." That was the target store. And--

WL: So the message to the community--the black community-- was to--

HJ: To stop and to support what was happening by stopping, and to realize that you are making your contribution. Okay?

WL: A kind of a boycott, in other words?

HJ: Huh?

WL: Was it a boycott? Or was it--

HJ: It was a boycott. Yes. Yes. And we actually met in churches. I mean, the representatives of the association, and we'd talk. I remember Ezell Blair [Jr.], the student, was at the first--he talked to the congregation at the first meeting we had. This was not during any regular service, but it was in the church. And we sang, and the spirit was religious, and the moral tone was, "We're going to be free." I remember Dr. [George] Evans spoke at the first meeting after he presided at that meeting--and then other churches did the similar thing. And Reverend [Otis] Hairston, who impressed me very much as a man of quiet strength, was able to do a whole lot with his congregation. I don't remember what that congregation is. But that's where the ecumenical service is going to take place tomorrow.

WL: Shiloh Baptist Church?

HJ: Yeah. Yeah. And so I decided that this has gone on now long enough for us to see if we can't bring it to a head. And a committee was named from the group to visit the most liberal, perhaps the only liberal name that we knew of in the business world, and that was Mose Kiser. Do you know?

WL: Yeah. He was a dairy--

HJ: Guilford Dairy.

WL: Guilford Dairies.

HJ: Yes. And we arranged, by telephone, to meet him, and we met in his upper offices. And it was a very congenial meeting, save I then learned that to get negotiations moving properly one had to be very careful in choosing the representatives who are going to do the negotiating. There was one person in the group who could not control temper, nor emotions, and we never used that person again in the negotiations.

But the outcome of talking to Kiser was wonderful. He first of all explained to us the difficulty of his situation. He first of all told us that he was all for what we were doing. He secondly told us that he had a great deal of trouble buying milk, I think, from black people. He was criticized by other farmers for doing this. And his conclusion to what we were asking him to do, which was to open Guilford Dairies to blacks, his conclusion was, "I will be glad to do that, but look at my situation. I'm not backing out, but give me one other business that will stand with me." We were quite happy to hear that. And then after we left and talked the matter through, there was no other business that we could possibly think of that we could get to go with us. Then the bright idea came "go to Woolworth." And I talked to this very carefully with Dr. Miller. Do you know

who Dr. Miller was?

WL: Yes.

HJ: They called him "Slick." The *Greensboro News* wrote up his death and I remember reading that in New York. But anyway, Dr. Miller and I saw that--he agreed with me that it's time for us now, with the Kiser build-up behind us, to go directly to Woolworth. And I called--his name is [Clarence "Curly" L.] Harris, the manager--and told him who I was and told him that I would like to meet with him--a committee of mine to meet with him to talk matters over. The same committee, incidently, that had gone to Mose Kiser, was the committee, except the one person who had showed to me that that person should not be in such a committee.

WL: Who was on the committee?

HJ: Huh?

WL: Who were some of the people on the committee?

HJ: I'm pretty sure that Dr. Miller was on the committee. Vance [Chavis] might have been, Johnny S. Leary might have been. I'm not naming the person whom I didn't want to appear again for the--I'm pretty sure that those are the names of those who were there. And I think that--I think Hairston might have been with us.

But at any rate, when I called Harris, he agreed to meet with us in his offices after the store was closed one evening, and we had him. And so George Evans, Vance, Dr. Miller, maybe George Simkins, John Leary, and myself, I know, were together, and when we got there I was very much surprised that we were not meeting with Harris as we had met with Kiser. Harris had invited members of the city council there. Now this was all right, but it was not what he and I had said on the telephone. And Mr. Zane is the only name that I remember, except the black person who was a member of the council then, that was Waldo Falkener. And Waldo was there for the meeting. I don't remember whether [*Greensboro Record* reporter] Jo Spivey was there throughout the meeting or not, but I think she was. I'm reasonably sure that she was.

Well, the meeting was in our favor. It was in our favor from the start, because Harris was harassed and he was not a good negotiator. He was too full of emotionalism and he was explosive and so forth. But we were calm. We knew what the problem was and we knew that his business had suffered financially. We knew that Elm Street had suffered financially. So it was as Red Barber used to say, we were in "the cat-bird seat," and we knew that. And it turned out that an agreement was reached that night that integration will take place. It will take place--I think it was--in the next week. Time is

needed to get the waitresses to understand that they are going to be serving black kids, along with white kids. They must make no distinction between the two colors of customers that they're going to have.

But the agreement also was let us inform the black citizens that this is going to happen. But let us not establish the date. We will not name the day on which the counters will be integrated. We do not want an inundation of black kids coming in. We want a small group to come in and the waitresses will do what's what. And that's what happened. The students controlled themselves very well.

I know in reason there were many kids who wanted to go down in a drove. But they did not do that. They did not do it on the second day, or the third day. They gradually had become simply a matter of the business of life.

And we had to explain--the way that we got the information to the black community was through the churches. We called a meeting of the ministers at Hayes-Taylor and told them what was going to happen. Everybody knew that eventually something had to give. So there's no surprise in this. And we told them--and the "we" I'm now using is editorial, because I was the only person from the association who had met with the ministers. And then I told them what week it would take place, and to inform them--ask them to inform their congregations and for us to take all of this in good stride. And the ministers agreed, and I understand they did give that instruction.

Everything was not rosy. There was a surprise attack on me that really hurt. One of the most articulate of the ministers, whom I admired and liked--not as a buddy-buddy, but I liked on a personal basis--and after I had explained all of this gleefully, full of joy what the student movement and we had been able to accomplish, this man said to me that, "We like all of this, but you've gone about it in the wrong way."

And I was flabbergasted. I was hurt, really. And I said, "What on earth do you mean?"

And he said, "You did not have a minister on the negotiating team."

And I explained to him what he knew, how I had often asked him to come in and give us the wisdom of his experience as we were forming the organization and so forth. But they all agreed.

Now, the reason I was the only one to go was that on that same night, [Horace] Kornegay, who was the district attorney for this area, had accepted an appointment with our committee concerning the arrests that had already been made of the students. And this was at the end of the school year. As a matter of fact, school was already out when the students had gone their ways, all over the United States, really. And Kornegay had scheduled the trial for a summer month. And our purpose in meeting Kornegay was to explain to him what awful consequences this would be: the attitudes of the blacks would be terrible, how we would have to raise money to bring the students back. Their parents couldn't afford it, or we assumed that the only way we'd be able to get the students back in time for a summer appearance was to raise money here and send for the students.

Kornegay had not been told that. He was very congenial, very understanding, and he assured us then and there that the trial, the case would be moved up to September. I forgot what the month was. But it would take place after school started. And we appreciated that. But I had been so affected by my meeting with the ministers that one of the people--one of my colleagues in the association--in Kornegay's office looked at me and said, "Hobart, what on earth is wrong with you?"

And I said, "I'll explain it to you later." And then I told them the experiences that I had had.

WL: How do you explain that reaction on the part of that minister? Do you think that they felt like they were being left out?

HJ: Yes. I think that they felt--I think that he felt that they had been left out. And I think that what he felt, they accepted. That's my general assumption. You see, the ministers throughout the South in the civil rights movement, by that moment, were really the leaders. And I'll tell you this, on the day that we met in Kenneth Lee's office, you remember? When I was named liaison, the minister who was there was named the vice-liaison. We weren't calling presidents or anything like that. And he came by my home, at least no more than two days later, to tell me that he found that he could not participate in the office. And I don't think that he--I think that he did not actually come to the meetings after that, once the meetings got started.

Now this is--the experience with the ministers is the one experience that I had that really hurt. I could tell you that I received telephone calls at three o'clock in the morning, good calls and bad calls, and I received vulgar letters, postcards, from members of the white community in Greensboro. That didn't make me happy, but it didn't hurt me. Because it was the kind of thing that I clearly anticipated would happen.

But in the chronology of the events, after we met with Kornegay that night, school was already out, I had a personal responsibility at a church school in Missouri--no, in Kansas, and I had left town with my wife at about four or five days after the lunch counter--no, the lunch counters had already been over and the students had been arrested but they were let go.

You see, I left about four or five days after our talking with Kornegay--I hate to say this. This is extremely personal. On the train, my wife and I had a parlor car, that night I awakened to go to the toilet and discovered that the train was making no noise. I had lost the hearing in my good ear. When I came to Bennett in '49 I had impaired hearing in one ear, but that night my reliable ear had just gone bad--I say this was very personal--but on our way to this school in Kansas, the train stopped in St. Louis, and this was on a Sunday, and I had to find some physician to tell me that there was nothing that he could do. And it was hard to find a physician. And we had something like a two-hour layover. I'm really embarrassed to say this. But this is a part of the experiences that I had.

And I taught these classes at this Methodist retreat where the people were all grown, and we went from there to my home in Tulsa, Oklahoma, for the rest of something like two weeks. And I saw many physicians there. And the hearing never came back.

While we were in Tulsa, Dr. Miller called me to tell me that things had erupted again in Greensboro, and we agreed that the lid should be held on until--I hate to say this, I don't like the way this sounds--but until I got back, and the lid was held on. And as soon as I got back--this must have been by September, because there was students around, I remember, we met with Meyer's [Department Store representatives]. What had erupted was that Meyer's had opened its lunch counter, but the students and citizens had protested against that, since they had not opened the restaurant.

WL: They had a lunch counter and a restaurant? Two different things?

HJ: Right. And I don't know whether the lunch counter was a stand-up or a sit-down, I don't know, I've forgotten. But I do know that as we met with the new manager of Meyer's, who had been sent from whatever chain owned Meyer's, sent by order of the chain of Meyer's from New York City. As we met with them, there was, I know, Vance, Tom, I think Dr. Miller, I know one of the four students, one of the four boys who had sat, and I'm reasonably sure that there were five people, but I don't remember. But I was there, and I do remember that this man said, the manager said, "Mr. Vance, you told me last summer that if we opened the lunch counter that was all that you were wanting."

And Vance said, "Yes, I did say that. But I was wrong. As you see, the desire is to open your eating facilities, whatever they are, to your customers, whoever they are." You know, the boys had argued that you buy a pencil but you can't buy a hot dog. That was the argument. So Vance was explaining to him that the desire of black people now is that if we can buy a dress, we want to sit in the restaurant. And the manager was prepared for this. He was a very intelligent man and we came to the agreement then and there that, yes, the restaurant would be open. It would not be made public, but certainly the word would get around. And Mrs. Jones, Mrs. David Jones [wife of the president of Bennett], and I were the two adults that were chosen.

I can't remember--I guess we had an association meeting after the small group had talked with the manager. But I do know that Mrs. Jones and I were the two adults, and a female student from A&T, and certainly from Bennett, were the four who were to integrate the restaurant. And we did. And it was just a lovely place. The waiters were all black men and they had been informed about what was coming on. And I've never been served so finely as we were served on that day. These men were grinning when we went in. They kept their poise but they made us know that they were tickled to death that we were there.

Now that really ended the struggle for eating in this city, because shortly thereafter--the next time--I left Greensboro in '61, and the next time I came to

Greensboro, Vance took me to a nice restaurant--that had nothing to do with anything other than food, and we enjoyed sitting and talking and that's the way things worked. So that's been a tremendous memory to me. It was the most exciting experience that I guess as I've ever had in life.

WL: Let me ask you, there was something in the paper that appeared recently that raised the question that the sit-ins had originally been conceived by Bennett students, do you know that story?

HJ: Yes, I saw that. I don't know anything at all about that. Nothing at all. I never heard--and Bennett students liked me and I liked them--but I never heard anything like that. When I first heard it, you know, about a week or so before I came down, I was called and was asked this question by one of the newspapers. And that was the first time I had come to hear it, and I had racked my brain. No, I don't know anything like that.

WL: But Bennett students were involved very early on, obviously.

HJ: They were what?

WL: Very quickly Bennett students were involved?

HJ: Oh, yes, immediately. After the sit-in, immediately, Bennett girls were very much involved. Yes.

WL: There was a good bit of fear, wasn't there, among the community that if people other than students got involved that they might lose their jobs? Is that why students did the sitting-in, and people in the community generally did not?

HJ: Uh, to be perfectly honest, I don't know that I heard anything like that, in my honesty. Also, I can really understand that there might well have been disturbance in the minds of adults who lived here and were working, that they might be chastised or penalized because of their positions. But I don't think the students were involved in anything like that. I really haven't thought about it. But I'm pretty sure that that would have had to occur to many people, in so many of the civil rights movements, so many of the protests that have been made but were not really movements. Black people were fired here and there, all over the country, for things like that.

WL: What kind of reaction did you get generally from the white community in Greensboro?

HJ: What kind of what?

WL: What kind of reaction did you get from Greensboro whites?

HJ: After all of this?

WL: Yeah, or during, or after--during or after? Was there much support?

HJ: I think there was a lot of support. I don't know whether it was inspired by love, but it might have been inspired by fear. But there was a lot of support, physical support, absenteeism from downtown. Now, my big guess is that there was a lot of moral support. But I cannot prove that. My sense of things was that there were many whites who were delighted that this took place. That's my sense of things.

This happened in '59. In '61, when I was leaving here, I advertised in the local papers certain furnishings that were for sale, and in about three cases people called and immediately were incensed--the white people were incensed when they realized that they were talking to a negro person who lived in the negro neighborhood, and [they] let it be known, "I wouldn't buy this goddamned thing for anything." You know, that kind of thing.

There were business people who gave me tremendous respect. When I left in '61, the Greensboro Citizens Association gave a big testimonial, a big testimonial dinner for me at Hayes-Taylor, and they presented me with two gifts: one from Schiffman's [Jewelers], a very attractive bowl, which we still have; and the other a collection of letters, personal letters, individual letters, bound, and in that collection there are letters from a few white people whom I had come to know.

My sense is that there's a kind of satisfaction that white communities had as a result of this. Even when the boys--when the students went on that day and sat, and the waiters and waitresses treated them correctly, there were whites at the counter. And there were no fights. There were no rumble. Now, that's just a very few people. But I'd always thought that the influence of the three white colleges mounted into the feelings of the two black colleges, and that this made its contribution to the gentle atmosphere of the city of Greensboro. I've always felt that. And I've never encountered anything to make me think that that was wrong. Now, certainly I'm not suggesting that there's anything perfect, for six years ago, wasn't it, when the members of the Klan were reacting against a black demonstration of some kind. There was a girl, a young woman who was killed, do you remember that?

WL: Yeah.

HJ: So--huh?

WL: Four people were killed.

HJ: And one was a black woman. I know that because that black woman was the wife of my godson, and I had met her sometime back. So I'm saying that by no means that I think that utopia came into existence. But I do think that more tolerance was recognized by the white community, was represented in the white community.

WL: By the time you left in 1961 there were still pockets of resistance. You still had movie theatres--

HJ: Still had what?

WL: Weren't the movie theatres still segregated when you left?

HJ: I'm reasonably sure that they were. There was no--in the movement that the sit-ins initiated there was no subsidiary movement that I can recall. When the theatres opened I don't know. I know that there was nothing dramatic about the opening because I never heard anything about that. In '61, when I left, I do not know what the condition was with the theatres.

WL: The focus of the sit-ins was on chain stores, wasn't it, on Woolworth's and Meyer's? It was on the chain stores, stores that were owned by--

HJ: No, the focus of the sit-ins was on any store that sold everything that the store had to sell except food, particularly food that was purchased sitting down.

WL: I see.

HJ: Are you familiar with the story of Joseph when he was in Egypt? And was given the responsibility of handling the produce as a result of the dream? Do you remember that?

WL: Yeah.

HJ: It's always interested me that when Joseph, who was commanding everything, to the good of his king that he was serving, did not eat with them. Do you remember that in the Bible?

WL: Yes.

HJ: It's in the Bible. He--there was a separation--it's not overly done, but there's--the text

indicates that there is a separation between the feeding of this Jew and the feeding of the persons that he's really administering over. And the separation does not suggest that he is in a kingly position. And look at it sometime. I've never--I'm no student of the Bible, but from time to time this has come into my--and even into the courses that I was teaching. And it's always struck me interestingly. And I think that that's the kind of thing that gave white Americans some kind of feeling of visual superiority, that you cannot eat with me. That seems to be the ultimate in intimacies, other than sexual, and it just cannot be done was the idea.

WL: So if black people sat down and ate with white people that meant an ultimate kind of equality?

HJ: It would have been what?

WL: It would have meant ultimate--a kind of equality?

HJ: Yes.

WL: That's why it was so threatening, you think?

HJ: Yes, I do. I do.

WL: Yeah.

HJ: You see, in the Pullman services in those days, when few people were riding on the planes, and there were few planes to ride on, there were dining cars--do you know anything about the dining cars?

WL: I remember them.

HJ: Yeah. They were positively separated. I mean, segregated. There was a kitchen here and table here. There was a green curtain, always a green curtain, and the black ate in this table nearest to the kitchen. And there just could not be a sitting together eating. I don't mean sitting at the same table. There could not be a sitting together unless there is a green curtain that separates. And what's your first name?

WL: Bill.

HJ: Bill?

WL: Yes.

HJ: Bill, when I was a young, married man, my wife, who came from New York--she grew up in Jamaica, Long Island. She's a Hunter College graduate. She's the one who couldn't teach Spanish there at Langston. We were coming from New York to Oklahoma, and once we crossed the Mason-Dixon Line, it so happened that after we had crossed the Mason-Dixon Line we went into the diner to eat, knowing what was going to happen--we knew where we had to sit--and as we were sitting there, two MPs [military police] brought something like five or six German prisoners of war, POW, into the dining car. And they sat wherever they--I remember them; I wasn't that old then--wanted to sit.

Oh, that really got--and my bride was young, I was young, and she looked at me--but she was from New York and she had eaten, she had gone to school with, she'd eaten with [whites]--wherever her life had been, there had been integration, it had been integrated. And there was nothing that I knew to do, other than to feel like dirt. But that was the way it was. And though movements of protests existed, there never was any strong progress on the integrating of the dining place that I knew anything at all about. I avoided the movie business myself, for myself, by not going until I would go to New York.

WL: But some things like transportation it was hard to avoid, the trains?

HJ: Transportation. Not only on trains but the buses.

WL: Yes.

HJ: Yes. When the planes began to be a major way of traveling, there was never any segregation, no suggestion of segregation.

WL: Was that after the segregation era, or even during it? Did the planes start running after the segregation era? Is that why?

HJ: Yeah, I think so. No. No. No. I don't think that is really the reason. I think that it was somehow a different mode and they operated under a different system. Why [unclear] if it's interstate. And it would be difficult to--[unclear] if you were sitting in car A, and you crossed the Mason Dixon Line, the conductor would impolitely--or politely, but certainly firmly--tell you to get out of that car and go to another car. There was no possibility of doing this on an plane, in its mode of operation. It seems to me that like something could not have segregation.

WL: You couldn't do it in the middle of the air? You're flying up there when you cross the--

[they laugh]

HJ: That's right. A lot of this was very silly. I'd like you to know for the history that the first memory that has really etched in my brain was in either 1921 or '22--I was born in '15 so this--I was six or seven. There was a Tulsa race riot, and I have never forgot the spirit of running from whites who were determined to destroy--my father's business was burned literally to the ground. My home, my grandmother's home, were ransacked. Everything was--every drawer was opened and turned over, and things that the loiterers wanted to take they took. It was--the streets were burned, ruined. My grandfather, whose home was in the same block that our home was in, refused to run. He was a big man. How he handled things I never knew. I don't think anybody ever knew because he never told, but I know that he stayed on his porch with his shotgun. And I know that his house was not burned and our house was not burned. Across the street from us everything was burned. That was my introduction into the ways of Americanism, and I was not impressed. I remember how completely surprised and flabbergasted, in short--