

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO CIVIL RIGHTS ORAL HISTORY
COLLECTION**

INTERVIEWEE: Abraham Peeler

INTERVIEWER: William Link

DATE: October 5, 1988

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

WILLIAM LINK: This is William Link, and the date is Oct 5, 1988. We're in the home of Mr. A. H. Peeler. Mr. Peeler, I wonder if you'd mind telling me a little bit about your early memories of childhood: where you were born, and where you were educated, and your early development of your career. You were born in Greensboro?

ABRAHAM PEELER: Yes, I was born on Ashe Street near what used to be five points at the junction of Lee, Eugene, Elm [Streets], at that point now. I was born in the parsonage there, May 23, 1904. My father was pastor of the St. Matthews--at that time it was the Methodist Episcopal Church, but it's the United Methodist Church now, since there are several other groups that have come in.

And I would assume that my early activities were typical of that particular time. And Papa moved from there to the presidency of Bennett College. And, of course, we lived in a wing of the dormitory at that time. And my mother served as his secretary. And it was a private institution that needed a great deal of money and all. We were not too far from the '65 date, and we--

WL: Fight the civil war, you mean?

AP: Beg your pardon.

WL: That, 1865?

AP: Right. We were not too far from that. And, of course, I don't know of anything particular, other than the fact that Bennett at that time--going into the Bennett aspect of it--shared the elementary level as well. Personally, I went to the first, second, and third grade at Bennett. A Ms. Levell[?] was my teacher there, and I have a brother who is still living and a sister living. There were four of us; I have a sister who is deceased.

We attended church regularly as you would expect, being the son of a minister [laughs] and school activities. And I think at that time, as I recall, many of the activities were of such that it--I might put it this way, really you buy a wagon now; we made wagons. And we would take barrel staves, for example, and make skis for the snow. And actually I believe we had winters that were a little bit more severe than we are having now. Totally. But--

WL: Did you, so you went to Bennett for the first early grades of elementary--

AP: First three grades.

WL: Then after that?

AP: Then after that I went to a private school on High Street, Ms. Seville's[?] school. Have you, are you familiar with that?

WL: No, I'm not familiar with that.

AP: I cover many of these things that I'm talking about in that presentation that we referred to a while ago. And I went to Ms. Seville's school for the fourth and fifth grade. I had some relatives. My mother's sister was the wife of Monroe Nathan Work, the yearbook person. And she, they lost children and she wanted to help her sister, so she had some of us to come and live with her.

So I went to Tuskegee [Alabama] and went through the high school at Tuskegee Institute it was then. It graduated to university now [laughs]. And the--took the trade of carpentry. You attended school: one group on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for the literary area; and Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday you went to a trade. That was the program at that time, and I took carpentry as a trade.

WL: This would have been about when? Let's see, you would have been in high school in the teens?

AP: That would have been in the latter teens, because I graduated from Tuskegee in 1920. I went to Morehouse [College] from there in Atlanta. Now, am I following your--

WL: Yes, indeed. Yes, indeed. Oh, yeah. I wanted to ask you just a few more things about--

AP: Break in anywhere.

WL: Okay, I wanted to ask you just a little bit more about Tuskegee. Tuskegee, of course, had

a strong emphasis on industrial education at that time, or what they called industrial education, with carpentry.

AP: Yes.

WL: What did the students, how did the students, as you remember it, react to that? Did they like that curriculum that you just described?

AP: Yes, but I can't say that their emphasis was altogether industrial in nature, because they put a lot of emphasis on the literary aspects of it and the quality of the literary in the, built into the curriculum there. We had some of the top people who were teachers in that area. And at the time, it was accepted. Now the students were older at that time, and you had, I feel, more of a dedication, because many of them came from points where the opportunities were not available to them. Tuskegee had a unique program because of the nature--and the same thing existed here in Greensboro. It was in the middle twenties before we had a high school, and the high school education was received through Bennett and A&T [North Carolina A&T State University] and similar institutions. All of them had high school departments.

Back to Tuskegee--and we had such contact like [George Washington] Carver and Booker T. Washington. And the program had built into it, as I look back now, some very fine qualities. For example, on Saturday evening we had a, we had literary clubs in which we studied material in addition to what we had studied in the formal classroom setting. And there, we were able to have practice in leadership as officers and whatnot. And one of the things that would surprise almost anybody was the fact that in the literary society that I was a member of, I sang a solo once. [both laugh] And that never happened again. But seriously, there were many activities of that type.

Tuskegee was set up on military basis. They did not have deans and officers of that type. But it was patterned after the military. And you had officers in charge of the dormitories and that sort of thing, and the person who would be a dean now was commandant. [William H.] Walcott. And the military training was very valuable to us. And as I look back over it, it was a real contribution to, in our education. Then they had a program that was designated as the C-prep program. That was a program that anybody could come into. And you would have a person, for example, who may be twenty some years old who had gone no farther than third or fourth grade in a one room rural school out there somewhere. And he would work in the day and go to school at night. And the program was more or less geared to his ability to move up the scale, so to speak. And then when he was qualified, he would move into what we would now call about high school, the first year. And he was able, you see, to earn his tuition by working in the day and go to night school. A very excellent program. And Tuskegee served a very, very great need by reaching and making available opportunities to people in the category of

that type. Also, they did nothing to discourage you from going on, too. Was, it, is that--

WL: Well, I--

AP: Anything else you wanted specific about Tuskegee?

WL: Tuskegee, in other words, provided students access to places like Morehouse or access to higher education and--

AP: Oh yes, definitely.

WL: Yeah, yeah. It must have been an interesting place to be, since a lot of things going on.

AP: Very, very interesting. I happened to have been there when Washington died. That was quite an experience. And then we had coming into Tuskegee the influence of some of the top people on the board of trustees and places like that. So that on Sunday afternoon, they would have a band concert on the lawn, and the boys and girls would socialize. And they didn't dance, but we marched instead of dancing at that time.

They had another program at that time that was quite interesting, for the younger folk. It would be, I would estimate, around a junior high level now, or upper middle school. They had two dormitories, one for young boys and one for young girls. And each dormitory had supervision separate from the mainstream, so to speak, of the university. In other words, it was more like home. And for the boys, J. D. Stevenson[?] and his wife were the ones--the mama and papa in Tuskegee, you see. I did not live on the campus, because I lived with my aunt and uncle.

But this program was broad enough to teach many of the things that are problems now and were problems then, too. For example, the question of sex and alcohol, all of those things. We had sessions in the dormitory with these younger folk. And the girls had their same activity over in their dormitory, the younger girls. Two separate dormitories. The social affairs were geared to that group, and we did not go to the socials of the older folk, the upperclassmen. We would go to--we had a separate social. At that, very nice program, very good program, very effective.

WL: Where did most of the students come from? Were they from--

AP: All over.

WL: All over.

AP: Foreign countries. We had Cubans, Africans, Hispanics. All over. Very broad

representation. Very, very broad representation.

WL: Did student--how did students feel about the regime? This seems as though it was a rigorous system.

AP: It was.

WL: Tightly controlled?

AP: Well, I would assume that there were people who were disgruntled, people who did not like it. But we have to think of the times. At that time, this animal we refer to as discipline had a different base from what it has now. The father in the home was the father in the home, and every child knew that. The whole social setting was different, so you would not have the problem that exists now in which they come out of a free type of home society and move into a restricted type of program in the schools. And by restricted, I do not necessarily mean that it's like the army, but it's certainly different than doing anything you please to do whenever you get ready to do it. And so we really, as I remember it, didn't face that as it would be faced at this particular time. Tuskegee now is not the Tuskegee that it was in the teens and earlier than that. I had the privilege of going back to Tuskegee in the fifties to teach in the summer school. At that time it had moved into the college area, and we had the graduate program for teachers who were renewing students and taking advanced work and that sort of thing. So I had an opportunity--I felt privileged to have this opportunity--to see Tuskegee twenty-five, thirty, forty years later. And it was not, it's not the same Tuskegee.

WL: You went from Tuskegee to Morehouse.

AP: To Morehouse.

WL: To Morehouse College.

AP: Yes.

WL: Was that a big jump, a big difference?

AP: There again, I would assume that it was more or less a product of the total social atmosphere at that time. I guess those are good words to use. But you--there was--at the present time, this is what happens to many of the children who are finishing high school: "Where do you want to go to school?" Or they may say, "I don't want to go to A school, I want to go to B school." Or, "If you send me to C school, I'm not going to school. I'm

going to join the army.”

You didn’t have that sort of feeling. And it wasn’t anything wrong with it. I would be quick to say there is nothing wrong with the concept now as such, but the whole response would be different because of this setting. And so why did I go to Morehouse? I went to Morehouse because uncle thought that was a good school and he sent me to Morehouse. And I didn’t say that I preferred to go to Harvard unless he sent me to Southern California. Probably I didn’t even know there was a Southern California then. But you see what I’m--the point I’m trying to make?

WL: Yes.

AP: Okay. I was fortunate in going to Morehouse because of the nature of the school. I was fortunate there again with some contacts there at Morehouse. The dean called me in and he talked like a father to me. He said, “Peeler, you’re not old.” And he said, “I think you’re going to have to take some more English. And I think you’re going to have to take some more mathematics somewhere. And you don’t have any foreign language in your program at all.” And at that time Latin was almost a requirement, some of it. And he said, “You don’t have any Latin.”

He said, “Now, you have two choices. I think we can work out a program for you, and load you now, so you can take some of these subjects in high school and one or two courses in college to begin with.” He said, “You see, you took English three days a week, and we don’t think that that meets the requirement. You took math three days a week.” You know, because of the program at Tuskegee. “Now, at your age, I would like to see you take high school, go into senior high school.” Morehouse had the high school. So I did, because it sounded all right to me. And, as I look back over it, it was one of the best things in the world that happened to me.

So I graduated from Morehouse High School and went to college. And that made my college sailing much, much easier. And along the line, we had folk, instructors who lived in wings of the dormitory. And we had study hall, and we had certain campus restrictions. And I’m proud that we did. And I’m doubly proud when I see some of the things that I see now. And I’m just so happy that I had the privilege of having these contacts.

Had a man in math, and the thing was getting kind of rough for me. He was a senior. And, incidentally, I met his daughter over at Bennett at a banquet not too long ago. And he looked at me and I guess he took pity on me. And he put his hand on me and helped me with that math. The personal touched that he--and later after he graduated, he became an instructor there. He’s passed now. But that personal contact meant so much at that level, because I was a young person and I guess I really didn’t know what I wanted, know where I was going or anything of that sort, which is nothing out of the ordinary. There are millions of them in the same situation. But--

WL: Was it--the Morehouse instruction you received, were you there one year in the high school? Is that the way it worked and then you went to the college level? Is that how--

AP: That's right. I went one year in high school and I took some additional English. I took one college course. Additional English and math, and they had several folks who hadn't had any Latin, and they put in a special course called "Latin S." And in one year they taught two years of Latin. So I had first year Latin and Caesar, and then the college curriculum went straight through.

WL: They didn't teach Latin at Tuskegee?

AP: No. At that time.

WL: Yeah. Yeah. Did--what kind of changes did you find when you went to Atlanta--I'm just curious, since this would be a big city, obviously. Or did you have exposure to it, or pretty much--

AP: Had what?

WL: Did you get out in Atlanta very much at all when you--?

AP: Oh. I told you we had certain campus regulations. You didn't just walk off the campus or drive off with your sports model car and go out of the city to somewhere and come back two or three days later. You--the freshmen had to have special permission to leave the campus and certain hours you could not leave the campus. Certain days you had to be back by certain times. We had regulations of that type. And as I said, maybe partly it was because of the times, there was some debating to it and some of the fellows slip out and all that sort of thing. But generally speaking, it was a sort of controlled atmosphere for educational purposes.

And as you move up the scale, they became more lenient, so that as a senior you had almost complete freedom. And, incidentally, as a senior, the president taught a course to all seniors in ethics. We had a book. But we read the chapters, but he talked and he talked to us about his experiences and life, what he would meet when he'd go on a trip to get money and sort of speak and so on. When he would come back, that would be the subject of that particular day, that ethics situation. And it--those types of things had a touch to them that we just don't see too much of now.

WL: Did you have much contact with the president, was it--?

AP: Personally. He knew--you see there were about four-- three, four, seventy-five hundred on the campus. And the majority of the folks were on the campus, and they ate breakfast, dinner, and supper. And study hall. We had chapel twelve times a week. And you had a personal touch with all of the officials, including the president. You had direct contact with him. And I think now, as I look back over, that his course in ethics was primarily a device that would enable him to know all the people who were graduating. Because he had you--you were in his class.

WL: This was John Hope, wasn't it?

AP: John Hope.

WL: Right.

AP: And [Samuel H] Archer was the teacher, who later became [president]--and Benny [Benjamin Elijah] Mays, who later became president, was one of my teachers.

WL: Yes. He was a teacher at that point?

AP: I've forgotten where in the line, but I took one or two courses under him. The fact is--this is in parentheses-- but these are interesting experiences, and I'm sure that they can be edited out [laughs].

I got a call one morning about 8:30 from your institution out there, and they said, "We're in trouble."

"What is it?"

Said, "We want somebody to introduce Benny Mays at a session at 10:30--at 11:30 [a.m]. And we know from a friend that you went to Morehouse. Would you do it?"

So I said, "Well, I'll come out there and do the best I can."

So when I walked in--of course, he, we knew each other, because I'd had other contacts--

WL: Kept up with him, yeah.

AP: --and so when I got up I said that, "I hope that I'm going to get a better grade on this introduction than I got in Dr. May's class." Of course, everybody laughs, you know. Then I went on and said good things about him and all. And when he got up he said, [AP in nasal voice] "Mr. Peeler--" You didn't know him?

WL: No.

AP: “--Mr. Peeler, thank you for that introduction that you gave. It was very good. Now as to that mark that you got in my class, was I fair?” And all. But it was fine.

Also, I’ve always loved athletics, and so I played football, basketball, and baseball, and I was number fourteen on the football team. I was number six or seven on the basketball team. And I was substitute catcher. So we had interesting experiences in that area which led to many helpful contacts and all in--later.

WL: Where would you, the teams compete with? What other kinds of schools would compete with you?

AP: They’re practically the same now. They have a conference: Morehouse, Alabama State, Tuskegee, Atlanta University, Morris Brown, Clark. About the setup is very similar to what we have now.

WL: What we have now?

AP: Yes.

WL: How--at what point did you realize you wanted to go into education, become an educator, when you were at, at Morehouse?

AP: That’s a very interesting question. And I have tried to analyze my own life and think from time to time. And I, I don’t know whether this is a credit, would be placed on the credit side, or counted as a minus. I, I’m not sure that I had a burning desire to be a certain thing. I’m really not.

I have a relative who wanted to be a nurse when she was four years old, five years old, she says, “I want to be a nurse.” Her toys at Christmas were a nurses cap, a uniform. “I want to be a nurse. I want to be this.” And she is now finishing up her doctorate’s degree in the area, traveled all over and so on.

Now honestly, I never had that sort of thing. And fate, I guess, led me through certain experiences that pointed up areas. I majored in biology and minored in history. That’s a terrible combination isn’t it? Never taught a single bit of biology. So the, so far as my employment is concerned and transition from college into the actual world of work, the superintendent, assistant superintendent from Winston[-Salem] came to Morehouse with him, and what he said, and the money he offered--he offered something like forty-seven dollars a month, and we were going to compete with Rockefeller and those other small boys at that time [laughs].

But on the serious side, there were four of us--we sat in chapel alphabetically by classes, the seniors did, alphabetically--

[recorder paused]

WL: You were saying.

AP: --all of us came to Winston.

WL: So he was a successful recruiter.

AP: Yeah.

WL: He did a very good job.

AP: Yeah, so far as we were concerned. And in Winston they did not, at that time, altogether they did not hire you for this and so on. But they seemed to get what--I guess they had an idea. It boiled down to this: biology was available, physical ed[ucation] was available, and industrial arts. Those positions. There were three of us concerned in that. One fellow had finished Hampton in the industrial arts. One of the other fellows, the other area. And because of my experience in athletics and that sort of thing, I got the physical ed. So I taught one course in social studies for the eighth grade and a physical ed for the rest of the time.

WL: So which school was this in Winston?

AP: In Winston at the Columbia Heights, a school that does not exist now. It was the forerunner of Atkins High School which is now, I think, a junior high school. The schools stood on the site where the chapel is now over at TC [Teachers College, now Winston-Salem State University].

WL: And you were in Winston how long?

AP: One year. A friend of mine who, if it were in present day, he would be called assistant superintendent, but he was supervisor of Negro education then, named Mr. W. B. Windsor, who was a friend of our families. And he said to me and to a friend of mine--also from Greensboro--who was over there, "You all don't belong in Winston; you belong in Greensboro. I'm going to give you more money." I think he gave us five dollars more or something of that sort. But anyway, we landed in Greensboro. And in Greensboro I taught five classes in the social sciences and did all the coaching.

WL: This was at, at which school?

AP: At Washington High School, which stood facing Washington Street about where that building is now. And it--you see, as I told you before I think you started recording, it wasn't until some time in around '22 or '23-- I don't remember the exact date--that we had a public high school for Negroes. And Washington High School was the forerunner of Dudley, which opened in '29.

WL: I see. So Washington was a high school, was for blacks.

AP: High School. Smaller school.

WL: Opening in the 1920s at some point.

AP: Huh?

WL: It started in the 1920s? Or was it earlier?

AP: Yes, that's right. And we, I worked one year there with that program.

Oh, incidentally, in Winston we started--we just had a contact within the last month that brings that freshly to mind--we started football. They had never had football. Only one boy had ever had his hands on a football, formally. And he had come from Augusta, Georgia, where Hanes Institute was at that time. And he had seen them play football. And we started a football program over there. And we have newspaper articles and things like that from that experience.

And, so, jumping back to Greensboro, the, my second year here I was made teaching principal at Jonesboro school, which is on the site of the present Jonesboro school, but the old building has been removed. I had six teachers. I was the sixth teacher. And at that time we had semester promotions, an A and B. 1A, 1B. 2A, 2B, all the way through. And we had at the high school, mid-year graduations. And I had a 6B, a 6A, and a 7B and a 7A, and a principal.

WL: So you were busy, I bet?

AP: Most of the time. But I had a good time [laughs]. Those were some of the best years of my life, actually--the personal experiences again. All of the teachers met in one classroom. That will give you some idea of how many teachers they had in Greensboro then.

WL: The whole city?

AP: Yeah. See, they met separately. Distinctly separately. Most of the time the superintendent

didn't even come to our first meeting. Mr. Windsor, who would have been assistant superintendent the way it's organized now, but he was the supervisor.

WL: So he would be with the black teachers and--

AP: Yeah, right. And that was before the state set up salary scales. The salaries scale was the way he said they were[?]. It was in a range I'm sure. But at the end of the first meeting, Mr. Windsor said to the other three principals, "Where are you going to have your meeting?" See, after the general meeting, you have school meetings.

"Well, we're right here on Washington Street; we'll just go over to room so-and-so."

"What are you going to do there?"

"Well, suppose we meet at so-and-so."

"Why are you going to so-and-so?"

"And by the way, we have a new principal this year. Peeler. Abraham Peeler is going to be teaching principal down at Jonesboro School. When are you going to have your meeting?"

[pause] And I said, "Tomorrow morning at 8:30." [laughs]

Really I had no--I had worked that summer in Atlantic City, and I gone to the library and done some preparation for my classes. And I had read [football coach] Knute Rockne's book on the Four Horsemen [of Notre Dame], and I had my plays all drawn up and everything. I was ready. [unclear]. That's the reason why I told you fate lead. I didn't prepare for the principalship. It was handed to me.

And I said 8:30. And I scrambled like mad to get something together.

Anyway, the following summer I went to Ohio State and got a little bit better prepared to open the school next year [laughs]. And incidentally, I took three courses. Because at that time, I was not certain where I was. I took a course in administration of secondary athletics; they had a physical ed program. I took a course in the administration of the elementary school, and I took a course in teaching of social studies at Ohio State in '27, the summer.

And I stayed at Jonesboro through '32. I had a beautiful experience down there. A wonderful experience. And still I'm meeting students talking about "at that time we played, and I learned--."

One of the boys who was in school then, family [?] he's retired now, was talking to me not so long ago. He said, "Boy came to me the other day." [He] said, "Mr. Peters," said, "man, they tell me they got a new game going now."

"What's the new game?"

Said, "Soccer." And he said, "I just died laughing, because we played soccer at Jonesboro in 1927 and 1928." [laughs] But I enjoyed the experience at Jonesboro.

Is it operating okay?

[recorder paused]

WL: Okay. In your experiences in the 1920s at Jonesboro and, and elsewhere, what kind of differences did you note between, say, white schools and black schools?

AP: We touch on all of this in the presentation. That presentation. There was a distinct difference. More materials were supplied in the white schools. Better materials, better furniture. And the salary scale was published and distinctly difference. The white teachers got a dollar, and we got seventy cents.

WL: Was that an average or just sort of--that seemed to be the way it worked out?

AP: That was the way it was set up. The scale exists.

WL: That was the scale.

AP: I mean it wasn't something underhand or anything. That was a published, published scale. And many, most, the majority of the books we got were used books. I, I, hesitate in a thing like this to mention specifically some of the experiences and merely talk about it from a general standpoint, because I was on a committee in the Chamber of Commerce during the early sixties when all the motion was going on. And a question came up, and one of the fellows turned to me and said, "Peeler, look, you could help us with this." Said, "You were in the school system." Said, "You know these people."

And I made a statement then off the top of my hat, but I'm so happy I made it, and I think it expresses what I'm trying to say now. I said, "Yes I was, and I'm a loyal member of the school system. I know every one of the principals. But I ain't going to tell you nothing about them."

And in a thing like this, that's going to be used publicly, I don't think I would be fair to myself and to the system. Because what existed, I might put it this way, existed. That's all. It existed. That's the way it was. And it wasn't behind the back door and all that. The salary scale was published and read by you and read by me. And some of the experiences that we had to go through, I think it's best not to--when you turn your machine off if you're interested I'd tell you, but I wouldn't want to put them on tape. Because I don't think it's right for you to tell me about the bills that you owe in your life. I know you owe somebody. And I know that you have had certain negative experiences in your life, as everyone else has had. But I don't think that--I think there's a sense of loyalty to a thing that I would want to maintain. And just as I said in the Chamber of Commerce. And so, but I can relate, I can document what I am saying about the differences. And in making the presentation, I always say that.

WL: Does--as a principal were you able to get, how difficult was it for you to get things if you needed something specifically? Say in terms of facility or--

AP: Well, I think under the heading that I've just drawn, let's put it this way: let's say that there was a difference in the concept of support of Negro schools and the concept of support of white schools. And leave it that way and stretch it across the board and let it answer any specific questions you may ask, rather than giving you the documentation. For instance, if you want the documentation of the salaries, I guess they would give it to you. They have it, and the things that was supplied, and that sort of thing.

We met separately; the principals did. Mr. Windsor met us on Thursday afternoons. The superintendent at times came to the meetings, but rarely. And it was, I couldn't give the date right off the top of my head as to when we started meeting together.

WL: Most of your contact was through Mr. Windsor [unclear]?

AP: Yeah.

WL: What about the black community?

AP: The what?

WL: To what extent did the black community support, in the case of Jonesboro and subsequently other schools?

AP: Black support?

WL: Right. Presumably--

AP: I would compliment them on their support. And something that many folk don't realize now--there are many folk who feel that "nothing happened until I came on the scene and began a protest." But that's not true. We had men early, like Mr. Windsor, who would go into the superintendent's office and, and tell him. And we had organized procedures requesting equal salaries and that sort of thing. They had lobbies and all of the techniques that are normally used requesting those types of things. And some of them became quite heated.

For instance, I have a letter, a copy of a handwritten letter of a group that met in the Ashe Street school in 1918--and that was called Public School Number 2; Percy Street was called Number 1--in which they were meeting to discuss improvement of

Negro schools. And so, we did have protest then. But, you know, I don't need to tell you, because all of us are aware of the fact that even in slavery, you had protest.

WL: Sure.

AP: And they, they were constantly fighting. And you don't need to go way back there; it's happening right now in Greensboro in many areas. And I guess folks seem to feel that if you're gonna get anything, you always have to fight for it. But sometimes the things are--

WL: In the case of Mr. Windsor, he would press--

AP: Oh yeah.

WL: --a point.

AP: Oh yeah, definitely, definitely, yeah. And the parents' support--and you must remember that in a community like at Price, we made a survey once of the parents who had gone to certain levels in school. And the percentage as you moved up went way, way down. And--but that's the way it was.

For example, our parents went to work for you and left their children to get dressed to get to school. Our parents stayed and served you dinner and washed the dishes, and then came to their children. That's the way it was. And it --I try to place emphasis on the positives, rather than the negatives. And that's the way I end this presentation and all. But that isn't anything that's hidden.

I thought something that happened, you've probably been reading in the paper about this Summerset experience, a series--

WL: Oh yeah, Summerset Place, right.

AP: Somewhere along the line, one of them made the statement that you know is true and I know is true, all of us do--and that is that we *did* make a contribution. We were not mayor of the city, but we swept the streets of the city and kept them clean, or what have you. We cooked. We were not in charge of the cafeteria and arranging the menu, but we prepared the food and that was an important contribution.

And the other night, I pulled a book down and started reading. And we did make some inventions. Carver, outstanding, of course--as you always find, you know, single people, who get out, way out front. But underneath they are a lot of us like your car, everybody talking about your car, "Oh, that car is pretty" but down there under their hoods there are some things jumping up and down in hot oil. But you don't hear about it very much.

A lot of things that were done--he definitely saved the situation. And strangely enough, Booker T. Washington is increasing in importance to education in our country as the years go by and people are able to evaluate. And even the contest that you are well aware of, I'm sure, of [W. E. B.] DuBois and Washington and their concepts. DuBois mellowed--if you want to use that word--in his later years. And it's--I don't know, sometimes I like to use the word that the lady in the country used, she said it's indescribable. [laughs] But it's interesting. It's interesting.

WL: One of the things that, of course, Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. DuBois talked about was leadership.

AP: Was what?

WL: Was leadership. You know what leadership should be, black leadership should be. And I guess in the case of Price School and other schools, that's what you were engaged in, in fact, was training leadership, was it not? I mean--

AP: That's right. That's right. That's right. That's right. We were constantly trying to provide experiences for the children that would enable them to take a place. And folks like Robert Meadows and lots of others who have contributed--and there are so many under the hood people in Greensboro. I call them under the hood, you know what I mean. You don't see them at all, but they're down there functioning.

I went to a fifty-year wedding anniversary shower Saturday. A family that many people never heard of, but they raised a group of children that are doing well and they contributed to Greensboro. And, and so, I don't know. I think I can only find, personally, a sense of satisfaction in trying to do well what is at hand, of being frank and open, and trying to live with the best judgment that I can on the scene of whatever comes up. Because if you, if you're not careful--I said to the superintendent once, I asked for something--I've forgotten what it was now, but it doesn't make any difference--and he was a man that made his decision, and said no. Then he looked at me and said, "You don't like that, do you?"

And I said, "I found out years ago that when I allow individuals to upset me or to develop in me a complaining attitude and whatnot, I go home, I'm disturbed, I can't eat, I want to fuss with my wife, I can't perform 100 percent. And the person who did it is playing golf out there, having a good time." And I said, "Mr. Superintendent, I joined the golf boys." [laughs] And we had that between us all the time. And he used to talk to me all the time; we became very close friends. I won't name him, because there are others on the scene too. He'd say, "How are the golf boys?" [laughs]

WL: Did you--you were at Price for a long time?

AP: Thirty-six years.

WL: Thirty-six years. So that would have been from--

AP: From '32-'33 to '68-'69.

WL: And obviously you saw a lot of changes that took place.

AP: Oh definitely. No question about that. No question about the changes. And that is the thing that we mentioned, and I keep referring to the presentation because we tried to cover the type of things you are talking about. That is the thing.

For instance, one of the illustrations--I use some transparencies to open up before the slides--and one of them is the time element, that it hasn't been long when you would have been put in jail for coming in to teach me how to read what's in that book. And I have a transparency that shows the disposition of some property during slavery times, handwritten. They were inventoried. On this side it has Big John, seventy-five dollars; Little Mary, thirty-five dollars; Turby, fifteen dollars; somebody else, fifty dollars. The slaves listed, double line drawn. And over here two bedsteads, ten pigs, four bedsteads or whatever the word is. Mattresses, two sets of silver, and whatnot.

And, I say this: changes have been made for the better. But I'm afraid there are still some people in Greensboro who equate certain other people with [unclear]. And there's work to be done on it and all. So that's my feeling. And we want to stress the positives, other than the negatives.

WL: Just to ask you more specifically about the process of desegregation and--

AP: Teacher relations?

WL: Well, no, desegregation.

AP: Oh, oh.

WL: When you began to get integration of the school system. Now that's right through with the end of your career, I guess. But to what extent was that happening, and how did it effect Price? Did it effect Price at all?

AP: I was in on the beginning of the actual physical integrating. We had--they were integrating staff to start with, as you are well aware--and we had two or three white teachers. And one of the girls who was formerly a teacher at Price, pardon me, had

become a supervisor, Laura Brown--I don't know whether you know her or not, her husband used to be a principal at Dudley--but anyway, she had become a supervisor, and she was one of the first Negroes to be supervisor of a group of schools that included whites.

WL: White and black?

AP: Yeah. And so actually, the impact of having white students with Negro students, I did not touch at all, because that actually happened after I came out. And we did have, register once a white student, and had some funny things to happen. But we, it hadn't taken place in the integration process.

WL: So, although there was a white student that registered, they didn't actually matriculate, they didn't get through, or?

AP: They what?

WL: You didn't actually have any white students?

AP: No, I didn't. No. It's all Negro. It's all Negro.

WL: The first stages then were integration of the teaching staff, you did have white teachers?

AP: That's right. It started at the top and filtered down.

WL: Right. How did that transpire, how did that take place? And how--were there problems?

AP: Yes there were problems. Yeah, there were problems, definitely. I was close enough to it to know that. And one, you talk with [Mel?] Swann, he is--I saw him, actually he calls us his mother and father; he lost both his mother and father. And he, I think, did such a good job at a position that he assumed that it helped him to get where he is. Because he was appointed to sort of look after, look into, take care of, help with the integration process at the secondary level. He did some very fine things in that position. [unclear] And, of course, as you would expect in almost any major movement of that type that you're going to have pros and cons. You have problems. And fortunately, we were spared of any, I think, major flares that they had in some cities.

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

WL: There we go. We're back on. Going back to the 1950s when the *Brown v. Topeka Board*

of Education decision came through, in which the Supreme Court, United States Supreme Court ruled that you could no longer have separate but equal schools, how did that effect, well, yourself personally? Do you remember how you heard about this?

AP: How was it received, generally?

WL: How was it received. Yeah.

AP: I would think it would be on--to cover in a few words, it was received with mixed emotions. You see, when you are dealing with a thing like that--and I'm not telling you or anyone else who may subsequently listen--you're dealing with deep roots. And you just don't walk in and change things completely, as that was done, without some upheaval in it. I remember distinctly a meeting that the superintendent had in the library at Brooks school when they were building this new office where they are now. He said this:

"I was in the army and I learned to take orders. I'm a loyal citizen." Several things of that sort. "The law of the land is what you have indicated, that it shall be equal, that they shall go to school together. And I know no other way, except to abide by that law. Now, if there are any of you in here who feel that you are unable to do that, I think out of fairness to yourself and to the system, I think you ought to say that you can't take it."

And I will remember that as long as I live. If you had been in Evanston[?] and had knocked on your friend's door across the street, we would have heard that in that meeting, because we were so quiet. Now, that was what I would call a concept that would give general direction. But you know, as well as anyone else would know, that to say those words and then to change one's thinking and operation from a custom of over the years is not going to be 100 percent in effectiveness.

But I think, going back to what I said a few moments ago, that generally speaking, we have accomplished it pretty well. But there is still, unfortunately, in spite of all that's been done, there is still a feeling that that is a white sitting there and that is a pink sitting there.

WL: Still a sense of race, in other words? A sense of--

AP: Towards integration. And the, the--you have to realize, all of us have to realize, that we aren't dealing with blocks like the child at the table playing when he's six or seven years old and putting the blocks together to make a car or what have you. We are dealing with people, and people just won't change like that. It, it takes, it's a slowly evolving process that has to take place. And the philosopher said, I'm told, years ago that the world has been going to the dogs for millions of years, but the dogs are still hungry. And you understand what I'm saying, that you have situations over there that you have to always be on guard to avoid and all. But everybody seems to be working at it.

WL: Getting back to the 1950s. The, the Supreme Court made, made its ruling, and the superintendent indicated his willingness to go along with it. But then, of course, it took until 1971, it took seventeen years.

AP: Yeah. That's right. That underscores what I was trying to say.

WL: Yeah. Yeah. Was there, how much sense of frustration was there about this, do you remember?

AP: A terrific amount of frustration. And I guess in a way one becomes accustomed to or learns to adapt to certain frustrations, and things like that would fall in that category I imagine. You, you don't feel that there's much else I can do about it, and yet you know it exists. And you want to do.

I was trying to think of an illustration that would make my point without some type of negative involvement in it. But it is frustrating to be, to feel that you are a part in any way. And that's total for anything and all. But we made it through. There's still, as the philosopher said, "The dogs are still hungry." [laughs]

WL: What was the, your observation, reaction to the new style of militancy that comes in the 1960s?

AP: The new what? The new style of what?

WL: The new style of militancy on the part of younger, younger blacks?

AP: Oh, well, naturally, older people have a tendency to be more reluctant for change, which is natural. In other words, I put that tape recorder up there and it would be just as well to plug it in the wall over there. But that's where I sit and go to sleep at times, and I'd just rather you not move it. And you tend to fall into that rut, I guess, as you grow older.

And there's a poem that I like to feel that's a part of my personal thinking. I don't know all the words to it, but the thrust of it is, "If you hadn't been willing to listen, we would still be studying by candlelight." And it goes on to mention a lot of other things that--

And my mother tells me, told me, told us that when they were growing up and read something about a plane flying—"Simon Green and his flying machine" was a little dance--and they all would drop down and laugh. And you go to the airport out here now, your international airport, and you stand there and look at that machine there and look at all those people getting on, all those bags and you say, "There ain't no way in the world that that thing can get up off the ground. It can't be done. It just can't. You can't get that

off the ground. There's too much of it."

And the men have just come back, and I'm so happy that they got back safely. But it's that type of, I guess, properly guided and controlled militancy, if you want to call it that. That young person says, "Yeah, I want to fly. I'm gonna try it, I'm gonna see if it will work." And strangely enough, it works a lot of times.

I tease my son who is an architect. I said we used to put walls all the way around under the house. Then you put pillars here and there to save brick. And now you go out and you look and you see a seven story building and a center that is a support, and one or two steel beams that are in the ground. And I tell him, I said, "You architects are going to design a building that's just going to be standing up there in the air, nothing supporting it." But it won't fall. It'll stay up there.

So that would be my answer to that--talking to myself as well as to anybody else--that we have to realize and hope that the militancy will be a type of positive and with reservations controlled militancy. See, I don't mean controlled that would kill it, because you don't want to kill the creativity. You want something creative. That's my feeling in reference to militancy. And you try to properly helm it and guide it, and that isn't anything new. Young people have always been sassy in their way of being.

You know, I--where is it, if I could put my hands on it right away it would fit so nicely here. I think I know right where it is. [Abolitionist educator] Horace Mann made an address and he summed it up very nicely. If when you finished the recording, if I can think of it, I'd like to read what he said, because it's applicable to the militancy that you referred to. Could you stop that just a minute?

WL: Sure.

[recorder paused]

WL: Yeah, I see your point there. So, in other words, the point being that militancy needs to be positively channeled.

AP: That's right.

WL: It needs to, it needs to have positive results.

AP: That's what I'm saying.

WL: And if you--also, the other point perhaps is, at least according, if I read Mann correctly there, that if we do things right originally, then militancy doesn't get to be militant, in a sense. Isn't that right?

AP: Yes. But one of the problems with that is, what is right? What is right? You see, it's wrong for you to jump off that porch and defy gravity, but if you don't do that and hold the sheet up and learn that you can overcome gravity then it's wrong. But it's all right for you to get up in that plane and fly. The--and that I think really--this is in parenthesis now, I guess--but I really think when you actually boil it down, that that is the problem.

Do you know, I was with junior high school children so long, it's hard to be a child now. You know that? It's hard to be a child now, to grow up. Because of the rightness and wrongness concept that we see and hear and develop and all. And I guess it's always been that way.

WL: A lot of the militance if you want--maybe militancy isn't the right word--but a lot of the things that happened in the sixties changed things.

AP: Yeah, that's right. And they were right.

WL: And they were right.

AP: They were right.

WL: They were very right, in retrospect.

AP: Nelson Johnson was right. You know him?

WL: I know of him, certainly. I haven't met him.

AP: Well, he's a personal friend of mine. He--look, and that's the thing; you have put it, you triggered it--and don't start me on a Baptist sermon [both laugh]--but Nelson Johnson is an illustration of somebody doing something for us that we could not do for ourselves. And it applies to racial relationships, to integration and segregation and that, as well as buying an automobile. He has done something that you couldn't do, and Lord knows I couldn't do it. I wouldn't do what Lewis Brandon--do you know Lewis?

WL: Know of him again, sure.

AP: --I wouldn't go with the sheriff standing over there who has locked their house up because a person didn't pay the rent and locked them out. I wouldn't take a hammer and go over there and knock that lock off. But that's what Lewis Brandon did. Now of course he had to pay for it and all of that. But it's just what you said.

And that's what youth faces. Youth faces the problem of alcohol damaging and papa and mama taking a shot at dinner everyday. He can't, he can't quite handle those.

And if his daddy's not happy, he's gonna beat the devil out of him for drinking. And I guess I'm trying to force on you, your captive audience, [both laugh] some of my personal thinking as we try to deal with children. It is hard for them to grow up. It's hard for them to grow up.

WL: Of course, what your school did so well, I'm sure, was to provide a base for leadership. And later on, when that leadership developed on its own and developed its own characteristics, in some cases aggressive or militant, it developed independently perhaps or--to what extent did you provide, in the case of Nelson Johnson and others, support?

AP: To support him?

WL: Support or counseling?

AP: I didn't. He wasn't a student of mine. I know him as an adult.

WL: So you knew him later.

AP: Yeah.

WL: But in other cases perhaps.

AP: Oh, yeah.

WL: Lewis Brandon was a teacher wasn't he, at Price?

AP: Yeah. Well, folks, he tells him that other folks were scared to hire him. We hired him, and he made a darn good teacher, and he's doing well now. He teaches over here at-- you know him?

WL: I haven't met him.

AP: He teaches over at the Gillespie now, and he's done a lot of fine things but at one time he was--that word militancy is a mild word. And there are others, I just haven't think of those. I don't know.

WL: Do you--I've guess you've talked about this already, just to change the subject, but to restate it, and maybe to end our conversation--I know I've kept you a long time today--how do you think race relations have changed? Have you, are you one of, are you a subscriber to the feeling that things have gotten better, say over the last twenty years?

AP: Oh, definitely. Anyone would have to, even the most militant person, I think, would have to agree that things have improved some. But there again, let's not go to sleep, because there's a lot to be done. And there's a lot to be done in the way of what I want to call expectancy. You don't expect it to happen overnight. You expect certain things, and you have to prepare for those. A fellow who taught me administration in Columbia University had a word, "foreseeability," for the principal. To be able to foresee. Now what would happen if so-and-so--it hadn't happened yet--but what would happen if somebody did so-and-so. What would you do? Now the ability to think ahead that way is-- and that's, things like that to me are fundamental in the answer to your question as to whether it's better or not. But there's plenty of room for, for improvement.

[End of Interview]