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William Henry Chafe Oral History Collection

INTERVIEWEE: Cecil Bishop
INTERVIEWER: William Chafe
DATE: October 12, 1977

WILLIAM CHAFE: In the middle of the tape I brought back from your house last time, all of the sudden rock 'n roll performance comes on. My son had recorded partly over the second side. [laughter] We only lost about fifteen minutes at the end of our conversation, thank goodness. The rest of it has been left intact. I was chagrined, to say the least.

I guess what I would really like to focus on today, if I could, is the period after '63. Maybe since we don't have too much time, just to focus on the point at which you become involved first with the Human Relations Commission and the point also at which you see action taking place in regard to the [Greensboro] Chamber of Commerce. Both those questions, I guess, are the ones I would like to dwell on primarily, and then maybe talk some more about school desegregation if we have time to do that. [pause] Did you join the chamber of commerce? [Do] you remember what year it was you became active in the chamber?

CECIL BISHOP: Well, let's see. I joined the chamber—it must have been somewhere around '63, just as a member. I guess '65 or '66 before I became active—'66, somewhere around in that timeframe. Because the whole thrust sort of took a change with the emergence of Hal Sieber. Allen Wannamaker was president of the chamber, and those two together started that movement that made the Greensboro chamber quite different from most chambers, in that while it was made up of a lot of people who were white conservatives—First Baptist, banker, insurance type people—it also included other types—black, younger people—and many of the positions that were expressed you would not expect to find coming out of the chamber.

WC: Right. Now did you—who first—do you remember when you were first—did you initiate the joining of the chamber of commerce? Was there a movement in the black community generally to join the chamber of commerce? Did someone make initiative from that side?

CB: From the chamber—the chamber was making the initiative, and that was largely done by Mike Fleming. I don't know if you have met that name.

WC: Yeah.

CB: Mike Fleming was dealing with that aspect of it and the Eight O'clock Club. And Mike was interested in getting membership for the chamber, and so he went out to get membership for the chamber, white, black. He did quite a bit in the black community. I don't know. I imagine that was by somebody's design, but he did a lot of work and brought in a lot of black people.

WC: Now this would have been right after the '63 demonstrations or almost coinciding with them.

CB: Oh, I would say probably right around that time. I'm not sure if it was just before. It would seem to me it was probably just after.

WC: So that almost in some way it would seem to reflect a consciousness that—

CB: I would think that had better be checked, because what you would say would be very pivotal of whether it was before or after. It was around that time, but whether it was before or after it's really difficult for me to say.

WC: How many—who would be some of the people that you joined with at the same time? Are there names that—and Lewis Dowdy was one of the first blacks on the board of the chamber but—

CB: Oh, yeah, other people like—we had a lot. I don't know that we all came in at the same time. Just people that I knew who were with the chamber would include people like Arthur Jackson, Jimmie Barber.

WC: Would Vance Chavis have already been a member?

CB: Vance Chavis, yeah. Carl Goode—I cannot remember his first name, but it's Goode.

WC: David Coley, would David Coley have already been there?

CB: David Coley. We were all coming in about that time, either that time or thereafter.

WC: Would you say that the people who joined the chamber at that point were primarily professional and business people, or would there have been a lot of small business people and tradesmen as well?

CB: Well, all of the blacks would be small business people like—those who were in business would probably be operating a dry cleaning establishment, barber shop, or some type of small shop, television repair. One of the guys, Parker, was a small suit shop, the formal rental type shop. The others were professional people, and because of your educational community—A&T [North Carolina A&T State University], et cetera, Bennett College—you had a good group of professional jobs.

WC: Did you know Ralph Johns at all?

CB: Yes.

WC: Now was he in Greensboro, I guess, most of the time when you were there? He left before you left?

CB: I was there during the time he was there, and then he subsequently left.

WC: Yeah, right. At some point I want to ask you about him if I can. He seemed to have been a figure of some controversy in the black community as well as the white community, and I would like to be able to get into that a little bit.

You said you became actively involved in the chamber in '66 or around there. What would have been the forum for that activity? Do you recall what kinds of things—

CB: I guess it was around 1968, the Martin Luther King assassination, the Community Unity [Council] became active at that point. At that time I was already with the Human Relations Commission. However, Community Unity was working also to quiet a very volatile situation in the community. There had been a shootout over at A&T and a riot and curfew, et cetera. And the mayor was kind of one side then the other, one day saying what he would do and do the opposite the next day, that kind of thing.

WC: Was this [Jack] Elam?

CB: No, this was Carson Bain.

WC: Carson Bain.

CB: So it was out of that milieu things. However, being a director on the chamber, the board was really not the decision-making body. The board sanctioned decisions that had already been made. I'll put it that way.

WC: And who would make those decisions?

CB: It was hard to get at that. It was hard to get at that.

WC: Who would have been the instrument of letting you know what those decisions were?

CB: Well, things would come up in board meetings that we would have to act on, maybe from other committees, et cetera. But you always had, as I guess you do in many organizations, you had the pretty clear feeling this is what we're supposed to do or this is not what we're supposed to do. Undoubtedly, Hal Sieber, who is quite expert in—I use the word in its highest sense—manipulating. And he—

[Recording paused]

CB: —background was the hand of Hal Sieber. He was able to move people without people realizing that he was moving. And sometimes when they did realize it, they realized it but also there wasn't much they could do about it.

WC: So he was really operating between two forces of people.

CB: True.

WC: But in a sense coordinating both of them to his own design. Would you say that's—?

CB: True. That's a fair statement. And his design, of course, was in keeping with the direction from the chamber, which was in keeping with the idea that a good community is a community where there is not racial unrest and racial bickering, et cetera. And this is good business. This is good for business to have a stable community where you don't have a lot of protesting, uprising, et cetera.

WC: Now that was the argument certainly which he would use to the business community, the white business community, in support of his endeavors. My own sense is that he had something deeper in mind himself which enabled him to use that argument that was nevertheless—in his own mind would have brought together—brought about something more far-reaching in the way of social change. I won't ask about—that's just my sense of what he was in some ways about.

CB: I think that is a correct assessment. However, I'm about at that junction now. But in the midst of these things, while one would think that, you had so much of an eye—and I think other people, too, other black people—had a great deal of distrust of good-doing

whites to the extent that even though we may have thought this, there was still a little bit suspect. Just watch, be very careful, be vigilant. We really weren't sure.

WC: Right, so that he obviously had a lot of credibility to create that wasn't there to start with.

CB: Yeah.

[Recording paused]

WC: We were talking about Sieber—

CB: Sieber, right.

WC: —and whether—how—the fact that there would be suspicion about his motivations, probably, because of where he was coming from. Just in terms of that '68 experience—that was the time that Willie Grimes was shot, wasn't it, or was that the year later? I get them mixed up all the time in my head. It was the Dudley flare up over Claude Barnes which then became—it came to involve A&T.

CB: Yeah, and the National Guard came in and all. That was when Willie Grimes was shot.

WC: Yeah, so that was '69 then. And '68 would have been—I guess it's my fault. I should just have those two events set up in my mind and I don't. But I think that Willie Grimes was shot in '68, after King's assassination.

CB: Yeah, I believe that's what happened, because the National Guard was in town and there was some effort to tie that to the National Guard.

WC: Yes. And there seemed to be—now I am—it is the next year, because the Black Liberation Front at A&T is involved in '69, and that's when they raided Scott Hall and they found the weapons and things like that. So it is that next year. Well, I guess what I'm—I'd like to sort of focus a little bit on how you, in relationship to other people in the black community, and then the chamber, became involved in that effort to kind of stabilize what was an unstable situation. If you can recall some of the things that happened in that period and the kinds of people you would be dealing with and—particularly the mayor, for example—the mayor on one hand maybe, and students in the black community on the other hand.

CB: Well, the mayor—in '68 Carson Bain was mayor. And I remember very well we were at a meeting and he had just mentioned that—how things were going to move and what was

going to happen, and then within twenty-four hours he slapped this curfew on them, without any consultation, after the statement made just a few hours before, which left a not so good taste in the mouth of the black community. You had people like that, of the mayor's thinking.

You had people who thought that the A&T students were just way, way out of hand. And maybe at some points they were, because this feeling was shared by blacks and whites, because you did have an element that was quite different from the majority of the student body. You had—this element was distrustful, tended to be disruptive of anything of the normal channel establishment type of procedure for dealing with the problems. There was somebody in the National Guard that wanted to bring cannon up and blast the dormitory. I think I mentioned in our last conversation that at A&T that was the only place during that period on campus where the students shot back.

And in all of that there was enough sentiment of goodwill, however, to want to work at preserving what most of us thought was a good city and town. That came from various quarters of the community, white and black. The whole action was deplored by—the action in terms of the shooting disturbance in that regard that took place. Of course, that was nationwide you had a lot of that in this time. But it was deplored by what you'd call "responsible" citizens of the community, deplored by some students. All of the students were not on that wagon.

WC: Now in terms of the student body, there seemed to be—at least one version of what was going on on campus that I've heard is that there is a very what I guess you would call a radical militant group, called the Black Liberation Front, which is separate from the group which later forms GAPP [Greensboro Association of Poor People] or the Nelson Johnson/Vince McCullough group. And then there is another group over here which is more conservative and I guess more traditional student type, and just in terms of not being political all the time or having primary in their minds social change. Does that alignment or that description of the student body as—seem accurate to you, as you recall?

CB: Yes, that's very accurate I think. And I'm trying to think of the guy's—they were young—oh, naturally they would be young as students—but there was one guy whose name I cannot recall who was a leader of this more conservative group. I can't think of his name. I can picture him quite clearly. But the Vince McCullough/Nelson Johnson faction actually threatened bodily harm this guy, told him they would literally castigate him if he didn't go along with their program.

WC: Willie Drake?

CB: No.

WC: No. Calvin something?

CB: Calvin—

WC: Okay, I have his name. Calvin Edwards or Calvin—I do have his name. So he would have been the leader of the more conservative?

CB: Right, to a point and then he sort of kind of knuckled under. I wouldn't say he joined that group, but he sort of knuckled under. The word that I received was that he was just threatened.

WC: Now, were you able to—did you have good communication with both the radical group and let's call it the Johnson group? Did you have—were you able to both make them see your point of view and perhaps also make them trust you as a spokesman for their point of view?

CB: I don't know that—how trustworthy they were of me as a spokesperson. I think at points we saw each other's point of view. There were even some places where the point of view coalesced. But when it got to the matter of method and the way of executing or initiating and carrying out our various philosophical positions, then that was where there was sort of a parting of the ways. There was much—I'll put it this way, there was respect for each other's point of view. They knew where I was coming from as a black minister; I knew where they were coming from. And in all of this, we respected each other's position and we respected the idea that both of us had something of a common goal. We were going at it in different ways, and I would question their ways and they would question my ways. Oversimplified but summarized: for me theirs was too radical or mine was too conservative.

WC: There are times when Nelson Johnson in his writing, particularly for the [*Carolina*] *Peacemaker*, seemed to be trying to establish a community. There's a sense of alliance with people who otherwise would've been thought to be against him.

CB: You see, Nelson Johnson had quite a shift in his own philosophy, because for a good while he would not work with anybody who was not of his—pretty much of his persuasion. Then there was a sort of turning around, and Nelson Johnson was working with everybody in the community—anybody, black especially, regardless of your position—and was taking initiative, coming to lay out his case and to enlist your support, sort of co-op you in, which was a change.

WC: Would this coincide with the founding of GAPP, or would this be later on with SOBU [Students Organization for Black Unity]?

CB: This was probably with GAPP, because GAPP did move more into the community and touched on tenants and public housing and that kind of thing.

WC: And they'd work with you on that kind of issue?

CB: Oh, yeah. We'd work together on those issues: matters of conditions in public housing, recreation, so forth. Yeah, we would have common ground.

WC: Would that kind of issue be brought by you or by GAPP specifically to the Human Relations Council, or—

CB: It might be. It could go either way. I don't think they took a lot of stock in the Human Relations Commission. One of its shortcomings, admitted shortcomings of the commission itself, was the only thing it could do was investigate—

WC: Right.

CB: —and recommend and just try to use moral persuasion, which to quote Martin Luther King, "You can't use with immoral men." They didn't put a regular stock in it. It provided a forum, however. It provided—the Human Relations Commission provided a forum, and many times news coverage was there.

WC: Yeah, yeah.

CB: And that provided a forum. A lot of this, I think, may have been fanned by the fact that here's a chance to—for that kind of media projection or projection by the media.

WC: Now when did you become head of the Human Relations Commission?

CB: [pause] It must have been around '67. I think it was '67.

WC: So that—were you head of the commission at the time of Dr. King's assassination?

CB: Yeah, I believe so.

WC: Yeah. And when that happened—I guess I've heard from Hal Sieber that he was immediately in contact with various people in the community to try to find a way of

dealing with the anger which would be present. Do you recall that, the specifics of that kind of—you know, were they that kind of calls? How did you all—?

CB: I don't recall the specifics. I do know that we had—I really don't recall the specifics. We were trying to plan a memorial service or something of that nature, a memorial service. The specifics of what happened around that time just escape me.

WC: All right. From what you said so far, it seems that certainly Carson Bain in his own response did not measure up to what you at least, and probably you and some others, expected of him. And did that create a long term kind of estrangement with the political power structure, or is that something which the Committee on Community Unity was able to sort of work around?

CB: The Community Unity Committee did work around it. I think actually that incident created sort of a—some credibility loss as far as Carson Bain was concerned. For me, there was another incident I think that just preceded that a little bit that grew out of the hearings on housing that the Human Relations Committee had conducted. And they conducted all these hearings and said some things to [Greensboro] City Council and then they were to respond. And they responded with a great big thick book of clippings and pictures about housing situation of Greensboro.

And the mayor called a meeting of the Council and Human Relations Commission out at what was then a Hot Shoppe on Summit Avenue. No press, we were just going to meet for dinner and we were going to discuss this. And he really thought they had scored. I can't figure out why, but he was very elated and animated about this document and to which my response was, "We were looking for some answers to the questions we raised. These are not answers." Carson did tend to be a little hot-headed. He got mad, picked up that book sitting over, "You want some damn answers, we'll give them some damn answers!" Grabbed the book and stormed out and left the meeting that he had called just there.

That sort of created an element, a new element of tension, estrangement, as far as our relationship was concerned. In my estimation, just as a politician at any level or a person, he sort of was disappointing. Regardless of his stance on the issue, he could've dealt with it and presented himself in quite a different manner.

WC: Would the Community Unity group—they would meet on a monthly basis?

CB: Yeah.

WC: And be thirty or forty people, is that correct? Was it that large?

CB: I don't think it was that large.

WC: Not that large.

CB: No, I feel like it was maybe, oh, fifteen or twenty people.

WC: Now, did the idea for the cell groups and the discussion sessions come out of that Community Unity group, or did the community—do you remember how that process worked, of meeting for—

CB: Different places?

WC: Yeah.

CB: I think that came out of Community Unity. A little bit later, on the whole matter of school desegregation, there were meetings and there was a seminar up at Chinqua Penn [Plantation]. All of that was the chamber working under the table when those things happened.

WC: Was that Chinqua Penn meeting sort of the encounter group? There was an encounter group session at one point where people were basically trying to come in touch with their racial feelings. Was that that session, or, you know, where there was almost kind of a “What are you feeling about this question now?” atmosphere?

CB: [unclear]

[Recording paused]

CB: That group was made up of like students, teachers, principals, school administrators. And I think maybe that was the encounter group. I think I'm right. It was because they were dropping all of their other protective trappings and having just to me on a horizontal basis—Yeah, it was—approached that with some fear and trembling. [laughter]

WC: I would think, yes. Carson Bain wasn't there, I expect. [laughter] In terms of—if I can ask you some questions about the black community during this period from, let's say, your active involvement, your chairmanship of the Human Relations Commission through the desegregation process in '71-'72. I guess one of the senses I have—and maybe you've already talked about this really in terms of Nelson Johnson's change of strategy or heart—one of the senses I guess I have is that through both the student movement after King's death and then the, certainly, the Dudley High School disruption

and carryover of that onto the A&T campus, that there was perhaps a greater generational gap being manifested than had been true of the '60 or the '63 period of demonstrations. And that one of the issues here was a much more clear-cut younger rejection of older leadership. Does that—how does that comport with your recollection of that, or is that just an appearance which comes through reading some newspapers, rather than—?

CB: I think that's a pretty accurate assessment. [Nineteen] sixty-three, for example, in the protest demonstrations are just mass meetings. You would have many adults participating, going to the mass meetings, voicing their feelings, taking part in the marches, even being arrested. Whereas in the '68 and '69 or—yeah, '68-'69 on up through the '71 period that you referred to, you did not have this broad spectrum. You had mostly students who were in fact rejecting older leadership. Example: by the '68 period, you had student demands. As you recall all, over the country you were having student takeovers and student demands, and you had much the same thing there, the student government demanding an office for the president. The student government president saying, "Well, you're not going to tell us, we're going to tell you. We want representation on the board of trustees. We want to say who will be our representative on the board of trustees," that kind of rejection of older leadership.

WC: Now that would come primarily in terms of the student group we talked about, from the Johnson and the Black Liberation Front, as opposed to from Calvin whatever his last name is, from that group. Would that be correct?

CB: Yes, primarily. But then Calvin was not in great opposition to those items. When you got out to the matter of "We'll do these things by any means possible," then there was sort of a breaking away. "We will provoke violence." Then Calvin was not really into that type.

WC: How about Malcolm X Liberation University? Did that have any support at all from the adult black community, or was that seen as something which was off the wall?

CB: I really think it was seen as something off the wall. I remember being invited to a meeting. I remember one meeting at our own church on this matter. I remember talking to some people and talking to Alvin Blount, who was a physician, and several others, and none of us could see really how this kind of education was going to help, be useful, or be fulfilling to black young people—just could not see it.

WC: Now, in terms of your own church or the churches of your colleagues, would you have found within your own youth groups, in your own young people at that time, anger and rejection of, let's say, your leadership or of the policies of the older members of the church?

CB: Some. I remember we had discussion one evening that the youth group of the church was initiating, leading. And they had parents to come in as panelists with them, and they really did a takeoff on the parents, which indicated a kind of respectful rejection. It was rejection that was done, but it was not with disrespect. And we were able to do a lot of communicating in that session. But there was some. Like I say, it was with respect. There was not this total disrespect for authority or the church, et cetera, but there was a great deal of questioning and non-acceptance of a lot of things past that [unclear] church values of the church and the adult community.

WC: I had the sense that John Marshall Stevenson [now Kilimanjaro] at that time saw himself as—and certainly saw the *Peacemaker* as a cohesive force which was going to tie the community together despite these divisions, and “Old Nosey,” in a sense, would berate either side for either hanging back or going too far and do that kind of thing. Do you think that—how important was the *Peacemaker* and Stevenson to the black community’s collective existence during these years, do you think?

CB: I think the *Peacemaker* called attention to many things in the black community that the white press would never have picked up, and it provided a forum for disseminating information to the black community—again, the white press may not disseminate. They were friendly reporters, but sometimes the reporting of it was one thing, the publishing of it would be another ballgame. Of course, it was not difficult to get items into the *Peacemaker*. In terms of its bridging, I don’t know. I think that Steve saw the *Peacemaker* as an instrument that black people did not have but really needed so that they could really find out what was going on and have a chance to tell their own story. I really think that’s how he saw it.

WC: Do you think it was as important a force as he also saw it, or was it a reflective force rather than a shaping force? There are points in his editorials, for example, four, five or six years after the paper has started where he really is almost claiming most of the credit for changes in the political structure, changes in the nature of black appointments to city agencies, changes in business opportunity, and things like that. It’s a hard question and I realize. If it’s not fair then just say so.

CB: Well, I think the *Peacemaker* takes—shares in the credit, but you have a whole diversity of events. You have many diverse events taking place that I think contributed to those gains, and I think the *Peacemaker* can share, but by no means take the lion’s share of the credit.

WC: Because certainly groups—there was almost a kind of—there were three or four different streams, it would seem, coming together.

CB: Oh, right.

WC: And SOBU is in some ways making much more legitimate some of the things that you would be advocating. You're advocating the same things, but just their presence makes you more acceptable, whereas if they had not been there, your demands would have been seen as being unacceptable.

CB: Sure. That became good leverage, too. "Who do you want to deal with? Are you going to deal with us, or you're going to deal with those radicals?" And at some points we knew that we needed each other, and there were points where we knew—when I say we, I'm speaking of those of us who were establishment types, the ministers, the professionals—we knew that we needed the troops, and the troops knew that, "Now, they ain't going to listen to us. So you all go and talk, but don't sell us out. Be sure to tell it like it is." That was about the—that was one way that there was a real sense of knowing that we kind of need each other. Even though we may be at different ends of the pole, we need each other.

WC: And I suppose some of those became most pronounced over the question of desegregation. I mean in a sense you were involved in mobilizing the black community in support of busing, while there were some members of the black community who seemed to be against that. What—was there a significant number of the percentage of the black community which resisted those changes when they came?

CB: Not a significant portion. Nelson Johnson's group, for example, by and large opted for the community school. There were those of us who said that you had a wrong that has been created, and that is black children have not be able to receive quality education. And the same things that were used to deny that kind of education may have to be used in order to give that type of education. Busing was just an example, one of the instruments used. We also said you had to put the same resources, the same money, the same expertise behind quality education and equality education as was put in—

[Recording paused]

WC: Now Cecil Rouson—would Cecil Rouson have been representative of the Johnson group, or was he separate from them?

CB: At one point he was very much representative of that group, but he had a—I guess his switch was from Black Power to green power, because at one point—you may have some specific questions. I'm just throwing this out. At one point he was very militant, very adamant in terms of his position, very similar to Nelson Johnson. He took pride in that he was an associate of Malcolm X, and he really—he had nothing for white people to do.

But after a little while, several years, he went into business. And I remember very well, very clearly he was operating a Mobile station on Summit Avenue—right across the street, by the way, from the Hot Shoppe where the other incident had taken place—and he was saying, “You know, man, all of this running the streets, that ain't going to get it.” He said, “I need to make some money.” And he said, “The thing now is green power.” And he had sort of—not that he had completely advocated those ultimate ideas, but he had taken a little more—a little different approach and his outlook was more different.

WC: Well, he seemed to have appeared before the school board in coalition with a group of white parents opposing busing. I did not get the sense when he did that he was speaking for SOBU or the Johnson group, but that he was almost a part of a faction of his own on the busing question. I don't know, maybe that's—maybe he was in effect acting out the same position that Johnson held on the busing issue. And I'm not sure when the business, the green power would have come in. I'll need to check more into that. Did you have any involvement in the Herman Gist/Tom Bailey flare up vis-à-vis the poverty program and the control of community action funds and that kind of thing?

CB: No. I had a much better working relationship, however, with Tom Bailey than I did with Herman Gist. Tom just always impressed me as more responsible, thoughtful person in his approach to all of these matters even though there were places where we disagreed. I had the feeling that Herman Gist was more of a sensational opportunist, and I wasn't always sure that Herman Gist was operating—was motivated by Herman Gist. I had sometimes feelings that maybe he was getting encouragement from other quarters who may not even be our friends.

WC: I'm sort of skipping around here now, but at one point there was a housing question involving apartments owned by John Taylor, and I believe that—it may have been Apex; I'm not sure which apartments they were—but [cough] GAPP, I think, was organizing around this particular question having to do with improvements on the apartments. And Taylor was being called on the carpet for some of these things. And I've gotten the impression that in that particular instance at least, someone like Otis Hairston felt badly that Taylor—he thought Taylor might be being treating unfairly there. I wondered whether there's any information you have about that particular episode, but also whether the people who might have been involved in those tenant movements, whether there was any tension between their involvement vis-à-vis GAPP and their involvement vis-à-vis,

let's say, the established ministers in the community and leaders in the community. So I'm really asking, I guess, two questions. Is Hairston, Reverend Hairston's point of view about Taylor a reflection of a larger division which might have been developing between tenants being organized by GAPP and more established members of the community?

CB: Hairston's point of view probably did have considerable credence with people of the black community. John Taylor had done several things and had—for example, he was operating the Holiday Inn and just on his own decided to desegregate it, no fanfare, just accepted anybody who comes. And of course he sort of got his wrist slapped in the white community for that. So John Taylor was looked upon as a friend in the black community, and when this surfaced, "Hey, our friend is being treated badly," yet there may have been some areas where housing did need improving.

WC: And I guess it my recollection is he did make some improvements and then sold.

CB: Sold.

WC: Yeah, yeah. Would there have been other cases in which a difference of opinion might have evolved between, let's say, the tenants on the one side—the tenants and GAPP on the one side and more established leaders of the community on the other?

CB: Mostly on the matter of method I would say. The issues were usually areas where we were pretty much together, unless it would be the matter of, say, desegregation, busing, housing, work conditions, the Industries of the Blind working conditions, cafeteria workers' working conditions, sanitation workers' working conditions. It was a sense of unity and togetherness.

WC: The sanitation workers strike failed, didn't it? The others seemed to have succeeded, but the sanitation workers I believe—

CB: Yeah, it wasn't as successful as we had hoped.

WC: But you would have been involved in coordinating that and in supporting it?

CB: Had many meetings with them.

WC: Who were the leaders of the sanitation men themselves?

CB: That escapes me. A number of the ministers—George Gay, Julius Douglas, Otis Hairston, Prince Graves—all of these ministers were really with that particular cause.

WC: Which church is Prince Graves' church?

CB: St. James Baptist.

WC: St. James Baptist. That was one of the questions I was going to ask. Again, I guess that we have talked about the ministers in the earlier period, and I was wondering, in addition to yourself and Reverend Hairston and Reverend Douglas, who would have been the ones in the seventies who would have been mostly identified with the leadership, and I guess you just named—

CB: J. C. Peters, that's one I left out. He's United Methodist.

WC: I guess if I could skip back for a second to Ralph Johns if I could. Was there a resentment that he was in a sense adopting—seeming to adopt a role of leadership, or not leadership, but assuming the mantle of being a leader in the community?

CB: I think there may have been. There was mixed emotions, I would say. At some point you would think precisely what you have said, and at some other point you would think that Ralph is really doing something good. I also had the feeling that maybe out of his own sense of guilt that he was sort of almost offering himself up, because many times the positions that Ralph would take would be far ahead of the positions that we were taking, and sometimes they seemed rather impractical positions. Some of the things that Ralph would want to do, we would say, "Hey, no, don't do that." Just tactically sometimes they were just bad positions.

WC: We haven't talked at all about politics or not directly about politics. We've talked about the wider realm of politics, but the role played by black politicians in city government and the state government, and white politicians in the city and state government. I guess I'm sort of—I don't know which question to ask. But were people like Henry Frye, McNeill Smith, were they actively involved in the kinds of things you're talking about in '68 with the Community Unity? Were they actively involved in negotiations with Carson Bain? Would they have been significant figures in dealing with the whole conflict between the university and the city in '68- '69?

CB: in a behind the scenes way, yeah.

WC: Primarily behind the scenes.

CB: Right.

WC: What kind, I mean—

CB: Okay, for example maybe McNeill Smith would be the person who could pick up a telephone and get somebody [snaps] like that and say, “Look, I think we ought to meet some place and talk about this.” Entré. There might be some people in the white community, for example, that none of us could get the ear to that say Henry Frye could get the ear of, or Dave Morehead could get the ear of, or Vance Chavis could get the ear of. So it was almost like a bull pen. Here is a guy that you send in to pitch to a right-handed hitter.

WC: Right. Okay. Was George Evans, Dr. George Evans, thought of as being conservative on a lot of these questions?

CB: Yeah, probably because he was not on the frontline, and sometimes people with quiet, easy-going temperament are mistaken, too, for being soft on issues when they are not. He was criticized something by a person I recall for something that he said when he was a member of the school board, or something he did or did not do. But by and large he was much in our corner in a very supportive way and the whole time that I was there.

WC: He certainly was the only one who was opposed to fighting HEW [Department of Health, Education, and Welfare] on desegregation. I mean when the school board was voting to hire attorneys to do all this baloney.

CB: That may have been it. I’m just trying to think if it was surrounding that. There was one time I recall, but the specifics get away with me.

WC: Okay, I think you have been more than generous of your time and I really appreciate it. There will be a—

[End of Interview]