

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY  
PROJECT**

INTERVIEWEE: Frank O. Sherrill Jr.

INTERVIEWER: Eugene F. Pfaff

DATE: 1980

[Begin Tape 1]

EUGENE PFAFF: --Library Oral History Program. I'm speaking with Mr. Frank O. Sherrill, Jr., who, in 1963, was assistant manager of the S&W Cafeteria in Greensboro at the time of the student demonstrations during the spring. I'd like to ask you, Mr. Sherrill, when and how did the pickets and demonstrations begin?

FRANK SHERRILL JR.: You mean how they began?

EP: It's my understanding that there were a series of pickets and--

FS: Right, right.

EP: --in the fall of 1962.

FS: Right.

EP: And that the--this continued intermittently until the spring.

FS: Right, okay.

EP: When did you first become aware of these pickets?

FS: Well, they were working at the theatre right around the corner from us, and they had started there. And we felt like they were going to move toward the cafeterias. In other words, we were getting worried that they were coming around to the cafeterias to try to come in and eat. And it wasn't long until they were there, you know.

And when they came--right before they came, the S&W Cafeteria was having a managers' meeting. The men were down in Florida on a cruise and they were having a

meeting down there, and I was running the cafeteria. And realizing the situation, I called the place down there in Florida and told them what the situation was. And I told them that I'd like to talk to all our help, and they said, "Oh no, not that!" They didn't want to do that, they were afraid it might stir up a lot of stuff and--

EP: What sort of things would you have said to the help?

FS: Well, they finally called me back a couple of hours later and said they felt like I could go ahead and talk to them. So I did call them together. And the reason I wanted to call them together, our help was--looked like they were very nervous, and they didn't know what to do. And I felt like if we could talk to them, and tell them our situation and how we felt about feeding colored people at that particular time, that they would be a little bit more at ease. And that was my, the reason I wanted to talk to them.

EP: How did you feel about serving black people?

FS: Well, I was going by what the company wanted to do. We had customers that said they wouldn't eat with us at all if, if we ever fed any one black in the cafeteria. And of course, we'd been in business a long time and we had a lot of people. And practically all of the whites were telling us this, you know. So we were--didn't know exactly what to do.

EP: Was this in the fall of '62 that we're talking about now?

FS: Right, yes. So I did talk to them. And after I talked to them in the meeting, everything settled down. And I told them exactly how the company felt, that we couldn't feed them until the laws were changed, you know. And that we would continue to do--to not feed [them] until something like that happened. I wanted them to know, and I wanted to be just as honest with them as I possibly could, so that they would know what the situation was. And of course, we were telling the pickets the same thing, you know.

EP: Did you ever speak with any of the leaders of the demonstrations?

FS: Oh, yes, I talked to [Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) director James] Farmer and--when he came here--and some of the students at the A&T College [North Carolina A&T State University]. Of course, they were more or less the ringleaders at that particular time.

EP: And what did you say to Farmer?

FS: We just told him we couldn't do it until the laws were changed, you know. That we could

do that then, unless the--the S&W would accept it.

EP: Now your father was the--

FS: President of S&W.

EP: Did you and your father discuss S&W policy?

FS: Oh, yeah. He would keep in daily contact with us, everyday, you know. And of course, the policy was from that point, you know, so--

EP: When did you become assistant manager of the S&W here in Greensboro?

FS: Oh, I came to Greensboro in '53, in October of '53, and I was assistant manager then.

EP: I see. Did you and Mr. Bentz [manager of the S&W] discuss this--

FS: Oh, yeah, naturally. We were very close on that, in what we were saying and doing, you know.

EP: And what did you say in your discussions with each other?

FS: Well, we had to carry out the policy of the company, and the policy was not to feed the colored people at that particular time.

EP: When was Armistead Sapp employed as an attorney for the S&W?

FS: I don't know an exact date, but it was along this area, like this time. We couldn't find a lawyer in town that would really fight for us. They were sort of--most of the lawyers were sort of on the middle of the fence. And we wanted a lawyer that would really fight for us, and we couldn't find one except for Armistead Sapp. And he was working on the--he was employed by the theatre around the corner. I think it's called the Center Theatre. And so we got him and talked to him, and he sounded like what we really wanted.

EP: Did he wait and see what your attitude was, or did he suggest policy on his own?

FS: Well, no. We hired him and he came and talked to us. And I remember some of the conversation--not all of it, it's been a long time now. But he said, he told us about five things he would do to, that he could do, you know, and--

EP: And what were these?

FS: Well, I can't remember the exact things. One of them I remember, he says he was going to change public opinion. And then--but the five things that he said--and I can't really remember, it's been so long ago--but he did every one of those five things. And when he got through telling us that, I said, "Well, maybe you can't do any of those things," you know. I just didn't think that he could. And he did, during the course of, you know, working for us, you know. And he was something. He was a real fighter, and he really fought for us.

EP: Did you meet with him on a daily basis or--

FS: Oh, yeah, he was there. He was at the cafeteria most of the time when things were going on, and he saw what was going on.

EP: Now was he outside or inside with you?

FS: He would go outside and inside. He would talk to the pickets and all of this in there.

EP: Now I understand that after November, the CORE agreed to a truce until the--[phone rings]

[recorder paused]

EP: Do you remember the circumstances surrounding the November twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth when a large number of CORE students came and they had what was called a pray-in in front of the S&W, and a number of them were arrested?

FS: Vaguely I remember all of that, but I'm not--I mean, just--I'm not quite sure. I can't quite remember that exactly. I was there all the time, I know, but I mean I just can't quite remember, it's been so far back.

EP: When the truce was called and the then existing mayor's Special Committee on Human Relations under Bland Worley asked for time to make a study and present a report that eventually was reported in February, I think, did he or any member of his committee come and speak with you?

FS: No.

EP: You don't ever remember being approached--

FS: Now Armistead Sapp may have, but I didn't talk to anybody like that.

EP: I see. Did anyone from the city administration try to contact you and speak with you?

FS: Well, everything was worked through Armistead, and course Armistead would talk to us about it, you know. But as far as me talking to them, I didn't do that.

EP: I see.

FS: I mean that committee I didn't.

EP: There was an incident at the S&W in Raleigh where a Liberian diplomat, a lady, came to the S&W and she had news media with her. I remember Mr. Sapp said to the news media that it looked like a set-up, and that she was turned away from service. And when it was learned that she was a diplomat, the mayor--committee under Governor [Terry] Sanford, which encouraged diplomats to visit North Carolina, extended an apology. Do you remember this incident, and did you and your father discuss this incident?

FS: No, no, I didn't discuss it with him.

EP: I see. Did you discuss matters of policy with your father regarding the corporation?

FS: Sometimes I did, but not all the time, you know. Armistead was talking with my father most of the time, you know, and he was, of course, he was a lawyer and he was working with us. From Sapp, he would talk to us, you know. But I'd talk to Dad on occasions, and maybe I'd go down to Charlotte and talk to him. But--and I'd know what his policy was, you know.

EP: And was the home office in Charlotte?

FS: Charlotte, yes.

EP: Did you feel any pressure from other businessmen who were under the boycott that was imposed at that time?

FS: You mean how they felt, you mean, about the situation? Oh, yes.

EP: And what was their reaction?

FS: Well, most of the reaction we had was that they didn't want to feed them, you know. There were just a few in town that did want to.

EP: Now I understand that--what I had in mind when I first asked my question was CORE announced the policy they were going to have a blanket boycott of all the stores downtown, such that even those that were serving blacks would put pressure on those who were not to try to get them to change their policy.

FS: Yeah, that's right.

EP: Did anyone approach you to try to change your policy?

FS: They were doing everything they could for us to change our policy.

EP: I'm speaking of the other businessmen downtown.

FS: No, no.

EP: Did you ever talk with the other managers of restaurants and theatres? For instance, Boyd Morris at the Mayfair?

FS: Yeah.

EP: And what did you discuss?

FS: Well, we'd just ask him what he was doing, and he'd ask us what we were doing, and we'd sort of let him know, you know.

EP: Did the fact that you two were the two largest cafeterias in town and that Mr. Morris was president of the National Restaurant Association have any influence on you?

FS: No. My father was president of that at one time. Same thing.

EP: There was a--this same mayor's Committee for Community Improvement under Bland Worley apparently sent letters to all of the businesses in town on April fifth urging desegregation. And Mr. Sapp called them hypocrites. He said, "Now you're urging desegregation of these businesses, but you yourself are not employing blacks or serving blacks." Did you have any either professional or personal opinion about this letter, or the attitude or actions of the committee?

FS: Well, I felt like Sapp was right at that particular time, because they weren't.

EP: Was there ever any feeling like, that the S&W would desegregate if the other businesses did also?

FS: What other businesses are you talking about? I mean--

EP: Well, that this time--

FS: Most of the time what they were doing, they were working on the restaurants and theatres at this particular time, and as far as I know they weren't working on anything else.

EP: Okay. What I'm talking about is that, as a result of the sit-ins, Woolworth and Kress opened their lunch counters.

FS: Right.

EP: I think Holiday Inn under John Taylor opened--

FS: Did you say opened--open to feeding them?

EP: Yes.

FS: No, they didn't do that.

EP: According to the newspaper in July 25, 1960, they began serving blacks and whites at the lunch counter at the Woolworth's, but that these were the only two places downtown.

FS: As far as I know, none of that was being done. The only place--the first place that they fed blacks, in this city was--[brief conversation with unknown individual]--the first place they fed them was over on Summit Avenue at the Hot Shoppe.

EP: Across from McDonald's, where the demonstrations started?

FS: Well, that's where McDonald's is now.

EP: Right.

FS: Right. And that's another story too right there.

EP: Would you care to convey--tell it?

FS: Well, [Attorney General] Bobby [Robert] Kennedy called Mr. [J. Willard] Marriott in Washington--he was the president of the Hot Shoppes and the Marriott Hotels. I don't, I really don't know whether--yeah, I guess it was Marriot Hotels at that particular time. But Mr. Marriott had some businesses in Washington, DC, in the government buildings. And Bobby Kennedy told him--it was about a million or two million dollars worth of business a year there. And Mr.--I mean Bobby Kennedy told Mr. Marriott if he didn't feed the colored people down here at the Hot Shoppe on Summit Avenue that he would take away his government contracts. In other words, political blackmail, in other words. And so Mr. Marriott, in that case, started feeding them here. And that was the first place I think they fed them here in Greensboro, as far as my knowledge is concerned.

EP: Where did you hear this story?

FS: Where did I--

EP: I'm not challenging it, I just want to verify it.

FS: Oh, well, I heard it, let's see, I heard it through Sapp. Sapp got it, I think, from my father, I'm not quite sure. Mr. Marriott and my father were very good friends. Mr. Marriot was also president of the National Restaurant Association and my father too, and of course they were talking things over, too, you know.

EP: How extensive was the S&W chain? Was it just regionally in the South?

FS: We had about--at that time, I think we had about maybe sixteen or seventeen cafeterias.

EP: Were there demonstrations at all of them?

FS: No, but at a lot of them there were I think, like the Raleigh you said. But--

EP: Charlotte, I know there were.

FS: Yeah, I think in Charlotte--but I'm not, nothing like as extensive as it was here.

EP: We discussed Armistead Sapp's legal advice. Could you characterize him as a person, as an individual?

FS: Yeah, he stood on his own two feet. Man, he would wade in. I mean, he'd just go in and



talk to them. He even went down to A&T College in their own auditorium down there and talked to them there. So he wasn't afraid of anything. He'd just get up and go. And a lot of the people, and most of the people here in town were afraid to even go down to that part of the city.

EP: In what ways, if any, did you attempt--

FS: But--

EP: I'm sorry--

FS: No, go ahead. That's all right.

EP: Were you going to add something else about Mr. Sapp?

FS: No, I was just talking about him. I thought he was terrific, I really did. I thought he was excellent.

EP: Do you remember--I'm really intrigued about these five things--

FS: I can't remember. I just cannot remember.

EP: I know you said he was going to influence or change public opinion.

FS: I just don't remember those things he said, but I remember at the time, I said, "Well, goodness, you can't do any of those things." And he did everyone of them as I remember.

EP: Did you try--attempt in any way to diffuse the issue or influence public opinion through PR [public relations] activities or anything else?

FS: No, I just, I did everything they wanted me to do. I worked for the cafeteria and I tried to do their policies.

EP: Were you ever interviewed by the news media [pause] trying to get a statement from you about policies?

FS: No, I don't think so.

EP: Did Mr. Sapp--

FS: Everything about--

EP: --tell you certain things to say?

FS: Yeah, he would tell us not to talk to them, that he was doing all the talking. And--

EP: I see. At one point, I remember later in a meeting in his office that was in the paper, he said that he thought perhaps it was a mistake, since CORE was getting all of the media attention for the, [for] his clients and the other businesses not to have made statements during the course of the six to eight weeks of the demonstrations. Did you ever feel this was a mistake? Do you feel that you should have put forth your policy, your point of view?

FS: No, I think, I think our policy was pretty good. We hired Armistead to do our work for us. He handled it, and he was in close contact with us.

EP: Were you anticipating a court order or some kind of either federal or state legislation that would desegregate eating establishments?

FS: Well, there was talk about it all over, you know, all over the country at that time. But nobody really contacted us about it, unless they did with Sapp, which I have no knowledge of.

EP: What were your attitudes toward the demonstrations?

FS: Well, I felt like that--I've never really told many people this--but I felt like that we should feed them. But my fa[ther]--I worked for the S&W, and I wanted to do what was best for the S&W, you know. And so I would do what they asked me to do.

EP: The fact that you were the son of the president obviously gave you a very close, personal insight into the establishment of policy. Did you ever try to influence your father to adopt this policy?

FS: I'd talk to him, but I felt like what he wanted done was what he wanted done, and--well, I was concerned, mainly, that we might lose a lot of our business. People saying, "We would not eat with you, we will not eat with you if you feed just one," you know. This was very strong opinion at this time, or about people. And it was like that, and I'm sure it is today, a lot of people feel this way today. Of course, things have changed, you know.

EP: Turning now to the week when the demonstrations began in earnest in the spring.

According to the newspaper on the evening of May eleventh, a large number of CORE marchers came downstairs--downtown and stopped at the S&W, and you asked the students to leave. I think there may have been four—

FS: Right.

EP: --students. And then picket lines were set up. Do you remember that incident?

FS: Yeah, that I--I mean, did I actually handled myself, you mean?

EP: Yes. Could you describe it for me?

FS: Yeah, this was very interesting I thought. In fact, it, this really stands out in my mind. We had a man and his wife and his little--it was either a little boy or little girl, I guess maybe about three or four years old, I guess. And they were sitting at a round table up in the front of the cafeteria, up next to--we had little round seat that sort of went around in sort of an S-shape. But this big round table was right in that little corner, that little seat. And these men came in and were very rude and ugly to these people and they sat down at the table.

EP: By rude and ugly, do you mean by just sitting down or do you mean saying things?

FS: Saying things.

EP: Do you remember anything they may have said?

FS: Not, not verbatim. But I went up and asked them to leave that particular table and go to another table, because they were upsetting the child and the mother and the father.

EP: So you didn't ask them to leave the cafeteria?

FS: Well, yeah, I did ask them to leave, too, but I mean, I wanted them to get away from the customers there. I mean, because they were agitating the customers, and the little boy, or girl was crying. I think it was a little girl, if I'm not mistaken. I don't even know their names. But they--the little child was crying and the mother was visibly upset. And we had a reporter there from the newspaper, was standing by a column there, just maybe four or five feet away and seeing all this stuff that was going on, you know.

EP: Do you think that was by accident or design?

FS: Well, I think they came by design, to come in and, you know--

EP: No, I mean the reporter. Do you think he was there to cover the [unclear].

FS: I don't know, I don't know what that was. But I remember all the incident and the family being very upset. And I was trying to get them to leave and they wouldn't leave. And they were talking ugly, and they would not get up and leave, and they were going to sit there and they're banging on the tables and that type thing. But finally we did get them to leave after they had done their little episode.

EP: Had you called the police at that time?

FS: Oh, the police were around at that particular time--no, not that particular time. But usually we'd try to go to the corner, you know, and get somebody to come down, but I don't remember having any police there then. But we did get them, we did finally get them to leave.

But what was so interesting to me, and I begin to see a little bit of how the papers work. When it came out in the paper, it was nothing like what it was when we were there, you know. The paper had soft-pedaled it, you know. They came in and sat very nicely down at the table and they weren't rude, and all of this kind of stuff. And the people who were there weren't upset. And I began to see that they were telling half-truths and not the full truth, you know. And when they put that in the paper, it was really a lie about it, I felt like. And of course, I called the paper and talked to them about it, and they didn't do anything about it.

EP: Who did you speak to at the paper?

FS: Oh, goodness, I don't know who it was then.

EP: Did you tell them that you felt that they had not presented the story accurately?

FS: Oh, yeah.

EP: And what was their response?

FS: Nothing, not anything, that I remember. I don't--

EP: Then it's my understanding that picket lines were set up outside, according to the newspaper.

FS: Oh, yeah, yeah, they were. We had those practically everyday, picket lines.

EP: Now did this begin--was this the beginning of the nightly demonstrations? According to the paper, it indicates it went on pretty much either late afternoon or early evening.

FS: Yeah. Or it was at lunchtime and in the afternoon, you know, but mostly when people were in the cafeteria.

EP: Now when this incident occurred on the evening of May eleventh that you just described, was it a--

FS: I don't remember, I don't remember the dates now.

EP: I'm getting the dates from the paper.

FS: Yeah, okay.

EP: Was it crowded, or was it fairly empty?

FS: Well, most of the time the cafeteria was not filled up, but, I mean, we still had customers coming in, I mean, you know.

EP: Now I'm summarizing the whole series of daily articles, but the, what the paper indicates [is] that they went to the S&W, then another group would go to the Mayfair, and another group would go to the Center and the Carolina [Theatres], and that usually the, at least the revolving door was locked. Was that fairly accurate? Was that something that you would do on a regular basis?

FS: No. We couldn't lock that door. I mean we could lock it, but we weren't allowed to lock it. We had fire laws and stuff that prevented us from locking that door. We could go up there and stop it.

EP: By what, physically standing in front of it?

FS: Yes, exactly, but we weren't allowed to--

EP: You never did lock the door?

FS: No, we didn't lock the door. We couldn't do that. We had another door sort of that you could push, that it would open up. It was sort of like a fire door, a swinging door. It

wasn't a real through-fare, but a lot of people went through there a lot of times, but--

EP: What would happen on a nightly basis? Would you be contacted beforehand by the police?

FS: Well, the paper usually let us know that they were coming, you know. Sometimes they'd come and we didn't know they were coming.

EP: So you were always ready after that first night, for when the demonstrators showed up?

FS: Oh, we were ready all the time.

EP: Did the police ask you what your policy was going to be, or did they just arrest on their own initiative?

FS: They did on their own initiatives, I mean, the--

EP: In other words, you didn't have to swear out warrants?

FS: No, unless they came in or something like that, we'd have to swear out a warrant.

EP: Did they ever come in after that first night?

FS: They got in several times as I remember, but it was pretty well controlled. I would say right now that the police did an excellent job of keeping things under control. [Captain William] Jackson, I think he was head of that thing at one time, and he was terrific. He was one of the finest folks. I think even the colored people respected him, very much, and we did too. He just did a terrific job.

EP: Now when you say you respected him, he did a terrific job, exactly what? Exactly how?

FS: Well, he would, he would talk to both sides and he would keep things calm. And when things looked like they were going to blow up, and he'd walk right out into the middle of it, and he would settle it and talk to them.

EP: This is Captain Jackson of the police department?

FS: Yes.

EP: How about Jesse Jackson? The newspaper indicates that you spoke several times to him.

FS: Yes, I spoke to him several times. As a matter of fact, when I spoke to Farmer, I think Farmer and Jesse came, Jesse Jackson came up. I talked to both of them. And they asked for us to feed them, I mean the colored folks. And we, of course, told them our policy. That's the only thing we knew to do. And I talked to them.

EP: Was there extended discussion or was it pretty much just that.

FS: It was right at the front door and we talked back and forth, you know. And as I remember, it didn't last long, maybe it lasted maybe about five or ten minutes. Then they walked on. They had a big crowd up with them, you know.

EP: Does any particular night stand out in your memory?

FS: Well, it had gotten to be a pretty steady thing, you know. They were coming every night, in the afternoon and at lunchtime. And it was just a steady thing. And it went on, and on, and on, you know.

EP: Were they pretty--

FS: They were very orderly, I think.

EP: Very orderly. Did you ever see any incidence of violence?

FS: No, not really.

EP: Did you ever feel threatened?

FS: I never felt threatened. The only time I felt maybe, the only thing that I felt like they might come back behind the S&W and maybe tear up some cars or something like that. We put lights up out there, you know, so they could shine down on the parking lot in the back of the cafeteria. A lot of our customers came in from that area. They'd come in, drive up in the parking lot, then they'd come in from the back of the cafeteria. And so we put these big spotlights up there so that it would light the area up, and you felt like that, that'd help.

EP: Did anything of that nature ever happen?

FS: No, it never did.

EP: There is one time where they said there were at least two marches, one in the afternoon with older adults, and that in the lead--I'm sorry, students at first, and they had a large cross, and they walked in front of the S&W. And then later there were about anywhere from fifteen hundred to two thousand older black adults. Do you remember this particular day?

FS: No, not particularly.

EP: I think it occurred on a Tuesday.

FS: I don't remember it ever--I don't ever remember it being just the elderly. But most of the time it was the young students that I saw, most of them from A&T College.

EP: There was one incident reported in the paper where one student was charged with assault when--it's not that he actually struck an assistant manager, it was unidentified assistant manager of the S&W, but he pushed against him at the door.

FS: As far as I know, no one ever struck an assistant manager there.

EP: How many assistant managers were there?

FS: There were two.

EP: Yourself and--

FS: There was Bill Thrower and Charles Topping, and Mr. Bentz and myself. That was, what was our nucleus.

EP: Did--in your discussions, did you ever talk about it on a daily basis?

FS: Oh, yeah. It was constantly on our minds all the time.

EP: What kind of things would you say to each other?

FS: Well, we were concerned about--we were really concerned about our customers, really, at that time. And of course, we were at the door so they couldn't come in and, you know, and give us trouble, so we were really trying to keep them out, you know.

EP: I know at the Mayfair, they said that at times--apparently, according to the paper, he [Boyd Morris] locked the door, at least stood in front of the door, and would, he and the



police, would assist patrons going in and out. Was this the same situation at the S&W? Open the doors, letting people out or letting people in?

FS: Yeah, well, yeah, we had the doors going. But you know, we just, we had people, you know, letting them in and out, you know. We were guarding the front door, in other words.

EP: And you never saw any acts of violence or disturbance?

FS: As far as I know, we didn't have any, any assistant manager was hit, no.

EP: Or threatened or anything?

FS: I don't know about threatened. You know, it was a lot of times you go out there and they were yelling at you and that kind of thing.

EP: Saying what sort of things?

FS: Yeah, like, you know, "Why don't you feed us?" and all this kind of stuff, and "Let us in," and, you know.

EP: Mrs. Bentz has told me that her husband would come home and talk about having been spat upon or his feet stepped on or cursed at. Did you ever witness any of that?

FS: No.

EP: Did any of that ever happen to you?

FS: No.

EP: So these shouts--[unclear, both speaking]

FS: But now, you see, Mr. Bentz, he'd--I'd be off one, you know, I'd get off at two o'clock, and then that evening I may be at home or something like that. Maybe it happened to him up there at that time. But usually I was there when something like that came up. You know, we'd realize that somebody was coming, I would go down to the cafeteria to be with him. But I don't remember any of that.

As far as I know, the whole thing was very orderly, except for when they came in the cafeteria like I was telling you, that one incident there, and banging on the tables. [pause] But I began to find out a lot of things. A lot of things that happened there'd be

reporters there, and when they would get through and when you would read it in the paper, it wasn't what it was like at all.

EP: Did you ever talk to any of the reporters and say, "Why didn't you tell it like it was?"

FS: Oh, yeah, yeah.

EP: And what would they say?

FS: Nothing.

EP: Do you remember any of the reporters that covered the demonstrations?

FS: Oh, no. There was a lot of young kids there at that time as I remember.

EP: What was your--you mentioned that you think the police handled the situation very well. What was your observation of the students?

FS: They were orderly. I thought they were very orderly.

EP: How about the counter-demonstrators and the spectators? I remember the police--the newspaper says that they were young white teenagers mostly, or young white men that would march usually on the other side of the street with signs.

FS: Oh, yeah. They were sort of scary, really.

EP: Scary in what, what sense?

FS: Well, they would--boys, country boys, I don't know, would come to town, you know. We didn't know where they came from really, but we were afraid that violence might erupt in the confrontation between them, you know. They were yelling at one another across the street, you know, and that type of thing. That was sort of scary, you know.

EP: Did they ever come in contact with each other?

FS: Not to my knowledge, but there was a lot of verbal stuff going on.

EP: Now how about--were the spectators usually across the street on the other side of Market Street?

FS: There were spectators all around, but where they, where they were marching in long files and that kind of thing, they certainly weren't in that group, you know. They would probably be on the streets looking, you know, that kind of thing.

EP: Were you ever contacted by anyone that was urging you not to desegregate, or even threatening you if you did?

FS: To desegregate?

EP: I mean, to remain segregated.

FS: All--practically all of our people were saying not to integrate, you know.

EP: How would they convey this to you? Just come up to you and talk?

FS: They would come up and talk, yes.

EP: I see. What I'm talking about--

FS: And some were very strong willed about it, you know. Of course, there was a strong will on both sides, but you would just have to stand there and, you know, and listen to it.

EP: What was your response to these people who were--

FS: Well, I would just tell them what our policy was.

EP: I guess what I'm thinking of was more official groups like the [Ku Klux] Klan. Were you ever contacted by anyone who--

FS: Klan? No, we didn't have any trouble with the Klan, as far as I know.

EP: Did you ever receive any telephone calls or personal correspondence at your home regarding this situation?

FS: Oh, yeah, there was stuff like that going on all the time.

EP: Were they threats? Were they advice?

FS: No, they just call you up and give you their opinion.

EP: Were they anonymous?

FS: Some of them were and some weren't, naturally.

EP: What kind of effect did this have on you personally?

FS: Well, it was a time that we were just going through, that personally, my personal opinion was that it was something that you didn't realize, you didn't know exactly what was going to happen next, you know. We didn't know whether we were going to feed them, or whether we weren't going to feed them. At that time when we were going through all this, we felt like we weren't going to feed them, you know.

EP: Were you under a great deal of tension?

FS: Oh, attention was everywhere, yes.

EP: Did this affect your personal life at home?

FS: No, no. A lot of people asked me, you know. I would go to a party or something and they would talk about it, you know, and it was very much on the minds of everybody at that particular time.

EP: You had said that on the one hand, your personal feeling was that you should desegregate, but on the other hand, there was the official part, policy of the company. In any of your personal statements or public statements did you get into your personal feelings?

FS: No, no, I never said anything like that. I just didn't feel like it was right not to feed them, but if I'd of come out then and said something like that, they'd have thought, my goodness, that would have been something else, you know.

EP: Did you ever attend any of the trials?

FS: Yes. I was a witness at one--several of them--one of them, I only went to one, really.

EP: How were they conducted?

FS: They all--very nicely. [Floyd] McKissick was one of the lawyers, I think as I remember. He cross-examined me I remember, but all I could say was just what our policy was and what I had done, you know.

EP: What kind of questions would he ask you?

FS: Oh, gosh, I don't remember way back then there. He would just, you know, they just ask you about the policy of the company and that kind of thing.

EP: Well, how about the solicitor? What kind of questions would he ask you?

FS: I don't remember, really. It was on television, as I remember, way back there.

EP: I know that Mr. Morris said that he would be given a photograph and that the people arrested would come by and he was asked to identify them from the photograph or from his personal memory. Is this what happened with you?

FS: No.

EP: Were you ever asked to personally identify any of the students?

FS: No, no.

EP: Including those four students that came in and sat down?

FS: No. As far as I know, no pictures were taken of that.

EP: So you weren't--this is in connection with the trespass and fire law violations?

FS: Yes.

EP: But you were never asked to identify any students?

FS: No.

EP: Was this in superior court or municipal court?

FS: Municipal court as I remember.

EP: Did you ever serve as a witness or attend any of the trials in superior court?

FS: No. I don't, I don't think I did. I went to court one time, but I don't, it wasn't superior court.

EP: Did you ever meet with any of the--like Mr. Morris, Mr. [Eugene] Street of the Cinema Theatre, Mr. [James] Bellows of the Center Theatre--

FS: Yes, yes. They'd come by the cafeteria and talk to us, you know.

EP: But you never got together in a large meeting and say, "What are we going to do? How are we going to do this?"

FS: No, none of that, no. Now Sapp may have talked to all those men. I think he might probably, possibly had, because he was working on that almost full time.

EP: Would he tell you what he was doing on a daily basis?

FS: Yes, he would tell us what he thought and what he felt like he was going to do about it. He didn't tell us everything, I'm sure, but he kept us right on the line, you know. And he'd be in contact with my father.

EP: At one time, he told the press that he felt his phone was tapped, that his clients' phones were tapped, they were under observation by justice department officials.

FS: That's right.

EP: Did you ever feel your phone was tapped?

FS: Well, no, I didn't think so, but maybe it was. I don't know.

EP: Did you ever feel you were being under observation by government officials?

FS: No, I never felt that, no. I know Sapp did, though.

EP: How about--did he ever convey to you why he felt this? Who had told him this, or why he felt this way?

FS: Oh, I think the FBI was talking to him, too. They would, as I understand it, the FBI wouldn't tell him anything, but if you had asked the question, they would answer the question, you know. And they would let him know what was going on, but only if he would ask the question, you know.

EP: There was one incident where he said two men from the justice department checked in at

the King Cotton [Hotel] or the O. Henry [Hotel], and that when their identities became known they checked out. Did you ever have any personal knowledge of this incident?

FS: No, no. There was a lot going on that I didn't know about actually, but only what Sapp told us.

EP: Now you mentioned the story with Mr. Marriot and Robert Kennedy.

FS: Right.

EP: Was this before the meeting where all the Southern restaurant owners who had chains in the South were asked to go up to Washington and meet with him?

FS: Well, my father went up there, I remember, and met with John Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy.

EP: What did he say about these meetings?

FS: Well, I'd rather not say about what that--I'd rather you talk my father about that. But what I heard that--my father always said, you know, that--I wish he'd honor this then [?], I don't know that I want you to tell this or not. But Kennedy was rather ruthless about the whole thing. He was sort of cut-and-dried and very ugly to him when he went up there.

EP: Ugly, by what? His--

FS: Just by mannerisms and, you know, like he hardly even wanted to talk to them. He had asked them to come up there and then he was very rude to them, you know.

EP: Did he meet them individually or as a large body?

FS: As a body. Not a large body, I don't think there was that many there, really.

EP: Now Mrs. Bentz says that her husband said that Robert Kennedy kept them waiting a long time while he stood in front of them and talked with, she says, James Meredith [first black to attend Mississippi University, 1962]. Did your father mention this?

FS: Meredith? Meredith? James Meredith? Yeah, I don't know. I don't have no idea.

EP: Did he mention this at all?

FS: I don't remember that at all, no.

EP: But he was--well, did he--the newspaper said that he [Kennedy], quote, "urged them to desegregate." And yet you're saying that he was a lot more blunt about it. And Mr. Sapp said that he came out and ordered them to desegregate.

FS: Yeah, I think he did, order them to desegregate.

EP: So you think that this is more accurate, that he ordered them?

FS: Well, I understand that he was very rude, that he hardly acknowledged they were even there, you know. And I don't know--that's the way I understand it. All of them that came away from there were saying how rude he was, you know. Now John Kennedy they seemed to like very much and, you know, he talked very nicely to them and what have you.

EP: But did he essentially convey the same message?

FS: Well, he was naturally--John Kennedy and both Bobby Kennedy wanted them to integrate, naturally. And, but Bobby Kennedy was very ugly about it.

EP: But you're saying that your father did not consider John Kennedy to be ugly about it?

FS: Oh, no, he thought he was very nice.

EP: Did this change your father's policy?

FS: No. That, that's--no, what really changed the policy at S&W Cafeteria [is] I think we had in Lynchburg, Virginia, we had a group called SNCC--was that it?

EP: Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee.

FS: Well, they were getting ready to--they said they were going to the S&W, they were going to wreck the place, you know. And I think with everything on the S&W and what have you, it had been going on for such a long time, I guess it was like a drop of water on a rock, you know. It kept eroding away the rock. But it was then, I think, my father decided the best thing to do was just go ahead and integrate. And it's because of the SNCC group in Lynchburg, Virginia, that caused this.

EP: Rather than anything that happened in Washington or Greensboro?



FS: Well, I'm sure that all of it had an effect on it, but it was because of the SNCC group that we integrated.

EP: One reason I asked that is because I've spoken with several people, including Mr. Morris and several others, and they said, "Well, you know, when the federal government said to integrate, then"--in effect, they said we saw the handwriting on the wall, that we knew eventually pressure was going to be brought to bear against us. Was this the thing--

FS: That's not what did it for us, no, as I understand it. It was just the threatening and coming in and just tearing up the whole place and that kind of thing. Course, you having customers and all this is going on, that's just no way to do anything, you know.

EP: Did the S&W blanket desegregate all of these sixteen cafeterias they had, or was it one by one?

FS: Blanket? They were all desegregated, yes. What?

EP: What I mean, was there a certain date that after which the S&W chain would be desegregated, or was it on an individual basis in each town?

FS: No, I think it was the whole thing done at the same time.

EP: All S&Ws desegregated at the same time?

FS: Yes.

EP: Was there a period like, you were waiting for a period of calm to desegregate or was this just a spot decision?

FS: It was a decision, and then I think a letter came out and we abided by it. I think all the papers got it, you know. I mean, they--

[End of Tape 1-Begin Tape 2]

FS: --sixty-one, two, three. Sixty-three.

EP: [Nineteen] sixty-three. Did you ever have any meetings with Mayor [David] Schenck?

FS: Yes.

EP: And what occurred in these meetings? What did he say to you?

FS: Of course he wanted to integrate too, you know.

EP: So he urged you to integrate?

FS: Integrate, yes.

EP: Now was this all along, or was this only after he--

FS: Well, I think they finally came to what they decided they felt like we ought to do, you know. And so they were trying to do the best for the whole city.

EP: By that, what I mean was, there were two large sit-downs on the fifth and sixth of--one was in the square and one was in front of the municipal building the night before.

FS: Right, I remember that.

EP: Then the mayor issued a statement to the press, and he called together a number of leading industrialists and businessmen of the city. What I'm asking was, were these meetings with him where he asked you to integrate before this time or after?

FS: No, we went to the meeting and then that's when he talked to us about it and then what he wanted to do.

EP: Now there--I understand there were meetings on the fifteenth and sixteenth of June, on a Monday and a Tuesday, and there may have been more than one meeting per day. Do you recall the substance of these meetings?

FS: No.

EP: Are those the meetings you're talking about?

FS: I think so, but I don't remember the substance of them.

EP: But essentially he asked you to integrate?

FS: Yes, as I remember that's what it was.

EP: Did you indicate to him that you were going to?

FS: No, we still had our policy, you know.

EP: So that didn't come about until you received the letter from your father?

FS: Oh, that was--well, this was--we were still, we still were, you know, in the same position we had been all along. And I think it was a pretty good while after that that we still didn't integrate. It was only after SNCC did this thing in Lynchburg, and I don't know exactly when that was.

EP: Did you try to tie your activities with the Mayfair, or did you function independently from them?

FS: Independently from them.

EP: I mean, no matter what they [unclear--both speaking at once], you were gonna--

FS: Of course, I think what Boyd was doing, he was doing the same thing we were doing, you know. And's we'd talk, we would talk back and forth, you know, that kind of thing. Have you talked to Boyd?

EP: Yes.

FS: He'd probably tell you about all that.

EP: There was a meeting in Armistead Sapp's office on June ninth, of his clients, both the theatre and the restaurant, and then other restaurants and theatre individuals who may or may not have been his clients. Did you attend that meeting?

FS: I don't remember that, no. I don't think so.

EP: The substance of this was there was a newsman present. He [Sapp] said, "Now, he has agreed not to identify individual speakers and therefore you can speak candidly," and they did. And the substance of it was that they didn't like being forced into a situation by the students and also the pressure of the federal government. Some of them even said they thought it was Communist-inspired. You did not attend this meeting?

FS: No, I don't think that I did, no. But I knew all that stuff was going on. [pause] Pickets, you know, they--

EP: Are you speaking of--I wanted to ask you a question about this. There was an A&T, I mean a Bennett College professor, a woman, who was identified--

FS: As a Communist?

EP: Yes. Is this the incident to which you're referring?

FS: Yeah, that one.

EP: Do you have any personal knowledge of this?

FS: Not personal knowledge, I mean--

EP: I mean, did you witness this?

FS: Oh yes, I saw them when they--yeah, I saw them, saw them--and they were pointed out to me, you know, that they were Communists, that particular woman.

EP: Did you ever feel this was Communist-inspired?

FS: Well, we felt like it at that time, you know, but I'm not really sure. Course, when you have Communists in a group, you know, you begin to wonder.

EP: Regarding the S&W management's decision to desegregate, how was it handled locally?

FS: You mean in the cafeteria?

EP: Yes. I mean, when you got the letter from your father, did you and Mr. Bentz decide how you were going to integrate? Were you just--the paper indicates that invitations were sent to certain members of the black community urging them to come in, in gradual numbers--

FS: I don't remember that part of it, really. The only thing I remember is just--in essence, what I had to say about it was, I'd talked to the help, you know, prior to them coming in. And I told them that now that we were going to feed them, that I felt like that we should be just as nice to them as we had been to any of the rest of our other customers before. And we were to, we were servants of the people, and we would want to act then--I mean, be just as nice to them as to anybody else. And maybe just go overboard a little bit just to be nicer to them. And since we were going to, and we going--we had to do it. And I wanted to do it the very nicest way that they possibly could.

EP: Did--were there any members of your employees who indicated that--were they reluctant to do this or stated flatly they just weren't going to do it?

FS: No, none of that.

EP: Did you employ black help at this time?

FS: Oh, yes. Most of our employees were black.

EP: What were their reactions to the demonstrations? Expressed sympathy or--

FS: Well, after we told them our policy, like I did in that meeting, like I told you about, and told them how we felt and what we were going to do--and I didn't want to hold anything back from them. I wanted them to know what we were doing, because I've always felt like if you know what's happening, you can do a little bit better, you know. But if you didn't know what was going to come up next, or you were very apprehensive and that kind of thing--and I felt like the best thing to do was just to let them know where we were and how we stood, and how they fitted into the picture.

EP: Was there ever any incidence of what you would term a slow down in service, or kind of attempts at subtle sabotage on the part of the help?

FS: After we started feeding them?

EP: No, beforehand. Now what I'm indicating is there was some suggestion from one source that the black help in the restaurants being demonstrated against tended to slow down their work, much like you get a slow down in a plant where there's not a union, and that this is their way of expressing displeasure.

FS: No.

EP: Nothing like that?

FS: No.

EP: Do you remember the first time that blacks entered the S&W after the desegregation policy was announced?

FS: Yes.

EP: What happened?

FS: Nothing. They came in and they were well-dressed. They were as nice as they could possibly be. They bought their families in. Looked like they were going to church, you know, that type of thing.

EP: So they were older people rather than students?

FS: Most of them, they were older families, yeah, you know. And they bought their children in. And I did notice one thing. They tipped the employees, like the busboy and the busgirl that carried their trays. They really tipped them. They did a, maybe a dollar, a dollar and a half, or something like that, maybe three dollars or something. But they would tip very well indeed, you know. And we tried to look after them just the best we possibly could.

EP: Was this unusual to tip the help, or was it just unusual for [unclear]?

FS: Oh, no, I mean they always got tips. But I mean when they came in, they would most of the time. And the help would talk to me about it, "My goodness, I got a three dollar tip," you know, or something like that.

EP: I spoke to one of the--oh, I'm sorry.

FS: No, go ahead.

EP: I was going to say, I spoke to one of these men who brought their families in, and he said that they sat down, they weren't used to a cafeteria--

FS: Right, you could see that they were not used to it, yeah.

EP: And then that someone from the management told them they would have to go through the line.

FS: Oh, yeah.

EP: Is this--do you remember that?

FS: Yes, that's--

EP: Did you ever speak to them personally?

FS: Oh, yeah. We just tried to be just as nice as we possibly could.

EP: What sort of things did you say?

FS: Oh, you know, I'd ask them if they liked the meal and that kind of thing, you know, and maybe sometimes talk to them. And sometimes I knew some of them, you know.

EP: Did blacks start coming to the S&W in large numbers or just gradually?

FS: Gradually, I think.

EP: Was this an agreement that was worked out with the administration--with the S&W management or just with the black community, or was this just something that happened?

FS: Just something that happened. We just tried to be just as nice as we could.

EP: How about the students? Did they come, or were your patrons mostly the older members-

FS: I think at first they came, you know, a lot of times. But mostly what we got I think were just real nice families, and they would come in and they were just as nice as they could possibly be.

EP: Did you lose much white patronage after you desegregated?

FS: I think we did for a while there, I think we did. But I don't think it really came back like it, like it was in the past.

EP: Now do you attribute the falloff of patrons to integration or the competition from the shopping centers, people just weren't coming down to shop--

FS: Oh, I think it was all of that.

EP: A combination?

FS: A combination, yeah.

EP: The S&W was a model restaurant of its time.

FS: Right.

EP: It was described thus by Boyd Morris, who said you had just the most efficient mechanization.

FS: Right. Most mechanized cafeteria in the country at that time.

EP: Why did these large cafeterias go out of business or fade from the scene?

FS: Well, practically--and you can see it today--the downtown business is just gone out to the shopping centers. And as I can remember, I think way back when I started working at the S&W, it was back in forty--'47, '46 and '47. And the things that changed the downtown cafeterias was they first started, people began to charcoal stuff at night, you know, out at their homes and stuff, steaks and [unclear]. And that took out a lot of business.

And then they began to tell the weather situations. And the weather, you know, they would say, well, it's going to rain tonight, you know. It might not rain and they said it was going to rain, and that would cut our business down.

And then the business--and when shopping centers began to come in, that began to take the business out of the city. And I don't think that was any of the S&W's, you know, reason business fell off. I think we had good business up to the very last, except for those things, you know. But I hear people now that say, "Well, I haven't been downtown in two or three years," you know.

EP: Do you think that there will ever be a resurgence of cafeterias the size of the S&W?

FS: Not in the downtown areas, I don't think. The shopping centers is the thing now.

EP: The cafeterias in the shopping centers tend to be smaller affairs, smaller buildings. Is that by design?

FS: Well, I think they're more efficient than cafeterias are now.

EP: So the day of the large cafeterias--

FS: Large cafeterias is probably gone, yeah, unless you are in a big, big area with a lot of people.

EP: You've described individual evenings. Could you characterize the scenes at the S&W whenever a demonstration took place? What would the students do?



FS: Well, of course, it was all outside, you know. We wouldn't let anybody in. And--I mean, we wouldn't let the colored folks in. We'd try to let our patrons come in, our customers. And business went on as usual. And it's sort of surprising--all this activity outside, and then people still coming in and eating and going out, you know.

EP: Now Boyd Morris said that he lost income by the thousands of dollars.

FS: Well, I'm sure, we all lost a lot of money.

EP: Would you say the same was true of the S&W?

FS: I'm sure that we'd have made more money, you know. We still had right large crowds come in.

EP: But it wasn't a severe loss of income?

FS: No, I wouldn't think so.

EP: Did you witness the sit-down on the square on June sixth?

FS: No, I didn't, I was off that night. But I heard it was something else, that Captain Jackson was really something that night, that he handled that thing, and it was a very--looked like it was just a touch-and-go situation, and--from what I remember. And that he was just a remarkable man to go out there with that situation like it was.

EP: Did you ever speak personally with any of the policemen involved?

FS: Oh, a few, you know. I talked to Jackson a lot, you know.

EP: And what would you say to him?

FS: Oh, he would just, you know, say, "Well, son, we're just doing the best we could," and that kind of thing. He was friendly with me, but he was also friendly with them, you know. And I think he was friend[ly]--I think he was very friendly about it. I mean, he conveyed that and I think he was.

EP: You think that's the reason that it didn't explode into violence?

FS: I really think so, yeah. I just can't say enough for that man. He was just unbelievable. And the police department of this city, I'm telling you, they worked night and day for

both sections, the colored and the white. And I really think they did a beautiful job.

EP: The incident that I alluded to earlier when a student was arrested for assaulting or allegedly pushing against a manager of the S&W--I suppose that would be Mr. Bentz?

FS: Yes.

EP: Did he ever describe that incident?

FS: No.

EP: And you did not witness it or anything?

FS: No. I don't remember anything like that. As far as I know, no one was, you know, pushed or anything like that.

EP: Now you had said that the S&W decided they would not integrate because they were afraid they'd lose their white patrons.

FS: Right. That's what all our customers were telling us, you know.

EP: What then was your reaction to the open letter to Greensboro businessmen that appeared in the paper, it was sponsored by the Greensboro Community Fellowship? There were about, oh, twelve or thirteen hundred signatures to it. Do you remember this?

FS: Yes.

EP: What was your reaction to it?

FS: Well, my reaction was I didn't know what we could do about it. Our policy was still our policy. And we were seeing these people working from the other side, you know. Doesn't mean there was one--we were on one side and they were on the other. And there was a confrontation and it was in the newspapers right and left, you know.

EP: Well, what I mean is, this was obviously an attempt by the Greensboro Community Fellowship to say, "Go ahead and integrate, we promise you we'll continue to patronize your establishment and you won't lose business."

FS: Yeah. Well, that was what, you said thirteen hundred people? We fed, you know, we fed a lot more people than that. They were still saying what they were saying, you know. And

these people weren't just very nice about it. They would come up to us and shake their finger at us, you know, and say, "Now, listen." And you have to sort of weigh everything, you know, as you go along.

EP: Was there ever any dialogue or discussion or confrontation between you and any member of the leadership of the demonstrators?

FS: Any, you mean confrontation?

EP: Well, I mean exchange of words.

FS: I think one time, yeah. We had a, we had a chef that worked for us, Issac Reid[?], and he had son at A&T College, and he was definitely for integration. He was very liberal, Issac was, and I'm sure his son was. And his son was very much caught up in it. I remember I was at the front door and he came up and said, "Why don't you feed me, because my father works for you." And it was a pretty good question, if you ask me. And I just told him our policy. That's the only thing I knew to tell him, you know.

EP: This has been characterized very seriously, like you just described it, and another version of it says that it was kind of a light-hearted banter. Which way would you characterize it?

FS: What do you mean by light-hearted banter?

EP: I mean saying--the *Civilities and Civil Rights*, this book that has just come out, the author of that [William Chafe] says--I'm paraphrasing his words, but essentially he was saying he came up and said, "My father cooks for y'all and I'd like to come in and have some of his cooking." But you're saying it wasn't light-hearted like that at all was it?

FS: No, no. It was very serious.

EP: Well, did Mr. Reid, your chef, ever speak with you about it?

FS: Oh, yeah. He said, he'd say, "Mr. Sherrill," said, "I know that times are changing, you know, and my son is caught up with what's going on now. And this is the way that he feels about it. And I'm not so sure that he's not right," you know.

EP: And what was your response to him?

FS: Well, I would just said, "Well, I understand, you know. I understand, Issac, what you're talking about, you know." But that question was definitely asked of me, and I thought

that it was a pretty good question. But the only thing I knew to tell him was the fact that our policy was such-and-such, and if and when it changed, we would do what was supposed to be done, you know. But I think--don't you think that was a pretty good question? I do, too. [laughs]

EP: What--did any of your staff feel they'd lose their jobs as a result of the demonstrations?

FS: Oh, you mean, the black help? Oh no. We didn't, we didn't do anything like that. We didn't threaten anybody. Course, we wanted them to work normally like they normally would. No one was ever fired because of anything like this. [coughs] To my knowledge, I don't think they were.

EP: Did you ever feel any pressure directly from Washington or Raleigh? There were reports in the paper that Governor Sanford was talking to the heads of restaurant chains, also urging them to integrate.

FS: All I know is that Governor Sanford--I don't know whether he was, yeah, I guess he was governor--was he governor then?

EP: Yes.

FS: Yeah? Well, I know he did talk to my father. Dad said that he came up to the farm up in Hendersonville, and they sat out on the porch and talked for a long time, you know.

EP: So he came to your father's residence and talked with him?

FS: Yes, and talked to him.

EP: Did he ever say what they talked about?

FS: No. Dad was always a good listener. [laughs]

EP: Oscar Burnett, on the second committee that was set up under Dr. George Evans and a number of other businessmen--it was a second committee--and apparently Mr. Burnett was in charge of talking to the restaurant owners. Did he ever talk with you?

FS: No. I think he talked to Mr. Bentz. I don't believe I ever talked to him. I may have, but I just don't remember.

EP: Did you--were you ever aware of the results of a poll he asked them to conduct to see if--

of some twenty Greensboro residents on June first to determine how many would desegregate if the other restaurants in town would desegregate?

FS: I think I remember something about it, yeah, not much though.

EP: What was your feeling? Do you think that if they could all get an agreement to desegregate together they would?

FS: I didn't think it would change our policy.

EP: Your policy came from Charlotte area?

FS: Charlotte, yeah.

EP: I see. No matter what the other Greensboro businesses [unclear, both speaking]--

FS: I don't mean no matter what, I don't mean that. But I just thought at that time that we just weren't going to feed them unless--the public opinion was changing though, and my father decided to do it. But I think he was afraid that we would lose so much business, and after all, that's what we were doing, you know. We were in business for business' sake.

EP: There's been some suggestion that a lot of businesses downtown that weren't serving blacks really wanted to to get the black patronage, since increasingly they were coming a large--

FS: Who, who are you talking about?

EP: Clothing stores. Some of the places like O. Henry Coffee Shop that wasn't serving them, but they, you know, a lot of, like, blacks who were serving as maids out here in this area [both speaking]--

FS: Well, if they wanted to do it, why didn't they do it?

EP: Well, the suggestion is that they weren't going to do it themselves because then they were afraid if they lost their customers, then they'd go out of business and they'd be kind of like the sacrificial lamb. But they said, "But if we could get everybody to do it together, that way, nobody suffers or everybody suffers alike." You think there was ever any feeling like that in the downtown merchants?

FS: I think there was some talk about it, yeah. But I don't, I don't think there was much to it there. I mean, I don't think there were many who wanted to do that.

EP: So the thing was, it wasn't just, wasn't social customs. It's just that they didn't want to serve blacks.

FS: Yeah. I think that's true to a certain extent.

EP: You're saying that--in the same meeting in Mr. Sapp's office, whoever, whatever individuals did attend said that the picketing wasn't having much effect on their businesses, but the demonstrations were in that they were driving customers away or people wouldn't come downtown fearing there'd be disturbances. Did this have an effect on your business?

FS: Oh, yeah.

EP: But it was the demonstrations rather than the picketing?

FS: Yeah, what I remember--I mean, like, sometimes we'd have a filled-up evening, you know, the cafeteria would be filled-up. Those nights when they were demonstrating we may be about half-filled or may be two-thirds filled or something like that, you know. So we were losing business. But people just didn't, people just don't want to walk into something like that, you know. A lot of people go for curiosity's sake, they want to see what's going on. But I think the mothers taking their children down there and that type of thing, that was sort of out at that time.

EP: Now there were a number of things that S&W did to sponsor their businesses and improve their business. I know that Howard Waynick played at least one night a week. There were movies shown or at least cartoons for the children.

FS: That was years back though that we did that. We done that for years.

EP: Did these kinds of things significantly improve your business? I'm not talking just about the demonstrations now, I'm just talking about in general.

FS: Well, it helped, it certainly helped when we first opened up here. We had little movies for the children on Thursday night and that kind of thing, you know.

EP: When did the S&W close here in Greensboro?

FS: I'm not sure. I think it was in '74, but the exact date, I don't know offhand. I've forgotten exactly.

EP: When did you leave the S&W?

FS: I left in '68. I'm diabetic and I was overweight, and my doctor said if I'd leave and not work for S&W--because I'd nibble a lot and I was overweight--that I would live about ten years longer. So for that reason I got out. And I went into photography, because I love photography and had done it, you know, had turned professional in '62.

EP: Was business still pretty good when you left the S&W in '68?

FS: Oh, yeah, but it began to die down after that.

EP: Was it a slow, gradual tapering off of clientele or more of an abrupt ending?

FS: Yeah. Slow, slow.

EP: I want to thank you very much for participating in--

FS: Oh, thank you. I didn't know I'd go through all this. [laughs]

[The dialogue that follows appears out of sequence.]

EP: What was his point of view on the legal points at issue here? Mr. Sapp.

FS: I don't quite understand "legal point."

EP: What comes across in the paper, he said, "A businessman ought to be able to select his clientele on whatever basis he wants to" and that "any kind of government infringement of that smacks of dictatorship and perhaps encroaching Communism." Was that his viewpoint?

FS: Yeah, that was his viewpoint, yes.

EP: Did he really think that there were--all kinds of statements were going around at that time: communist cell at A&T, and Bennett, and Woman's College, that this was encroaching socialism from the government [unclear--both talking at once]

FS: Well, he felt like there was Communism in there, you know.

EP: Did he ever state specifically why? I know that certain similar charges were made against, like, Southern Christian Leadership Conference under Martin Luther King, because supposedly the FBI had pictures of him attending a Communist meeting. Now was there anything that specific in his point of view, or did he just feel this kind of agitation is the kind of thing the Communists do?

FS: Well, he felt, yeah, he felt like that and I did too. I think the communists do this type thing. And they were there, you know. And it shows that they were doing something.

EP: Did he--is the way I've characterized his point of view pretty much what he said to you?

FS: Pretty much. Pretty much.

EP: So in other words, what he was saying for the press wasn't just for rhetoric's sake--

FS: No, no.

EP: --or for attention. This was what he was really saying.

FS: Yes. Armistead pretty well had his facts together, and he was always checking into things. And I think he did an excellent job. I think my father felt like Armistead did an excellent job.

EP: Now he always announced to the press that there was no change in the S&W's policy, and even when the policy was announced, it was he who was responsible who was announcing it. What would he do, just go and talk to a reporter, call a press conference, or what?

FS: Well, I don't really remember what he did. I'm sure he just, I mean, he just, he handled it, that's all I know, you know. I don't think--I don't know whether he called a press conference or what have you. I don't remember that part of it. But he was our legal man and we worked through him and my father.

EP: I suppose my final question is this: did he tell you what he thought what you should do, or did he say, "Now you tell me what you want to do, and I'll give you legal advice?"

FS: Well, I think what he did--my father told him how he felt about it, and then Armistead went to work, and he did what we wanted him to do. And he stood on his own two feet and he did it. Now how Armistead felt about the whole situation, I never did quite get



that straight. I didn't know whether he was definitely, you know, he wasn't definitely-- what I really felt like, really and true, was that he wasn't against the colored people, really he wasn't. And I wasn't either. I don't think any of us were really against any of them. We just had a policy that we didn't want to feed them because we felt like we'd lose our business. And this is what he went on. And then, but he--Armistead said that he was going to change public opinion and he was going to fight this thing and he was going to win it. And that he felt like he could win it, and I felt like he could win it, after seeing him work the way that he had.

EP: Did he ever say how he was going to change public opinion?

FS: Well, he was going to do it, you know, by statements and the truth, you know.

EP: The reason I ask that is I got the impression that public opinion was pretty much behind the S&W and the other segregated businesses. Now what did he feel he was fighting?

FS: That he was, well, he was fighting for those businesses, you know.

EP: Well, I mean, if public opinion was behind y'all, then he wouldn't have to change the minds of the public about that.

FS: No, no.

EP: So I gather he was saying he was going to be fighting the federal government in intervention or pressure from the federal government.

FS: Well, I'm not so sure about that. I don't know.

EP: He never identified who he talked to?

FS: I really felt, I really felt that we had it licked until the SNCC thing came along, and that--Armistead had nothing to do with that. That was my father, you know. And I remember the day that Dad called Armistead and told him that we were going to integrate, you know, because of that particular thing. And I remember that Armistead and I were upset about it, you know, because we'd worked so hard to do this thing. And Armistead really more so than I was, you know.

EP: Did he try to change your father's opinion?

FS: I'm sure Armistead--now I don't know. I'm sure when Dad said what he wanted to do,

Armistead accepted that.

EP: Didn't try to talk him out of it?

FS: No. I'm sure that Armistead let him know that he didn't feel like he ought to do that, you now.

EP: So you feel that if there hadn't been this threat from SNCC up in Lynchburg, Virginia, that S&W would have remained segregated?

FS: Yes, well, up to that time, I did, you know, so.

[End of Interview]