GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO CIVIL RIGHTS ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION

INTERVIEWEE: Rev. Michael King

INTERVIEWER: Kathy Carter

DATE: N.D.

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

KATHY CARTER: This interview is with the Rev. Michael King. Reverend King, we generally start these things by just speaking a little bit about your background, your upbringing, and then move on into subjects concerning the civil rights movement and race relations in Greensboro. Are you a native of Greensboro?

MICHAEL KING: I've been in Greensboro most of my life. I'm originally from New Jersey. I grew up in Virginia. I was sort of an Army brat. So we did some traveling, extensive traveling. But I guess for the last twenty years I've been in Greensboro.

KC: Okay. So you remember coming to Greensboro, then? It wasn't as though you came as a small child with memories forgotten. How did it compare with where you'd been before? What were your impressions of Greensboro?

MK: Well, it's sort of hard, because, you know, I was so young then, and so sort of sheltered. So I don't remember any other atmosphere other than just a home, so, I, you know. We, like I said, we lived in Virginia, lived in California, and for a short time we lived in Georgia. And so [unclear] we did extensive travels, so I guess I can't really make a good judgment on that.

KC: Okay. How old were you when you came to Greensboro?

MK: I would say I must have been--well, I started first grade here, so I must have been around six.

KC: And so you went to which school?

MK: Miraculous[?] Middle, a Catholic school on Lee Street.

KC: Okay, and I don't know much about that particular school. I know more about the public school systems. That would have been a black school, or was it integrated?

MK: It was, it was a black school. The faculty was white, but it was a private black school, a Catholic school.

KC: Okay. Did you attend that all the way through?

MK: I attended the Catholic school to the third grade. And I started to public school in the fourth grade.

KC: And at that point, you would have gone to which school?

MK: Peeler.

KC: Do you remember the transition, the difference?

MK: Very much so.

KC: Can you talk a little bit about it?

MK: Of course, my fourth grade year was the first year of integration, so it was the first year of mandatory integration, and I guess it was my first experience of integration. So, you know, there was a lot of difference, particularly dealing with religion, because in the Catholic school, of course, religion is incorporated into the secular classes, but not so in the public schools. So, it was pretty much a transition for me.

KC: Okay. In terms of both religious instruction and the integrated classes?

MK: Yes.

KC: Okay. Let's see, I forgot where I wanted to go from there, I'm sorry. [laughs] So were you, was this the neighborhood school for you, or were you part of a busing?

MK: Part of a busing. We lived then on Alamance Church Road, so we were just within the city limits. And so it was busing.

KC: And you had to go how far every day?

MK: Across town, maybe five or six miles.

KC: Do you recall any problems or adjustments or tensions in the integrated classrooms?

MK: I think, as I said, it was the first year of integration, and I think originally, you know, that there was some tension. I think basically because of the unknown, more so than anything else. I guess about the middle of the year, the students found out that everyone's human, and we had a good teacher, and things sort of worked their way out.

KC: okay. Were parents involved in, to any extent? I have spoken with some of the principals of elementary schools during that early period of mandatory desegregation, and they recal a lot of the tension didn't smooth over until parents began getting involved with things like PTA [Parent Teacher Association] and actually understanding what it meant to be part of a desegregated school system.

MK: I think, I really think the kids that had the problem, I think the parents had the problem. Excuse me.

[phone ringing--recorder paused]

KC: All right. So getting back to your experiences. So you went into the desegregated school system, and you graduated high school in the system?

MK: Yes.

KC: You graduated, I understand, from Dudley, is that correct?

MK: That is correct.

KC: Okay, then did you go to college?

MK: I went a short time to Guilford and to John Wesley, and that was basically a short time in both of those colleges.

KC: Going back to something that occurred to me while you were on the phone. Why did your parents send you to Catholic school?

MK: I think then it was a status symbol, going to a private school. And back then, of course, about the only private school that you could actually go to was Catholic.

KC: And your parents then were comfortable enough that they could send you there--they were prosperous enough. And was your father retired military by that time?

MK: No, he didn't really retire the military, he left the military--captain status. And he opened up a service station here in Greensboro [unclear].

KC: I see. Okay. Well that had just occurred to me and I wanted to make sure before it slipped my mind again. So you went to Guilford and John Wesley for a while. How was your experience at Guilford?

MK: It sort of reminded me of my Catholic days--a Quaker school, so it was somewhat religious oriented. And so it just sort of reminded me of the Catholic days.

KC: And then after you went to post-high school for a while, did you become an ordained minister?

MK: Yes.

KC: In what denomination?

MK: Baptist.

KC: Okay, and you have a church here?

MK: Yes. One of the reasons I left John Wesley, I got married and ended up--was pastoring a church. And so I started pastoring at nineteen; I've been pastoring this church for ten years.

KC: Which church?

MK: Garden of Prayer Baptist Church.

KC: That's quite an interesting religious background you have. [both laugh] Catholic school education, Quaker college.

MK: And grew up Methodist, so.

KC: Grew up Methodist, and now you're a Baptist.

MK: Yes, I finally saw the light. [both laugh] I'm sorry, are you hot?

KC: No, I'm fine. Actually I'm quite comfortable right now, thank you for asking. Okay. And I understand that in eighties you got involved in the school board--is that?—

MK: Yeah.

KC: --at the beginning of this decade. What led you to become a school board official?

MK: I was the student body president at Dudley High School when I graduated. And they had started a new program that once a month the president of the various high schools met with members of the board of education. And so that sort of intrigued me, as far as the board was concerned. But initially, what got me involved was the misplaced, the misplacing of one of the high school coaches, Jonathan McKee. He was the athletic director at Dudley High School, and he was--he had a very prominent position in the black community. And he was sort of railroaded, and he was demoted, and just treated very horribly. And to see that the board of education just refused to address it at all-- they just would not address it in any shape, form, or fashion--sort of ignited something in me to run. And so the more I got involved in that, the more I was able to see the other injustice that was going on in the system.

KC: Can you give me some examples?

MK: Well, there was a--well, we deal with Dudley High School. There was a noticeable change in the faculty there. In talking with some of the faculty members, they were just very, very disgruntled and dissatisfied with the way they were being treated. We discovered that Dudley was always operating without resources, and so there was just a lot of things that, once we got into the McKee case, that began to surface. The student ratio had been changed so. When we were going to school, it was about half and half in all the schools, at least that was the goal. But they were so warped now, at Dudley I think then was about 85 percent black, and you had Page on the other side of town with just the opposite. So things were just so different and no one seemed to care.

KC: And you knew for sure, you could see for sure the inequities, for example, between Dudley and Page?

MK: Yes. Yes. And then, throughout the whole system. And one of the other things about Dudley, they had the largest dropout rate. They had the largest retention rate, they had the largest suspension rate, and it was the smallest high school. Particularly the year we got involved, it was I think 1100 students at Dudley, and there were 869 suspensions. And so I was just extremely concerned why the principal was allowing Dudley to fall so far

behind the other schools, and why she would misplace, displace Coach McKee when he was such a role model, and always had the respect of the citizens of Greensboro. And Dudley was systematically designed to close. The zoning, they had changed the zoning. And Dudley, the zone that fed into Dudley High School, was a mature community. And so you had Benbow Park and Dudley Heights--there just wasn't any kids come out there, because you had a lot of retirees. And Dudley didn't have [housing] project, and there are reasons for that, but your best athletes tend to come from the projects, because sports was one of the few resources that they have. And so they spend more time in that kind of thing. So Dudley was really designed to close. And so, I felt that from the board level I could possibly force some changes.

KC: Okay. And you were elected to the board in when?

MK: I, I guess it was eighty--'85.

KC: Okay. So you served for a couple of years?

MK: Yes.

KC: How was it dealing with other members of the board? I would imagine--I wasn't living in Greensboro at the time-- but I would imagine it would have been predominately white committee.

MK: It was. It was. It reminded me of apartheid in Africa.

KC: Really?

MK: Because you had a system that was predominantely black being ruled by a predominantely white board. And so the culture concerns, the ethnic concerns were not addressed. They saw things the only way any person could see, from their own perspective. So they saw things from a minority perspective, versus the majority perspective. And so it was extremely hard to get the board to do some things that would benefit the whole of the system. When you have that many--when you have minorities, quote, making up the majority of the system, then I think special concern should be addressed to the minority, and minority needs. It was hard to get them to see that, such as finding role models. We had very few black counselors in the system, and consequently, we discovered the students were told that they didn't need to go to college, or if they were encouraged to go to college, they were encouraged to go to predominately white colleges. So, it is all of these factors that keeps the system like it is.

KC: Sure. What happened when you would try--I imagine, you strike me as a pretty outspoken person who would state his mind on any subject--what happened when you tried to change the viewpoint of the school board to get them to come around to some issues that you think are very important?

MK: Well, number one, their attitude and the way they dealt with problems was to ignore that they exist. And so as long as we pretend that there's no problems, then we don't have to worry about a solution or any of those things. So it was always a struggle to make them acknowledge that there was a problem, and so that was just a super, super problem, an unbelievable problem, to get people to open their eyes when their intention was to keep their eyes closed to the issues. And then, it was extremely hard to get them to do the right thing, to solve problems. Usually, we had to be satisfied with some type of compromise, versus getting what needed to be done to solve the problems.

KC: Sure. Can you think of an example of that?

MK: A prime example may have been the principal at Dudley High School. That would be--she--we had the uniform code of conduct, which was a policy of the board that every student would be treated, disciplined alike, so like infractions would receive like punishments. And, as I told you, her suspensions were three times higher than any other school system, I mean than any other high school. And initially, we could not get--the administration's position was, the reason her suspensions were higher was because blacks act up more. So there were two black board members, Dr. Alma Adams, who is on the school board now, and myself. And, we then went in and started checking the reasons why the kids were being suspended, and discovered that she had her own policy that if a student was late to class three times, it was the same thing as an absentee. And the system had--it's been so long I think the figures may be wrong--I think it was five absentees out of a class, you were dropped. And so, she was counting the tardies--three tardies as an absentee, and so it added up, and so kids were actually being dropped and suspended. I think the system was after five absentees, you were dropped from the class. After three absentees, unexcused absentees, you were suspended. And so she was counting the late absentees, three as one unexcused absence, and so this accounted for why her suspensions were three times higher.

And I--I mean, it was just unbelievable, and it was just unbelievable the trouble we went through--and this is, what brought this on was that they had a girl who was vice president of the junior class. And she was late for class a certain amount of times, and they counted the lateness as absentees and suspended her. And then there was another rule that said if you were suspended, you could not serve as a class officer. So they stripped her of her office. And then another rule that said that you could not be a cheerleader, so they stripped her of her cheerleading. And so all of this was brought about

on this girl, and it almost just totally crushed her.

KC: And this is a nice kid.

MK: She was an honor roll student. Plus, they were counting these--then the other thing was that if you were suspended because of absentees, then they counted the days you were suspended against the five days that you missed, and you were dropped from your class. So it was just--so it was, so the matter to--the girl was late, and she was suspended, and she was dropped from the classes, and she was stripped of her title, and she wasn't allowed to be a cheerleader. So it just--

KC: Terrible unfariness.

MK: So I was forced just to do some unbelievable things even to get the board to admit that the principal was wrong. The superintendent, Dr. Newbold[?] at the time, said that he had the powers to allow one principal to run the school different than other high schools. And he was citing a board--his interpretation of the board's policy. So what the board did was to get our attorney, which writes most of the wording of the board policy, to give us an interpretation. And so the attorney's interpretation agreed with me. But publically, the board agreed with Dr. Newbold.

So we had a confidential letter from the board's attorney saying that the principal had no--did not have the power to suspend, according to board policy. But the board of education refused, would not address it. They just chose not--when the question would arise whether or not the principal was wrong--they wouldn't say anything. They just wouldn't do anything.

So somebody released the confidential [laughs]--somebody release the confidential letter from the attorney. And they stripped me--the board stripped me, or the chairman of the board, stripped me out of the--chairman of personnel stripped me, personnel--because they accused me of releasing that confidential memorandum. But I'm just saying, it took all of that before the board would say, "All right, the principal's wrong." And so they did, they made her rule uniform throughout the whole system. And the girl was restored back to her position, and all of that. But the point was it took all of that just to solve what could have been a simple, a simple—

So you know, the superintendent's attitude was that blacks needed more discipline, and therefore he was allowing this principal, which was also black, to require more from the black students. And, and they were not even concerned about the results. And so, you know, everyone knew that Dudley's suspensions were three times higher, their failure was three times higher, their dropout rate was three times higher. But yet no one was interested enough, or they just chose just to ignore that it exists.

KC: Or they made some assumptions about why it existed.

MK: That's right. That's correct, that's correct.

KC: Okay, you say that part of that compromise was to take that particular principal's standards and apply them system-wide?

MK: System-wide.

KC: Did the suspension rate then start to increase amongst predominantly white schools or--

MK: Yes. Yes. System-wide the suspension rate began to increase. So, and there was such an outcry that they eventually put in in-school suspension so the kids no longer--as long as it was just limited to predominantly black schools, there wasn't no in-school suspensions; it was out-of-school suspensions. But then once--and then these other rules did not apply, so kids were not caught in the same situation that was at Dudley High School when we first addressed the problem. Okay.

So, you know, Dr. Adams and I found that the only way that we could get changes, you know, that it came a question not of right and wrong, but as the board used to say, we used to have to hold them hostage. In other words, we would cooperate or do what they wanted in order to get them to address an inequity. And so that was, I think, that was the whole attitude of the board members. They could--whenever they wanted something done, we'd ask, well, what are you going to do for the black students? And so that--we always had to attach something that we wanted, something that we thought was needful to something that they wanted in order to get them to do it. That was just the way we operated.

KC: Which probably earned you a reputation as a fairly militant school board member as a result.

MK: Well, that was awful strange. Dr. Adams and I laugh about it now, that we were often times attacked by the newspaper and all, and looked upon as being radical. They used to call me radical. However, you know, we looked upon ourselves as being effective.

KC: Yeah. Well it makes good sense from what you are telling me.

MK: We represented a district, and we addressed the concerns of our district. Our district was extremely pleased with--

[bell rings—recorder paused]

KC: Okay. We were talking about the school board. And you were effective getting this done.

MK: And so, we addressed the concerns of our community. We represented two communities. You're talking about other racial problems--the whole election process of the school board is a prime example of racism in Greensboro, particularly. Originally, the school boards, the school board was an appointed position by the city council. There were blacks appointed, but they were not the choosing of the community, they weren't the choice of the community. And so, filing a suit in a compromise was that the board would be elected. However, the board is elected by the entire city, although individuals represent a district. So it was a very awkward situation.

I think I received 85 percent of our district's support, and still lost the election the second go round. And as I said, that was 85 percent. And so, in fact, during the primary, I think there were about two thousand votes cast. There were three people running, and I received fifteen hundred of those. So the choice of a district was unmistakable. And so the city overrode the choice of a district. And so what you have now, you have individuals who represent a district but are not answerable to the district. And so the black community feels disfranchised through the whole process, because those individuals were not the choice of the black community, nor are they accountable to the black community. They are accountable to the white community. Because a white community put them in office. And so [phone rings]--please excue me. I'm sorry.

[recorder paused]

MK: We were punished because we were addressing the concerns of the black community. And it was said--you'd have to go through the newspaper articles. I, at one time, got as much ink as President Reagan. But the papers attacked us as not being team players and being radical and all, because we saw things from a different perspective. And it's interesting that when white folks are vocal and concerned about things, they are concerned citizens. When black, they're radical. And we applaud Jesse Jackson, I mean Jesse Helms for being effective in the Senate, for addressing the needs of North Carolina. So we see nothing wrong with him looking or being vocal, addressing the concerns of his constituents.

But yet when Alma and I were being vocal in addressing the concerns of our constituents and had overwhelming support--in fact, we a the school board like it had never been attacked before. We had threatened to resign--like I said, in order to get things done, we just had to think of the most unusual ways. We were trying to get them to hire more black teachers, to institute an affirmative action. And, I can't remember, there were some other issues that we thought was just [unclear] and the board just refused to address them.

And it was a very frustrating thing that, being a minority on the board, all you could do was get a second. If the board didn't want to discuss it, they wouldn't discuss it. If the board didn't want to address it, they wouldn't address it. So it was just a very frustrating thing that all you could do was, you could raise it and get a second, but that was just as far as you could do it. And the only way we could get things done is we had to refuse to cooperate with the board, or not give in or to do some things the board wanted us to do.

One of the most effective tools that we discovered was they did not want bad publicity. And so, to get things done, we would threaten to have a press conference, and I had several press conferences. And, so things just got so awful bad that the board had agreed to do things and then they refused to do it. We were without a superintendent, and so they said let's keep harmony and all, and they had promised to do some things and address some things, and they sort of led us until they got a superintendent. And then they just sort of felt, well, we no longer, I mean, we're going to treat you like we were treating you before the superintendent left.

And so, we felt betrayed--they were having secret meetings. Just, just wild, crazy things were being done. So Dr. Adams and I had talked about it, we said, well, the board has rendered us ineffective. And so, we had one trump card left. And that was that we could threaten to resign. And we felt one of two things would happen. We would either not have the support of the community, and we would go on and resign, or the board would be made to see how much support we did have in the community. And, I guess for maybe a couple of weeks, Greensboro was turned upside down.

The chamber was trying to get some corporation here, and when this hit the paper and all, all that went through. So the chamber was jumping up and down. The board of education was trying to get its budget approved by the county commissioner, and the chamber was going against the budget simply because of this. They weren't going to support it. And so, they, the chamber organized and made some super–committee, and assigned each, assigned a person to each person of the school board, and told them to get this thing resolved. And so the chamber asked us not to resign, and the human relations asked us not to resign, and the school board asked us not to resign, and so all this, you know.

But, and so we did not resign based upon the school board agreeing to do what they said they would do, in instituting an affirmative action, because we were discovering that black kids were going through the whole system and some of them had never seen a black teacher, had never been exposed to a black teacher, had never seen a black teacher at all. And it was very possible that, you know, you're not talking about isolated cases. And so, it, it did and it does have an effect on blacks when they see that the only person that is in power is white. And the only person that they've been exposed to to teach them is white, they begin to think then that they themselves are inferior. And so, you're seeing the repercussions of all of this.

KC: I've talked to a number of people who have grown up in Greensboro back in the 1930s and forties, and went to Dudley when it was a segregated black facility, and their experience being educated through the system is quite different. They tend to recall it as a time when respect for individuals and achievement and making the most of what one had were very important values that were instilled. And you seem to be saying that by the 1980s that situation had pretty well become a thing of the past.

MK: Well, what I think the white populace failed to realize is when you destroy a culture, you also deteriorate respect of those attributes and qualities that are desirable. And so the first thing was that Dr. King in the sixties movement, was not for desegregation. That was actually a white term, and that was a compromise. They really wanted integration.

KC: Yes, there is a difference.

MK: Difference, you know. And so, integration, you integrate the various cultures. And so, actually, the United States was made worse, because they could have been enriched by the various cultures, you see? You know, the don't--if they had been exposed to the various cultures, then actually our system would have been enriched, instead of just one culture dominating the whole system to demolish all other cultures; and that's what took place. And so the moralities, the morality is not what it used to be. And so a prime example of this, this lady who ran through the park who was raped by these twenty blacks.

KC: Oh, up in New York?

MK: Yeah, up in New York. And, you see, what actually took place was, it destroyed the cohesiveness of the black community. The black community has just never been the same after desegregation. It destroyed the home. It destroyed relationships and all those things. So it was the worst thing that ever happened to blacks. When we had the segregated schools, blacks had a tendency to learn more, even though they did not have equal facilities. But what you had, you had teachers who came from their community, who were accountable to the community, because they attended the same church, and ate at the same restaurant, and were a part of the community itself.

KC: Sometimes lived down the block a ways.

MK: Down the block. They knew your mama by name, they grew up with your aunt, and so on, and so. You had these ties, and when you have these type ties, you know, the teachers had more liberties to teach and to go the extra mile. And so when you have this type of

tie-in and accountability, you're going to find that the students are just going to do better. It's just no other--they're going to do better. It was nothing, but you just didn't sass a teacher, because the teacher would call your mama. More so, she could hit you and nothing would be said. Nothing would be said at all. So it was just different. And the teacher would say--it wasn't a question of whether or not you want to do your homework, you will do your homework. You know, and so you had those factors that are missing now. And so, blacks are just not doing as well.

And there are cultural differences that people won't take note of. The board used to say that--the administrations used to say that when they went into the classroom, they didn't see any color. And that is the most racist statement to make, because being a historian, you know that history plays a part in anybody's background. And so, when you have individuals who are not as richly exposed to things, then it takes more to educate them. I mean, that what it requires. You find very few blacks that have computers in their home. With their white counterparts, they're brought up with computers. So, it's gonna require more to orient that, the blacks on computers. So, it has to do with simply, it simply has to do with exposure.

The whole testing is biased, the whole testing process is biased. And they know it's biased. They know it's biased, but the system refuses to do anything about it. And so I may be going, I'm, this is just a national, a national problem. If blacks were tested on the things that they are familiar with, then they would do better. And so if we took you out of your natural culture and put you in another culture, then you would reflect, it would be reflected that you are retarded or something, because you just don't know.

So, these are the type things that we constantly tried to make the system aware of. We institute, instituted some things in the system, and so the gifted and talented program has become a model for the whole country. That was because of efforts that we brought in Asa Hilliard, and he showed some things they were doing that kept blacks out of the gifted and talented program. And so they broadened the gifted and talented program and found out, indeed,,that blacks were and could meet a standard.

So it's just--I guess the whole of Greensboro is, and North Carolina, is that there is a very subtle racism. In fact, North Carolina and Greensboro, particularly, is one of the, in my opinion, one of the most racist places in this nation. However, it is so subtle till you can't document it, you can't take it to court, it's nothing tangible. But things are put into the system that brings about the desired results.

KC: Yeah, you can see that particularly in the response to the *Brown v. Board of Education* in '54. Greensboro was one of the first cities in the southeast to say "we will comply" and one of the last cities in the southeast actually to desegregate, under strict court order.

MK: And, when they did it. The other thing I had Dr. Adams to call me. She's supposed to testify in Raleigh, and they want to talk about desegregation and integration and what the

problems seem to be. I think one of the most overlooked problems was simply this: I think a fellow named Bull Connor, I guess it was, was siccing the dogs on the blacks.

KC: Mississippi?

MK: Yes. When you took systems to court, and they were ordered by the courts to desegregate, people with Bull Connor's mentality was the ones who desegregated the schools. They were the ones who were in office. And so you had people who were in power who didn't want to do it, and were made to do it. And so, that's why you have what you have. You make people do what they don't want to do, then quite naturally it's not going to be successful.

KC: Absolutely.

MK: And so, and so I think that was one of the things that was just overlooked. When the court ordered to do it, who was supposed to do it? And they had the wrong people doing it. And so what you have nationwide is just a grand mess.

KC: Could they have done it differently? If you were given the order in structuring out integration of educational facilities, how could it have been done differently in order to achieve integration as opposed to desegregation?

MK: Well, I think number one, I'm not sure whether or not integration could have ever been achieved, because it was requiring--you can't legislate morality. You just can't do it. And you can't make people do what they don't want to do. And so you can't pass a law that says that everyone's going to get along with each other and love each other. I mean, you just, it's just, it sounds good, but it just doesn't work. And so I don't know that integration could have been achieved. However, we will never know, because it was never tried. What we have--they never tried to integrate the schools. I think that you would have had to put people in charge who wanted to integrate schools. I think that was maybe what the courts should have done, should have had someone to oversee the whole thing, versus leaving those same individuals who were in charge to do it. And then, as you know, then what they would--they would have to take it to the Justice Department, and so what you saw was just the very minimum done that was legal.

So, you know, I think now that there's been some positive though. I think race relations have been made better by integration, or desegregation, I think to an extent. However, I think the black community has suffered more because of it. And so, you know, I think that there is at least an interchanging attitude, some acceptance because of integration. And I think had not we had integration, things prob[ably]--or desegregation, I think things probably, as far as race relations, would have been worse in the United

States. I think we would have been--the sixties would have remained, I felt. In that sense, I think that benefited. But educationally, I think blacks have suffered because of it.

KC: Okay. If you were in charge of things, what would you do to make it better? You know, you're saying that we've basically been stuck with fairly grand mess as the result of desegregation in the public school system. What could be done to repair it? What's the solution to fix that [unclear]?

MK: I think I had some ideas. I'm going to run for school board again when it's merged. And I think I have some ideas that could fix the, fix it into a better situation. I think, number one, that we're going to have to dismiss the idea of integrating the schools. I don't think forced integration--I don't think we will be able to do that. I think what we need to do is merge this entire system, and see the system--

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

KC: --which seems to go on for yards on this tape.

MK: Okay, I think we need to merge the system, and see the whole system as one. And then I think the system needs to attack the weakest links. The chain will never be any stronger than its weakest link. And so as we improve the weaker links, then we strengthen the entire chain. Therefore, I think the monies and the resources need to go to the students who need it the most. Okay. That would not be to neglect the GT program, or gifted and talented students. I think we still enhance that. However, I think we need to strengthen the weak links.

And I think it needs to be done this way. There are, throughout this nation, situations similar to ours. The worst scenario someone has been successful in resolving the problems somewhere in this nation. A prime example is the movie they just had out, *Lean On Me*, this man who turns this high school around. And so what I think we find, we identify what our problems are, then we find someone who has a proven record. The unique thing about Greensboro, Guilford County, is people don't mind spending money on education.

KC: That is very unique.

MK: And so, there are a lot of systems who have problems, but then they don't have any money. So what I'm saying is we go locate individuals, specialists in certain areas, and bring them down and ask them how long will it take you to turn this situation around? And monitor their success, give them a certain length of time, provide for rewards if they're achieved. And so, there's just no problem in our system that can't be turned

around. And so, you know, I feel that that would be the most appropriate way of making this system something that all of us can be proud of.

KC: It sounds to me as though you're suggesting possibly a return to neighborhood schools, then?

MK: Yes, to an extent. Basically, we have that now anyway.

KC: True.

MK: If a person--that was one thing we wrestled with at Dudley, the black population of Dudley decreased every year because the people getting transferred out. So that it wasn't that--they weren't earmarked to go to Dudley, but there were so many ways to get out of Dudley. So the point, you know, I think that's just a losing, losing struggle. I think we can, we can better utilize our energies in other areas.

So I think it's just an acknowledgment now that people are going to community schools anyway, or going basically to where they want to go, or least they're able to not go where they don't want to go. So if they can't go where they want to go, they cannot go where they don't want to go. So you have that. So, you know, I think we ought to deal with reality, and community schools if they're structured right, I don't see any problem at all with it. I think the magnet programs can enhance some form of desegregation. I think you can the magnets to do that.

But I think more importantly than who sits--whether a black and white sits in the same classroom--is that the blacks and whites are meeting their full potential. I think that should be the question of the day. Are we providing for every student the atmosphere that that individual can be the very best student it can be? And so if we can answer that yes, then I think everybody's satisfied. I think now, you know, that blacks and whites are going to go to schools together, naturally--you know, those persons who are not racist and all will have no problems with who their daughters and sons go to school with now. And those who do have problem with it, there's nothing you can do. You just can't make them change.

So they move out in the county, and the county became predominantly all-white in situations, and now they're talking about merging the system again, so they're going to find another way if you try to force them to do it. I don't think that's the challenge of education. I think that we ought to provide every student the resources to reach their full potential. And I think secondarily, if we can do some things that will strengthen and better race relationships, that's time. I don't think it ought to be a paramount responsibility of education. I think that's sort of what, what happened in the sixties. We were more concerned with numbers in ratios than we were about students and whether or not we're providing the best education we can, we can provide.

KC: How about the issue of race relations then? If it's not appropriate that the schools become a focus for that, if schools should educate to the best potential, what becomes the mechanism to enhance improved race relations, which have come a long way since the 1950s [unclear]?

MK: I tell you what, I think educating kids to their full potential automatically improves race relationships. A prime example: I guess I had gotten so into the needs of the black community that I sort of took on tunnel vision, and I did not realize just how effective white teachers could be with black students. I still hold that we, that they at least need to be exposed to some black presence, okay? But this year my son went to General Greene [Elementary School]. He had a white teacher. And she is probably one of the best teachers I have ever seen in my life--black, white, or indifferent. And so, I'm saying, if we concentrate on educating kids and that black teacher is providing the service she ought to, then those parents would be appreciative enough, and the students, that the relationship automatically is improved.

And so I think the focus needs to be on education, and then I think these other things have a way of sort of settling themselves. You understand? You know, we have tried busing and all that kind of stuff. I think now if we just concentrate on education. And I think basically, that's what every parent wants for his child, and the person who achieves that is going to be recognized by that parent, regardless of the color. So if I had my way, I'd leave him in Miss Cook's class another year, because she was just, she was just excellent.

KC: Have I forgotten to ask you anything that I should be asking you?

MK: No, not that I know of.

KC: Well, I've just about run out of questions, and I really thank you for your time. Let me just cut this off.

[End of Interview]