

# **CIVIL RIGHTS GREENSBORO DIGITAL ARCHIVE PROJECT**

## **William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection**

INTERVIEWEE: Carolyn Allen

INTERVIEWER: William H. Chafe

DATE: circa 1975

WILLIAM H. CHAFE: I'm talking to Carolyn Allen, who has been active with the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association] for many years and was chairman of the—chairperson of the Human Relations Committee, and also the Restructuring Committee?

CAROLYN ALLEN: We just called it “structuring.”

WC: Structuring—the Structuring Committee. Structuring or anything like that. [chuckles] Had you been—how long have you been in Greensboro?

CA: This is our thirteenth year. [whistle] [laughs] Well, we came in fall of '62, so maybe this is our fourteenth year. I don't know.

WC: Fall of '62?

CA: Yeah. Man.

WC: [laughs] Where did you come from?

CA: Texas—Austin, and my husband's from Fort Worth.

WC: Oh. And had your grown up—you'd grown up in Austin?

CA: More or less. I was born in Michigan, but that was an accident, really, kind of. [laughs] My—certainly through—through high school I was there in Austin, and then back for a while and some university time, so forth. But I lived in Missouri, went to Stephens [College] for two years. Did an undergraduate degree at [University of] Texas, and then did some work on a master's at Florida State [University]. [I] lived in New Mexico and Colorado in between those times.

WC: Wow.

CA: I would not have guessed when we came here that we'd be here today.

WC: Yeah.

CA: Don's in sociology, which was also my graduate field.

WC: Is he at UNCG [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro]?

CA: Yeah. And I don't know. There have been opportunities—or there were before the academic budgets began shrinking. [laughs] We thought about other places, but it seemed in many ways that this was a good place to be.

WC: Yeah. Do you feel that, on the basis of your thirteen years of experience being part of both an academic community and the larger community—this is kind of a general question—do you think that the academic community has much impact on the wider community?

CA: In some ways, no. In other ways, perhaps, yes. Which is to say that I think among the groups of which I've known socially, there is a disproportionate representation of either faculty wives or faculty members in where it is a service-oriented kind of thing. Which is not to say that—that is but a segment of the service-oriented things, because I think that there is a great chunk of local activity which the university is not part of at all.

WC: Could you talk about—what are those groups which would be most likely to have university people affiliated with them versus those which might be more independent of the university?

CA: Well, the League of Women Voters is heavily larded with either women who teach themselves or who are faculty wives, and that's—certainly, there's a big chunk of Guilford College there, too. And some—the wife of at least one A&T [North Carolina A&T State University] person—well, more than that, I'm sure. I didn't really count it up. But things like this Gateways program, which is kind of sputtering unevenly at this point, I gather.

WC: I'm not familiar with that.

CA: This was initiated—I'm not sure whether it was a year ago this Christmas or if it's been longer than that. In any case, the Junior League, with additional and fairly broad-based

correlative support, undertook—you know, I think it had a subtitle of some sort, but it was an effort at citizen involvement in community planning and the establishment of—they started with twelve problem areas, and it—housing became a thirteenth after they got their initial group together. They had task forces in these areas, things like education from elementary on up through college level, cultural affairs, recreation, transportation, one catch-all they called “community development”—which is what I had been a part of—health services, and so forth and so on. Housing apparently was fairly crucial.

And an effort was made to involve the existing political and governmental structure from the beginning, as well as to get ideas fed into this process. Seems to me that they had about three hundred to maybe three hundred and fifty in their planning session, which came, say, a year or more or so ago. Then they wrote for each of these areas a kind of a position paper, and tried to give wide circulation to these papers. Then had what they call Gateways Day, with co-sponsorship of some of the more active groups. They had it at UNCG at the student center [Elliott University Center] there all day, and invited the community to come in. And I think that that was really very successful; they had something over a thousand people involved in it. They had [Boston mayor] Kevin White down—this was pre-Boston struggles [laughter]—and he gave sort of a kickoff address, after which they broke up into task force sections, the point being to come up at the end of the day—and it was a pretty frantic day—with goals for that area.

We were not very successful in the community development section covering the waterfront[?]. We had about a hundred—well, that’s close enough—in that section. We divided up into four groups, and tried to then come back together, say, 3:00, 3:30 [pm] or so, and get all four different sets of goals coordinated, and we couldn’t do that. We didn’t have enough time even to work through those. As a consequence, what came forth from the group as a set of goals was incomplete, and they would not accept as a goal of community development any statement that the total community development group hadn’t voted on, so there were some things that we simply held onto as secondary goals or statements that we simply didn’t have time to cope with. There were many of those—many more that we actually had goals.

WC: Were there many blacks at the conference?

CA: I would say less than a proportionate representation. There were certainly some. We had some, but there again, many less than we might have had in the community development section. Now, I’m not sure; housing may have been better represented. I’m not familiar with—

WC: And this was started by the Junior League initially, and then in cooperation with other groups? In terms of the relationship of faculty people to community institutions, would you consider the Y—the YWCA—one of those institutions which has a great deal of

connection to the academic community, or was it relatively independent, do you think, of the academic community?

CA: Well, I would say a very solid connection, but it is not by any means as, well, say, heavily dependent as the League of Women Voters is. However, I don't know in terms of the current board—of our black board members, I don't know. Right off the top of my head, I would bet most of them are themselves faculty members.

WC: Yeah.

CA: Linda Bragg is at UNCG, and Yvonne Johnson's is from UNCG. Josephine Gray is on one of the [states?] and so on down through.

WC: So maybe it's become more so over time. Were you active in the Greensboro Community Fellowship?

CA: A little. I went to their meetings. I did not really—was not very much involved. And as a matter of fact, the Y—we had been here a number of years before I became involved in anything in the Y. It was probably the first pull into kind of community activity. So that in a sense, my effective date of involvement much in town was really about, say, around '68, something like that.

WC: Would you have had much contact from '68 on with Hal Sieber?

CA: I had quite a bit.

WC: What was that like?

CA: A mixed bag. Hal, I think, was an immensely capable person. I [laughs] think in the vernacular of the present, he was one of the most thoroughgoing male chauvinists I have ever encountered. And I had my innings with him, kind of, sometimes pointedly and sometimes unwittingly I was reacting to him because of that, and I'm not sure that he was always aware of this as a factor. But on the other hand, Hal, for example, in initiating some of the tea group type sessions, and in participating himself, did open up. I mean he was not really deliberate, I think, in these efforts to—well, in way—ways that he tended to rub people.

WC: What were some of the issues over which his male chauvinism would become a very, you know, kind of salient thing?

CA: It's very hard to pinpoint. I felt on several occasions that in dealing, certainly, with me as a representative of the Y committee, that he did not think that we'd get much done I guess is the way to put. And certainly in some cases, he was quite correct in this. Our real power base is pretty flimsy. [chuckles] Where it comes is when push comes to shove, we can line up on the side of the good guys, but there's not much that we can do to put screws down on anybody.

WC: What could be done to put the screws down on someone?

CA: Well, I don't know. I had feeling the way Hal operated, that he was almost in the role of the labor relations negotiators, that he did, I think, have the confidence of many in the black community, or at least I had this impression. He got along with Rouson.

WC: Cecil Rouson?

CA: Yeah. And for a while, Cecil was certainly a [paid?] spokesman for some of the activist groups. So that I think that Hal had immediate grasp of what their demands were, and also had a pretty good feel for who, say, within the business community and the political structure, who the buttons were to push in terms of the possible, so that where our committee could do something like have a dialogue group where there was a kind of situation that some action could be taken—I can't really put my finger on a good example—but Hal would at least be in there stirring the pot to see that—

WC: So he would be looking to the Y for occasional support—

CA: Yeah.

WC: —of his larger enterprise, rather than as a kind of front line?

CA: Right. This was pretty much the feeling that I had. My Community Unity division chairman was the front group, I think.

WC: Were you part of that?

CA: No.

WC: Were any—was anyone from the Y a part of that?

CA: [pause] I—it seems to me that certainly during the early—the tension years, I don't think so. Now there have been peripheral people—Henrietta Franklin, for example, who's

done—probably as a Y member, she pays her dues, I don't know—but has done a number of programs for us and served as a dialogue group leader during that period—did serve in that division, I think. And there were others, I think, but I don't believe anybody on the Y board that was active—that was involved there.

WC: Had there always been a Human Relations Commission—Committee within the Y?

CA: My impression is that at least in '68, that there was not one, that they had always had concerns in this area, and sometimes had had a committee on it that sometimes didn't.

[Tape error]

WC: What was your impression of the relations between black and white women when you became active in the Y?

CA: Good.

WC: Good?

CA: Yes. I would say generally that this has always been true in my involvement in the Y. I think—well, this is not quite an answer to your question; it's maybe another question—but I have felt some change since I would guess about '70, if I had to put a date on it, but I don't think it's fair really to date it. I think it had more—much more to do with the evolution of black separatism that a lot of the old-line white liberals haven't quite known how to cope with the kind of emerging independent perspectives in the black community. And that—well, I have seen even recently, on the part of some of our white board members, an absence of a recognition that while at most levels we work very closely and very well, there is still a level where there is absolutely no real communion, I guess, or anyway, a lack of full oneness.

WC: Yeah. Would this change be prompted by younger black women coming into the Y, or would it also take place among older black women who had been part of the Y for a long time?

CA: I think it's very largely been from the younger black women. I have always felt that the middle-class black has really been whipsawed in terms of their goals and abilities and the demand of the lower-class black. And the situation of the middle and upper-class black has always based in terms of the lower-class white. And I don't know. Of course, our—we very largely have had the middle-class black gal involved. We've had some lower class—low income, whatever you want to call it—but not vast numbers. And I think, up

to a point, that for those—I'm wondering what the point—I think for those low-income women that we've had, this has been a good experience for us and for them. But to go back to the age factor, I think it—that it has been the young, and that they have pushed the older black women to certain kinds of positions they might not take on their own.

WC: So someone like Linda Bragg might push someone who would be a veteran of the Y for many years and older into a more militant position?

CA: Yes.

WC: And that in turn would create problems for some white liberal people?

CA: Yeah. Acknowledged or not, I think.

WC: Yeah. Can you give me an example of that kind of thing or the kind of issue with the [unclear] might involve?

CA: Well, I think I detected a little bit of this just recently—well, in the last executive committee meeting of the board. We are having to put in a revised budget, and as you're probably aware, because of the shortfall in United Way receipts, that's always a painful process. It, for us, very well may mean—could mean cutting staff. In one situation where we have two adult program people—one white, one black—I suspect that there's to be a cut. It should be the black in terms of productivity vis-à-vis the association.

WC: Right.

CA: And I think that—I don't know how widely shared this feeling is, but a senior black board member—if I can phrase it that way, without, of course, no names named—but without being specific was plainly saying, I think, that you can't change staffing patterns without causing a flak. You know, I think basically that this woman knows full well the performance levels of the people, and I think that she would in all cases put the white first. And in fact, by raising this issue, she may be putting the white first. She may be saying, "Look, this is what we can [unclear]."

WC: Yeah, yeah. But that thing might not have happened five years ago.

CA: No, it might not have.

WC: When you became active in the Y in '67, '68, was it—to what extent was it true that there was a black Y and a white Y?

CA: It was—as far as the community was concerned, and I would say as far as the bulk of the Y membership was concerned, it was sort of status quo. I think for the Y board and for the active committee people, there was not any—well, it was probably a tacit view, acceptance of it, of the orientation of the two buildings. But they had used the mechanical device—which was typical of Ys all over the country that had separate buildings—of having the board over the area association, and having what they called a committee on administration for the Lee Street building. And that committee, as well as the board, had been integrated for years. Which is to say—I believe the Lee Street building was constructed in '58, so I'm not sure about anything prior to that point—but I think from the inception of that work in that building, they had integrated [plans?] and instruction. Now—

WC: But the Y—but the downtown—the board of directors—wouldn't the integration there be largely a function of representation on the board from the head of the committee on administration of Lee Street?

CA: No.

WC: It was more—

CA: They always had some elected board members who were—the chairman of the committee on administration was an ex officio member of the board. But there were always two or three others. Token, maybe. One marvelous old gal, Geraldine Westerband[?], was a member of this board for years. And I'm sure there were others that I don't know that were active. Well, I do know— [pause—unclear] I suppose her title would be a social worker, although actually, when I was working with her, she was a liaison under one of the—I guess Title II—one of the education acts. She was working between home and school with problem children of various kinds.

WC: Not Mrs. [Anne] Graves[-Kornegay]?

CA: No—Carrington.

WC: Oh, yes. Right.

CA: Now, I think that she was on board—

WC: Yeah, she was. Yeah.



CA: —before.

WC: Right, right. Well, what did you see as your mandate? I mean, what kinds of things were on the front burner when you became head of the Human Relations Committee? Was this a—Did you see one of your primary functions as working out problems within the Y, or was it primarily directed toward the outside community?

CA: Primarily outside. We—I think one of the—one impetus to action here came from national Y. They put a good bit of energy into a kit, I believe with some name like “Dialogue for Action” or something of this sort, which was kind of an operational step-by-step, “This is how you get people together and have communication from that,” target activities. The move to try to set up the Human Relations Committee started here prior to the national’s issuing of this material, but it—not too long prior to that—and it also came prior to, but not much ahead of, Dr. [Martin Luther] King’s death, so that things began to pop kind of all at once.

And we never seemed to lack for the big community problem. There was a time when simply having our dialogue sessions represented a kind of firm step to keep people in communication. I—we did do some letter writing, sent some letters to Mr. [L. Richardson] Preyer. I’m trying—there was an issue centering around the use of the [National] Guard at A&T, which it seems to me we expressed our opinions on. I’m not sure what—whether this had any influence on anything or not, but we tried generally to be supportive of whatever groups were—Do we need to go back?

WC: Yeah, sorry. This side is going to be over in just a little while.

So you started off with dialogue groups. Was that the first kind of activity which you engaged in?

CA: Essentially, yes. Now, we had—partly, to me, one of the initial problems—since I started with almost no knowledge of the people who were out there—was finding a committee and overcoming some of my own inertia, with which I still have [laughs] immense problems. My road to hell is paved with the sins of omission. I think I’m the world’s most inefficient type, but at any rate, by and large, my involvement with that group was not totally, but largely with dialogue groups.

WC: How would you start a dialogue group?

CA: The first time around—again, we used national Y materials to a point. We issued kind of a blanket invitation to the community through the newspapers, through the Y’s own mailing list. I think we used the Community Fellowship mailing list. I’m not sure whether

we did that initially. I think not. But not particularly any different technique than we'd use on any program.

WC: So that you would—you were in large part, at least in the beginning, seeking your own constituency to come and talk to each other.

CA: Well, yes or no, in the sense that—well, and we also sent letters to various other community groups. I—I have never known—they may know—have a better idea today than we did then—is when we mail to our membership, what our return actually is in terms of participants. We sent— mailing out, we—note—we sent notices all over the campuses in our community. So while our own membership would have been a good part, I suppose, of the participants, we were not really aiming at that.

WC: How many people would come to one of these sessions?

CA: The first series, initially, we had something over a hundred and split up. And we carried four groups more or less intact through to May, having started sometime in the fall, I think. Now, one of the groups of the four, one of them pretty well dissipated. But there were enough people left at the end of that school year so that we had an evaluation session and tried a town meeting. And that was a case—I don't know that Hal Sieber really had anything to do with that. No, I've forgotten the immediate timetable of events, but that probably was the spring of '69. And I think that that was in May, in fact. And I think that some of the troubles at Dudley [High School] and A&T were brewing.

We had issued invitations to City Council members. I forget precisely what we'd asked them to talk about, but it had to do with human relations and community problems. And I thought we had pretty good, well, contact with—I guess Jack Elam was mayor at that time. The invitations had been to these people, say, for three to four weeks. Anyway, I think prior to the date we had set for this—this was sort of to—well, and it was for that occasion that we used the Greensboro Community Fellowship mailing list. We put in considerable time in trying to reach numbers of people, and had, I guess—I don't know exactly how we're going to cope with this—anyway, we had somebody to moderate, and we had a backup plan [unclear], questions, so forth. Well, the Dudley business broke a few days prior, and without any notification to us, the—yes, and we were having this at Lee Street, and whether that was a factor, I do not know. But at any rate, nobody from the City Council came. And they were in session, but they had not notified us, and that too may have been a slip-up. We had sort of an informal apology from Elam. His secretary was supposed to have notified us, but it was not particularly well handled.

WC: And you had a lot of people there waiting for the people to come.

CA: We had a lot of people sitting on their duffs, and we had to pull that one out of the hat.

WC: A lot of black people?

CA: Yeah, it was mixed, very mixed.

WC: Did the fact that they didn't show up get a lot of publicity?

CA: Not really, not really. We probably did not use that effectively. On the other hand, I guess we figured that the general community tensions being what they were, that we didn't need to complicate official men's life any more, but there were some mighty mad people. I guess we pulled it off all right. Hal Sieber was one who sort of formed an impromptu panel. Major Lee[?] in housing—whatever that group is. Some other—those were the two I remember. Anyway, we kind of turned it into a dialogue of the large, but it was certainly not the meeting that we had intended.

WC: Yeah. That's interesting.

CA: Well, it was kind of interesting to us. We thought [it was] very typical of sort of the grossly inept communication that seemed, from the outside looking on, to be typical of that whole period. And I don't think the school system operated the way it should have. I think there was just a lot of slippage.

[End Tape 1, Side 1—Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

WC: —to which—the people who came to these dialogue sessions would have gotten into any kind of polarization. I mean, was there a—were these sessions ones in which, through your experience, people would—were they reinforced in what they already believed, or did they go through profound kinds of reassessments of things?

CA: Oh, I don't believe anybody went through any profound reassessment because I think, certainly in the white community, the participants were people already moved to the hope that goodwill would prevail, and who were not rigid in their beliefs about blacks or the race relations or whatever. In that sense, we were probably reinforcing what they already thought. However, I think that you always, if you're reasonably open to things, you do get some new input out of the idea exchange. It was over the course of, say, two years, I could see change in, well, for example, the black position.

WC: What kind of change?

CA: Well, the evolving specifically of the separatist pull was the most apparent thing to me. The [strains?], if you will, this seemed to be generating not so much in black/white, but within some of the blacks themselves. This was what I was seeing in this period.

The—one aspect of that, of course—I guess I was kind of tuned in to it, because, again, national Y entered the picture. I've forgotten the date on this, but they had a series of eight workshops around the country for Y people. I think they called them regional conferences, but what the—boy, I'm blank on what that title was. In any case, they kind of dropped it in our laps to have the regional conference here, and this was prior to—it must have been '70 national convention. These meeting were an effort to shake up what amounted to the black voice in Y nationally.

WC: Yeah.

CA: And that was—the meeting was in Houston, and the Young Women Committed to Action was a spinoff of that national convention. And what did they call those meetings? At any rate, by suddenly having this thing dumped in our laps here, I had to scratch around a bit and help lay some groundwork so that, for example, they wanted to look at black businesses in the community, so we made some calls and set up groups to go various places in town. And—well, I don't know. We didn't really—[how do I put this?—I think it wasn't too many—we—that was our main contribution to the program, because actually national staff came in and—I've forgotten her name, too—

WC: It wasn't Lillian Sharpe[?], was it?

CA: No. Lillian wasn't involved in this one. This was the National Office of Race—Racial Justice—big, tall black gal. She always struck me as very—she was very good. I could see her with a broom, you know, just giving a kid a whack that he'd never forget. Wright [Dorothy Irene Height] was her name? I'm not sure. Anyway, she's also been an officer—probably national president—of a black women's organization, except they were [unclear] negro women, I believe, with that group.

WC: Yeah, yeah. National Organization [sic—Council] of Negro Women.

CA: Yeah.

WC: Yeah.

CA: She was here, and then they brought some young black spokesmen. That's what they had.

WC: And didn't this lead to a request from some black women in Greensboro for funding to go the [Congressional] Black Caucus before the Houston convention?

CA: Yeah.

WC: Was that a divisive issue?

CA: No. We—As a matter of fact, that was one of the things our committee did was help raise some money to get her there.

WC: Who was that woman that was sent?

CA: Georgia Pennix[?].

WC: Georgia Pennix. Yeah. She's not here anymore, is she?

CA: Yes.

WC: She is?

CA: Yes.

WC: Still with the Y?

CA: Yeah, staff.

WC: Here or there or both?

CA: Both. Bur she's teen—on the teen staff. Georgia—I was trying to think whether anybody else attended any of those sessions. Shirley Frye, Georgia, and I guess Helen Ashby went, but I think that's all the money we had. Georgia was kind of an interesting person to be involved in that, because she—how can I put it?—does not show her feelings. She's very soft-spoken and tends not to—to me at least—take strong stands on things, so that I suspect that the—whatever the effects of those meetings, the spin back to the association was lessened by her own nature, because she's not inflammatory and she couldn't come back and immediately tool up to—

WC: Who were some of the people—other people who were active on your Human Relations Committee?

CA: I—that's one list I should've gone over. Well, Yvonne Johnson, staff—present staff—came in at that point as a volunteer. Most—let's see—we had lots of young [unclear], my age almost—a gal named Carole Treadway who is a very interesting person. I have not seen much of her lately. Her husband is on the Bennett [College] faculty. They are white, and they have adopted a black child. I suspect that while these dialogue groups—you know, it's very hard to measure whether you do anything or not—but I think that for the Treadways, for Carole—who is, again, very mild—we seem to have people with very low fuse levels, or what do I want to say?—maybe that's backwards—I mean people who are slow to anger involved in these things, whether that's—I don't know what that said. But anyway, Carole never talked about their own situation, or seldom, I'd say, not until these dialogues had gone on for a very long time. But I think for her, and later for her husband as well, this must have been one of the few outlets that they had. And so I still don't know their social situation. I think it must be constrained considerably. In any case, she was very helpful. And they have some other problems, too. Their son is a hemophiliac. They have an older boy and an adopted black baby. So they've had just immense personal difficulties.

WC: Wow.

CA: We had the—a sizeable—well, not sizeable number, but several women who have been very strong over the years: Louise Smith, Betsy Taylor, Kay Troxler, [pause] Carrington and [unclear].

WC: Phyllis?

CA: No. Marietta. Yeah, Marietta Carrington—Marietta Farlow[?] Now, I tried not to rely too much on the women who had been longtime Y people, because I think they—for the most part, many of them were older and they had other kinds of commitments, so that we tried to use as the workforce some of the younger, newer people. I've lost another name. The wife of the current chairman of A&T's engineering school was quite active. They had not been here very long at that time. Well, Zoe Barbee, a little bit. [chuckles] I can't remember anybody's name. I just know great [unclear], also A&T type, also a member of the Y board at various times, now retired. You've probably talked to her. She was in home economics and worked on the Buildings and Rooms Committee here, I think was her last—

WC: Yeah. I think I have the name somewhere. So the committee was fifty-fifty black and white, just about?

CA: Well, just about. It varied some. I—there's a name—there is another woman whose name—I'm going to have to look this one up because she's a puzzle to me. She was white, and her husband is or was a Cone Mills employee, and they lived at that time in the area of the—I remember that's at Proximity [Cotton] Mill—I think it is Proximity Mill in the northeast section of town. And this gal was one of the people who came to Helen Ashby and said, "I want to do something about race relations." And this is not a segment of the community that I usually think of as being engaged in this sort of effort.

WC: So she came from a working class family?

CA: I would think so. No, I really don't know anything about her own background. She—we lost her for committee work. She went to work herself. This is a continuing problem with all committees. [chuckles] Let's see. We had a speakers' bureau. Now this was short-lived because we didn't pursue it, but I think our one-shot appearance was reasonably successful. Let's see, who did that? Marietta Carrington and Georgia were two. I think we had six people. Marnie Gutsell probably was another one who was—

WC: Who?

CA: Marnie Gutsell.

WC: Gutsell?

CA: Yes.

WC: How do you spell that last name?

CA: It's G-u-t-s-e-l-l, I think. Her husband [James] is Guilford College faculty. They're on leave this year. She was active on the committee. Estelle Himes—her husband [Joseph] is UNCG sociology. They have lived in Durham for a while.

WC: He's blind, isn't he?

CA: Yeah.

WC: Did your committee get involved very much in the Dudley and A&T conflict?

CA: Not directly. Now, we—well, two things. We'd had some—we knew Nelson Johnson, who was kind of a spokesman, at least for a while, with A&T, and who was instrumental, I think, in setting up GAPP [Greensboro Association of Poor People].

WC: Yeah. When you say, “We knew Nelson Johnson,” you mean you did, or the committee?

CA: Well, I did, but I think the committee knew him, and certainly Margaret Headen, who was the Y staff person at the building over there, and Georgia. I think, in fact, at that time, Georgia’s office was over there. And Nelson did come to dialogue groups occasionally and bring associates with him. He would come with three or four young men. To that extent, we had some feel for who he was and kind of a stance that he was taking, certain kinds of things. There was another fellow that was very active with him.

WC: Vincent McCullough?

CA: May well be. Did he sort of disappear from the scene?

WC: I think so. He’s not here now.

CA: I’ll—I—this is not germane exactly to what we’ve been saying, but another guy we had quite a bit of interaction with was Gist—Herman Gist.

WC: Herman Gist, yeah.

CA: Who has been a puzzle to me.

WC: Now, he’s fairly—he’s older, isn’t he?

CA: Yes, he’s older. Oh and I—one of the other women who was active for a while was Taylor—black Taylor as opposed to white Taylor. The Herman—Herman Taylor? In any case, her husband’s an attorney. And she had a dialogue group at their house on one occasion, and came to meetings for a while. Going back to A&T and Dudley business—now Yvonne Johnson’s current staff. Yvonne, again, in her volunteer days went—I think that she was responsible for setting up one dialogue session at which we must have had—I don’t think I exaggerate when I say around twenty Dudley—well, not just Dudley—Dudley and Lincoln [Junior High School] students meeting with the—I don’t remember which of the dialogue groups this was; it doesn’t really matter—but anyway, and as an invited guest had at that time the only woman on the school board. She’s—I think—

WC: Myra Kennedy Harris[?]

CA: Yes. That’s right, Harris. Is she in real estate person?



WC: She's a lawyer.

CA: Lawyer. Okay. She came and I—gee, I don't know whether we had anyone from the Dudley faculty or not. I think Mrs. Harris was the prime balance board for the session, and I think it went very well. Now, I don't remember whether that was before or after the riot period.

WC: Probably after.

CA: I think that it was after, because it seems to me that the public information officer for the public schools came in for his share of the scorching. But that was an interesting session. Now, whether it—you know, again, what it did, I don't know.

WC: Yeah. But the—you said you'd had—you knew Nelson Johnson. Would people, when you were on the committee, talk to him about the situation? Would you be intermediaries in any way between himself and other people he couldn't necessarily reach on his own, or—

CA: No, I was not. Now, possibly there very well may have been some—some people he did contact.

WC: What was your impression of him?

CA: I think he was an extremely bright guy, clearly a young man with a cause, very intense.

WC: Good leader?

CA: Well, this far away from it, that's hard to answer. He seemed to serve the purpose of the time. Now, in that same period, or shortly thereafter, when the flap about the black school in Durham—

WC: Malcolm X?

CA: Yeah, Malcolm X University evolved, and who was that?

WC: Well, his anglicized name was Howard Fuller.

CA: Yeah. Nelson did not have the flamboyance and appeal of Howard Fuller. And in fact, I don't know how much of Nelson's own inspiration came from Howard Fuller, whether

perhaps Fuller was not sort of a leader or a model of inspiration or something or other for Nelson.

WC: Did you have the sense at that time that the city was just terribly polarized and that race conflict—violent racial conflict—was imminent?

CA: I—well, not really. I think, however, that the whole bit with the National Guard was psychologically very nerve-wracking, and that if there was a time when people really felt that confrontation was kind of there, it was when the Guard was here. That even with the riot situation—well, I don't know. There were some kind of rough incidents there for individuals, but I think by and large the town as a whole—you know, the bulk of the white community goes on its daily round and doesn't even know that the southeast quadrant of the city is there.

WC: Yeah. Right.

CA: And to that extent, there—it's sort of a safety valve. Now, there was a little stuff of conversation, and I think—I don't think really very widespread—about what are you going to do if it spills over into your neighborhood. But again, I think a lot of that was exacerbated by the presence of men with rifles showing up on the rooftops.

WC: Would you and your committee have much to do with, or was there much communication with, older black leaders like Vance Chavis, Julius Douglas, people like that?

CA: Well, Vance came to dialogue groups from time to time, as did Douglas—not with any regularity. I have always had the feeling—now Margaret Headen was certainly a contemporary of those men, and I always felt that if they had things to say, that they pretty well got it fed into the equation. Now, again, in terms of the age differentials, I—I'm too far away from it—but I think that there were situations where young blacks took a stand on something and pushed that age group into doing something. Possibly a case in point, though I maybe have—my memory may not be good enough on it—but when the garbage workers went on strike here, Cecil was on this, was involved in serving as a spokesman for them. But at that point, I think one of the older—probably a black, probably a minister—who did that?—headed up kind of a negotiating committee which at—in one way I think could have been read as an effort on part of that generation to take a stand.

WC: Yeah, and take control of [something?] Would that have been Cecil Bishop or Otis Hairston?

CA: May have been Otis Hairston. I'm not really sure about that. I don't think Cecil Bishop, I believe at that time—or anyway in that period—was the chair of the city Human Relations Commission.

WC: He was head of the Community Unity thing, too, wasn't he?

CA: Yes, and—well, the last thing that I think he co-chaired with Dick [unclear]—I think maybe that was the Community Unity-inspired committee from Save the Schools.

WC: Yeah. Community—Concerned Citizens—Citizens for Concerned—I never can get that right—Citizens—

CA: Concerned Citizens for Schools?

WC: Yeah, something like that, yeah. Very—CCS.

CA: Yeah. And that big push—again, that was a thing that Hal Sieber, I'm sure, was pushing along—

WC: Yeah.

CA: —in various fronts. We supported this through the Y, but, you know, he didn't come to us and say, "Do this."

WC: Yeah, yeah.

CA: You know, we had sent a letter to—to, I guess it was [school superintendent Wayne] House. I don't know. [Phil] Weaver—I can't remember when Weaver died.

WC: It was around '68.

CA: But that's kind of pointless speculation, but I wonder—I had wondered at the time—I still wonder whether there were some communications problems [that] would have been and what they apparently were if he had been superintendant of schools.

WC: You mean Weaver was better than House? That kind of—

CA: That was my impression, though I had no firsthand contact with Weaver.

WC: What kind of sense do you have of the—you had indicated earlier that you thought that things—communications weren't very good and the school board was not being very effective at this point in time. What kinds of things did you have in mind?

CA: Well, the guy that really made people gnash their teeth was a fellow named, I believe, Owen Lewis, that had been a writer for the [Greensboro] *Daily News* and—I hope I have that name correct. In any case, it seems to me that he did an art review column, or something of that sort. And for reasons which I know nothing of, he was hired by the school system as a public relations person. Well, I watched him on a couple of occasions attempting to function as an information officer to a group of assembled people. Of course, they were hot spots, and I think that he was sent out on missions that he simply should not have been sent on. And the administrator who told him to go made a bad decision. Now that wasn't the school board's fault. In that sense, they had to come along and pick up the pieces, but I assume that they had approved his appointment—

WC: Yeah.

CA: —someplace along the way.

WC: What kinds of things did he do to screw things up?

CA: Well, I think for one thing that—I don't know. He did not appear to have ever had this kind of experience before. I don't think he knew people in the black community. He looked absolutely petrified, personally, on some of these occasions when he would be picked up by television newscasts. And I think there was some indication with the first Dudley business that—well, I've forgotten the immediate back and forth of it—but he had made a particular effort to, say, get the superintendent to go to Dudley. Again, maybe this was actually later done; I don't know. But he was unsuccessful as an intermediary, and then kind of compounded confusion all along the line.

WC: Was the liberal community in Greensboro—liberal white community—very upset with the school board for their constant appeals of the HEW [United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] orders, or was there a feeling that the school board was really doing a good job?

CA: I don't know. I can't really fairly assess that. I suppose that to the extent that the Concerned Citizens for Schools was generated and it was fairly effective—Joan Bluethenthal, I think, was the moving force behind that, though I do not know her well. It seems to me that she's a very effective gal. And I don't—I think that the people who were concerned turned in to help that, and that there really wasn't much carping, and to

the extent that there was some time there, it allowed—well, it allowed some time to work things through.

WC: Yeah, to prepare. A couple of quick questions—Was the Structure Committee set up with the explicit mandate to integrate the two Ys?

CA: Yes or no. There were no—I don't think there were any written instructions to the committee. We did have, we thought, a fairly explicit mandate from national Y to make sure that there was no discrimination within the association, and we still have that—I don't know—that is, that set of instructions. And they later followed up with the association review process, which is, of course, much broader than that, but that's a part of it.

WC: Was there a feeling that this work of the Structure Committee—I guess what I'm asking was: did people generally feel that this was an effort to remake the Y so that there would no longer be a black Y and a white Y?

CA: I'm sure there were those who interpreted it that way. For the women who were on the committee on administration—Anne Graves, for example, was chairman at that time—this probably did represent a remaking of the Y to the degree that we did away with the committee on administration. However, we did not do away with the offices—well, positions that the women who were on the committee on administration held, which is to say that group was absorbed almost toto into the—onto the existing board.

WC: Right. I guess one of the things that intrigues me is that, you know, despite an effort over the years by the board to present the Y as a single organization, there seems to have been fairly common recognition that in reality there were two Ys, and one was black and one was white, and at some point that changed. And it seems—at least the change seems to—if it didn't coincide with, it certainly culminated with the structural reform.

CA: Certainly, the one imperative, as it was phrased out of the 1970 national convention, was taken very seriously here. The thing on the—I thought I could say [unclear] but anyway—racism diss—not dissolution—do it in, in any case. And we did, I'm sure, lose a few Y memberships because of that. Nobody knows how many. And so many things happened kind of all at the same time with construction of this building, and the loss of an executive, dismemberment of the staff—disgruntlement and dismemberment of the staff [laughs] and so forth, that I think for those who stayed with the association, it was one Y. There was no choice. It had to sink or swim.

WC: Yeah. It's an interesting irony. I think that once it does become an integrated Y, it becomes one Y, physically as well as politically and psychologically, I guess.

CA: Which, obviously, is a step the YM [YMCA—Young Men's Christian Association] has never taken. You know, whether that's good or bad, I don't know. I think they pussyfooted around a lot. [laughs]

WC: They're in it—yeah, that's a very interesting conflict. Why is it you think that the YWCA has not had the ability to exercise more power independently?

CA: Primarily because I guess we are afflicted with the woman's slot in our social system, which is to say we have never had the budget that has made us independent in the same sense, say, as the YM, added to the belief that this was a service organization. Consequently, our dues should stay low, we should provide activity—

[End of Interview]