GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: Cecil Bishop

INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff, Jr.

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EUGENE PFAFF: --the Greensboro Public Library Oral History program. I'm speaking with Cecil Bishop, concerning the civil rights activities in Greensboro in the early 1960s. When did you come to Greensboro?

CECIL BISHOP: I arrived in Greensboro in November of 1960.

EP: Had the sit-ins pretty much quieted down by then?

CB: The initial movement that spread very quickly over North Carolina and other places had started and that initial fanfare had sort of passed. But it had created a groundswell, I think, that was by no means dead from February to November. If anything, I believe it sort of provided a kind of inspiration and motivation for a lot of things that did follow on into the sixties.

EP: And you were the minister of which church?

CB: Trinity AME Zion Church on East Washington Street. It was located there when I arrived and we remained there until 1966. And in 1966, we built a new facility and moved from 445 East Washington Street to 631 East Florida Street, the present location of Trinity AME Zion Church.

EP: The reason I ask whether they had quieted down is that in speaking with Jibreel Khazan, one of the original Greensboro Four, he says that when students got back from summer vacation in the fall of 1960, blacks were being served at Woolworth's and Kress. And the students did not immediately resume large-scale activities. He says that basically they began, a small group of students began meeting and discussing the problems of segregation in the immediate area and deciding what course of action they should take, which I understand included observation of the places that still remained segregated, and deciding whether they should sit-in or picket these establishments. Were you associated

with this activity in any way?

CB: I think my association probably came just a little later than that, because activity did begin to pick up relative to some other places in town that were operating on a segregated basis. And I did have very quickly a relationship with the student community. Twenty-five years ago, I was not a long, long way removed from the student mindset myself. So it was easy to establish rapport and a relationship.

If what you're asking was, like, come September when the students returned, was everything at the same pitch as it was in the spring of the year? I would have to say no. But what I am saying is that those activities in February, I definitely feel provided the springboard, the launching pad as I say, the inspiration and motivation for going on to these other places in Greensboro that were still segregated at the time.

EP: And your previous ministry had been where?

CB: In Rockville, Maryland.

EP: So, in anticipation of--did you come to Greensboro with the expectation of being involved in civil rights activity, given that it had originated the sit-ins of February 1960?

CB: Not really. My objective was really to come as pastor of Trinity AME Zion Church, and that was number one. But I did see then, and I still envision now, the pastor role as extending beyond the confines of the church itself, the church membership. I think one's ministry must go into the environs of the community where one serves. So, these things happening, I felt a responsibility as a minister to participate after I got here.
In Rockville, however, just as a sidelight, something similar had happened, and I was arrested there in a sit-in before coming to Greensboro.

EP: So you were fully prepared.

CB: Somewhat.

EP: You said that you very quickly got into a working relationship with the students in the community. Could you elaborate on the nature of this relationship?

CB: There was a foundation, the name of which escapes me. It seems like it was the Southern Christian Leadership Foundation that was based on A&T's [North Carolina A&T State University] campus. Reverend Cleo McCoy was college minister. The Reverend A. Knighton Stanley worked with this foundation. And I sort of had a working relationship with that. I had many members who were employed in some capacity at A&T. And, of

course, a lot of the young people in the congregation were students.

So, it was just almost a natural, that by virtue of the pastor role, that I touched these various places and was just sort of, as a natural, drawn into--that I would attend meetings of the student groups, participate in discussions, seminars, et cetera, particularly at A&T campus. And that was sort of how I moved in toward the students, who'd then want to have meetings, and they would want them at churches. And our church, Trinity Church, was always open for that kind of activity.

EP: So, the students did meet there to discuss these issues.

CB: Yes, frequently.

EP: Did you just provide the church, or were you an active participant in the meetings?

CB: Well, I tried to be an active participant in the meetings, as did several of the other ministers who were here then and some who are here now. Reverend Otis Hairston, who is still here, has a long line of activity. Reverend Prince Graves, at that time, Reverend Julius Douglas, now deceased, Reverend Richard Hicks, just to name a few who were here and who were very active in that whole thrust.

EP: As an extension of your pastoral role, were you concerned that these activities remain nonviolent? Was this in the nature of your counseling?

CB: Right, yes; mine, and the other names that I just mentioned, plus all of the clergy and, I think, largely the entire black community--you'll recall that that was in the real ascendancy of the Martin Luther King era, chief apostle of nonviolence. And so that was our posture and stance, too--that whatever we did, the action should be of a nonviolent nature.

EP: What was the nature of race relations in Greensboro when you came here? What were your observations?

CB: That Greensboro was a segregated town with clear lines of racial demarcation. That there was--it was easy to tell what one's color would be just by one's address. You knew that most of the addresses that would fall anywhere in east Greensboro would probably be black people. And you knew, at that time, that black people were not living outside of that area. In terms of public accommodations, it was somewhat distressing, coming from the Washington metropolitan area, where things were considerably different--by no means ideal, I would hasten to add, but different; and somewhat better, but not ideal. It was quite a change.

Example: I was accustomed to eating out a good bit. That was very limited when I arrived here. I could see very clearly patterns of public school segregation still existing. Employment discrimination was very, very high. And there was a real, real separation.

EP: The impression I get from speaking with other members of the black community is that there was communication between the white power structure and the black community, if I may characterize it as the black power structure.

CB: Okay.

EP: [clears throat] But that mainly it was one-way communication. The white power structure never came into the black community. If there was communication, it meant that black leaders had to go downtown or to places like the YWCA [Young Women's Christian Association]. The Red Cross building, I understand, was frequently the meeting place. Is this an accurate assessment?

CB: Yes. That is an accurate assessment. I do remember--this was a little farther down into the sixties--'63-'64, '62-'63. Mayor Dave Schenck did come to Hayes-Taylor YMCA to meet a group and that sort of--there was a little of that kind of thing. But essentially, and by and large, what you say is true. The black community always had to be going. It was a one-way street. It was that way for a good long while.

EP: Since I've mentioned black leaders, leaders of the black community, could you identify these leaders?

CB: Well, I think there were many leaders from many segments of the black community. I think you had leaders from the student community; Jesse Jackson was here at that time, Bill Thomas, to name two outstanding in the student community. Another student escapes me; I wish I could remember his name. But Dr. George Simpkins, Reverend Otis Hairston, J. T. Douglas, David Morehead, Herman Gist, Waldo Falkener. And you had a number of people from the public housing communities who exercised meaningful leadership in those communities. It was a dispersed kind of leadership coming from various segments of the community. The ministers representing the religious community, as well as the larger community. From the academic community, you had people from both colleges [Bennett College and A&T] providing leadership. It was a dispersed kind of leadership that many people provided, because everybody had the same problem.

EP: The Association of Southern Churchmen was--has often been brought to my attention. Was this an interracial organization? I don't think of it being mentioned particularly in association with Greensboro. It was--various ministers in the South--the reason that it

comes up is, I became familiar with it in talking with Dr. Warren Ashby. Are you familiar with Dr. Ashby?

CB: Right, yes. He was quite a--

EP: No, Fellowship of Southern Churchmen, I'm sorry. That was the title of the organization. I assume that this did not play a meaningful role at all in Greensboro.

CB: Yeah. You sure you don't mean the Fellowship of Reconciliation?

EP: No, sir. This may have been stronger perhaps in Atlanta areas.

CB: That name does not ring a bell.

EP: What I'm leading up to is, I understand there were a few organizations--I don't think they were formal organizations--where members of the black and white academic community would get together and discuss various issues, not all of them race-related or regarding segregation.

But Dr. Ashby was a member of it. There were--I don't recall all the names at this point. But they would very frequently include people from what was then Woman's College [now UNCG], Bennett College, and A&T, as well as individual ministers. Did you ever meet with any of these individuals I mentioned?

CB: Yes. Warren Ashby, particularly. I cannot remember the organization. But Warren Ashby. I think Robert Jolly [sic - Dr. J. Ralph Jolly] was president of Greensboro College. But we did meet across those lines in a more informal way, as you suggest.

EP: But this was by no means having official sanction, in that there were no what you would call the business or industrial or political leaders of the white community involved?

CB: Yeah, by and large. We talked about influence and moral persuasion and--which is to say that there was no kind of political clout or any other kind of clout, really, that could be used, no kind of pressure that could be brought to bear through, through these exchanges. But it did keep lines of communication open between segments of the black and white community that I think probably had a filtering down--or over, or away--process that touched the lives of other people in the white community. And I think that was a very important ingredient in all that was going on.

EP: I understand that two of the most influential organizations in the black community were the Greensboro Citizens Association and the Greensboro Men's Club. Is that correct?

And of course, the Greensboro--I'm sorry, the Ministerial Alliance, Greensboro Ministerial Alliance, is that the organization of black ministers?

CB: Right. That was the Pulpit Forum.

EP: Pulpit Forum, I beg your pardon.

CB: And, of course, the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] was a very viable organization. The Greensboro Citizens Association was very, very strong and active, [as was] the Greensboro Men's Club, and the Pulpit Forum. There did emerge what later came to be known as the Coordinating Committee that brought together representation from these various groups so that we would sort of have like a council almost, made up so that these lines of communication in the black community could be kept open, and we would not be moving in different directions but somewhat in the same vein, and able to share with each other and each other's organizations what our overall mutual concerns were.

EP: How did the black community perceive the city government? Was there resentment that any time we want something that should be done, such as paving the street, or putting up streetlights, or running out sewer and water lines, we have to go there and we have to demand these services before the city council? Was it sort of an adversarial relationship? Or am I putting it too strongly?

CB: Yeah, that may be a tad strong. I think it may have been that the black community felt just a sense of neglect. That other parts of the community would generally get better attention and quicker attention on most everything before the black community. Example: when school integration really did come into being, I talked to some teachers who had moved from segregated schools that were all black to integrated situations. And they were just utterly amazed at the wealth of teaching materials that were immediately available at the schools that they were helping to integrate over against the segregated schools they had left.

EP: I've always heard that frequently the black schools would get the desks that really were--otherwise would have been destroyed as being unfit for the students. That frequently the books that were given to the black schools had many pages ripped out of them. In other words, the material that would otherwise have been discarded was sent to the black schools. Is this fair?

CB: That's probably true. But what I'm saying is that in many instances, materials existed in white schools that never existed in any kind of condition in the black schools.

EP: And this did not change until there was significant and meaningful integration.

CB: Right, right.

EP: I'd like to skip ahead, if I might, because your role came to my attention through Dr. Elizabeth Laizner. And she indicated to me--who taught German and Russian over at Bennett College--she indicated to me that when the four--after the CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] chapter was formed, and Bill Thomas and Reverend Stanley and Pat Patterson and a fourth leader of the CORE chapter were arrested at McDonald's on May 11, 1963, that you spoke with her. And the gist of the conversation was, you got something started here, keep something going until I can address my congregation, and we'll try to get broad-based support in the adult black community. Does this conversation ring a bell with you?

CB: Not specifically. And, and yet I can very well see and hear myself saying that and doing that in that setting. We had a lot of conversations. And I have no doubt that probably that is what I did say and try to do.

EP: The major meeting that she recalls that this came out of--and I think James Farmer may have been here--and there was some question as to--this was after the students had been released from the Polio Hospital and National Guard Armory. There was a major mass meeting and the community, adult community, decided that they would march in support of the students. And I've heard the figure anywhere from fifteen hundred to several thousand adults were involved in this march on this particular Sunday afternoon. It probably would have been May twenty-first, twenty-second--something along that time. And that this was the first significant show of demonstrable adult support of the students who were marching on a nightly basis. Does this sound like an accurate--

CB: Yeah, that sounds reasonable. I'm not able from memory, to pinpoint those dates of twenty years ago accurately. But that sounds reasonable, because I can remember our efforts to bring together the student community and the adult black community, and it did start with marches. And I can remember--this may not have been the one, but right in that period--one march where people were, I guess, four or five abreast from just west of the railroad overpass where Old Pearson Street used to be--what is now Murrow Boulevard--from there all the way back up to Hayes-Taylor YMCA. You just had the sidewalk abreast as wide as the sidewalk could take all the way back. I mean that was one of the many marches that I remember. And this was largely the adult black community.

EP: What motivated the black community to get out and begin marching? What was the

feeling there?

CB: Basically, we're all in this together. We all have the same problem. It was just, I think, a--the reason it hadn't happened sooner [was] there had not been the synthesizing of leadership and a kind of focus. There were so many things, you know. But here, we started to have a focus, and that focus then brought together the community, the black community: student, adult black, religious, educational. If you were black, these were your problems.

EP: You mentioned the Coordinating Committee. Do you remember how it was formed? I guess what I'm saying is, was it the initiative of the adult black community, or did the students from the CORE chapter come and suggest that we need cooperation along age lines and between students and the adults? Or is there no clear delineation of who started what?

CB: My best recollection is that as people talked that there was--that things sort of evolved out of the discussion; that, "We need to do this. Well, can't we do this?"

"Yes."

"Well, will you work on doing this?"

"Yes."

"Will you work on doing this?"

I think it came about as a result of the basic initiatives that did emanate from the student community, picked up, supported and carried on by people in the adult black community, particularly, at that time, leadership in some of the organizations that you mentioned: black clergy, Greensboro Citizens [Association], NAACP, and then the Greensboro Men's Club. You know, we'd have a mass meeting. And then people from these various entities would be making statements and suggestions, and, "Well, the Citizens Association's going to meet Tuesday night." "Well, we're going to do so and so." "Well--. " There was an obvious need for a kind of coordinating this whole movement for Greensboro. And I think that out of that kind of thing, that it gave rise to the Coordinating Committee.

EP: And I understand the membership was one and the same in many of these organizations, is that correct? In other words, if you were a member of the Greensboro Men's Club, you were also probably members of the Greensboro Citizens Association and the NAACP.

CB: Oh, right, yeah.

EP: So that facilitated the cooperation.

CB: Sure.

EP: The impression I get is that, of course, CORE would have some meetings and decide. And then its representatives, usually Bill Thomas or one of the other officers, would then meet with the Coordinating Committee and inform them of their intentions. And the committee would then make suggestions or maybe attempt to coordinate some similar activity, a march or a demonstration--well, not demonstration, but march in the--amongst the adult community. I mean, is this pretty much how it operated or not?

CB: Well, I think that's one of the ways it operated. I do think that out of the coordinating committee itself things happened, and the reverse would be the case. The Coordinating Committee would say X, Y and Z, and that would go back to the member organizations of the Coordinating Committee. So it was, you know, it was--both of these methods of operation were employed. I think a goodly number of things did arise from the student community. It was just sort of like the student community provided the advance troops, and the adult community provided the backup.

EP: I see. The reason I make a distinction between a march and a demonstration--it may be a specious distinction—but what I was leading up to was, there was a mass--and it may have been part of the same mass march on Sunday that I mentioned. There was still a number of students incarcerated at the Polio Hospital. And thousands of members of the adult black community marched out to the Polio Hospital, surrounded it. And there were speeches. There were many hymns sung. And I think at one point the national anthem was sung.

Do you recall this? [coughing] The reason I mention it is that it had a potential, I guess, of going both ways. I mean, the policemen were out there with, with the dogs. And I think someone, a leader of the march, called for the singing of the national anthem, and the police stood at attention. And this was--has been described to me by several individuals--was almost a visible easing of the tension, which could have built up another way. Because many of the parents had children in that building and were quite upset because there had been inadequate communication as to how they were being treated and that sort of thing. Does this incident come to mind?

CB: That does not. It may have been--I remember very distinctly making a trip back to Washington and reading, picking up the *Washington Post* and reading while I was in Washington that week what was happening in Greensboro. The demonstration that I remember most vividly is the one that took place right here in the square when all those people were arrested. You may be planning to get to that later, but--

EP: Why don't we get to it right now? What are your recollections?

CB: You know, there was this march on downtown. And it was just a, you know--the street was just full of people, and a lot of the adult community. And it was a mix: students, adults--you know, the community was visibly saying, voicing, and demonstrating its protest. And, people, I think, had had it just about up to here and they were ready to go to jail. And so Captain Jackson and the [Greensboro] Police Department were there. And they just made mass arrests and took people to jail in buses and took them over to the [Greensboro] Coliseum and processed them. That could have erupted into something of a violent nature because of just simply the numbers of people, but it did not. And it was amazing.

EP: You know, I've heard different things from different people. Some people said that they knew that they planned to sit down in the Square. Other people say they were totally surprised, because they had not gotten the word that this was what they were going to do. And they thought it might have been almost a spontaneous thing or, at least, planned just by the leadership. Now, were you there that evening?

CB: Yeah.

EP: Did you sit in the square?

CB: I stood right on the curb.

EP: I see. Did it seem to you that it was a closely coordinated and planned or spontaneous?

CB: It really seemed spontaneous. But the interesting thing--and I remember very distinctly that many people who were not sitting down were arrested. And I remember so--the reason I remember so well--I had a member who was a public school teacher at the time and who had been a member of the police force. He was in the demonstration. He was not seated. And I watched them. They just herd him right on in.

EP: Is that right?

CB: Yeah. And there were others like him. The reason he sticks in my mind is he was an officer at the church. He was a member of the board of trustees. But, you know, it was just almost like saying, well, you know, "Hey, I'm in this, too. And I'm"--he was a public school teacher. But he went right on. There was no--

EP: He wanted to be arrested.

CB: Holding back--yeah, he wanted to make his statement. That whole thing we just--and I don't know why. I was standing right on the curb. I don't know why--they just went right on past. And I was just standing there saying, well, I'm sure that somebody is going to take me by the hand. But I stood right on the curb, I think on the northwest curb right there. That would have been by where the old Jefferson Insurance building was, right there.

EP: Do you think perhaps it might have been that the police consciously were trying to avoid many leaders of the black community so that they wouldn't be in jail and then there'd be this leaderless group of people extremely angry and that something very ugly might develop?

CB: No.

EP: --and violent.

CB: No.

EP: Okay. Just sheer chance. What--was there any singleness of purpose amongst the black clergy as to what they were going to do, how they were going to proceed as this, as the momentum of the marches built to a higher and higher level?

CB: You mean, in terms of what black clergy as individual clergy or in terms of what they would be saying to their congregations would be doing?

EP: I suppose what I'm trying to indicate is both, actually. How they were going to act as individual pastors to their congregation, and how they as a group were going to try to assist in this movement, and yet, also, try to keep it from becoming violent.

CB: Yeah. I think, you know, two things. One, most of the black clergymen saw their participation as, one, constantly keeping "the white power structure" mindful that the black community is not happy, is not satisfied. That there is great unrest. We want conditions to change. At the same time, saying to our own constituency, do not despair, but do not become so frustrated that you become violent. Stay with the movement, participate. Have no fear of anything happening. We are counseling nonviolence. That was the whole thrust of what we were trying to say. The one message to downtown and the other message to our people. And we would say to both sides, this is what we're doing. You know, we would say to our people, now look, we're trying to keep the pressure on those folks downtown. We would say to downtown, look, we're trying to keep our people informed, and we're counseling nonviolence. We hope that we can

continue, that we would hope that our counsel would continue to be heeded. And we were quick to point out, which was obviously true, that there was no assurance we could give. And I got the feeling that downtown wanted us to say that we would actually promise, you know, that nothing would happen. But we couldn't make that promise.

EP: When you met with people from downtown, was it in a formal meeting? Was it--would they send a representative into the black community, or would you sit down at much like a table like this and discuss the thing? What were the nature of these meetings?

CB: I can remember some meetings where there would be representatives. For example, Mr. [Edward R.] Zane, who was with Burlington [Industries], was like an unofficial goodwill ambassador, so to speak, with a lot of clout both ways. And would meet--and there was a lot of talking with--his initials--E. R. Zane? It escapes me.

EP: E. R. Zane, yes.

CB: Yeah. You know, he would bring a lot of things and take a lot of things back, on occasion, with some members of the city council. After a point, after a point--this is on up into the sixties now, this is after the passage of the 1964 public accommodations bill [Civil Rights Act], which had opened up everything, but there was still a lot of problems in Greensboro. There would be a lot of meetings: [Greensboro] Chamber of Commerce, Community Unity Committee of [the] Chamber of Commerce, then Human Relations Commission--all of those would provide forums where members of the black and white community would sometimes meet in the kind of meeting that you're describing. And then sometimes it would be an unofficial, off-the-record meeting. Sometimes--I remember once there was a meeting of members of the Human Relations Commission and members of the [Greensboro] City Council. It was like dinner. So the press wouldn't be there. And we talked about a lot of things relative to Greensboro.

EP: I imagine the conversations tended to be more candid in those--

CB: Oh, definitely.

EP: --and not having to worry about a press release or a statement.

CB: Very definitely.

EP: I suppose one thing I'm trying to get at is that once the marches had stopped in June of 1963 and the Human Relations Commission was established, the first one--certainly the first officially sanctioned one--did you play a role in that, or continuing to meet with the

city government?

CB: After the establishment of the Human Relations Commission?

EP: Yes.

CB: Yeah. I attended a number of meetings.

EP: Were you a member of the Commission?

CB: Eventually, right, yes.

EP: At what date? It can be an approximate.

CB: Yeah. It was probably like ’65, ’66--yeah, right in there. I served as chairman for a while. It was right in that period, I think.

EP: Do you think the city was showing good faith in having established--I mean, were they really serious about the stated purpose of the establishment of the Human Relations Commission to bring these matters to the attention of city government and to attempt to do something about--

CB: Well, you know, the Human Relations Commission was established as a result of the insistence of the black community. That was one of the demands, that such a commission be established. And it was established. And, yeah, I think it was. Many people in the black community felt that it was just a sham and it would only be--had really no legal power. It could gather information, and it did a lot of that and a lot of things it had publicized. And I think therein was a great deal of its power. But I think there was some effort on the part of the elected officials to do those things that would lessen some of the tension and hostility that existed right around that time.

EP: What had been the principal achievements of the commission during the time you were a member in the ’65-‘66 period?

CB: We focused on a lot of substandard housing conditions. There were many pockets of substandard housing in Greensboro, pockets of it here and there. And we focused on those. We focused on the treatment, the way landlords dealt with tenants. Employment was another matter. But I think the housing conditions--that was a real focus.

EP: The impression I get is that this series of protests were initiated by the students, and they

kept the pressure on by their numbers and added to it by the black community. And that there was feeling in the black community [that] all right, these students are going to go home for summer. They're going to graduate. If we're going to keep the pressure on the city government to, to make these changes, then it's going to have to be done by the black community and that we're going to have to take it over and keep the ball rolling. Was this the attitude?

CB: I think that mindset did exist. It was never with the thought of including the student community out. But the black community did, the adult black community did come to grips with the idea that we're going to be here. And that we are going to have to be the ones really to work, to put up some money, to back these organizations or the Coordinating Committee, work together. You know, because we're going to be here. Students may come and go. They can help us, but we really need to get our act together, because we will be ongoing entities in this community. I think that's essentially right.

EP: Do you think that this--of course, it wasn't the same momentum as the marches--but this feeling carried on after the marches and in the black community and that there continued to be either official or unofficial meetings amongst leaders of the black community saying, "I don't--this is what we want the city to do and this is what we're going to make our demands of," and proceed in that manner?

CB: Yeah. I think there were many kinds and types of issues that the black community felt had to be addressed on its behalf. One, housing, that I keep referring to. The, the school situation. The ward system for the elections, that was a thing that, that was always a fight, you know. Open housing. So, you know, these were some things the black community, conditions in the public housing communities--

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

CB: --pushed aside. And, on the other hand, many people in the white community, particularly, felt that too much was being done for those people. And people in those communities felt that not enough was being done. So that was a whole other issue. And there came leadership out of the public housing community that joined other leadership in the black community in addressing that, as well as the other issues--that issue along with the others.

EP: You mentioned substandard housing. Now, in this regard, was it that the residents of the substandard housing just wanted it upgraded, or did they want more public housing? What was the nature of the discontent there?

CB: Okay. The nature of the discontent was in several respects. One, these pockets of housing owned by slum landlords in various parts of town--no relationship to public housing at all--people felt that many times they were lax in the repairs. Sometimes water would be cut off, roofs would be leaking, plumbing would be in just a shambles. They were expected to pay the rent. If that housing was condemned, then these people would have to move out, and they may not have any place to go. So, they had to just kind of go along with those conditions.

For people who were in public housing, they had the feeling that the delivery of services was inadequate, that the response to needs was much too slow, that the modernization programs in public housing were just inadequate. So you have these two kinds of concerns coming: one, from the public housing community, and two, from these people who were in housing that were owned by members of the private sector.

EP: Was the Human Relations Commission the vehicle through which these discontents were expressed, in their reports then to the council, or were there other avenues in which you expressed discontent?

CB: Well, I think people tried to take advantage of every possible forum to express these things. The Human Relations Commission would be one. The Citizens Association would be another. The organizations, the residents councils within public housing was then still another. Perhaps the people who had the least in terms of a forum were those people who lived in substandard housing owned by members of the private sector. People who were in public housing had their own organization and could also petition the Housing Authority itself, as they many times did. They could--the organization itself then could go to the Human Relations Commission, as it sometimes did, or even to the city council, as it sometimes did.

But, you know, two or three people here or there, you know, scattered all over town with no kind of unity often would just have to, did just go along and go along and go along until maybe it would be brought to somebody's attention, somebody in leadership. I can remember Connie Raiford, a person who was always sort of a champion of the underdog and people like this. And sometimes he would call to our attention these matters, and then people would begin to look at them. I remember going to a place that was called Little Korea and taking a lot of photographs of just some very, very substandard conditions that people were living in.

EP: And it's called Little Korea because of the conditions?

CB: I don't know how it ever got that name.

EP: You succeeded whom as chairman of the Human Relations Commission?

[Pause]

CB: It escapes me as who my predecessor was.

EP: And do you recall who succeeded you in turn? I suppose what I'm trying to get at is--

CB: I think it was Dick Forman. I'm not sure.

EP: Okay. Was it the usual case that the chairman of the Human Relations Commission was black?

CB: No.

EP: So it just alternated or--

CB: Right. It may or may not.

EP: I'd like to--I've skipped back and forth and all around. I am curious as to--if you were involved as a member of the Coordinating Committee, involved in actually planning sessions regarding sit-ins or marches or negotiations with city officials. Did, did you--what I'm saying is, did the members of the Coordinating Committee actually plan strategy and act as tacticians, or was that more or less left to the students, and the Coordinating Committee acted as an advisory committee and perhaps--a public spokesman for the black community?

CB: No. The Coordinating Committee as I recall, did do strategy planning. But, again, the Coordinating Committee, by its very composition, had the student input in that strategizing and planning. The idea was that the Coordinating Committee would be representative of the total black community. And that there would not be, you know, spurious and tangential efforts going in different directions. But that there would be some kind of unity in the thrust, in terms of what's being said, in the strategy and the planning. And that's why all of these different entities were included in the Coordinating Committee.

EP: Do you think that the marches, once they had ceased, did they have an immediate impact on change in race relations in Greensboro, or were the more fundamental problems still present after they had ended?

CB: Well, take the S&W Cafeteria situation. Okay. The demonstrations there, you know,

resulted in S&W finally serving black patrons. But those things only changed the condition at S&W. And business as usual was going on in the rest of the community.

EP: In reading the newspaper accounts of when the Human Relations Commission was first established, they would announce, I guess, roughly, first a weekly, and then a monthly business for X number of seats in restaurants had been integrated. And I thought it was a curious way to inflate the numbers is what it sounded like to me. X number of motel rooms had been integrated, rather than X number of restaurants and X number of motels. Do you think this was kind of a way of getting around a very slow and foot-dragging change on the part of the previously segregated white community?

CB: Well, it may have been that. But the way that S&W really started its integration was along that line. Firstly, at the breakfast hour, say four black people would come to breakfast, and then four black people would come to lunch. And then four would come in the evening hour. That went on, I guess, for several days. And then it would, it would pick up, you know. It was almost like saying, you know, if too many black people show up, it might collapse or self-destruct or something would happen. So, it went on like that--sort of that we've got to sort of ease this thing into place, because if it just, boom, opens, what will happen? So, that was the way that happened at that location.

EP: So the management was afraid [that] suddenly the numbers that had been on the street in the demonstrations would appear for service?

CB: Yeah, right. You know, it was made to appear that maybe half the student body from A&T would show up and say, "Hey, we want to eat," but that, that never did happen. The irony of the whole thing was that it came to a point that the biggest clientele that S&W had to help it survive came from students at A&T. It finally ended up closing, as you know. But in those latter years, if you had suddenly subtracted all of the trade from the student communities, they would have really been hurting and would have closed sooner.

EP: You stayed in Greensboro until what year?

CB: 1975.

EP: And did you--were you--did you continue to be involved in any official capacity after stepping down from chairman of the Human Relations Commission in those intervening years--those next nine years--with the city or negotiations for changes in these areas that you've mentioned, such as housing, employment, et cetera?

CB: Yeah. I later served on the housing authority, Greensboro Housing Authority.

EP: What kind of conditions did you see there? Do you think it was conscientiously trying to address the needs of the black community in terms of how you as a member and leader of that community perceived the need?

CB: Yeah. I think that in the housing authority with some, with the kind of personnel that--well, let me back up. About a few months before I came on board, a new director was employed. Now the previous director had a background--it was that of a prison warden. So that orientation transferred itself into the way that he carried out his duties and executed his role as the executive director of the Housing Authority. And in my opinion, he was quite insensitive to many of the needs. There were some people, I think, who were board members who were not very sensitive, not as sensitive as I would like to have seen them be.

With the change in directors, I think the board and the director together were able to very conscientiously address the needs of the public housing communities and did try to do that, even in the midst of great criticism from both the private sector of the community and residents of the public housing communities themselves. It was always--we were in the middle. One side of the community saying you're doing too much. The members of the community that we were trying to serve, public housing community, saying we weren't doing anything, not enough. But I think there was a very serious attempt to do that. One of the things that would indicate that was that from the commission itself came the request to the city council that the board be enlarged to include a voting member from the housing community itself, and that the public housing organizations would themselves determine who that person would be to serve on the board. In other words, it wouldn't be somebody handpicked by us or by the mayor, but that they would have at least that little bit of self determination in saying that X, Y or Z will represent us. That proved quite helpful.

EP: Were you--I know that you've mentioned Community Unity Division of the Chamber [of Commerce]. I suppose its greatest role would have been during the disturbances at Dudley High School and A&T in the spring of 1969. Is that correct?

CB: I think that's correct.

EP: Were you--I know that you were on a committee that wrote a report concerning that. Were you an official member of the Community Unity Division? Did you have any official connection with it?

CB: I don't think I was ever officially a member. I was a member of the Chamber [of Commerce]. I served at one time as one of the directors of the chamber. I don't think I

ever served on Community Unity.

EP: What was your feeling about how this whole situation came about? Were you--was it clear in your mind where you could determine fault?

CB: Which situation?

EP: This would have been the spring in ’69. And it involved the fact that a young man had been elected president of Dudley, and then the principal of Dudley said he was ineligible to serve in that post. A number of students walked out of class and I think went over to Lincoln. And a number of the students there joined them. Eventually, the police were called. And then one thing built on another until eventually there was a situation where there were shots fired from Scott Hall at A&T. I think the National Guard was called in to clear out that hall. One student was killed, Willie Grimes.

CB: Willie Grimes. Yeah. There were so many contributing factors that it kind of mushroomed into a lot of other things. And I think it did that, because there were some animosities residual in the community on both sides. Out of all that had happened, I think that there had been a lot of disturbances on campuses all over the country. I think that A&T represented the only instance in all of the campus disturbances where the students shot back at the police.

EP: Yes. That’s what it sounds like.

CB: In terms of assessing blame and where fault was, my memory has not been sufficiently jogged to get that part clear.

EP: Do you remember what the result of the report was? I think it in part called for a new election for president of the student body president.

CB: Student body president.

EP: And if I’m not mistaken, this individual was re-elected.

CB: Re-elected. I think that did, in fact, happen.

EP: So obviously, part of your feeling there was a sense of unnecessary obstruction on the part of the administration of Dudley High School for overturning the result of the election.

CB: Yeah, obviously so.

EP: Well, I'm not asking you to try to assess specific blame. But it just seemed to me that it was clear that obviously, this level of violence could not have simply resulted out of discontent of a local high school election. It's really feeding upon much more--

CB: Yeah. That's, that's what I'm saying, yeah. That simply became the spark that set off the big fire.

EP: Do you feel that perhaps the use of force was excessive on the part of the city and the state?

CB: Yeah, I think it was. It didn't have to go those proportions, not at all, I don't think.

EP: Well, do you think that, as has been suggested by Dr. William Chafe in his book *Civilities and Civil Rights*, that this was a signal from the white power structure that, "All right, at least for the time being, enough concessions have been given; this is where we're drawing the line. And, you know, we gave in in '63 as a result of the marches and that now we're going to start showing a little toughness"?

CB: Yeah. I definitely believe that's what it was, without a doubt. And it was kind of like the white community saying, "Okay, boy, now you've said enough. I've heard you, and sit down and be quiet." I think that was a message. I mean, it wasn't necessary to have the National Guard out there and to bring all of the guns. And the big guns. They had some big guns aimed at Scott Hall, ready to shoot.

EP: You mean like artillery?

CB: Yeah. Yeah.

EP: So you're saying that really the '63 marches, at least in part, solved the immediate problem concerning public accommodations. But that there were these other ongoing problems that really continued to boil under the surface, and they exploded again in '69.

CB: Yeah. But the '63 marches, I don't know what would have happened had it not been for the public accommodations bill of 1964. That's what solved the problem, because there were still a lot of places in Greensboro that were operated on a segregated basis. But it was only after the public accommodations bill that was passed by the Congress in 1964 that everything opened--boom. Had it not been for that, there would have been still an ongoing movement in that regard. But when public accommodations opened, that still did

not touch jobs and housing, upward mobility in employment, et cetera.

So, there was almost after the public accommodations bill a kind of feeling of temporary calm and well-being in the black community. “Hey, we’re over.” But we discovered that we’re not over. And so by 1969, we’d gotten into a whole lot of other things that it became quite clear that public accommodations didn’t just do a favor for blacks, because they were spending money for whatever accommodations they were receiving. They weren’t getting it free. So it was no favor. And so people looked at that. And they also began to see that here’s really a drain on our resources going away from us. Places were open, you could go any place to eat or to sleep or at any lunch counter. But that did not solve these other attendant problems.

What I’m saying is that the 1963 demonstrations did not solve the public accommodations problem in Greensboro. It highlighted it. It opened a few places. But it was the public accommodations act that opened up everything, that then sort of took the winds out of the sails of that movement in ’63 that was directed toward places of public accommodation. Then, other areas had to be addressed. So, this time it started over and picked up another momentum that mushroomed on into what we talked about happening in 1969.

EP: You--do you feel that the addressing of jobs and housing and so forth could not be addressed in the same way that the public accommodations could be--that is, through the mass marches, sit-ins, picketing? I mean, did it call for a different sort of strategy?

CB: Yeah. You know finally there was--the Open [Fair] Housing Act [Civil Rights Act of 1968] was finally passed. But it did demand and call for a different kind of approach, because many times--I can’t think of anything specific to illustrate this. But many times you would be led to believe, you know, there’s no problem, there’s no problem. But there always was a problem. And sometimes it got--I think it finally got to the point where the marching and the protesting did not really get to the heart. You know, there had to be then meaningful negotiations of sitting down and talking about these things. And I think that Greensboro got to that point. I think that happened with the schools and, to some degree, with, with jobs. For example, Greensboro did not have the kind of problems, say, that Charlotte had in school integration. School integration went off pretty smoothly in the Greensboro community. Employment and upgrading of teachers and other educational--or other, other people in education, that movement may not, was not as rapid as it should have been.

Example: I remember an opening. And the then-superintendent made the statement that the black community was trying to get somebody black for that opening, [he] made a statement [that] nobody qualified, he couldn’t find anybody qualified. And there was a member of the school board who had sent a person with excellent qualifications, a black person, who had the information there when the person applied,

what the response was, and also their credentials and qualifications, which illustrated that point. Well, it was--it's that kind of sitting down and confronting that had to take place as an ongoing way of dealing with the problem. It still exists, you know, in February 1985.

EP: So are you saying, in part, that direct nonviolent demonstrations has its limitations? It can only do so much.

CB: Yeah. Direct action has its place and can only do so much.

EP: Then it has to come over by the slow negotiating--

CB: It's not a panacea for all of the ills. You have to have a varied approach to the multitude of problems that are different, different shadings. The climate's different at one time or another. People in positions of authority change, and they have different outlooks that must be dealt with differently, a lot of change.

EP: By way of summation, Elliott Rudwick and August Meier have said--concluded in their history of CORE *[CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942–1968*], that by the end of the summer, the Greensboro adult community was exhausted. That it really reached about the limits of what it could do at the time the demonstrations ended, that the students had lost their momentum and the city had passed some anti-demonstration ordinances which would militate against similar demonstrations taking place in the future. Do you agree or disagree with that assessment on their part?

CB: I don't know that the--I don't think the community was exhausted. Because the problem still exists, and the community knew that they still had problems. I think the community was sort of in a holding action, trying to find these other ways to address problems. Because often we would say, hey, look, this demonstrating, that's not going to change much now. I mean, people, don't get uptight. You know, they'll help you protest and demonstrate. You've got to get inside, sit down and talk to somebody, find out some way you can bring some other pressure to bear other than out there on the street. We recognize that that had limitations and at that time had about run its course.

In part, because I think we were making some efforts at meaningful negotiations, sitting down at the conference table and talking things out. That also was the case because it was felt by the black community that the white community had gotten smarter, that demonstrations could result in violence, and violence could have an overall negative impact on the city. And the Chamber of Commerce did not want that. The business community did not want that.

So, the white community was more open to saying, "Oh, come in, you know, sit down. We'll talk, too." So, everybody started then coming to the conference table,

mindful of the fact that, like anything else, it too had its shortcomings, because there was always the fear that it may just be talk. But it did move us away from direct action as being the, the way to go, the panacea for all of the civil rights ills that were bothering us.

EP: Well, thank you.

CB: All right.

EP: I appreciate it.

CB: Okay. I'm sorry I held you up like this.

[End of Interview]