

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

INTERVIEWEE: Owen Lewis

INTERVIEWER: William Link

DATE: December 5, 1988

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

WL: This is William Link and the date is December 5, 1988. And I'm here with Owen Lewis. I wonder if we could start sort of where we left off, and that was about the subject of public schools, which sort of encompasses your experience later on in the 1960s. Greensboro went through several periods of evolution with school desegregation, and what sort of pressures existed in the system to desegregate by the mid-1960s?

OL: Well, I don't know that the pressures were so much from within the system as they were from without. My first involvement with the public schools of Greensboro was as a journalist reporting on it when I returned from Chapel Hill in 1967 when I'd been on a fellowship for a year. I was assigned to cover education pretty much full time. I also covered art and religion, but I guess education was the main thing. And during this period of time, the Greensboro public schools were involved in administrative enforcement proceedings with the, what was then called the Department of Health, Education and Welfare [HEW].

And I followed this very closely and even went to Washington, [D.C.] when they had a hearing before the administrative law judge in Washington. I covered this for the, what was then called the *Greensboro Daily News* [now the *News & Record*]. Of course, I was involved with covering education somewhat from the time that I came with the newspaper in 1962, but my heaviest involvement, though, was in the period of 1967 to '69.

During this time, as I said, the pressure was on from the federal government to desegregate, and that was at the administrative level. And then as far as litigation is concerned, the local NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] had brought a suit against the school board, and this was progressing along slowly also. And the pressure there came from the leaders of the NAACP.

Dr. [George] Simkins and others filed suit, charging that the "freedom of choice" plan that the school board had adopted was prima facie discriminatory, because even

though they said the kids could go anywhere in town they wanted to, they didn't allow them transportation to go to schools other than those outside [sic] of their neighborhood. So, it was really de facto desegregation if not de jure, which that had been up to the point of the freedom of choice option that was given.

WL: How well was the, was freedom of choice working?

OL: I'd say it wasn't working.

WL: It wasn't working.

OL: That's the reason that these people instituted the suit, was simply because all they had under freedom of choice was tokenism.

WL: A few black students were attending a few white schools.

OL: Right. And I don't know of any conversely. I don't--and also, desegregation of the faculties had begun, but it moved very, very slowly until the big push came after A) the HEW dictated that they should abolish that plan, and B) a federal judge ruled that the plan that they had was unconstitutional and that they would have to go to a cross-town busing situation.

WL: What was the attitude of the school system toward desegregation at this point, let's say--?

OL: When you say the system, what do you mean? The board? The administration? The teachers? The students?

WL: Good question. Let's start at the top. Let's start with the school superintendent and the school board.

OL: Okay. The superintendent at that time was Philip Weaver. He was a very fair-minded individual and he believed very strongly that what he was doing was the--and what he was recommending to the board that they do--was the proper, moral, legal and ethical thing to do. And that they threw up all kinds of road blocks that indicated that this was the best way to go, and that desegregation, total desegregation, just wasn't a practical option.

I think the guy really believed that, and he really wanted to do what was right. He was a very good man morally and ethically and so forth, and had strong convictions about what was right. And I think that in his own mind that he thought he was doing the right thing in his recommendations that he made.

And the same thing is true of the school board. Now, the school board has changed a lot since back then. See, at that time the school board was appointed, and you had a different level of people from what you have now when the school board is elected. And these people were community leaders, and they wanted to set a good example for the city. And they thought that what they were doing was the right thing and that they were indeed complying with the law and with the Constitution and so forth. But the courts and the HEW thought otherwise, and I think rightly so.

WL: Did the appointed school boards, you said, were different, you just said, very different than the school boards you get now, which are elected. I wonder if you could elaborate on that?

OL: Well, for instance, Blue Bell [Inc.] would always have a man on there, and Burlington [Industries] would have a man on there. And the--they tried to get the different geographical districts represented to some extent, but not nearly so well as they are represented under a straight district system such as we now have. And so the people that were on there were from Cone Mills, Burlington, or they were leading lawyers or--

WL: Officials.

OL: Right, those. They always had one black guy on there, and he would be either a lawyer, or a dentist, or a physician or something. This was the type of people that served on the board. They were top executives and professional people, hand-picked by the board and the superintendent. That's the way it was.

Of course, the city council at that time appointed them, so you had a good bit of the city's "good ol' boy network" going there, like Carson Bain was the chairman, and Al Lineberry and so forth, and George Norman. These people were the, shall we say, the perpetual good ol' boy network.

WL: And the school board worked fairly harmoniously with the superintendent, as well as--?

OL: Yes, right. That is, as long as Mr. Weaver was superintendent. Of course, he died very suddenly in '69. He was a young man. He was about fifty-six years old and had a heart attack. And then that was at the same time that all this desegregation stuff had started, and there were so many other problems that it had the department in utter confusion there for awhile.

WL: Right in the middle of this very sensitive period in the history of desegregation, he died, and it created further confusion.

OL: That's right.

WL: Let's go on down the ladder. How--what about teachers? Well, principals, perhaps. Let's start with principals.

OL: Okay. The schools were easily racially identifiable at the time. I mean, even the names of the schools had a racial identity. I mean, you very well know that Dudley [High School], Lincoln [Junior High School], and Bluford [Elementary School], on the one hand [all-black schools], and Grimsley [High School], Kiser [Junior High School] and Brooks [Elementary School] on the other hand [all-white schools]--two educational parts, on the northwest and the southeast side of town. That indicates that the character of the schools and the faculties were equally racially identifiable.

In fact, before Mr. Weaver came they actually had what they called a supervising Negro principal, who was John Tarpley, that was in charge of hiring the principals and teachers for the black schools. So it was a totally separate type of thing. And there is no greater dictator or authoritarian figure than the black principal in the all-black school. They ruled these things with an iron hand. And so they didn't want their little happy home broken up. And the--

WL: Who were some of the black principals that would come to mind that were important during this period?

OL: Well, Abe Peeler was one that I think of immediately. And Franklin Brown. Franklin was at Dudley, and Abe Peeler was at the J.C. Price [Junior High] School. And those were the--and then Vance Chavis was at, was at Lincoln, and Jay [Julius] Fulmore was at Hampton [Elementary]. And--

WL: These are all people who'd been around a long time.

OL: Yeah, right, they were old-timers.

WL: And because of the way the system had worked, they had a great deal of autonomy, I guess, and were able to, as you say, run, run the school.

OL: Run their own shops without--with minimum interference from the central office downtown.

WL: So you're suggesting that maybe they might have been a little threatened by--

OL: Yeah, well, I don't think they really wanted this thing to go the way it did, because it was

breaking up their happy little situation. As far as the white principals were concerned, I think a lot of them were unreconstructed rednecks and weren't really interested in seeing desegregation implemented that much.

WL: Who were--who would be some of the principals that come to mind?

OL: Well, Red [A.P.] Routh at Grimsley and Chick Herbert at Aycock [Junior High School], Bill McIver at Smith [High School]. Let's see, Luke Medlin at Page [High School]. These are the same, these are old-timers that run their own school.

WL: They have been around a long time. Comparable to the black principals. It's sort of a tenured generation.

OL: Right.

WL: So on both sides, in other words, there was not a great deal of [unclear--both talking at once] for change.

OL: Right. They were happy with the way things were going and they didn't see a whole lot of need for change that much. And as far as the teachers were concerned, the first desegregation of faculties was on a purely voluntary basis. And so therefore, there was very little of that that went on in either direction, because the people for the most part were pretty happy where they were, and they didn't--and there was always a great fear of the unknown, not knowing what they would get into when they went over to the others. Some of these situations were very touchy when these pioneers went over, probably tougher on the teachers that made that initial change than most anybody else--probably as hard on them as it was on students, maybe harder.

WL: Would they get--they would get flack from other teachers?

OL: Yeah, and then, or get ignored.

WL: Cold shoulder.

OL: Silent treatment, yeah. And not get that much cooperation and help from either the principal or their colleagues.

WL: Do you know of any specific instance of schools that, or teachers that ran into problems when integration occurred during this early period?

OL: No, I wasn't that intimately associated with it during that, during that period. I do remember, of course, this comes along to another story, a 1969 thing. I remember that Mrs. Garcia, a home ec[onomics] teacher, was one of the first persons that had gone to teach at Dudley. And when they had all of the terrible racial unrest in the spring of 1969, Mrs. Garcia barricaded herself in her room, pushed her desk against the door and held out against these people that were trying to take over the place.

She showed a lot of spunk and courage in this thing. See, they were not going to run her away from there, that's for sure. And I think that a lot of the people that were in the type of position that she was were of the same mind and the same character that she had. They believed that this was the way it ought to be and that nobody was going to deter them from what they thought was right.

WL: What about the parents and students? What kind of attitude did you have--

OL: Well, you had, in the beginning, you know, when the first black students went into white schools, you had some racial slurs and this type thing. But it didn't last long. Kids relate to this thing a whole lot better than their parents do. And so I don't believe they had a whole lot of ugly incidents involved in this. Nothing like what you've heard about in other cities.

They didn't, they certainly didn't make any headlines with racial unrest at the student level. And a lot of incidents that were played up as racial incidents I don't think really were. They were just normal schoolboy fighting or something like that.

WL: Harassment. Student against student, rather than race against race.

OL: Yeah, I think so.

WL: What sort of feeling was there on the part of the leadership--the administration and the school board--that it would be possible to avert what the HEW wanted to accomplish in the late 1960s?

OL: Well, they kept thinking that they would. In fact, the plan was to go ahead and appeal that administrative ruling to the courts. But meanwhile, down this other track, came the decision from Judge Stanley in the Middle District Federal Court declaring us a unitary school system and having a court-ordered desegregation plan put into effect. So at that point, that was, that hope that they held out was gone, because the avenue that they thought they were going to be able to cross was soon closed off to them.

WL: I see. So there were basically two tracks at work here. There's the--

OL: Yeah, the administrative track and the legal track.

WL: The suit that was being issued [unclear].

OL: Course, this administrative enforcement proceedings are what you might say a quasi-legal setting, and the school board had two lawyers working full time on the thing, even though it was an administrative matter. There was an awful lot of legal expertise required to deal with that type of thing.

WL: Was there ever any feeling that it would be possible to go beyond the court's ruling and appeal it?

OL: No. They never, they never offered to appeal it. I mean, they just accepted that and went on.

WL: They accepted that level?

OL: Yeah. And, you see, that came with a different administration, too. When they got into that, Wayne House took over as superintendent at Mr. Weaver's death, and he wasn't nearly so inclined to fight things. He was more for accepting it and working out the differences.

WL: Think Weaver would have fought it?

OL: He might well have. It's hard to say what would have happened, but I suspect he might well have done that. Of course the--we had, you had changes in the school board, too. Dick Hunter[?] was the chairman of the school board. He died, and you had other school board chairmen coming in there. Turnover in that department, turnover on the board itself. It's just hard to say what would have been. I mean, there's really not much point in pursuing that.

WL: But you do have a, you did have a situation in which the school, the leadership was less coherent perhaps, or less--

OL: Less cohesive I think's a better word than coherent.

WL: Yeah.

OL: They weren't incoherent. [laughs]

WL: [laughs] Yeah, well, they didn't have a well-established or well-grounded sort of footing, because of the loss of leaders such as Weaver--

OL: Right.

WL: Let's talk a little bit about Dudley and the problems at Dudley in 1969. What were some of the causes that were important sources of unrest at Dudley?

OL: Well, what happened to trigger this incident was a student council election. And there was this [Claude] Barnes kid, I can't even remember his first name now, was nominated for president and some say he was elected. I don't know, I never saw the ballots.

But some way or other the results of the election were turned around to where he didn't, didn't get it. And I think it may have been that he was ineligible in the first place, or that there was some fiddling with the ballots or something like that. The person that could tell you, but probably wouldn't, is Mason Henry who's the, they called him Dean of Girls back then. She was the advisor to the student council.

And when this Barnes kid was denied the office, there were great protests on the campus. And at the same time, you had this group coming down from the Ivy League schools and other places under the title SOBU, Students Organized for Black Unity. And they were attending a meeting at A&T [North Carolina A&T State University]. One of their objectives was to show high school kids how--for college kids to show high school kids how to run an effective protest to get what they want. So these people got in the act. And they not only were advising them on the strategy, but they actually came physically to the campus and staged demonstrations.

And when they came to the Dudley campus there were about seventy-five of them that came, and I was across the street trying to calm Vance Chavis down. He was the vice--he was the principal of Lincoln Junior High School and he was scared out of his wits. I was looking out of his window when I saw these guys coming down across there.

WL: What was he scared of? The violence?

OL: Yeah, right. He'd locked all the doors of the school and everything, which of course was against the fire laws and whatnot. I tried to get him to go on with a little bit of business as usual. While I'm over there, I look out the window and see these guys coming down through--across the campus of Dudley across the street. So I leave his office and run over there to confront them. And I tell them to get off the campus, and one of the guys says, "Fuck you, you white pig," and they just keep on going.

WL: What was your capacity at that point?

OL: I was public information director with the school system. I was assistant to the superintendent. I hadn't been in the job all that long. I went into it in February and this was about, I guess, about May by now. So I'd been on the job about three months and all hell broke loose there.

And they--we went--they went on down to the gym. And Bill Jackson, the captain of [police] detectives, caught up with me, and he and I went on in together into the gym where they were having this last meeting with students. They went all through all the buildings, run all down the halls on each floor trying to get them a claue to go with them.

And they ended up down in what we called the girls' gym back then. And, let's see, Nelson Johnson was leading the cheering and he was up there on a bullhorn. Bill Jackson came up, tapped him on the leg, because, see, he's standing up on a table there with a bullhorn. He told him, "Nelson, you're going to have to come down there or I'm going to have to arrest you." And Nelson just kept on yakking. And some guy in a dashiki came up right then and kicked Bill Jackson real hard in the butt.

So Bill and I got the heck out of there in a hurry. And I--one of the detectives took me down to, straight down to the police station, and they suggested that I swear out a warrant, which I did, and named the people whose names that I knew and that Bill Jackson knew, anything else that we could get together on the warrant.

WL: This would include people like, like whom?

OL: Well, I remember specifically the ones that, that stuck with were Vince McCullough, who was president of the student body, and Nelson Johnson. And--

WL: Nelson Johnson at that time was--

OL: He was vice-president of the student body at A&T. And then Robert Evans was the third one. And he's the one that said, "Fuck you, you white pig," so I was wanted to be sure he got on the list. And I remember there was a guy named Michael Aikens[?]. There were others on there. And they--these were the people that were the leaders of the little demonstration that was going on over there.

WL: Were they attracting much support?

OL: Well, they probably had two or three hundred kids in the gym. Yeah. Percentage-wise, I guess that's not all that many, probably 20 percent of the student body, but that's, that's a lot.

WL: A large group.

OL: So, then the thing escalated, you know, over to the A&T campus. And then [in] the riot that went on over there, a student named Willie Grimes was killed. And then things really got rough and they had martial law declared. They called out the National Guard. It was really a state of emergency.

WL: What were the connections between what happened at Dudley and what happened at A&T? Similar leadership?

OL: Yeah, I think it was the fact of the same guys were running both shows is what it came down to. That's why I'm saying that it was all an outcome of this meeting of the SOBU on the A&T campus, which went over to Dudley and stirred up things over there and then moved back to A&T and continued to work. Of course, there were lots of meetings and demonstrations and so forth going on all during this, about a two-week period there. They were picketing everyday and this sort of thing.

WL: What sort of reaction did the main-line black leadership of Greensboro have toward this? It seems to be generational things. All the younger blacks, student leaders--

OL: They were supported by the older blacks for the most part. And there were many attempts to get people together to have meetings to try to resolve this, with the school leaders and the city powers and the demonstrators together. One of the people that did a lot towards peacemaking was Cecil Bishop, who was a minister. He's now a bishop in the church. He's up in Baltimore now, but at that time he was--

WL: Which church?

OL: AME Zion, it's Trinity AME Zion. And some of the meetings, community-based meetings were held at his church. He did a lot. And John Marshall Kilimanjaro [local black activist], who was then John Marshall Stephenson, was trying to keep things stirred up. In fact, he called me. The reason I was over there when the, in the first demonstrations was because he had called me at home the night before and told me that they were going to do that.

And let's see, who else was active in that? George Simkins [local black dentist] and Otis Hairston [minister of Shiloh Baptist Church] were not so involved with that as they were in other things. So it seems that other ministers and other black leaders were involved in it.

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

WL: We're talking about the response of black leadership to the 1969 crisis. And how did white leaders and the white community generally respond to having the National Guard at A&T, but also having martial law declared? This must have been obviously a very big crisis.

OL: Well, I think the leadership was very supportive of the school administration. I remember a meeting we had down at the central office one night. Jack Elam was the mayor, and Jack said, in effect, said, "You run the schools and we'll keep the peace." And [he] indicated that whatever support were needed in the way of police protection and so forth would be available, so that they could keep the schools open and not be running scared. And at this point, and then also later, they would assign an officer full-time to come down to the school headquarters and sort of run a command post from there and keep a finger on the situation.

WL: Officer, meaning--

OL: I mean a top official, and the--for instance, Conrad Wade, who was later chief of police, was assigned to us at one point for several months. He had an office there at the central office of the schools, and that was kind of the nerve center of the police operation when it came to keeping peace in the schools.

WL: I see. So the police were prepared to be there.

OL: Right.

WL: Yeah. What about the decision to, to reach, or to create a busing plan in 1971. I guess that all comes fairly quickly, doesn't it?

OL: Yeah, well, 1971, of course, is the result of the court decision.

WL: The court order.

OL: Right.

WL: The court order comes in the spring, doesn't it? And the plan is then actually brought into place in--

OL: September.

WL: --in September.

OL: Right.

WL: Short space of time for the school system to adapt. So it must have been sort of a--

OL: Yeah, this was--Link House was superintendent then. That was a tough one. That was a hard summer for him and for all of us that were working there. We all worked very long hours on this project, and the school board put in an awful lot of time, too. And the poor transportation director was really climbing the walls. It was a really tough assignment, but I think we did a pretty good job with it. I think the thought of the desegregation plan that we have in Greensboro is not what the original plan was. But the fact that it hasn't been modified in a long--and when it has been modified, it's been to mollify special interest. And it's been discriminatory against the southern part of the city. But the original plan, I think, considering the times and everything, was a good plan.

WL: Fair.

OL: Yeah, right. Now, for instance, in the beginning, they had a thing called "the horn in the west," which would have taken a lot of people from this area west of the campus into Dudley High School. Well, they decided against that because they were afraid of the repercussions and so forth. It might not have been a bad idea. There were other plans.

WL: What were they afraid of specifically?

OL: Well, they were afraid that they would lose the base of support of the higher socioeconomic groups, you know, for the schools, and these people would turn to academies and private schools and stuff if they sent them off--if they shipped all their kids across town to Dudley and Lincoln and Bluford. So what you ended up with was a lot of compromise. You had paired schools and clustered schools and busing in both directions.

But the brunt of the system fell on the lower socioeconomic classes. It was a lot harder on people in the southern part of town and in the northeast than it was on the people in the northwest. They got off with the best deal. And it's still that way. It's gotten worse instead of better.

WL: So there was a conscious decision not to alienate that crucial part of the white section of Greensboro.

OL: Right. The affluent white parts of town were pretty much left alone. And the changes, as I say, the changes that have been made have been negative. Like at Dudley, there a couple

of years ago they made a change in the attendance lines, and so we lost an awful lot of the good white students that we had because they were shifted over to Smith. And that was, I know, was bad news. So Dudley is now, well, back to almost where it was in the beginning, except it's got a predominantly-white faculty. It's about 92 percent black now, at least it was last year. It's probably a little blacker than that now, but they haven't released any figures for this year. And most of those are in the open school, which is a free choice program. Most of the whites are in the open schools.

WL: Back to the summer of 1971, what sort of preparations were made, along with preparing the plan for the national busing plan. What other sorts of things did the school administration try to do, or--?

OL: I was part of the administration, and one of the things we did was a massive education program. They got great cooperation out of [local TV station] WFMY. Lee Kinard [WFMY host] was most helpful in this, and at one time the WFMY assigned a reporter full-time to the situation. His name was Joe Krebs, or something like that. He was full-time on the project. So we had stuff on every day for, about--well, of the schools. Every morning there was a principal on, telling about the schools and so forth, and trying to put people's fears to rest.

There was a massive amount of literature that went out, press releases and so forth. And then there was an awful lot of human relations training and activity. There were a couple of positions created, director of student affairs, coordinator of volunteers, and director of school community relations and so forth--these positions to beef-up the public information program and to gain acceptance by the public. And I think we did a damn good job.

WL: Where'd you get the idea for this kind of approach? Or ideas? Did you have help from the outside? Were there--for example, the human relations workshops, which you ran in the summer.

OL: Normally it was pretty much an in-house deal. You know, we drew on the resources of the community. But Doris Hutchinson was the director of staff development at that time, and she coordinated the programs. And then Joan Bluethenthal, who was later on the school board, was active then in the PTA [Parent Teacher Association] council, and other community-based groups [that] were active then. Al Lineberry was chairman of the school board along then.

These people, of course, had great community resources at their disposal, and these people worked for years. And then the State Department of Public Instruction had a lot of people that were into this sort of thing, and they came and helped out, so--

WL: They were doing this all over the state?

OL: Right. This was happening not just in Greensboro, but statewide and nationally as far as that's concerned. In fact, I made presentations at national meetings about our desegregation efforts. I made presentations in Atlantic City and New Orleans and so forth at the professional meetings, describing our success and telling what techniques we used to achieve successful desegregation.

WL: What was the public reaction to all of this, in the summer of--I would say, August and September?

OL: Well, every time you'd have a school board meeting there'd be a capacity crowd. In fact, some of the meetings had to be moved over to Page High School. There'd be a thousand people come to the meetings. People were very much up in arms about it. But I think that it was handled well and people had their, had their say.

There were some modifications made in the plan sometimes to satisfy the people. The board listened and reacted, and I think it was a successful program. I don't fault what was done back then.

WL: How did, how well did busing work once it began? Was there--I know there was a lot of concern about, on the part of the school board and the administration, to address the fears of parents about busing, and that seems to have worked quite successfully.

OL: Well, you know, that was part of the PR campaign. It had all these posters, "The Bus Stops Here," and we had this multimedia slide presentation computerized, an early computerized slide presentation that we put on.

And people are not fearful of busing per se. They'd always had busing just as a means of transportation to remote or isolated areas. But what they're concerned about is what's there where the bus stops. And that's what we addressed with our PR campaign, and I think they were successful in it. We had school bus monitors, monitors riding on the school bus with kids and so forth. And I think it was well accepted.

You find that this busing thing--for instance, let's take Claxton and Bluford. Here's the pairing of two schools, one in northwest and one in southeast Greensboro. What did you have at Bluford? You had a strong cadre of concerned-type mamas from the northwest that were really pitching in and doing good things for the school. And they were raising money like it was going out of style. I mean, they'd throw a carnival and raise ten thousand bucks in a heartbeat. And these things were used to improve the services delivered to kids. I mean, I think it was a success. I don't--I'd still say it was an unqualified success.

WL: How did the experience vary in the high schools? Was there much difference, for example, between what happened at Page and what happened at Grimsley, Smith, and Dudley, in that first year of desegregation?

OL: Yeah, well, things turned around after the first year. But you had a different mix of kids, and you still do for that matter, because Grimsley is the whitest one of the bunch, and Page next, then Smith, then, then Dudley. And you had more problems at Smith and Dudley in the beginning than you had at the others. But then since then, I think that things have smoothed out at Smith and Dudley and more has gone awry at the other schools.

You've got a volatile mix in the south end of town of low socioeconomic blacks mixing with low socioeconomic whites. Whereas in the north side of town, they were pulling off the more affluent blacks to go to those schools, and they sort of fit in.

And then, and also you had a situation where there was--oh, shit--at Grimsley for instance, you'd see eight bus loads of kids coming out of there early in the afternoon. They'd fix their schedules up so that all the blacks that lived in the project would finish up the school day early, and they'd carry them on back down there before they hung around and caused any trouble. I feel real sure that that's what they were doing.

WL: That's why they did it.

OL: That was part of it, yeah. But there were some problems at all the schools. But as I say, there was more problems in the south than there was in the north of the town because of the more volatile mix of student bodies.

WL: What sorts of problems? Just day-to-day sort of incidents that might occur?

OL: Yeah, right. I mean, the racial slurs, and fights, and demonstrations, all kinds of things. And something like, well, for instance, the cheerleaders and the homecoming queen and stuff like that. They pretty much got away from a lot of those things, and they set racial quotas on the others and so forth and dealt with it. But those were some of the--

WL: Big issues.

OL: --some of the sources of prejudice, yeah.

WL: How about athletics? How has athletics fared, how did it fare the first, say, the first year or so?

OL: I don't know that it had a great effect on athletics, except that we got into a lot of

recruiting that hadn't gone on before. They're still doing that. They won't admit they're doing it. But Page and Grimsley are recruiting all the time. Page especially recruits athletes from all over town. And I think that's bad news. I think that shouldn't be at the high school level. I think it has a bad effect on the kids. But that's one of the outgrowths of the--

And another thing about--student activities generally have not fared as well since schools have been, not so much desegregated but put into a cross-town busing situation, because it kills a lot of after school activities because of transportation problems. There's also poor attendance and poor participation in many school activities--not just athletics, but, you know, plays and clubs and all kinds of things.

WL: How did desegregation effect black neighborhood schools? Obviously, all neighborhood schools were directly affected by massive busing. Did--well, I suppose, which community lost more, black community or white in this whole process?

OL: Well, proportionately, black people are bused a whole lot more than white people in the system that they've got. And that's true in every system that I know of that has gone to a massive busing system. They just bus blacks more proportionately than they do whites, because they're less fearful that the blacks are going to pull out and go to private schools. In other words, they don't have as much clout when it comes to dealing with the system or getting what they want out of the system. The predominantly black schools, of course, have been altered in many ways to try to deal with this situation and to get the schools better used.

Well, I've--we've had, we've got another thing going on, too, besides desegregation. Declining enrollment has been going on at the same time as desegregation. When I came to the school system in 1969 there were thirty-three thousand students, and we're not much over twenty thousand now. So you see there's been a great attrition in numbers.

So consequently, when they close schools, they mostly close black schools. Of course, a lot of this not only helps desegregation, but also those facilities were usually inferior to the, to the white schools. I mean physically inferior, the physical facilities very inferior. So, you know, they closed Caldwell and closed J.C. Price and whatnot.

So that's one thing they've done. And then special programs have been set up at some of the black schools, and they're still working in that direction. They're going into more magnet programs and so forth. [unclear] I've mentioned, they've got the open school there. And Erwin [Montessori Elementary] School and Peeler [Open Elementary School] are the two open elementary schools, and they're both in black neighborhoods. Wiley [Elementary School] is a traditional school and it's in a black neighborhood. So, that is one way that this has been dealt with. And out of--of course, the black communities were very upset when they closed their schools and they protested. What

Commented [s1]: The only thing I found on "open" school is that it promotes social and emotional development.

can they do?

WL: On balance, you think that desegregation, school desegregation was a great success. And is that something--would you agree with that statement? In the last twenty years--

OL: Well, I don't know if I said, it was in the beginning a big success, but I think we're slipping backwards now. I mean, hell, I think we need another redistricting bad in order to get away from the inequities of the system. I mean, I'm teaching in a school now that is over 90 percent black, and that should not be in what's supposed to be a desegregated system. So I think we need some major adjustments in the attendance zones. But aside from that, I think it's working very well.

WL: What do you think about race relations generally, I mean in the same period?

OL: Well, I think race relations in Greensboro are very good. I think particularly compared to cities of comparable size in the rest of the South, I think we're, we're a very enlightened city. I'm very proud to be from Greensboro and to be a part of this thing.

WL: And things have gotten better?

OL: Definitely.

WL: In the past twenty, twenty-five years.

OL: Now, for instance, I don't--I'm active in all facets of the community. I'm on the planning board and in the Rotary Club and stuff, and various--and the various professional groups like Phi Delta Kappa [association for professional educators] and so forth--all of these things are desegregated. And I belong to the City Club, and it's desegregated. It opened that way in 1973 when it opened its doors. And I don't think they tried that in many cities. So I think we do a good job in Greensboro. And it's--part of it is the schools, part of it is the general spirit of the community and the community leadership. I think they're a pretty enlightened bunch around here.

[End of Interview]