

CIVIL RIGHTS GREENSBORO DIGITAL ARCHIVE PROJECT
William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: Walter Johnson

INTERVIEWER: William H. Chafe

DATE: circa 1978

[Interview takes place at a restaurant. Background noise heard throughout.]

WALTER JOHNSON: —against the school board. Alfreda Webb, George Simkins, and also [unclear].

WILLIAM H. CHAFE: Yeah.

WJ: Now, George and I, although we're about ten years difference in age, we grew up together. And Anna Simkins and mother had been friends for, you know, forty years. And Alfreda used to live right around the corner from my parents. And, you know, I've known them—known—well, I knew them earlier, this family, all my life. I've known Alfreda ever since they've been in Greensboro.

So if you have folks who talk to one another, then you can get a sense of what's going on and a perspective about what the implications are. And I was given an opportunity to—before I went on the school board, in addition to being on the human relations committee—I was given an opportunity to work in United Community Services [UCS] about the same time, beginning in 1969, which gave me a sense of what was going on in the larger community, and it gave me an opportunity to try to understand that which was going on.

And finally, Bland Worley—right after I got back; I hadn't been back for a month two—I had worked for Bland cutting his grass back when he first came to Greensboro. He was president of the [Greensboro] Chamber [of Commerce] and he was some of everything. He's just rich now, but back in those days he was still a worker. And he called me and asked me did I want to be on this committee to deal with the form of government we have in Greensboro. And it gave me an opportunity to meet people like [Charles] "Chuck" Whitehurst, D. Edward Hudgins, and others who, though they

probably had a different point of view from the point I had, at least were basically intellectually honest about things, and that was a learning process.

WC: Yeah, yeah. So by the time you—I mean when you got on the board, things were really—there was a lot of pressure on you, obviously—there must have been.

WJ: Right.

WC: Besides [Dick?] Hunter trying to [pause] mess with you—

WJ: I wouldn't put it that way. "Ignore" would be a better—

WC: Okay, okay. What other kinds—were you getting—what kind of pressure did you get from the black community? I guess one of the things I'm really interested in asking about is the—what I see at least—is the sense of struggle going on to retain unity in the years after '69 within the black community, both across generations and across political lines. A struggle which seems to have—

Waitress: Hope you enjoy it.

WJ: Thank you.

WC: —been victorious until '71, victorious in the sense of there being unity around issues—well, from the [North Carolina] A&T [State University] issue to the cafeteria workers' strike, sanitation men strike, skilled craft workers, all those kinds of things. But that the one issue on which the things which could move—which most severely divided the, let's say, the GAPP [Greensboro Association of Poor People] people from the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] people or from most of the ministers, the one issue which would really get at those underlying tensions was the desegregation issue, largely because of what it said to the whole dimensions of the movement toward Black Power and black community development. So were you getting mixed kinds of pressures from the black community?

WJ: The first incident I had with that sort of situation was the cafeteria workers' strike. It happened right as I came on the board. I didn't know from Adam's housecat what was going on. And, you know, Nelson Johnson was pushing from one point of view and [unclear]. But Otis Hairston called me up and said he wanted to—he was president of the [Greensboro] Citizens Association or Citizens Coalition or whatever it was called, Concerned Citizens—and he invited me to church, to the—over at St. Stephens [Congregational Christian Church]—to hear what the cafeteria workers' complaints were.

And the board wasn't going to do nothing about it. I mean they were just going to forget it, let it sort of die on the vine. And I thought they had a right valid complaint, and I saw that the—you know, the board probably wasn't going to do anything about it, so what I did was I wrote every member of the school board a certified letter—

Waitress: Some more coffee, sir?

WC: Please.

WJ: —telling them what I had found out—

Waitress: Any dessert?

WC: No, thank you.

WJ: —and telling them in effect that I thought something ought to be done about it. And if something wasn't done about it, if they continued to ignore it, that everything that they saw in that certified letter that I was going to say publicly. But I thought it ought to be everybody would be given an opportunity to try to resolve it. Al Lineberry, who I'd met on this government—this local government committee through the chamber—called me up and said, "You know, I didn't know this was going on." Al usually had good instincts, but, you know, the board under Dick Hunter, the board just didn't come to the meeting. So Al was vice chairman or—no, he wasn't vice chairman. George Long[?] was vice chairman.

WC: George Long was.

WJ: But Al got hold of George Long, and I don't know what he told him, but by the time we got to the meeting, they had resolved that problem. They had gotten to Thorpe Jones[?], and Thorpe Jones came forward with a solution that ultimately was adopted, because they didn't—you know, I guess Al told them—he told Dick Hunter, said, "Everything he said in the letter, he probably will do. He's giving you a chance to bow out gracefully."

And so then when they brought the lawsuit in '71, there was a difference of opinion in the black community about what ought to be done, because, you know, all the black parents wanted was a bus to go to Page [High School]. If they'd given them a free bus to Page, there wouldn't have been no suit.

WC: Right, right.

WJ: But, you know, that shows you how stupid Hunter was. I don't want to say that about the man, he's dead. "Insensitive" may be a better word.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: Well, the biggest—I hate to say this, but, you know, the greatest thing that happened—well, not the greatest thing—in terms of us ultimately getting to a place where the community was able to deal with the problem, was the Lord saw fit to take Mr. Hunter to heaven and George Norman became the chairman. I mean had that not happened, we would have had all kinds of problems, because George Norman was replaced by the best politician in town, named Carson Bain.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: Carson may have had a lot of faults, but he had no peers when it comes to knowing the political realities of this little town here. And he was elected on several occasions because of the support of George Simkins. Carson never forgets those who helped him, or know he doesn't forget those who hurt him either.

WC: That's right. [laughter] I've heard a couple of those.

WJ: But he had more—and then when he came on the board, he was sort of ignored by the administration. You know, they didn't pay him any deference, which was a mistake on everybody's part.

WC: Is that because he came from the county, or—

WJ: No, Carson lives in Starmount. But he was the county board of education's selection to replace Dick Hunter, primarily because he and Howard Carr[?] are good friends and been good friends for umpteen years. The introduction of Carson to the board, which brought a political realism to the board that wasn't there before, and George Norman's corporate approach to things—and though Al Lineberry really carried out the thing, Norman set up the framework that made it all possible, because he devised a system that would—that involved more of the board in the decision making. His statement—of course, I've said this publicly in speeches many times—he said, "You know, we're all in this thing together, so we better get to talking about this among ourselves before we get to the meeting." And that approach and the involvement really enabled the board members to get to know one another a little more, and to respect one another's point of view even though it might—they might be different. And Al Lineberry pretty much picked up and carried on that same approach. But I think George Norman laid the groundwork.

The other thing that was helpful was, once we got into the thing in '71, was the—was our ability—oh, the other thing that helped was city council had to get to name Otis Hairston on the board in 1971, I guess, and that helped because Otis—you know, people like Nelson [Johnson] and others, they criticized me on some—in some areas that they didn't agree with, but it was hard to criticize Otis, because Otis was out in front of all of us.

WC: Yeah, yeah.

WJ: I mean he was taking risks when it wasn't helpful.

WC: Right, right. Yeah.

WJ: Up front. Not back in the back, you know, agitating; he was up front. So he had been a part of the struggle, and so it gave a much better balance. And plus Otis and Carson respected one another. Didn't always agree, but they respected one another. And that—there developed then a coalition on the board. We developed, after that happened, a voting majority. And that consisted of Howard Butler[?]¹—who's now dead, who had been appointed to the school board by Carson when he was mayor, and was in Carson's debt for another reason—and Otis and I. And when it counted, we could about do anything we wanted to, and very rarely call things to a head. But when there was a need, there were four votes, and Carson said, "On a seven-man board, you can do anything you want to with four votes, if you choose to."

WC: That's a good political rule. [laughs] If you have to. So that Reverend Hairston in a sense was more difficult to criticize even on the desegregation issue from the left—or how you want to call it, whether you call it the left or the right—but from a Nelson Johnson position, say let's call it, because he had so much of a track record?

WJ: He was out in front of all of them. Everything they were talking about doing, he'd already done that.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: And was still doing it. And was making a more meaningful contribution to a larger number of people in the community on a daily basis.

WC: Yeah, yeah.

WJ: He was providing housing for them. He was providing daycare services for them.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: Money, whatever they needed—social services, every day.

WC: Yeah, remarkable man.

WJ: He is. He's one of my favorite people.

WC: Done an incredible job with that church. It's just magnificent. He was the first—the first black person I went and saw five years ago.

WJ: Well, you started at the right place.

WC: Yeah, started and finished in the right place. [laughs]

WJ: I didn't say that.

WC: Well, in a sense, I guess, I—you know—there are two ways, I guess, of looking—that I see—of looking at what happens in '71. One is to kind of see it as, even if twenty years late, the community finally dealing with the issue that had been on the agenda for all those years, and showing how effectively it could be dealt with once the decision was made to deal with it. And, of course, that would be primarily the decision of the white leadership to go along with the changes and to do what black leaders had been pushing for all along. The other way, I guess, is to see it as a very effective move toward dividing the black community and co-opting [pause] black leaders.

WJ: One way of looking at it would be: the people who were as responsible as anybody were focused on the leadership in volunteer agencies—the United Way and the Chamber of Commerce—again, all the same folk.

WC: Yeah, yeah.

WJ: And, you know, what is good for the community? You know, we had '69. Are we going to have that all over again? We're going to have some federal judge come in and tell us that this is [unclear]. The answer is no, we're not. We're going to do what's good for business, which is the reason they settled in '63.

WC: Right.

WJ: You know, it's a question of economics.

WC: Right.

WJ: What is going to be best for this town in the long run if our goal is to further the town. It's the reason they—that's the way they settled, they solved the rent strike, you know, down in the Avalon area. That was not good for business.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: So they had to let that go.

WC: Right.

WJ: And the powers—you know, the powers that be brought more economic pressure on the people who, the GAPP [unclear] and they brought that matter to a screeching halt. And I think that you had some people in the community who were trying to—you know, that it would be good for the community to do certain things. And you had black leadership like Cecil Bishop and Otis Hairston who said, "Well, let's go along with it, because I think, you know, if we go along with them, we'll get where we ought to be eventually."

WC: Yeah.

WJ: And, you know, once again, if you had people who differed from their point of view, it was really hard to attack—for people who differed, it was hard to attack Cecil and Otis because they were funding the operation. I mean, you know, they were the ones who were raising money and so forth. And so—and then when the, you know, the money was put up by the chamber and the United Community Services to try to make the thing work for the publicity campaign and all that sort of thing in the summer of '71—

WC: Yeah.

WJ: It was—that was the black leadership. Otis and Cecil played a hand in how this came.

WC: Right.

WJ: And Joan [Bluethenthal] and I were working with the, you know, the planning division of the UCS back in those days and were able to work with people like Caesar Cone, who was, though conservative, was intellectually honest. If he decided it was good for Cone Mills to do something from an economic point of view—you know, not so much because it was the right thing to do, but for reasons satisfactory to himself. You know, in this

town, as you probably have found out, if the people at Jefferson Standard, the Prices, and [John] Van Lindley and that crowd, if they ever talk to the people at Cone Mills and Burlington Industries, and if they ever decide, the three of them, decide they're going to do something in this town, it's done. You know, they don't get together too often, but it used to be.

Waitress: Some more coffee?

WC: Yeah, please.

WJ: But if they ever got together, you know, and said, "Now this is the way things are going to go—"

WC: It happened.

WJ: That's right. Favorite story is that, you know that David Schenck, back in the days of the sit-ins, you know, was smiles and howdy and wasn't going to do anything. And, boy, the waiters out at the country club said that the folk I just got through talking about got together at the Greensboro Country Club and handed him his speech. And this is what you're going to read here [unclear]. And oh—

WC: It took those guys a long time to get their act together, though.

WJ: Well, you know, first of all, they weren't talking to one another. They weren't talking. See, Cone and Burlington are competitors.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: And they, you know—

WC: Yeah.

WJ: The Cones own the northeast part of town, the Benjamins and that crowd own the northwest part of town, and Burlington had the southeast and that general area with all them mills down on that way, and the Lindleys own all the rest of the land you could see. And as the boys used to say, the Prices had a mortgage on everything.

WC: [laughs] Yeah, yeah. It's interesting to me that it took them that long in '63 to get their act together, though.

WJ: Hey, Mr. [unclear]. How are you doing?

Unknown: Fine. How are you?

WJ: Okay.

WC: They really just were—they messed around for an awful long time.

WJ: Yeah.

WC: They really—

WJ: But maybe they learned something, you know—

WC: Yeah.

WJ: —in terms of what's best for the community and so forth, and what kinds of industry are we trying to bring in, and the image we're trying to maintain, and all that sort of thing.

WC: Exactly, yeah. But then what's still astonishing to me is that they let it—they let happen what they did let happen in '69. I mean, they let the police lose—you know, go out of control.

WJ: School officials are to blame for that.

WC: Yeah, they are, but it's, you know—

WJ: First of all, they should have put Owen Lewis in jail.

WC: Yeah, yeah.

WJ: As Bill Zuckerman told me—he was the head of the Community Unity section of the chamber back in those days—he said—when I got named to the school board, he said, “Wally,” he said, “the best thing you can do on the school board, the best service you can render to this community is fire Owen Lewis.”

WC: Yeah. I've got a memo that Lewis wrote in '68 which perfectly reflects the paranoia going on among Lewis and Hunter and [Robert] Moseley vis-a-vis the Feds. I mean, it's a—I'm not—I came upon it by accident, but it's a beautiful example of that mentality.

WJ: Oh, it was terrible. See, I was on the Human Relations Commission, so I was looking at it from a much different perspective. It was terrible.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: But the factors had changed, the players had changed, and in '71 we had people who could talk to [unclear].

WC: Right. Right.

WJ: And, you know, when we got to the bottom line of making decisions about school attendance zones, we had Carson Bain, we had Otis Hairston. We had Ed Lucas[?], who though he did not always agree, he had a great deal of intellectual honesty, and was forthright in expressing his opinion to those who disagreed with him and disagreed with them in a very gracious way. And because of the framework that had been laid by George Norman, the board members were able to talk to one other with a baseline of respect that ultimately worked out. Because we got ready to—we didn't want to go through the problems that Charlotte had gone through, you know, having Judge [Edward] Stanley coming in and order us what to do. So George Simkins called me up and he said, "Julius [Chambers?] is going to be in town along with the guy who is now superintendent of schools in New Orleans"—he was then superintendent of schools in Wilmington, Delaware—who, by the way, trained the current county superintendent and number two man in the county, Douglas Macon[?] and McLeod[?] both worked for this guy in Wilmington and then he pushed them, and now they wind up in Greensboro, but that's another whole story.

And so he came in, and I met with Julius and George and the guy from Wilmington, and Julius said, "Here, why don't I show you what our proposal is going to be to—You know, what the plan's going to be in detail and the rationale behind it." Said, "Now, you know, I can't give you these documents, but I'll let you read everything." And so we sat there, and I have a fair memory. And when we got back to the school, I said, "Well, this is what they're going to propose, gentlemen," and, you know, just sketched out the outlines and so forth from memory. And said now, "You know, I'm going to get back with them and tell them what we can take, what we can live with." And so we backdoored it like that until we got to a point that then Julius could talk to them with Bill Caffrey, who was a far more enlightened person than Mr. Moseley.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: He had been a school teacher and a school principal and, you know, a Methodist layman and so forth, and a good lawyer, and a Duke [University] graduate, by the way. But we

were able, both formally and informally, to reach an agreement that everybody could live with, because there was some openness on the part of Julius and George, and the fact that we knew that we could trust one another based on years of contact.

WC: Right, right. Well, you've been here for all your life, except for your time in Virginia—

WJ: West Virginia.

WC: And West Virginia and the service.

WJ: Yeah.

WC: Do you think much has changed?

WJ: Some things have changed a lot, and some things haven't changed at all. They're going through a trauma right now with school attendance zones.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: And they're—you know, they're talking about we ought to go back to neighborhood schools. And, you know, what you have is the same people who were against what we did in '71 now see an opportunity to try to reverse the trend. And so the motivation is the same, the words are different. But so in that regard, I think that with that group of people, things haven't changed at all.

But I think in terms of the perceptions of some of our young kids—kids like my children, who have never experienced another way—on both sides, they've changed a lot, because they take things for granted and they accept relationships with one another that weren't possible when I was their age. And that's a healthy sign. It's the people of my generation and beyond, particularly beyond, that still do not want to completely accept a new way. They go along with it for various reasons—economics, political, you know—but if we can continue a [unclear] of a society where young people can learn from one another and mix with one another without letting too much institutional racism stifle one group as opposed to the other, I think that it will be a better place in the year 2000.

But you still have the insidious things, you know, the institutionalized blocks—you know, competency tests that are—have certain biases. And they were talking about a test one time that didn't have any biases. Assistants of my wife, who's in psychology, got hold of a test that they ran out once. They had me [unclear]. My wife couldn't make five on it. The average black kid from the ghetto could make a hundred.

WC: Right.

WJ: Because, you know, they ask kids things about what things mean that are completely foreign. So we still have a long way to go, but I think in terms of the relationships of our young people—well, let me give you a classic example. When we integrated Dudley High School, see, most towns, they closed the black high school—

WC: Yeah.

WJ: —fired all the black principals. My first year on the board, must have been 1970, I had an opportunity to have lunch with Benjamin Mays. And Benjamin Mays said that the key is that you have to get blacks in policy-making positions, and you have to set that as one of your goals. And if you do that, if you put enough black educators in various levels in policy-making positions, the rest of it will take care of itself. And he said that was the lesson that should've been learned from Atlanta. And, you know, it—manipulating attendance zones is self-defeating. You know, once you get it set, try to stay with it, because if you don't, things will just be flip-flop. And you notice in Greensboro for this time, we've pretty much stayed with a form of stability. And you haven't had as much white flight. And we've had changes in percentages of blacks and whites in certain schools. In some schools, you have black majorities. But, see, by the—you know, there was, as Otis and I said privately—we never said publicly—ain't nothing wrong with that.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: Interesting experience for those whites who are in the situation.

WC: Right.

WJ: But by maintaining stability, it enabled us to have growth areas in the town and also cut the declining enrollment.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: Well, they're now dealing with that problem again with some of the people on the board not having the full recognition of it—of, you know, the politics of attendance zones or whatever you want to call it. But my daddy has an expression that I quote in black circles, but I very rarely quote in white circles. He was in education administration on the state level for many years. He said, "One Negro in any structure can't do anything." He said, "But if you give that nigger some company," said, "you'd be surprised what he can do."

WC: Yeah.

WJ: And that was really the goal of the—of what we were trying—what Otis and I were trying to during the time we were on the school board.

WC: Yeah, yeah. Right. [pause] How do you handle the issue, though, which people will raise, of the whole—of the whole question of having a universal ratio or having a ratio with only a ten percent deviancy?

WJ: I don't believe in that.

WC: Well, you know—right.

WJ: See, first of all, if you've ever seen anything that I've ever said about it publicly, I don't—I never talked about it. I mean, you know, I don't believe in that stuff.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: I believe in an opportunity for young people from all races to get together and get to know one another for a truly multiracial society. I believe that we ought to—that we should have an equal educational opportunity and give—and actually deal with the question of teaching children, because that, I think, is one of the real problems. Black kids, by and large, in integrated settings a lot of times are ignored. They say, well, you know.

WC: Right.

WJ: But they have—if Mother and Daddy can't teach you at home, if they didn't learn anything themselves, then you've got to real problem teaching that child, and we need to deal with that educational issue of how you're going to bring that child along.

WC: Right. Because it's always made sense to me that a school like Dudley and like—let's—like Lincoln [Junior High School]—I mean, the history of those schools is so precious for the history of the black community, that it's very important that that identity be retained. But then what do you do with the question of—you don't want those schools to be all black, because obviously if they're all black, then someone else is going to say that that school is going to be all white, and you're going to get back into the same situation that existed.

WJ: Well, the way you deal with that is what they've tried to do. And I hope they don't tamper with it, but they might. The way you keep Dudley from being all black is to do

what they did. You put a special program in there that attracts kids, you know, from everywhere.

WC: Right, right.

WJ: The school within a school. And that keeps a certain percentage of whites down here. They have their own thing within the school, but they mingle with the other kids. They're playing on the football team, and, you know, they do that sort of thing. And then you have to have some super teachers. Now, they had a teacher at Dudley, Georgine [unclear], who was one of the few people that I have known in my lifetime who could make kids from different backgrounds and different races work together and literally love one another. She was a miracle worker. She had the dance group and it was 50-50, and there was truly a feeling between the girls. They were part of something together, and they—there was a feeling from the mothers—the white mothers used to come down there at first and stand in the halls. At first, they wouldn't let the girls in, but she would recruit them. And they would look to see if something happened to their daughters down here on this dance group, but then after a while, they became supportive in the movement, too. But so few people like that come along.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: And, of course, she died at an early age because she was trying to overdo it, but that's another story. But super teachers like that who have a true sensitivity for all kinds of kids, they make a lot of difference.

WC: You said a little while ago that some of the same people who are—who were fighting what happened in '71 are now fighting this, and I guess I'm a little bit unclear about—I mean, there are a lot of people who seem to be arguing for stability against Plans A through C and for the whole neighborhood school concept. Are those the people you mean?

WJ: The folk who are saying, "Let's go back to neighborhood schools," were saying, "Let's have neighborhood schools," back in '71. The difference is that the ones that, you know, when you argue for stability, that means let's just try to work with the status quo with a few modifications. That will retain basic integration.

WC: Yeah. And that's something which you feel comfortable with.

WJ: Yeah.

WC: Yeah. But what puzzles me is two things, and these may be just technical issues, but you know, like, why the attendance advisory committee last year wanted so strongly to go to a 55/45 thing, and why the present school board in its—in basically the guidelines, [Kenneth] Newbold also kind of emphasized the staying within 10% figure?

WJ: Because that's probably—that might be the idealistic approach.

WC: But does it recognize the politics of the situation in terms of the both white community and the black community?

WJ: You notice that it was voted down, six to one, at the last board.

WC: Yeah, right. Yeah.

WJ: There was a—you know, first of all, there was a human cry for doing certain things. So there had to be a vehicle to get the whole thing out in the open and discuss the issues and get people's feelings. But there was also a feeling, at least among those of us who had been through the process once before, about where we were going to come down, but we did want to hear what the—what was being said and so forth, and it made a lot of folks mighty angry.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: By totally ignoring—well, not totally ignoring, but adopting a concept. We did adopt a concept of what they were talking about, findings and so forth, and then putting their own recommendations in it.

WC: Yeah, yeah.

WJ: And if you'll read them carefully, we didn't mandate to Dr. Newbold to do anything.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: Which Bill Caffrey, I understand, has told him at least four or five times.

WC: He seems to be finally getting the message. [laughs] Yeah. [pause] One of the—

WJ: The people on that thing, like Herman Fox, you know, who has been very active in the community, who disagrees with me vehemently, with what I just said—

WC: Yeah. Sure. But probably most people in the black community, as well as most people in the white community, do agree with what you just said.

WJ: Maybe so.

WC: Okay.

WJ: I can't say.

WC: Since we don't have a public opinion poll, I guess we better not make those leaps. One last thing, or—see, one of the—this book begins with an introduction which talks about two themes in this book. One is North Carolina's "progressive mystique" and how it's operated as a means of basically perpetuating the status quo and eliminating any kind of structural or significant change in power or resources.

WJ: Terry Sanford's cosmetic veneer, which he brought across the state.

WC: Right.

WJ: And brought it kicking and screaming into the twentieth century. Go ahead.

WC: And Greensboro, of course, is beautifully an example of that. You know, you don't do anything without consensus, conflict is nasty. On the other hand, you're open to new ideas, okay. But above all, you're paternalistic toward black people and toward workers, generally, you know. Okay. And so that's one theme, how that's—how that works. That's one theme of the book. The other theme in the book is the stages of insurgency against that mystique, and the way in which different means of controlling black protest has in turn generated different means of challenging those means of control.

And, you know, I've been trying to—I've been tracing this out over a twenty year period, twenty-five year period, and I—you know, we get to 1971 and all of a sudden I'm not sure where I am anymore. I mean, I feel like I've got those things under control, or have tried to get them under control up till that point, but then I look at the situation and I say, well, what really has, you know—all right, a lot of behavioral things have changed. Obviously, housing has opened up much more than it certainly was ten years ago. You've got the end of a dual school system. Economically, there have been some changes, if not great changes. But has the progressive mystique really been challenged, or is it simply in control under a new guise?

WJ: The black community changed some. You give a thirty-year period, which you're talking about, and you take a look at where we've gotten. I would look at it this way: we, in

southwest Greensboro, you had the dominant forces, you know, in Shiloh [Baptist Church]. And the baton was passed from J. T. Hairston to Otis Hairston, but the philosophy didn't change, that's push in all areas as much as we can for the benefit of those who we serve. And, you know, the civil rights area—George Christopher Simkins, Sr. made it seem possible for George Christopher Simkins, Jr. to do that which he did, because he was one of the few people in the community who could not be completely stamped out economically, because the old man had made a bunch of money. So when he died at a very early age—he died at sixty—but, you know, George, for example, never had to make a house payment. So then you couldn't call in the mortgage. But the father passed on to the son a perspective about how things ought to go and allowed him to—it allowed him to become active in the community because he didn't have to worry about where to live. He earns [a little,?] but he doesn't have to worry about it. And, you know, a lot of people followed George because they knew he couldn't be bought off.

WC: Right.

WJ: Not for five dollars, the way they used to buy off some other folks who [unclear]. But, see, you used to buy the black vote.

WC: Right.

WJ: You know, there was L. R. Russell[?] in the southeast and Mr. Hundley[?] in the southwest, and they made a hundred dollars, if that.

WC: Right.

WJ: And, you know, they were interesting men, and maybe effective in their spheres, but they were bought off, could be. So, you know. And what you had is, if nothing else—the difference between '45 and '71 is, what, a difference of twenty years. And you have, you know, maybe beginning to speak to the problem are another generation's approach. We have been given an opportunity to be heard in an area.

And there are some folk in the black community who talk to one another. You have organizations like the Greensboro Men's Club, which is now getting somewhat on the older side, but it's evolving into a different group. But you had in that group, back in the time when you started, F. D. Bluford, David Jones, Bill Hampton, Vance Chavis, John Tarpley, Dr. [Hobart] Jarrett from Bennett [College]. And twice a month, they met in each other's homes and they just talked.

WC: Yeah.

WJ: And in that group, you had folk who had something to say about practically every black person who was employed in any kind of job that was paying anything. And that had a decided influence on the way things were done, said and done. Well, you know, as things became a little more diverse in a non-segregated society, there came up others with a more diverse group of people who were having an opportunity to be heard. And in that diversity, you know, you didn't have one voice speaking for the community.

WC: Right.

WJ: And some of those people speaking were, you know, people who had grown up here who had experienced what was going on, and who—but who had been away and seen something a little different and came back with somewhat different perspectives about how things could and should work.

Plus, you had a university here who—particularly A&T, I think—offered its student leaders a platform from which they could try to influence the larger community. Nelson Johnson's biggest platform was when he was vice president of student government, and was, you know, speaking not only to A&T issues but to larger issues. Jesse Jackson's platform was president of the student government.

WC: Right.

WJ: So I think if you look at those contributing factors, and the fact that the town in '71 was a much bigger place than it was in '45, and you had different voices, but a sort of a continuity among some of the voices that reach back fifty years—fifty or sixty years—you then might have a way of explaining what you're trying to get at.

WC: Right. One of the things that I have focused on throughout is the continuity theme. I mean one of the things I'm—the chapter on the sit-ins has as one of its three major arguments that this is continuity rather than a break from tradition. It's a new form of expressing a theme of protest that has roots very deep in the history of the community. And I think that's very—I think that's—what you've just said is very helpful to me. I guess I also have the sense of continuity of the white community, and—

WJ: When my daddy came here to school in 19—

[End of Interview]