

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

INTERVIEWEE: William Snider

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WILLIAM SNIDER: —the chance to go to Charlotte. I had come out of—had been secretary to the governor in Raleigh at that time and had stayed on down there with Kerr Scott for a while in state government. And then I had a chance to, to come here or to go to Charlotte. And I, I grew up in Salisbury, sort of midway—and I liked what I knew about Greensboro.

One of the people who was influential in my life was William Polk, who is Marnie Ross's father. And I thought the Greensboro Daily News was a—the best newspaper in North Carolina, particularly editorially, it seemed to me. It had had a succession of very interesting people. And the newspaper had played a part, a role in the community that was interesting.

The old Greensboro Industrial News was a predecessor of the Greensboro Daily News. As you probably know it was a faction of the Republican Party, the Butler faction. And Dick Douglas's father [Richard D. Douglas] was editor for that paper back in 19—the early 1900s.

In about 1908 the paper went bankrupt and Captain [Edwin] Jeffress and his associates took over. They came down from Haywood County and from Asheville. And they had had a succession of interesting people here on the Daily News, among them Gerald Johnson, who is—went on to the Baltimore Sun and had a very distinguished career as a newspaperman and biographer. And Lenoir Chambers who went on to Norfolk to become editor there and won the Pulitzer Prize during the massive resistance situation in the fifties. And Slim Kendall, who was a very, a very conscientious and forward-looking person in terms of the mental health programs in North Carolina—the Kendall Center being named for him now, as you know. And Bill Polk, Bill Polk was probably the literary craftsman of the group and I thought was a person of tremendous stature in journalism and, and as a, a short story writer.

But that is simply as a prelude to saying that I think Greensboro had leaders, not only in journalism but in other areas, who reflected a high quality of character and effectiveness in public policy. And I was never disappointed in what they tried to do. Greensboro was always more of an open community, I felt, or more varied community

than, say, Charlotte or Winston-Salem, or even Raleigh, in the sense that it was not really run by any one faction. It was a series of very interesting groups of people including the Quakers, the Jewish community was great, had a great impact on Greensboro—the Cone family, the Sternberger family, the Benjamins—and the textile and insurance business, of course, was predominant here.

But there was a kind of—there was great interest in education. Greensboro, as you know, and Guilford have some great leaders in their background who were interested in education all the way dating back from David Caldwell on down. And I think that to some extent the character and the flavor of this community were established by some of these sources and some of this background in its history. So I think in the fifties—and also to mention the educational institutions here, which I think were a tremendous factor in any community.

The fact that you had two units of, of the university system here, the public education system [The University of North Carolina at Greensboro and North Carolina A&T State University]. You had Greensboro College, you had Bennett [College], you had Guilford College—the Quaker influence was quite important. So I think all these factors played a role in creating the kind of climate, say, that would produce a police department that in the fifties turned out to be rather sophisticated for its day. Certainly more so than the average southern police department. The fact that you could produce a Captain [William] Jackson who would call Jesse Jackson and make plans for a march downtown, and have an arrangement whereby he would try to maintain peace in the community and at the same time allow for this sort of thing, was very interesting.

I don't know whether you know this or not, but the, the Klan marched at the same time that the, that the A&T students marched. And Captain Jackson had a habit of calling up Jesse Jackson, who was president of the student body in those days. And they would say—he would say—this is the story I'm told. You may check this with Captain Jackson and maybe you already have. “Jesse, where you all going to march tonight? Give me your route.” And they would make their plans.

And there was a sort of feeling of trust established there that was interesting. And I think that that would never have happened if in Greensboro you hadn't had this background of, of a willingness to recognize what the role of the press ought to be.

You know somebody once said about Albert Coates and establishing the Institute of Government, don't shoot your sheriff, teach him.

EUGENE PFAFF: [laughs]

WS: And this is supposed to be what the Institute of Government was all about. I think this police department had been steeped in some, some pretty good education about what its function was in a time like that.

EP: You mention the, what the role of the press should be. Given the 1960 sit-ins and the 1963 demonstration marches, what do you think the role of the press should be—was?

WS: Well, the press was assailed by all of the forces in the community. Those that were—had accepted this separate but equal and the fact that lunch counters weren't open or that restaurants were not open, that segregation was a way of life. And therefore, you had a status quo feeling in the community which was reflected all over the South, in every area but in differing degrees. You also had here a feeling on the part of a lot of people that there was an unfairness about this. And that when you began to think about it and analyze it, it didn't make much sense.

There was, as I recall, a very strong support for the young college students, the black college students, in the black community obviously, which was not so openly expressed, because whereas the students were not vulnerable to reprisal, the older generation out in the working world could have been. I don't want to maintain that Greensboro was a liberal community in the sense of being far, far ahead. But I think the very fact that its school board in the fifties was willing to begin token desegregation, and on the night of the Brown [v. Board of Education] decision, the night afterwards, met and decided to take a stand in which it would accept the court decision and try to work with it. It's rather interesting.

EP: There was an editorial in the paper at that time about the 1960 sit-ins which said, in effect, that we have always gone along with the conditions at the time, that it has, albeit reluctantly—here is the exact quote. It says, “This state has managed so far in episodes growing out of the Brown decision to keep out of the courts breathing down our necks. We have done what we reluctantly deem necessary, but we, with full awareness of the need for avoiding court orders and public disorders.”

This seems to me a kind of reluctant acceptance of the reality of the situation and a feeling that this is what we have to do. Let's be realistic. Let's go ahead and whip it. Do you think that was an accurate reflection of the, one, the mood of the community, and, two, the perspective of the press?

WS: The perspective of the, the Greensboro Daily News as I recall it in that day was that there were the same kinds of, of nuances of difference in reaction to the Brown decision and to the sit-ins that you would find in any group. This reflected in part from the age of the members of our staff at that time, differing impressions about what would be the best way to avoid disorder. There was a great effort made to maintain the peace, at the same time move along toward some sort of accommodation or change that would be moderate in nature, but at the same time would reflect a willingness to try to see what could be done.

EP: In a later editorial in the April 1960 entitled Lunch Counters and Common Sense, the perspective seemed to be a more positively on the side of the students. And the gist of the editorial was that it only makes sense to open up the counters to all. Either everybody's standing or everybody's seated. And that this was really interfering with the progress of the community. Does that reflect a change more in sympathy with the students and integration?

WS: It reflects, I think, a feeling on the part of our paper at that time, the editorial board of the paper. There were three members of that board, Mr. Kendall, who was the editor at that time, Mr. Polk, who was the senior associate editor, and myself. And the thrust was that probably the situation wasn't going to go away and we were going to have to try to find some way to deal with it.

And I think that there was a consensus, ultimately, with all three of us having somewhat different views about how it ought to be handled, that we were going to have to find some way to, to make a change. And we were trying to find as many compelling arguments in that direction as we could without precipitating an open confrontation between the groups.

There was great effort made in that time to work through the Woolworth Company, through the New York offices, through—Mr. Zane was an, was an interesting figure in this. Ed Zane, in which he was trying to work with some of the corporate leaders in the community to, to show that it might be necessary for all of them together to make a decision that would move in the direction of opening up the accommodations to all. Yet there was great reluctance on the part of many of these people to move in that direction because of the argument that this was private property. It wasn't public property. And therefore, that, you know, a man ought not to be told who he had to serve.

That turned out to be a rather much, a rather dead-end street in a way because—and the other argument, the other side of that argument, is that if you are opening your facilities to the public then the public is the public and people are people. And can you distinguish between a black person and a white person as a member of the public?

EP: Mr. Harris, C.L. Harris, manager of the Woolworth store, at least as portrayed in Miles Wolff's book, Lunch at the 5 & 10, seemed to feel that the press was openly in sympathy to students and in effect, crucifying him. And he said that the distinction was not made between editorial policy and objective news reporting. He felt that this attitude was reflected in the editorials of the paper as well as the news reporting on the situation. How would you respond to that or how did you at the time?

WS: Well, of course, Mr. Harris was, would have rather that there would have no reporting at all. I mean, any reporting of it was always seen by Mr. Harris as, as probably not helping his cause because he would have preferred for the whole thing to go away. But it wasn't

going to go away. And he was caught, to some extent, in a situation which he thought, or at least he said that he thought, that if he allowed the blacks to come in his establishment that, or to eat lunch in his establishment, that he would run his white customers away.

This is the old argument, you know, that you always hear about. "Well, I feel all right about this but the others are the ones." And so you have the old familiar argument that: "I'm willing to go along with it but I think it's going to hurt my business." Or, "I think that others will respond negatively."

Harris also was dickering with his headquarters of the, of the company that he worked for. And he was the man on the spot here. I think he would have preferred that there be no coverage of it at all. And so he interpreted the coverage of the news as being slanted because it was being covered.

EP: So there was no effective cooperation between he and the news media?

WS: Well, there was except he was highly emotional. And he was quite—he had moments when he got quite angry about the situation. He—I think he saw that this was disturbing his business as indeed it was.

EP: Mr. Hogate, manager of the Kress's, which was the second target of the sit-in demonstrators, appears to be kind of a shadowy figure. You don't read very much about him in the press. He's a very, very minor figure in Wolff's book. Was he that in, in reality?

WS: Indeed, he was. Unless you had mentioned his name I could not have told you what his name was. I don't think he played a leading role in this at all.

EP: You've mentioned that yourself, Mr. Kendall—

WS: And Mr. Polk.

EP: And Mr. Polk were, were the three members of the editorial staff. Did the editorials that were written reflect the common input of the three of you or was it one person's final decision?

WS: We have a, an editorial department which has always been inclined towards an evident consensus. It isn't always possible. I wrote a great many of those editorials. My view, I being at that time about in my early thirties, probably reflected a view which was more sympathetic toward the student causes than the attitudes of Mr. Pope or Mr. Kendall.

They, however, were very experienced and open-minded and tolerant kind of people and not at all dogmatic in their judgments about whether their opinions might

have been right or wrong. I remember one time Mr. Polk said something that I thought about often in the intervening years. He said one time, he said, "Well, Bill, you know, equality ought not to be the end. Excellence ought to be the end but equality ought to be the means." [telephone rings]

WS: And I thought about that because—you want to turn it off—

[Recorder is turned off and then back on.]

EP: We're in business again.

WS: So we would try to observe what Robert Penn Warren said, "Everybody has his fracture points." And so we would try as best we could to come up with something that we could all agree on. We didn't necessary feel that we had to write anything. But there was a great freedom of expression involved. And then we would try to get together to see if we had any differences about what came out.

I would say that the fact that I represented a younger generation, and maybe a somewhat differing point of view, may have reflected the nuances of difference you find in the editorials from time to time as to exactly how, how forward looking the Daily News was trying to be in this particular situation toward change. There was a real feeling on all of our part that we wanted to try to avoid disorder in the community on this issue, that we wanted to try to bring along all of the parties. And, as it turned out, the parties did eventually come, come along. And the situation worked its way out. There was a lot on the other side because we had Boyd Morris and the Mayfair Cafeteria, which became a big issue, as you know.

EP: I was about to ask. This was rather a novel, perhaps even radical change in tactics for its time in 1960, given that before this time, although there had been marches, the usual procedure was then NAACP seeking action through the courts. Now here for the first time was really major confrontation. But by 1963, particularly after Birmingham, this was not such a novelty. Had the perspective of the community changed as a result of the intervening years, and particularly, the experience of Birmingham?

WS: I think that Greensboro was not a predestined community for this sort of thing. But it was interesting in that it had all these college students in both white and black institutions in one community. And the college student on his campus is sort of in a sanctuary, and he is able to do things sometimes that other persons can't do.

So my feeling is that probably the fact that Greensboro had so many college students here helped create a climate in which this sort of activity could take place rather easily. As you will recall, the black students were assisted by the students from UNCG, at

that time all white and, and I suppose, from Guilford. I happen to remember the UNCG participation.

EP: Is this the '63 demonstration?

WS: This was the lunch counter.

EP: The lunch counter.

WS: And I thought that was interesting in that you, you had a large constituency here of young people who would reflect a point of view that would be more militant or more in favor of change or more receptive to the kind of things that had happened. And I think that Greensboro, to that extent, was a community that was more vulnerable or perhaps readier for this sort of thing to happen.

EP: Comparably, what was the editorial policy in the paper in the '63 demonstrations? You stated that in 1960 you had to be very cautious about hoping to bring along the opposing factions. What was the situation for the press in 1963?

WS: Well that was a rather tumultuous time. As you recall, this was, of course this was prior to the—this was during the time of the Kennedy assassination and the beginning of the demonstrations. As I recall, particularly, the marches that took place during, after Martin Luther King's assassination. That was in sixty—

EP: Eight.

WS: In '68. Our building at that time was on Friendly Avenue. And I can remember the marches that were held and the feelings of apprehension in the community about what might happen as a result of those marches.

The paper took the view in those days that we, we hoped that they could be done peacefully and that persons could have a right to express themselves, and that there could be an openness about differences of opinion, and that Greensboro could tolerate differences and could come through in, in a situation of this kind.

EP: Editorially, could the paper, or did the paper, take an advocacy position, or was it trying to seek objective middle of the road, unbiased opinion?

WS: Well, not unbiased because I don't think editorials can be unbiased. In fact I don't think anybody can be objective when you get right down to it. I think you've got to try to be fair.

But I think increasingly my experience shows me that even people who try to be objective find that there's, there are pressures working on them that they don't even know about. So I would say that—no, I wouldn't say they're unbiased at all. I would say that the paper did try to reflect a moderate view which was favorable toward change—or not unfavorable toward change—but at the same time was trying to persuade the community to come along with accommodation to the kinds of things that we're going to have to accept.

EP: What was your editorial position in the 1963 demonstrations? Did you have more control over the editorial policy and the editorials that were written?

WS: Mr. Kendall was still the editor until 1965. And generally speaking, we had much the same arrangement and set up. I was, I was somewhat older. I'd been here longer and perhaps I had more influence than I did earlier. But nevertheless, we were in a, in a very difficult period beginning in the sixties. And I had—I feel, I feel we're much under the same—well, we were much under the same situation there.

Now Mr. Polk in the meantime had died, and we had a new member of our editorial staff—several new members came and went at that time. And I became the, the successor actually to Mr. Polk. And then eventually succeeded Mr. Kendall in 1965 when he retired. And in that respect I had perhaps more influence as time went on.

EP: Did you, as editor of the Daily News, participate in any of the meetings with the mayor's committee both in 1960 and in 1963 and the, the store managers and the demonstrators?

WS: I did not, no.

EP: So your perspective was totally as editorial—

WS: Yes, yes. I, I—we had—then we did participate in an effort in 1954, after the Supreme Court decision, in conjunction with the editor of the Charlotte Observer and the Winston-Salem Journal, at that time Pete McKnight and Reid Sarrat. I participated in meetings with them toward an end of taking the position that we would, we would try to accept the court decision and begin token desegregation. This was in an effort at that time to assist the school boards. And we did have a joint effort.

I had some difficulties in my own mind with the role the newspaper ought to take in situations of this kind. How much it ought to be involved in making the news or in participating in decisions that made the news, and on the other hand, in commenting on it or in writing about it. And this is a, this question has persisted through the years, and still is a problem, I think, with any newspaper operation as to how much it shall be detached

and not involved so that it's able to be more objective or fairer in its commentary or whether it should be so tied up in it that it, it's helping to make the news it reports on.

EP: Did you reach any sort of conclusion in the course of these two events as to which role the Greensboro Daily News was actually playing?

WS: I felt a little concerned, in retrospect, looking back on the '54 situation, wondering whether or not we ought to have been involved in trying to work with the school boards. I felt on the one hand that we should, because we were looking out for what we thought was the best, the welfare of the community. Again, in the eyes of many people, we would be looked on as being in collusion or in trying to work out some kind of behind-the-scenes accommodation which we would then report on favorably.

And my view is that the press must try to remain as independent as possible. But sometimes it's very difficult to be able to know what is going on unless you're participating to some extent in community affairs.

As I've grown older, I've discovered that it seems more difficult to me to try to participate in events and report on them at the same time. There are conflicts of interest which inevitably grow. And I think this has been shown since the Watergate and since some the things that have happened over the early seventies and sixties.

EP: Did you have occasion to observe the behavior of the Greensboro Police Department in 1960 and 1963?

WS: Yes, I did.

EP: And what was your assessment of their behavior?

WS: Well, I thought the Police Department handled itself superbly. I sensed, and know, that their policy was to try to be as fair as possible to all parties that were involved, to maintain the peace but at the same time not to be repressive to any point of view as much as possible, to avoid violence.

I think I mentioned earlier that on one occasion we had the, the Klan marching downtown and of A&T marching students and the police department trying to keep them from marching down the same street. And I thought they succeeded awfully well in a very difficult situation.

EP: Is there any one particular person or group of people that you would attribute this attitude to?

WS: Earlier, I'd said I think the whole climate of the community and the climate of the leaders, the councilmen and the mayor and others, who in turn had been influenced by all of the factors I mentioned earlier involving the community mix, the, the background of Greensboro, the college institutions, the, the general climate of opinion and what was tolerable in Greensboro, had a lot to do with the way the police department conducted itself.

EP: How about the behavior of the demonstrators, how would you characterize that?

WS: The demonstrators from the beginning seemed to have pretty good leadership. I thought Jesse Jackson was an extremely impressive young man. I remember he came to my office one time early. He was a young student from South Carolina who eventually became president of [the student body of] A&T. And I had the feeling that they were trying to make known their opinion but they were not trying to foster violence. That is, the predominant leadership was not. And they were quite anxious to try to express themselves but at the same time not to disrupt the community in a violent way.

EP: The older members of the black community, private citizens, but especially the leaders of the various churches, did not take that active a participation in the sit-ins, but the eventual settlement was with the Greensboro Ministers Association. And after the students had gone home—and they did participate more directly in 1963. And the eventual settlement, once again, was not with the students but with the older members of the black community. What the store managers regarded as a responsible element of the black community. What—how would you characterize their actions?

WS: I think that initially the older citizens of the community were inclined to be with the students in spirit but to feel that they were not in a position especially to do the sorts of daring things they thought the young people were doing. However, that was not to say that they didn't want to support them as thoroughly as they could. But I, I have a feeling that they were reluctant to become actively involved in some cases because of the fact that they felt they were more vulnerable to reprisals than the students might be. Now that's generalization and there may be exceptions and, indeed, there were exceptions to that.

EP: Miles Wolff and his book, once again, *The Lunch at 5 & 10*, singles out the editorial staff of the Greensboro Daily News and, in particular, Mr. Kendall, W. H. Slim Kendall, for praise for their position, their moderation, whatever aid they gave. Do you think he as an individual stands out in this or was it a cooperative effort of the entire editorial staff?

WS: Mr. Kendall was a very self-effacing, modest sort of person, and never projected himself in situations, although he was a man of tremendously fine character and ability and thoughtfulness. So he instinctively liked to work as a group more than as an individual who would make himself seen and recognized in the community. He reflected the background of the paper, which has been, had been there before him, I think, and continued afterwards. And I, quite frankly, think that's an admirable way to operate. And, and I've tried to encourage my associates, my young associates, to, to this point of view, too.

Different styles of, of editors and different ways of doing things—but the persuasive way and the way of trying to reason with people rather than to—to be very dogmatic or flamboyant has not been a style of the, of the Greensboro Daily News.

EP: In both the 1960 and the 1963 demonstrations, the national media, news media, came to Greensboro. As a newspaper editor, what would be your assessment of the way, manner in which they presented the news in Greensboro? Do you feel it was accurate, fair?

WS: Every person at one time or another has a chance to assess how the national media covers a story which they're locally informed about. And I have found that, generally speaking, the national media suffers from the same job we all do. It tries to be as complete and thorough and fair as it can, but in the bustle and the hurry and the briefness of a report, it often isn't able to get the nuances of the situation very well.

I have that feeling, for example, about an editorial the New York Times had on the HEW [Dept. of Health, Education, and Welfare]-UNC [University of North Carolina] controversy last week, which struck me as being terribly over-simplistic and without any evidence that anyone had done any study at all about the complexity of the questions that are being faced by both sides in this controversy. It was an effort to make things seem fairly black and white of someone standing in the schoolhouse door about segregation when that's not true at all.

And so I'd say that the national press when it comes in, in that way, is bound to have some clichés and some stereotypes reflected. And I would sense that that could have been true here. There, there was some good reporting, as I remember, in that time. And I wouldn't say that in a derogatory way but just to say that's the way news is covered these days.

EP: You've mentioned Ed Zane's committee and the work that it did in the 1960 demonstrations. In 1963 there seemed to be three such committees that were designated as the mayor's special committee on human relations. What would be your assessment of their input into the resolution of the situation in 1963 as compared to the activities of the Zane committee in '60?

WS: Was this David Schenck? Was David Schenck mayor at that time?

EP: Yes, David Schenck was mayor at that time.

WS: I thought David Schenck was very courageous as mayor at that time to make the statement he did in which he urged that there be a settlement and that the accommodations be open. That it was necessary that this be done.

I think that at that time that kind of leadership was necessary and that David Schenck was in a unique position to be able to do it. He, himself, was personally certainly no great militant on this subject. But, and he had enough support from the conservative community to make an impact when he said that—I'd say it'd be sort of like Nixon going to China or some situation in which a person could accomplish something because he was bringing along a constituency, which he represented into a new area. And so I think that, that Schenck's contribution was considerable in those days.

EP: How would you compare the role of the two mayors in each situation?

WS: The other mayor was Roach and Schenck. I personally felt that Schenck was a far more, a far abler man than Roach. Maybe that reflects a bias. I didn't see in Roach the same elements of an understanding of the perspectives of this situation that I thought I sensed in, in David Schenck.

EP: You touched upon earlier the situation of Greensboro dating back to the 1950s which set the scene for this, its response to these activities. In V. O. Key's book, *Southern Politics*, he's characterized North Carolina and Greensboro as a progressive, liberal—at least for the South—state, energetic and ambitious. In other words, all the characteristics we've come to associate with the New South. Would you say that that was an accurate portrayal and, and how did it contribute to the resolution of these situations?

WS: What V. O. Key said was that North Carolina was a progressive plutocracy, which is an interesting combination. He mentioned in his book something about the, the small skyscrapers of the Piedmont of Winston and Greensboro playing a large role in the political decisions being made in Raleigh. And he contrasted the more conservative coastal culture of North Carolina with a sort of progressive bustling movement of the Piedmont, which almost made them two different states of mind.

I think that for that particular era that Key was accurate. Actually it was Alex Heard who was doing most of this. As you may know, he was the associate of Key at that time and was—of course he's now chancellor of Vanderbilt—but at that time was a graduate, was on the faculty of Chapel Hill and helped Key write that book. I think that was true for that day.

It's been interesting to me to see North Carolina have a national reputation in those days of being progressive and enlightened for the South. And today because of a number of different things, the "Wilmington Ten" and Joan Little and other things, now it seems to be considered reactionary.

I think these are stereotypes that we come to use about various regions and that North Carolina is a rather complicated state, sort of like Tennessee, in that we have three different regions and they're rather remarkably different in the way people think and in the tolerance of what they will accept and their interest in change and the status quo.

EP: A recurring observation in a discussion of the racial situation in 1960s in North Carolina, and particularly Greensboro, is that we had good relations between the races—that there was an understanding and a willing to compromise and cooperate to try to seek a resolution of differences. Do you think this is an accurate picture or is this somewhat of an oversimplification?

WS: I think it's something of an oversimplification. It's like the old story about the housewife who says she knows all about the cooperation between the races because of her maid. And my view is that, that the white people of good will wanted to feel that there were good race relations. And they wanted to feel that they understood what the black man thought. But that in essence, they didn't really know it in all of its complexity.

And, therefore, there was much made of, "Oh, we get along fine here." And perhaps on the surface they did. But they did only because there was a certain formality of the rituals people went through in those days that were acceptable to both races. And however they seemed to be voluntary, they were still imposed. And I think that's always true. I think the present situation involving the ambivalence of the blacks, their desire to be a majority or to have an ethnic culture of their own, at the same time be integrated, is a reflection of this today.

EP: Given this situation, do you think that Greensboro as a community, both the average private citizen and the community leaders, were prepared for the somewhat militant black activism of the 1960s?

WS: I doubt whether any community was really prepared for what happened in the sixties. But I think there were more elements here that would make an adjustment possible here than there might have been in many places in the South. And I think that probably what has happened in the interim has showed us to be the case.

EP: And what would that be?

WS: That we have adjusted more rapidly in some ways, I think, to, to integration. I would say one example of that is that the—that blacks were asked initially to go into the membership of the Greensboro City Club, whereas, I understand both in Charlotte and in Raleigh that this is not the case.

I think that there's been a willingness to accept the fact that race ought not to be a factor in the participation of individuals in their civic affairs and commercial affairs and in government.

EP: There seems to be a curious contradiction in Greensboro in both of these situations in that Greensboro's response was more moderate than surrounding cities, than High Point, Winston-Salem, Raleigh, Durham. But that these cities desegregated the target areas of the demonstrators—

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

EP: Is there anything in the community which would seem to explain this apparent contradiction?

WS: I think I know what you mean. You mean that initially Greensboro seemed to respond more rapidly but that later more complete integration took place in other places than here. That may be because when the eggs were broken in the other communities, the thing had to be done more quickly. North Carolina tried to avoid the massive resistance of Virginia and some other southern states by adopting the Pearsall Plan and pupil assignments and some other things that many liberals thought were ill-advised. But they succeeded in, in avoiding violence in the closing of the schools.

In the perspective of history, people forget how things were at the time and the emotional involvement people had and what issues meant to people in, in earlier times. And I think we tend to, to forget or to reflect decisions made in another era in the light of what we know today in a way that changes the substance of what people were facing in those days.

I'll give you an example of that. I think that the whites were—those whites who tried to, to break through segregation in the fifties, even in a small way, were subject to, to tremendous pressures and reprisals including crosses burned and deliveries of coal and rocks thrown through windows and other things of that sort. But today all that seems like a rather minor sort of thing. Yet for its time it represented considerable courage for Ben Smith and Ed Hudgins and others to do what they did, and to stand up to the opposition that came from the Klan and from other elements in the community who didn't want them to do anything.

That time was quickly passed and we moved on from the time when you talked about token desegregation into the time of complete integration or imposed integration,

raising all of these most difficult problems of quotas and racial balance and other things which now assail us. And so the whole climate of the situation has changed. And we're talking about different, different questions today than we were then. We're talking about the black, black problems. The problems of whether or not the blacks want more unity or more diversity.

And so my answer to that would be that, yes, you could say that Greensboro didn't succeed in full integration of its schools as quickly as some other communities. But maybe it, it moved more profitably for all parties involved ultimately by doing it the way it did. There were different styles of approaching the same question.

EP: Returning now to the role of the press, specifically the Greensboro Daily News and the Greensboro Record in the 1960 and 1963 disturbances—do you think that the paper's role of encouraging letters to the editor in response to Mr. Zane's committee's efforts acted as a safety valve to release emotions that might have been directed to more overt physical action?

WS: That was the purpose. We saw the newspapers as an open forum an opportunity for persons to express themselves on these issues and to discuss these issues and to debate them. And we felt this was very important in reaching decisions.

EP: There were a little over a thousand letters received by the newspaper at this time. Given the trend or tendency of only the most vocal people to write letters to the editor, do you think that this, Mr. Zane's disappointment in this respect was justified?

WS: In that he didn't receive more letters than that?

EP: Yes.

WS: I think that's a tremendous number of letters to receive on a question of that kind. Probably we didn't get more letters on any issue besides fluoridation.

EP: One prevailing attitude that was expressed more frequently in 1960 than 1963 in the letters to the editor and quotes in the paper was that the community seemed that the Negro was forcing himself on the community in an unjust and rather unbecoming way for the quote, unquote “good” Negro, the educated responsible professional class. And that they must be more patient and prove themselves worthy.

Was this a prevailing attitude or—and how would you characterize it in terms of exactly what did they mean by proving themselves and was this just a delaying tactic?

WS: It was a rationalization of the status quo. People are inclined to find good reasons for doing what they already believe. And I think that any change in this area was startling because people, many white people, assumed that this was the way things had always been and, therefore, they were right because they'd always been that way. That's true of any sort of change basically. And some people are more amenable to it than others. But obviously the, the side of right was on the side of treating blacks as people rather than property or treating blacks as people rather than as less than people, which, of course, they had been treated for years.

It's like when I find a situation involving Dudley High School where you find the facilities, or the physical facilities, seem to be much inferior to those in Grimsley High School. The two high schools were built about the same time. But there is a tendency among people to see what they want to see. And I think this is true of all of us. It's very difficult to know when you're subjected to pressures that you know not.

EP: What role do you think that absence of sensationalism in the objective reporting played on the part of how the resolutions were reached in each of these cases?

WS: Well, I think it was much better that Greensboro should have tried to work out its problems than to have, have tried to incite confrontation. I don't think the newspapers were interested at all if people say that, "Oh, all you want to do is to sell more newspapers."

I don't think there was any element of that because in those days, as in these, there is no connection between the, the advertising policies of the paper and the editorial policies. The newspaper, much to the contrary—many people believe that this is true but it isn't true, certainly with our papers, and never has been.

EP: There were never pressures attempted to be brought to bear on the paper by people who paid a substantial advertisement fee?

WS: Well, again, this is—it all goes back to this question of what is tolerable or what is seen as possible. I don't think that most people thought that this was something that would be acceptable. Therefore, they didn't really try.

There were efforts made, I suppose. I don't remember any flagrant efforts of, of anyone to say. I do think there was a feeling—I think that Mr. Zane used the, the argument that, look, your business is going to be hurt if you don't take these, these demonstrations seriously. And I think he tried to use this as a, and I think quite rightly so, as a factor in, in trying to find some kind of accord.

EP: In 1960 the editorial, at least initial editorials that appeared the first week of the sit-in demonstrations, applauded the goals, or at least showed a sympathy and understanding of

the goals and objectives of the students, but questioned their tactics and seemed to lament the fact that they were taking over physical, at least legally questionable, means to achieve these goals. Could you explain the editorial position of the paper on that point?

WS: I think that reflected some of the old, perhaps resistance to change that might be reflected in an alarm over the possibility of violence that might occur in the community. Possibly the changes that were seen in that policy resulted from the fact that maybe more investigation was made to find out what the grievances were. And the issues were more starkly presented. And as a result the issue of either having to support one position or another became more important. The paper tried to be, tried to be, tried to avoid violent confrontation but not to necessarily fail to accept change if it came.

EP: Miles Wolff in his book, *Lunch at the 5 & 10*, stated that, although both the Greensboro Daily News and the Greensboro Record were excellent papers, it was generally assumed, at least by himself, that the Greensboro Daily News carried—was considered more progressive and carried more influence than the Record. Would you characterize it?

WS: Well, the Daily News was a larger paper and had, had been more influential in its editorial policy over a broader area for—than the Record. The Record was an afternoon paper, which had roughly a third of the circulation of the Daily News. The Daily News was a statewide newspaper, and had had influence beyond the bounds of Guilford County, and was so recognized. So I think that's probably, that probably accounts for it.

It also, I think, had probably had a series of editors. Although Mr. [Edwin B.] Jeffress bought out the Record in 1930 I believe, about 1930, the, the Daily News had become a newspaper of some consequence in North Carolina rather rapidly in the early twentieth century, early 1900s, and was—had more influence, I think, at that time than the Record.

EP: Once again, in his book, Miles Wolff stated that there was a feeling that there was a dangerous vacuum between the records—between the races. And this was quoted from an editorial from the Greensboro Record. How does this fit in with this—what you have just characterized as an oversimplified feeling in the community that there was understanding in the races, and what sort of communication did exist between the two communities?

WS: Well, Greensboro had a black councilman rather early. You remember the man who got the highest vote and refused to become mayor, Dr. Hampton, was the first black councilman, I believe. It was a custom, I think, for the man who got the largest vote to become mayor. As I recall, Dr. Hampton refused to become mayor. This was either before I came to Greensboro or about the time I came to Greensboro that this occurred—some time in the fifties.

There was a relationship, I think, at the upper levels in the professional business, professional areas, the black community and white community. I remember particularly Dr. Jones of Bennett [College] was very influential in those days, president of Bennett. And there was a relationship.

Interestingly enough, Mrs. Julius Cone was a, was a strong advocate of racial communications across the lines in Greensboro. She entertained Mrs. Roosevelt here at a time when Mrs. Roosevelt was rather anathema in much of the South, the white South. She also was very closely tied in with the leadership at Bennett College. And I happen to know that she was a benefactor of the black colleges here.

I cite that as just a personal example of something I happen to know about. But there were ties and there were relations across the lines. But there was still quite a vacuum. And I think that I would agree that more communications ought to, ought to have been existing in those days, more candid communications. You know people play their roles sometimes because they don't know that there's anything else possible.

EP: Do you think that the white community leadership did assert itself in these two instances or was it the—just the activity of a few individuals that result in the resolution of this conflict?

WS: Well, it took a rather long time to, to get it resolved. And I think that initially the reaction of the community was bewilderment or some surprise, certainly in the white community and perhaps in a lot of the black community. Certainly the older, some of the older blacks, I think, were surprised about the students as, as many of the whites were.

I think that after the community's leadership was able to rally its forces and see what it faced and what needed to be done, that it was ultimately, as Mayor Schenck proved, willing to go ahead and, and do what it needed to do. I don't think that it was militantly liberal in approach at all. I think that what it did was to try to make the best of a situation that was very disturbing. That it somehow succeeded in, in resolving what could have been much worse in the way of violence and disruption.

EP: In the 1960 lunch counter sit-ins, were you surprised at the rapid spread of the movement—what started out as a spontaneous local event in a matter of weeks became a national phenomenon?

WS: I was surprised initially at the, when, when the sit-ins began. It seemed to me, though, fairly clear early that this particular kind of technique if carried forward would, would be successful and would, would be provocative and would be almost impossible to, to slow down because it became symbolic.

It was not illegal. It raised very serious moral questions in the white community among people of goodwill who felt that they couldn't conscientiously say that the blacks

shouldn't be served at lunch counters. And despite all our rationalizations and arguments that were raised, none of them seemed to be very effective over the, the sheer fact that blacks are people and part of the public and ought to be served. And I think that kind of sort of commonsense approach ultimately prevailed among many people, even though they were led kicking and screaming toward the decision.

EP: What effect do you think the black boycott had on the desegregation of the lunch counters and later in 1963 the restaurants and, and hotels and motels, the theatres?

WS: I don't really recall how important that was. It—I don't have any particular memory of that being important.

EP: Do you think that in stating that the city of Greensboro had a traditional history of response of the leadership to various crises, with referring to the current situation or looking back toward a past history?

WS: I don't know that Greensboro had had much experience with that in the past that I can recall.

EP: Do you feel that the image that Greensboro had of itself as having the leadership that could rise to such a situation was accurate or rather self-serving?

WS: I think that it probably played a part in, in having people feel that they had to rise to the occasion.

EP: It was continually mentioned in 1960 and 1963 by the press, by the representatives of the businesses that had been targeted by the demonstrators, that violating an owner's legal rights were the wrong method and that the moral privileges could not be attained by force or intimidation. But do you think that it could have been accomplished in any other way?

WS: Well, this again was a rationalization on the part of the owners of the property to try to justify their position that they felt that their business would be damaged if changes were made. I think it was a rationalization and an argument, which seemed to be the first one that came to hand and that it was used for that reason.

The—of course, if you think further about that question you immediately say, well, if you serve the public, how do you define the public? And ultimately, the courts made that quite clear.

EP: The individual accounts of the 1963 demonstrations, particularly instances when there was flagrant violation of the then existing laws, such as the sit-ins on Greene Street on

the night of June fifth, and the mass numbers that sat down in Jefferson Square on June sixth, were described variously as potentially explosive, mob scene—"nightmare scene" was a phrase used. Do you think that that was objective reporting and if so, did it contribute positively or negatively to the interpretation of the situation?

WS: Ultimately I think the solution, or at least the mayor's statement came shortly after those sit-downs. The feeling was that there was a potential for violence in the blocking of areas, and not just marching through the area but blocking the streets and the traffic. And as you know, the police made the habit of roping off certain areas of the downtown so the marches could take place.

But once the sit-downs began to take place I suppose the community saw that the potential for violence was being escalated right much and that that brought about a feeling that something needed to be done about it. So I don't know that the speculation about it was particularly hurtful. It might have helped bring about a resolution.

EP: Although radical at the time, do not these nonviolent marches by well-dressed, well-mannered students seem tame by comparison, by the subsequent turn that several riots' agitation had by the end of the decade?

WS: Absolutely. But Martin Luther King's nonviolent resistant approach, which paralleled that of Gandhi in India, might have been typical of the way a minority reacts in a majority situation where it realizes that if it breaks the law violently it will be repressed. But if it makes known its grievances in a polite way it can be more effective perhaps than not.

I think this may have been a typically southern sort of thing—the South emphasizes manners—and I think that this mannerliness was very persuasive in many areas because it was not disruptive or it was not violent in the sense that the—some of the sit-ins became later in the sixties in other parts of the country, not racial sit-ins necessarily but the sit-ins in the offices of college presidents and so forth.

EP: Why do you think that the tactics or course of events of subsequent civil rights agitation did become more violent, more polarized in the later sixties?

WS: Somebody said that the fact that we had so many young people in the sixties played a role in what happened—that the population itself was dominated by youth because of the young people who were coming of age from the post-World War II baby boom. My feeling is that there was something to that. I think they became more violent because of the injustice of the Vietnam War and the disillusionment on young people with their government. And whereas World War II could be perceived by its generation as a just war, that the Vietnam War could not be perceived as such. And, therefore, there was more cause for young people to feel that they, that violence was justified.

EP: In the early 1960 civil rights demonstration dealing with racial segregation, there are images of black college students behaving nonviolently, as we've said, well-dressed, well-mannered. And later, particularly following the death of Martin Luther King, there were blacks in khakis. There was the militant, strident militancy of H. Rap Brown and the Black Panther party, Eldridge Cleaver, Huey Newton brandishing guns and advocating what amounted to a racial civil war. Why do you think there was this shift, this trend?

WS: Well, much of the civil rights movement began in the South because the South was dramatically seen to be the area where there was racial discrimination. But in truth, racial discrimination existed all over the nation but it simply wasn't dramatized in the same way. And because the South had had this de jure segregation and segregation laws on its books for long periods of time, and it had been the place where slavery flowered.

I think that as the racial struggle moved into the national scene that it took on trappings of, of a different nature. I think that the Vietnam War escalated all of this along the way. Even though it wasn't connected particularly with civil rights, it was in some ways in that blacks sensed that they were, more blacks were serving in the military than, than not. Ironically, because whites were able to get to college and get into school and maybe blacks were not, so you had a tie-in here in the sixties that was of these unrelated events which somehow were related and came together to produce an explosive situation.

EP: The—how would you characterize the civil rights movement today? How then has it changed from this aggressive moving movement that was gaining momentum every year until what it is involved into now?

WS: Well, I will answer that by saying that I heard Jesse Jackson speak at the Cosmos Club in Greensboro about two years ago to a predominantly black audience in which he pointed out to his audience, look, this is not the sixties. We have achieved certain things that we sought in the sixties. But many of us, meaning blacks, are still reacting as if we are still back in the sixties. And he said we're now in a new time. And you know the whole theme of [Operation] PUSH [People United To Serve Humanity], which is that you've got to get up off your rear ends and do something yourself. And you've got a chance. It isn't what people are going to give you. It's what you're going to do with the opportunities you already have. And are you making, taking advantage of the opportunities you have?

Therefore, the whole racial situation has changed so that the target now is on those blacks who will take advantage of the opportunities they have gained. And a leader like Jesse Jackson is speaking to that particular issue when he says all right let's, let's do something with what we have.

EP: So would you say we are witnessing a second generation of blacks and that they are building upon what the first generation of blacks, so to speak, achieved in the more overt demonstrations of the 1960s?

WS: The blacks are faced with a problem that all revolutionary movements face, that after the revolution you think that things will be changed and that, that some things will—some things have changed but the new problems arise about how you deal with the post-revolutionary era as, as the Ayatollah is learning in Iran.

And so I think we're now in a different kind of setting in the late seventies than we were in the sixties—one in which the blacks are trying to decide whether they want to be as much of the mainstream as they thought, some of them thought they did. Or whether they want to assert themselves in a way that allows them the chance to, to have their own ethnic traditions and habits that were useful to them, and, and that they valued in a white society.

And that's a very difficult question to deal with because what is the—do you remain a minority or are you absorbed by the majority? How do you maintain diversity and unity? It's a very difficult problem.

EP: What do you see as the ultimate significance of the 1960 sit-ins and the 1963 marches for Greensboro?

WS: I suppose that the sit-ins are seen as one of the historical events that happened in Greensboro, probably one of the more distinctive things that happened in this community. I think that probably Eric Goldman has recognized that in writing, coming down to write his book about this, this episode.

I don't know what long-range effects will be, will come from this because I suppose that the sit-ins would have started somewhere if they hadn't started in Greensboro. It just happened that the, that those students were in the right place at the right time to make this happen.

EP: What do you think has been the result in terms of regional and national image of Greensboro? Or did it result in [unclear]—

WS: Well that's, that's hard to say. Probably it differs. As I mentioned earlier, I think that the national image of North Carolina today is that we are a vastly conservative state with a senator like Jesse Helms in Washington, with the “Wilmington Ten”, with the HEW controversy. All these things have, have made it popular to say that North Carolina somehow changed.

I have never felt the—the state, of course, has changed over the years, but I think that the dominant characteristics of the state are still asserting themselves. And North Carolina is a rather independent and stubborn kind of state that doesn't take very easily to

always going along. And that this sort of stubborn independence streak is still evident here in the seventies just as it was earlier.

But things have changed in the nation. There's been a vast disillusionment about many of the, the so-called liberal solutions to problems that people were more optimistic about in the sixties than they are in the seventies. And you're in the midst of a—as someone said, one of the great untold stories was the rise of fundamentalist religion in the sixties at the very time that you were having all of the student riots and revolts.

So I don't know that North Carolina has changed all that much. And I'm amused at times by the outside commentators who come in and on the basis of rather spare investigation decide that North Carolina has lost that image that you spoke of, the progressive plutocracy that Key talked about. That was a kind of paradoxical term to use anyway. In effect it was saying that it was a state that was basically conservative but that it had a progressiveness that from time to time asserted itself.

And I think you'll see this in North Carolina's history. I think that you'll see a liberal governor will rise occasionally in the state's history, but that the vast story of North Carolina—particularly in the twentieth century—has been of a, of a rather moderate to conservative state that is independent and stubborn, and has a liberal streak which comes out every now and then.

[End of Interview]