

UNC at Asheville, North Carolina

Center for Diversity in Education

March 4, 2005

Interviewing James & Barbara Ferguson (JF and BF respectively) and Marvin Chambers (MC)

Interviewers are: Dolly Mullen (Dolly) and Dwight Mullen (DM) and some students in the audience.

Dolly: This is, this is Felicia.

JF: Which one is Felicia?

F: I'm Felicia.

JF: Your Felicia. Hi I'm James Ferguson, how you doing?

MC: Marvin Chambers

Dolly: She is from Gastonia and I am from

MC: Your from Gastonia? Oh really.

F: Yeah.

MC: He's from Charlotte.

F: uh oh, (laughter)

MC: Do you know Vernon Terry? Do you know Vernon Terry ?

F: Hum?

MC: Vernon Terry? He used to be with the Boy Scouts?

F: (laughter), I've heard of Terry, I'm not sure if we called him by his first name..... ? (lots of background conversation and noise, multiple conversations)

MC: Okay. What did you call him?? (lots of background conversation and noise, multiple conversations)

F: Obi. (lots of background conversation and noise, multiple conversations)

MC: Obi Ch.....(lots of background conversation and noise, multiple conversations)

Std: Agent Shy.(lots of background conversation and noise, multiple conversations)

MC: Agent Shy? Shy.(lots of background conversation and noise, multiple conversations)

Std: Ummm,Fayetteville.

MC: Fayetteville? I know some Shys from Fayetteville, that's why I asked you.(lots of background conversation and noise, multiple conversations)

? (Can you make them up?)

? Hi.

?

MC: Yeah, I was just in Fayetteville Saturday.

? Oh, okay.

MC: I know some Masons from down there.

DM: So now what, what year are you all in at school? Your.....

Std: Freshman

DM: You're a freshman.

Std: I'm a freshman

DM: You're a freshman

Std: I'm a senior

DM: You're a senior?

MC: You're a senior?

Std:political science major

? uh huh.

MC: political science?

? I'll have a little bite of that popcorn

? popcorn?

MC: See now you brought out the right thing. (laughter) I'm telling you now, I'm a popcorn freak (laughter)

? Hey, Dwight.....would you grab some

MC: Popcorn freak your talking,

? I am too

MC: I love it (cough)

? I am too

MC: Serious

? We go to the movies and carry on.....

(laughter)

MC: I, I, buy it and pop it at home and carry it on

? (muffled background conversation)

? it's okay

? sorry, (laughter)

? (muffled background conversation)

? here's a little popcorn a cup

? (muffled background conversation)

? (laughter, plates clanking?)

? If I may

MC: You don't really, you don't want any do you?

? (muffled background conversation)

MC: I didn't think you did.

? (muffled conversation)hard candy....

? ...you need to come.....with the real thing

? Oh.

? Well, I got a little thing right here.....

? (laughter) (muffled conversation)

? I already got it

? Oh, here we go, you got..... Yeah go ahead

? (noise, multiple muffled conversations)

Female: You want me to go and this?

Male: This will be good.....I can just do it like this..

Female: Yeah go ahead

Male: I'll just do it like this.....

Female:.....cus ya'lland I'm feeling like..... this is old homework for me.

? So where is home,.....

? Baltimore

? Baltimore, where is that?... (laughter)

? (noise, muffled multiple conversations)

Male: yeah?

Female: Oh we love each other that much.

(noise, multiple muffled conversations)

? Okay, no that's fine

? You got another tape

? (noise, multiple muffled conversations)

? okay

Female: actually, I want to take.....

? (noise, multiple muffled conversations)

Female:.....South French Broad story.....

? (Muffled response)

? How did ya'll find out that, how did ya'll find out that French Broad was gonna be
.....

2males:They put it in the paper.

Male: It was in direct response to the objections that we were bringing, so called
improvements later.....

JF: We need to have that story...(Muffled response). Stephens Lee won the state
championship in 1958, Thanksgiving day. We were out of school and when we
came back to school on Monday, the little yellow buses that you see around, they
had a whole bunch of them at the school, we turned out the school. We rode
those buses all over town, all over everywhere, for hours and no body said a word.
Were you with us Barbara? You didn't get, you stayed in class. Anyway, we were
riding those buses, all over town, hollering and yelling out the windows and
everything. And nobody said a word. But the moment, that we drove, you know
when you come into Asheville High's campus, we drove the buses onto the
campus, pulled up in front of the school and started down the hill. Before we got
down the hill, there were 5 carloads of cops. (laughter) BOOM, now we've been
riding for hours, (laughter) and nobody said anything.

Dolly: celebrating your championship

JF: right, but the moment that we hit that campus. You remember that, were you
there?

MC: Oh yeah.

JF: I didn't think you were there, (laughter)

Male: You know I wouldn't miss that..

JF: That's a fact. They came from nowhere and led us back. (laughter) led us back to
campus.

Dolly: Where were you Barbara?

BF: Mr. was that your senior year?

MC: Yeah, No.

MC:theof 58 would have been our junior

JF: no, no, no, that was our sophomore

BF: yeah see, I was in 8th grade, I was still down at Hill Street.

JF: yeah, listen to this

Dolly: this was not your boyfriend, then was it

BF: no, (laughter)

Dolly: Just checking

MC: But soon after that

BF no,no, no, not soon after (laughter) No we started dating after his, after his first year of college and it was my senior year. I was going to my senior high school and already

JF: But really, they had, it really started long before then.

BF: No we didn't

Dolly: the inside stuff

JF: It really started cus see, her friend, (laughter)

BF: No we didn't

JF: Yeah we were.....she won't

(laughter)

JF: Well that's out, you can go on to another part.

Dolly: well then this is the best part

MC: No (laughter), well actually I mean in a sense this is an ASCORE romance. Because we met through.....

MC: We all worked together, and we started dating each other when we were going to ASCORE, I guess for the students who just came in, ASCORE was a group called Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality, that ah, being ah, in some of our colleagues forum, back in, shortly after the sit-ins started in February of ah, 1960 ah we wanted to get involved in a protest movement here, ah, but we didn't have a college campus here so, it was left to us as high school students to do something..... uhm, so we agreed among ourselves that we would get involved in the sit-ins, and in preparation for doing so, we made contact. I can't remember who all we made contact with, but uhm, initially we were all prepared to just go out and start sitting-in somewhere. But we talked to some adults in the community and they, they advised and guided us to ahh, to get information about, ahh, a non-violent resistance. And we got literature on it, uhm, we went to some

meetings about it. We were put in contact with people from American Foreign Service Committee and they came in, different ones came in to give us some training on how to do that. So instead of just going downtown and sitting-in, like, like what had happened to get sit-ins started, ahh, we started reading this literature and getting -----and it talked about the steps for non-violent. I can't remember all of the steps right now, but one was education about the problem, another was preparation, where you got prepared so you could not fight back---- and it was difficult. Because we had to go through these training sessions where we would act out, ahh, what it would be like to go and sit-in. Uhm,

Dolly: (unable to make out what is asked).....for the training.....

MC: Ahh, Mount Zion Baptist Church, which is where we would meet a lot of the times. Reverend _____ would allow us to come and meet. And by this time, there were several adults who were involved in that, Mr. Roland, Will Roland, who was -----, he was, he owned a jewelry business, he owned----- Jewelers, which was just up on the Block.

? It was destroyed and -----down-----.

MC: Yeah, and because of his commitment, he lost his business.

Dolly: It was destroyed?

MC: He lost his business because he was so committed to this and ahh, people began to put the screws on him.

Dolly: oh...

JF: He was the only black jeweler at that time.

MC:So he eventually lost his business, but I remember Mr. Roland who was very committed, he'd be in the back of his jewelry shop sometimes----- and Mr. Roland, Mr. McCoy, a woman named Leaha Butler, she was the wife of ah, Dr. Butler who was -----, Rosetta -----, Reverend Avery who was the Pastor of Hill Street Church, and ahh, I think those were the ones who met with us regular.

JF: (muffled response)

MC: But I do remember at that time, that ahh, as part of our preparation, we met with, you know we met with Ruben Bailey and ah, Harold Epps, the two lawyers, the only two black lawyers in town. We met with them thinking they were going to give us this long discourse on what the law was, how to make sure we did this and make sure we did that,?:

? (muffled question)

MC: Ruben Bailey and Harold Epps, yeah they were the only two black lawyers-----
---, uhm, but basically they told us, you all go and do what you feel like you can
do and we'll be ----- back here. That was a group ----- basically.....

JF: There was a group of adults that who belonged to the Citizens -----

MC: I know the group your talking about, I can't tell you the name of it.

JF: There's a Black group that -----Actis, Activists -----yeah, I can't remember the
name, but.....

Dolly: Were they older people? Or

MC: Yeah, these were adults, basically one of the things that we were doing in terms of
our organization's structure, we traveled to ----- that's when we met -----
--

JF: yeah, we went to Charlotte

MC: we went to Charlotte

JF: we went to Raleigh,

MC: Yeah, we went to Raleigh, we went to Raleigh for something

MC: I thought, I remember going down to South Carolina, did we get on to the -----?

JF: Yeah.

MC: We did go get a -----

(laughter)

DM: Now who sponsored this, who, who sponsored it.

JF: Well, Mr. Roland would get money from somewhere. I don't know where he got
it from, Mr. Butler would get money, Miss. Gill would get money and maybe
some other folk. I don't know where they got it.

Dolly: -----

MC: and the American Friends people had money.

JF: Yeah, America too, Bill Bagley, and there was a woman, I can't remember her
name.

MC: There was another guy too, it was a white guy,

JF: It was three of them.....

MC: It was a white guy and a black guy and a woman and I can't remember their names. But I do remember Bill Bagley and they would come up. I'll tell you, much of what I learned from that, became or has become a part of my life even now because I could tell you that had I not had some of that exposure, I could not have done some of the things that I did or have done in my life. Even working in the industry, because a lot of time I was the only the Black engineer in the office. And it was tough. If it were not for that, I don't know what ----- as far as I'm concerned.

Dolly: So I'm curious, also about the community, you know I mean, I would think in that time period, doing what you were doing, you know, I imagine you parents and all those folks saying you know, this is dangerous. (laughter)

JF: Oh they did, they did...

Dolly: this is very dangerous...

JF: They did, but we didn't care, we went on we were going to do it anyway.

MC: But there were some, there were some who wanted to join with us, who couldn't

JF: Because their parents wouldn't let them.....

BF: That's what.....

MC: I can recall coming over, going over to Bo's house, going over to Bo's house and his mother would say, Dean you and Bo be careful. Yep.

(laughter)

JF: ..she'd always say that.... but she never told me not to do it.

MC: She didn't tell you not to do it, she'd say be careful, ya'll be careful because she knew we were going to do it anyway.

JF: Yeah.

DM: I don't mean to be a fixater on time, I'm just trying to make sure that we.....

MC: Yeah, go ahead...

DM: ..the time when you all would go out of town.....

MC: All the others taken place ahh, you know this happened pretty quickly. This is 1960.

JF: 1960, yeah.

MC: So after the sit-ins started is when we started making contacts, and then the network just kind of pulled us into it. Uhm, and, I'm trying to remember, I don't know how long we were in training, it wasn't long but it was long enough for us to, become familiar with the non-violent technique or what ever you call it. Because if you recall, we were prepared to do sit-ins, but part of the steps in the non-violent technique at the preparation was negotiation. Uhm, and all this was to be done before you did the direct action. So we prepared ourselves to negotiate with ahh the store owners, the store managers and the powers that be downtown. Uhm, and we would just identify ah, a different store and make contact with who ever the manager was at the store and tell them that we wanted to meet with them to negotiate with them. And interestingly, uhm, we never got to the point where we actually had a sit-in. Because as a result of our negotiating with them, and it seems to me Dean, that at some point the mayor got involved.....

BF: No we did picket Winn-Dixie

MC: We picketed Winn-Dixie, that's right, but that was a little bit later after we.....

JF: Yeah, lets back up a couple of days here to the negotiations.....

BF:Winn-Dixie.....

MC: Remember when we went to -----Drug Store?

JF: He was right over here.....

MC: Yeah, remember that morning when..... in the places that he told us he wasn't going to serve us? Remember? And you said, you got lunch counters, don't you, you got stools and counters here and we'll be back tomorrow. He said, you'll come back but there won't be anything else -----, he took them up. And from that day after that, until he closed the store, there was never a place that, he served food and ice cream,-----there was never a place to sit down.

JF: I'd forgotten about that.

Dolly: So, he took the chairs out...

MC: He took the stools,.....

Dolly: rather than let you sit down.

MC: He took the stools up and the booths.

? Was that place -----

MC: The building, it's over there where MAHEC is now, a Dr. Isby or somebody's office is in there, right on the corner used to be Winn-Dixie and the drug store was right after the ahh, the supermarket, and then there was a laundry mat on the

other end. Anyway, he took every stool in there up and we asked him if he could make the decision, and he said he was not the position to make the decision, that he and his partner were-----or something---- would be the ones to go to the city. They said there would not be any stools if we came back. And there wasn't. They must have worked all night..

DM: They took them all up

MC: and, when there was

DM: and this all----- except for Winn-Dixie.....

JF: well, Winn-Dixie came a little bit later.

Dolly: Because Barbara, you went to the Winn-Dixie one day didn't you

JF: -----started it, ahh

BF: Yes, ahh, I was, I think I was chair of the group by then so this was -----.

JF: Now, we did do, when we got ready, see.....

MC: Cus, we were riding, I remember we were ready to sit-in at Kress', cus I think Kress was one of the -----

JF: You remember, they, Mrs. Butler said we have a group of white people who are going meet you.

MC: When we went to Woolworth's?

JF: We have a group of white people who are interested in what your doing and we are going to work with you. One of the key things they did not want to happen in Asheville, is that Asheville is a tourist town, the powers that be did not want any thing that would deter.....

Dolly: tourism

JF: That's right, so they were willing to negotiate, that's when the mayor came...

Dolly: to keep it peaceful..

JF: and there were people, they says okay, you guys go down and sit at the lunch counter and there were be, when you sit you leave a seat between you and somebody white will come and sit there and say don't worry, it's gonna be okay.

MC: Because we actually had to go to the ----- of people who would go in.....and the whites would come join us and boot us up. As far as management, understood that's what was going to happen.

? Wow.

MC: ----- this is what works. And this was the way it got done and that's how, that's how Asheville avoided sit-ins, and all of it was public-----

?: -----

MC: Uhm huh, because they did not want the publicity....

DM: Now, with, with, there were people who were supporters,.....

? Yes,..... the town

DM: people who at the negotiating cooperated.....

JF: Yeah, see while we were negotiating, and we did this negotiating,...

MC:we ourselves.....the students

JF: but you had people like Ms. Butler, who was connected.....

MC: Yes

JF: around town and she was talking to some of the white ladies and she ----, a lady named Ms. BeBe-----and different one who were interested in trying to make this happen so

? (unable to make out what is being said; muffled conversation)

JF: yeah, and I don't think we will ever know all of the connections that were made in that regard, but they, word got out and then folks wanted to avoid, what they saw in Greensboro and what happen in Durham and all around the south.

Dolly: and so then, that made them also, I guess less uhm, likely to uhm, punish people because that could lead to violence and.....

MC: ...it could blow up in their faces....(muffled conversation)

Dolly: right, right so you could go and.....

JF: and then it got close, because its not like we just walked in and said okay, we want to eat at your lunch counter. I mean this was, there was a good deal of back and forth and it was heavy, heavy negotiations that went on before they actually agreed to allow us, ahh, us to come in.

DM: That must have been difficult

JF: Oh it was,.....Because see now,

BF: But you know, I think we didn't realized, I don't remember being fearful, I mean, you know your young, you absorb, because I am a, I was just not as aggressive as they were, because I wasn't involved in the initial part. I think I started the summer of '60 because you know being two years behind them, and I had to learn to go in and negotiate and I never thought, I don't remember thinking a whole lot about it. Now we had been in training for a long time, by the time I got to it, so I don't remember it, any real serious fear, and they would have experienced that before I came along-----, there was some success. So after wards, I felt like well, you know it's going to work, we will be successful. With the negotiations we'll get it.

?: I don't recall lots of women being uhm, in authority positions, chairs of these kinds of organizations.

BF: I was the second female chair.

MC: I was the first chair and then a woman, Etta Mae Whitman, was chair after me and then Bobby -----was a chair after that. So you see we, we, we were ahead of our time. (laughter) There were other members of our crew, you remember Jane,

JF: Jane, Jane, Jane Burkey, Jane Van Burkey, Patricia -----, Virginia Dawkins, ahh,

MC: I might remember another girl, there was the three of them, you and me, Burnell Freeman, Charles-----

JF: And the thing that was interesting about this is that we all were together at all time. If you messed with one you messed with us all. That was -----

MC: Virginia Dawkins

JF: Virginia Dawkins, and the thing is that, we took, they would give us -----, but we'd come up with the ideas and they'd put them on paper, (laughter) and we'd fuss cus they didn't have it right,----- sort of killing the idea. (laughter)

DM: Did you all encounter hostility, were you all ever threatened?

JF: Ahh, how do you mean

BF: I don't remember any direct overt threats

? you know, I, I

? an anti-apartheid group, I had ----- Nazis.

? Oh, that doesn't surprise me

? At UNCA,

JF: Now, when was that

? This was '84,'85', 86

MC: '85, '86. I would guess at that time, because of what we were saying about the, the..., the atmosphere in Asheville, what Asheville represented, the power structure did not want anything to happen to that because,----- come to Asheville, and if anyone had started something ah, the power structures would have killed it.

JF: See I think if we had had sit-ins, a-----then I think a lot of the hostility would have come to the surface, but because we did it the way we did it with the negotiations, with it being arranged and things were going.....

DM: in your surroundings, it was the ----- (muffled conversation)? When I came here, it was ----- very clear to me to stay out of our Madison County.

JF: everybody, everybody knew that, yeah -----

?: but, if Buncombe county was a moreipehus, it was

JF: Yeah, Buncombe county

MC: It was a little different from Madison County

JF: Madison county was totally, Madison county ahhh, Robbinsville,

?: (muffled conversation)

JF: we all knew where not to go

DM: Okay, I was wondering, that all I.....

JF: and our focus was right here in Asheville, uhm, see, see, there's something else that we, I think, is -----potential, how we went about doing some things. We had educational meetings with our adults, so we could explain to them what their position would be, and then we ----- at ahh, Mount Zion, where we explained to them, along with Mr. Roland.....

? Yeah, right

JF:explained to the adults, and that's the entire uhm, black leadership of this city at that time, what our position was and what we were doing so that there would not be any confusion about where we are as this happened and that too helped us to b----- a lot of folks, because many of them wanted to once we got it started to take it over and we said no. (muffled statement). But the interesting thing was, the adults who went with us, didn't want to see the results.

MC: That's right, that exactly right.

JF: They were very empowering-----, Mr. Roland you remember always wanted us to do it. We sometimes asked him to ----- and he'd say no. -----, this is yours, Ms. Butler, same thing, Ms. McCoy same,..... (muffled conversation)

Std: (muffled conversation),like all of them..... I wanted to ask about uhm, I know how Asheville wanted to suppress what was ----- so when you read your newspapers, did you ever see anything about.....

JF: Well, I take that back to be honest with you, we were not as media savvy at that time as we are today. We never really didn't pay that much attention to what was in the press. Ahh, yeah, we did what we were going to do and we'd see it in the press but I don't think we took a very analytical approach to..... we just didn't, so I don't know how accurately the press portrayed what was going on at the time, it was in the press-----, but I really don't have a recollection of -----or even collecting the articles, which is unfortunate.

MC: I really don't ----- it being in the papers.

Std: -----remember when you were not even interested in building plans, you were

JF: that, that, was a big (muffled statement), ahh, but mostly, as I think back on it, I think because this was done really well, the negotiations, everybody agreeing on how things would be done, I think, I'm sure you got a sanitized view in the paper, it wasn't long, and of course we got credit for what happened -----, the white people, that had goodwill, wanted-----

MC:and you need to understand too that the city manager who was in power at that time was a very strong person.....

? do you remember who that was (muffled conversation)

JF:but I don't know if you've got more time or not, but let me say quickly that ahh, we did this negotiations up to the summer of 1960 and then those of us who started we really wanted to go away to school and we wanted to make sure that there was a group there to carry it on and that's when we started bringing in others who were in classes, lower than the senior class, ahh, and, ahh and we were grooming them for leadership and -----at the time----- Whitman, Ellie May Whitman who was the one the secretary.....

?: Whitman?

JF: Whitman

? Whitmire

JF: Whitman, Whitman, ahh so Ellie May was the second president and -----
---was the third president and a guy named George Reynolds was the third, the
fourth, I'm sorry, so we were trying to lay the ground work for this from the
beginning, because we didn't stop at the lunch counter. Ah, we went for
cafeterias, we went for jobs, ahh, the parks, recreation parks, ahh, and all of that.
So we were looking long term at that time, we wanted to integrate everything,
yeah.

? An interesting thing that happened while we were doing the job. It was in the
wintertime, we were going to Eckerds, and ah, they had a ----- that -----
-----, it was -----in the lunch eating area, and we came in-----
- and we asked to see a manager, and they said well he's not available right now,
why would you like to see him? We said, we told him we were coming there and
that we wanted to talk to him about employment at this place -----
-----, (muffled conversation). He said, well the manager is not
here, he's on the roof, shoveling snow.

? (muffled conversation)

? Think about this, that must have thought we were dumb -----, there was a
black guy back there, a Mr. Porter, sitting down in a chair, but the manager is on
the roof shoveling snow. (laughter) now think about that, that's just one of the
things ----- and that was prior to the picketing-----

? Winn-Dixie was the -----, they didn't want to hire anybody.

One thing you have to understand, here, here is what we were talking about at the
time, we were talking about Winn-Dixie hiring bag boys, to bag the groceries.
They were not hiring blacks to bag groceries------(muffled
conversation).

? And this Winn-Dixie was located across from the ahh, County courthouse, yeah
on College Street, where the parking lot is now,

female?: Is that right?

Oh yeah, right below, between the Bank of America and -----.

We had to picket in order to get them to hire bag boys, at that time.

Now that's when we got the publicity.

DM: How many people were at that demonstration?

JF: It was an ongoing thing, we would, you know, we determined what numbers
....we worked in shifts, to keep somebody there at all times.

BF: There were probably five-----

JF: Yeah, it wasn't a huge crowd

DM: How long did it take?

BF: It didn't take very long for them to realize that, we weren't going anywhere.

DM: Was there a boycott with it

JF: Yeah, well I mean yeah, that was the whole idea behind it

DM: I mean was it successful, people were not -----

JF: It's hard to know, we don't know the numbers, we don't know the economic impact it had, because soon after we started, they went ahead and -----

DM: and it was after -----

JF: The thing that is interesting is it was one person that went in, he and his wife used to go in there and he'd come and say, "we're with you, but we gotta go eat", (laughter) I always thought that was real funny.

DM: You know that was actually on a line of questions I wanted to follow is uhm, is uhm, you know you talk about education, and we talked you know, you all just talked about targeting employment, which you probably need to talk a little bit more about----- to changing employment practices, but you know, were, were there other areas that you focused on ahh, to change, housing, or ahh,ahh,

SIDE TWO OF THE CASSETTE TAPE

JF: I remember that, you know, I don't know what her title was,

DM:that was after she was, was she a principle at the school? Or was she

? No this was after she was principle, she was a principle, yeah she was a principle over at.....

DM: Is that the mountain, that's the mountain ((muffled multiple conversation)

?: Which Harris are you talking about, you said Harry?

JF: Lucy Harris,....

? Lucy.....

JF: She was president, I mean she was principle over at Mountain Street, I believe.

DM: Yeah, right, that's where they moved the central office.

? Okay

JF: And then she went on

DM: They call it the Lucy Harrin school, that what they used to call it, but I don't know what they were doing over there before the central office moved over there, it was probably some kind of a

JF: It was Lucy H.... it was Mountain Street is really what it was, it was Mountain Street at first, then they changed it to Mountain Street.....(muffled conversation)

(something dropped and laughter and muffled sentences, someone says thank you, things being moved around near the cassette recorder)

DM: Now you all knew her when she was, I mean you knew her the whole time but she was your school teacher? What grade did she teach you.

JF: she was elementary wasn't she

MC: She taught elementary school. Ahh, I mean, she was the principle over at Mountain Street, so she didn't actually teach me, but you know

DM: Is that where you went to elementary school?

MC: No, I went right over here at ahh, Livingston Street

JF: We went, well, I went to Hill Street and Livingston Street, one year at Livingston and the rest of the time was at Hill Street.

JF: Isn't there some sort of center over there now?

MC: That's Reid, Reid Center now.

DM: Okay

JF: Now what is Reid Center?

MC: That's, that's the old, that's a Park and Recreation.....

DM: ..and that was a school....

MC: That was a school, yes...

JF: Oh yeah,..

MC: If you look at, if you'll look at all the recreations centers that are in the black neighborhoods, they were all schools.

DM: Deborah told me that that was a school. You know what I had in my mind, the building looks newer to me than that, you know, so that's why I think I get all

MC: It looks newer to you than what?

DM: Than uhm,

MC: Than you think that then a school would look

DM: Than the age of a school

JF: Well see, Livingston Street, they built a new school to give.....

? It was a brand new school that they built there

JF: They built a brand new school there

? Right there behind ahh,

MC: I think somewhere in the, I'm trying to remember, did I, they were building a new school when I was in elementary school

? When are you talking about?

MC: When they built the new school over at Livingston Street.

? I think about my elementary school and it looks

? I remember when they built

JF: You know Livingston Street, Livingston Street was an add on, -----.....

MC: yeah that's what I'm talking about.....

JF: See, see, see, when we were in school there was a woodland,

MC: They used to have a little white woods.....

BF: Oh yeah that's right.....

MC: Remember that?

DM: Where was that now,

MC: This was at Livingston Street, but then while we were there they added on...

JF: They added on,..... You remember when, Josey, not Josey, S. Charles came to the school.

? No, (muffled conversation)

JF: Remember when S. Charles came to the school, he had beaten Joe Louis. Yeah, we booed him, cus he took.....(laughter)

MC: I do remember that now.

DM: It was a white, uhm, uhm wood building there? Before.....

MC: It was a white wooden building, yeah, down

JF: down, if you went down,, lets see, down Gaston, where the gym is now, the auditorium thing is.

DM: Where the Reid Center is, uh huh, uh huh

JF: and where the lunch room and the part where they meet for some of their activities downstairs, that part right in there was the wood part, white wood and there was an -----, was there a flag pole out there? We used to sing this song, one a penny two a penny, hot crossed buns (laughter).

DM: Well, how are the children uhm, so there was that school and Hill Street was another elementary school and Mountain Street was another.....

MC: Mountain Street, Hill Street, Livingston Street ahh, Burton Street----- those were the black elementary schools

DM: Anything on Montford?

MC: Montford school.....

JF: See Montford used to be a white neighborhood

MC: Montford, that was William Randolph, but see the thing about it

JF: No William Randolph was a, was that a elementary school?

MC: Yeah,..

JF: Okay...

MC: Because they changed Montford to William Randolph and that's when they built the new William Randolph and Hill Street were built at the same time.

JF: Right But the difference is, if you go look at Hill Street and look at William Randolph, you'll see marble in the front of the building and if you look at Hill Street it's on the back side. Do you remember that?

MC: I didn't remember that, see you know all of these details.....I,

DM: details, we need as many details as possible

MC: This man here is a walking memory book, all-----, I'm very grateful for the.....

?: The last time talked to me about the ahh, 1958 football championship.

JF: oh yeah, (laughter) that's where we caught real hell, (laughter)

?: that's what I want, I want to get that down,

DM: That's really about the beginning of the time where you all were thinking about or organizing to do what came about this integration.

? ahh, no

MC: We didn't really.....

DM: When did that happen.....

MC: that was '59, when we went

JF: yeah, we went to the G GA, remember Ms. Shandler, GAI

? Greater Asheville Inter-----

DM: Who did you say you remember Ms. who.

JF: Schandler, uhm, her husband is a doctor, Dr. Schandler, Joe Schandler's wife here on Merrimon Avenue, optometrist., yeah. His mother had a group that was called the G.A. , the Greater Asheville Intergroup Youth Council, GAIYC, that's what it was called and they met at the old YWCA which is now the, -----behind the ahh, right up on a Grove Street.

DM: Is that the senior center ?

MC: No, the senior center is actually across the street.

JF: This is the one directly, the brick building, there used to be some restaurants or something in there

MC: It used to be the white YMCA, the white YWCA

JF: and they had this group and they got us involved in going there and we went to some of the meetings, back then and then after that we, then we went to

?: Greater Asheville Intergroup Youth Council

MC: Susan G-----was the president. Her daddy,..... Deborah knows the mother, they own ahhh spinning mill or something down on Sweeten Creek. And then we went, what really got us started, correct me ----- if I'm wrong.....

JF: Well, lets, lets go quickly, don't worry about that.....Ms. Schandler and somebody else, I can't remember, was the lady's name Ms. France, do you remember somebody named Ms. France.....?

BF: I remember a Franz

JF: That's right, that's right, Ms. Franz.

MC: That had called this group together to begin black and white youth----- across the racial lines, it's basically what it was about.

?female: You all were how old about when this was going on.....

MC: We were in high school..... Bo was ninety and I was probably about 15.

? (laughter) that old?

? that would have started, it started before that didn't it.....because I remember

? (muffled conversation)

MC: There were some other people who had been in the program,.....

JF: It may have been, because I don't recall the other people.....

MC: Because I, I, I thought it started when we were at Hill Street.....

JF: I don't remember that.....

MC: It started before we were seniors,.....

JF: Oh yeah, we were, we were

MC: we were early in high school.....

JF: we were about in the 10th grade or 11th grade

MC: 9th or 10th

JF: because when we did this, remember we went out to a conference in the Oaks.....

MC: I remember that....

JF: That's when we discussed all these things and the white kids.....

DM: About when was that?

MC: It's somewhere between '58 and '59.

JF: So you, so the black students and the white students went together to discuss.....

MC:we were already, we were already, something, I don't know who, said, asked us to participate, but somebody from the school or someplace asked us to participate and we started participating with this group at the uhm, at the YW and we were meeting discussing various issues and conditions and circumstances and then we held a conference, held at in the Oaks, out in Swannanoa and we were discussing the silly kinds of things about racial things and something came up about the schools and one of the young ladies,-----, the white students said that the reasons we have ---- a lot of things or get a lot of things is because our parents come to the PTA and fight for what we want, remember?

JF: (muffled conversation)..... I don't remember all that, (laughter).....

MC: (laughter) son, I tell you what..... any way, after that we started looking at some things that affected our school, and that's when we went to the PTA, Mr. Mapp and those guys were there.....

JF: Yeah, but if you remember, there was something more than that that precipitated this thing, there was this grand plan that they were going to.....

MC: That's right.....

JF: they were talking about adding some additions up at Stephen's Lee.....

MC:that's were that came up.....

JF: some additions up at Stephen's Lee, Stephen's Lee was basically land locked at that time, so there wasn't very much space up there, and they were talking about putting some additions up there, which it would have, just made the area very crowded, it would have been nothing compared to what Lee Edwards was and when we were looking at that plan, we said this just isn't gonna do. So, if.....

MC: Hold that right there.....

JF: No, let me finish this, if you going to make any improvements up here, we want a school that's gonna be comparable to the others.

MC: You said to build it where?

JF: Somewhere other than up there, I can't remember...

MC: You said build it at McCormick field or at Memorial -----.

JF: that's what we did talk about, that's right, that's exactly right.

MC: cause, they said we don't have space..... that's right, they wanted -----
if we don't have space up here to build the kind of school your talking about, we
were talking about a school with a track, you know, all the stuff we had at down
at ----- and they, you know they came up with every excuse in the world why
they couldn't do it

JF: and it came out in the paper, the mayor, Bo was the mayor of student council, I
was the treasurer, (muffled conversation), they had all the hell
raisers in -----positions. -----T was a councilman,.... (muffled
conversation).....

BF:actually the -----.....

JF: ...now wait a minute, now see there.....(laughter).....

BF:..... (laughter) I mean there is a part of the conversation I can't participate in

because I wasn't there when they started, and I kind of came along, if they started
when at 10th grade, I was in the 8th grade, I was a youngster, okay

MC: I like that....(laughter)

JF: But, this really, this was not a whole student council project.

MC: No, no it wasn't, but you happen to have been the mayor..

JF: Yeah, I had been the mayor

MC: but somehow it leaked out to the superintendent and it made the paper, on the
front page and there were two papers, the Asheville-Citizen and the Asheville
Times, and he was on the front page of the Asheville-Citizen; Mayor of Stephen's
Lee rejects school improvements,

JF: yeah, something like that. Yeah,

MC: and the superintendent call Bo up to the office and

? This would have been '59 this actually happened, he was in office in '59-'60.
This actually happened, they called him up there, and it was messed up.

DM: and so what do you mean? What did he say to you

JF: I don't remember the exact words that he spoke but ahh, -----

MC: Dean would know, (laughter)

Dean: I wasn't in there.....

JF: are you talking about when I went by my self?

MC: Yeah, cause you went by yourself,

JF: right, right, right, no I he, cause I think it was Byers at the time, Byers wasn't the superintendent?

MC: No, no it was EC Thunderbird

JF. Thunderbird, that's right it was Thunderbird, that's right, EC Thunderbird and ahh, he called me in and he was nice about it, but ahh, he wanted, he wanted to show me how this was going to be a great improvement for Stephen's Lee, and ahh, wanted to know why it was I rejecting the plan and why I hadn't come to him to talk about it.....I talked about it but I didn't talk to the school superintendent about it or anything else, but it was clear what he want to do was to steer me away from what we were doing. And I explained to him that we had a group of participants and uhm, it was not something that we were willing to give up because we felt that we were entitled to, to have ----- the type of schools equal to Lee Edwards, the type of schools we----- and went to PTA, the we got Mr. Mapp and Mr. McCoy, because Mr. McCoy and Mr. Waters, Mr. Clyde Waters, Sr. and they appointed us as a committee to represent the PTA, to get this function (muffled conversation), right but now there's one step you missed Dean, in there somewhere, I can't really remember where it was sequentially, but ahh, if you recall Belton,

MC: That came after Belton

JF: That came after, yeah,

MC: See what happened was, we got together, and so show you how cooperative the spirit was the staff was, the teachers were, they allowed to, they gave us some a PTA manual, to go through school, check it out to see what was there, how it worked and we took that book and went to work. We measured every classroom, we went through the thing, we did a full analytical thing, and pressure became the prevalent thing and so some of these things we were doing while we were in class. We were -----in class, mind you, ahh, we were ----- ,we were students who could do whatever was necessary, how do I say that, we could do whatever we wanted to do and get away with it because we could do our school work too and still be in top form.....

MC: ...I understand....

MC: and it was also difficult, we were students, we were, we were students that we were somewhat hard to deal with because we had our own minds about what we felt was right.

MC:felt protected because you were good students, had you not been as good, I would imagine,

MC: and so we had made all of these analysis and one of the things I noticed which was very interesting was, there were some, some, some chemicals in, in, the chemistry lab that were there when my father was there, which was something like twenty years later, and at Stephen's Lee we were still using alcohol burners, rather than bunsen burners, all of those kinds of things.....

JF: and we went through and just sort of listed the kind of equipment and facilities and stuff that.....

?you were expecting to come into your school.....

JF: well, no, we were demonstrating what we didn't have, to just sort of illustrate you know, what we should have had, and to justify having a new school rather than an addition to the school.

?:the unequal part of separate....

MC:we were showing the unequal (muffled conversation).....

JF: but the unfortunate part about when we, when we finished our study, we had written a letter and sent to all the black organizations and churches and so forth and(muffled conversation) it snowed, remember.(laughter)..... it snowed.....

DM: Yeah, that was actually one of the questions I wanted to ask, is that did you all do organizing and then aimed at churches and organizations.....

JF: we tried that and we had written to the schools as a committee and we didn't do it as students, as a committee from the PTA,

DM: which just happen to overlap into the Student Council

JF: right and then by our doing it, it snowed, a big, big snow, -----two times, twice ...

DM: really?

JF: Yeah, and so we didn't get to have the impact, but the next time the PTA-----, Bo couldn't be there because he had another engagement, but he called me and said, Dean, you get the guys together and when you start the report, I'll be there---

-----Anyway, before we could do anything, Mr. Belton called me, Fernell and Bates, Charles Bates into his office.

MC: Who is the Belton?

JF: He is the principle.....

MC: Okay

JF:and he told us, he says, you cannot give this report tonight, and ----- said why not. He said because -----, we see Thunderbird as the school superintendent and some of the councilmen are going to be there,.....in other words, we were -----, if you gave the report, you will not graduate, so that's what he said.

MC: I can't tell you (laughter)

JF: we said, we are going to give this report, graduation or not, but fortunately when we got downstairs, those people were----- down in the gym, below in the auditorium and ----- and across the stage was a whole slew of white fellows and Mr. Mapp was there,

MC: Mapp was the president of the PTA..

JF: and there was a man Mr. , what was McCoy, was it Oscar McCoy, no, no ----- ---he went by L. H. McCoy,

MC: now McCoy if you recall, he was the president of the NAACP,.

JF: that's exactly right.... I think its LH McCar, it definitely was McCar, I may not have the first initials right,

MC: he was a railroad cook, retired cook from the railroad. He came to that meeting, he was in the meeting and he stood up and he said, Mr. President, I know all of these people are here, but we are here to hear a report from these young people, this committee that we have selected and we want to hear from them, and I move that we hear this report and Mr. Waters, Clyde Waters Sr. seconded the motion and Virgil Kelly and Bo got up and made the report. And boy,.. (laughter)..it was a good thing you all were going to college.....(laughter) The shape on -----(laughter), but anyway, once the report was made, then it was out. And that was that phase. And uhn then

DM: Well what did they do with the report?

MC: Well, city council, I'm not sure exactly how they did it, but Dean, if you remember, there was one phase in there, ahh, where we took the position that either we got a school comparable to Lee Edwards and that they put it somewhere (muffled conversation), just put it somewhere that can be comfortably -----

-, otherwise, we were going to lead a mass march down the avenue. (laughter)
That's when they got serious about making some changes...

JF: and we were radical enough to do that and everyone knew that and and

Dolly: How large of a following did you all have with the people who were in the school.

MC: well, we really didn't know, but I can tell you this, Bo was a very popular person and he had a lot of influence, and all of us that ran together, we, in fact we stopped the bosses initiation, let me tell you that. (laughter). That's neither here nor there...

Dolly: Well I think it's there and here. (laughter)

MC: We did a lot of crazy things, but the thing that is interesting about it is that, we were capable enough to ----- our word, and we had it and we knew we could do it, and we helped each other get with everyone there.....

DwM: Were there any national organizations like NAACP, -----, CORE, Urban League, uhm, fraternities or sororities or any there

MC: No, see the thing you to remember here is that , we were just a bunch of high school students, kind of isolated from..... and this was happening actually before the sit ins started in Greensboro, see this happened, it started in the fall of the year, ahh, and you mentioned the snow so it might have been December or January .

BF: It might have been January or February, yeah

MC: Yeah, it was before February 1st, I do remember that because this was happening before,.....

JF: it have to have happened sometime between September and December because
Brother Berkely call you into his office, yeah somewhere in there.

MC: yes, but this was what I'm coming to, this was sort of a prelude to the sit-in movement that started. Because we were focused on this before the sit-ins started. And then the sit-ins happened in February 1st, in 1960 and when we saw that going on, we wanted to be involved in that too, but we didn't have a college then, and the sit in movements were directed at colleges. Ahh, so we had sort of the beginning of our group and what all we had been working on, ahh be we all most immediately wanted to get involved, in the sit-in group. This same group had been involved in trying to get the schools supports.....ah, we became a group called ASCORE, Asheville Student Committee on Racial Equality (muffled conversation), let's back up to the school thing all right.

MC: Now, as, as, as the school thing began to materialize, the place where they wanted to put the school had to be determined, so what they decided to do was to take, go over on South French Broad, which had been, this is where a number of white people used to live at one time and they moved out and moved to south Asheville, so black folks had bought these homes, and had been there.....

JF: They hadn't been there that long...

MC: That's what I'm saying, they had been th....., there was a change and it had clearly tipped by then so it was clearly a black ----- by then so it was clearly a black area by then and that is why they choose that area.

JF: And they had, and they put right in behind the school, you know that street that's on the side of the school right now, there's a road that-----that goes into ah a parking lot or something like that. That used to be, where it used to go to like or flight transportations school-----They bought all of that property from a black lady, to put the school. Now, how did they come about choosing that site, they got all of the black leaders, supposedly, together and they decided. We weren't included in it. They got the black leaders supposedly together and they decided that's where was to go. That's why you have South-----Asheville, they probably don't know where that is now.

Dolly: Why, what, what did you, you know you were excluded for a reason.

JF: You mean from the site selection group and all that?

Dolly: That's right.

MC: Because we were students

JF: yeah,

Dolly: Well also, you would have picked, you would have had some objections

JF: yes, that's right, we would have

MC: uhm hum

JF: Because we, we, we would have wanted, well what the intent was really, basically we knew was not comparable to Lee Edwards and there was an integration program that was in process and we felt like, it was moving too slowly, and we needed to be a part of where is, you know we needed to be on that level of acadamia, but we knew that wasn't going to happen. Because they had,

MC: But by, that was not any integration in the high schools

JF: That's what I'm saying... they had progressive programs, they hadn't, it was

decided that they would start at an elementary level and

MC: and phase it in

JF: and phase it in and that said it was going to take like thirty years, it would take almost thirty years

? Yeah, heard about that in Fayetteville

JF: They didn't want the older students integrated, because they were afraid the boys would hit on the girls andso if they started with the elementary schools they weren't doing that.

Dolly: It would be safe, yeah

(laughter)

JF: That's, that is what that was all about. Now that's how South French Broad got there, then after the schools became totally integrated, they would put us with the school that they really didn't know what to anything with -----new Hall Fletcher. See Hall Fletcher was at one time would have been a middle school or it was a middle school.

(Knock at the door) (laughter)

Std: Hi, how are you? (multiple greetings)

MC: So these are the students who are participating in the project.

Dolly: Yeah, these are them

DM: Plus Jamal, but Jamal is at work

? Oh

Dolly: Did he not call

DM: Hum?

Dolly: Did he call

DM: He didn't call, but right before he left he came and ----- there are two seniors tomorrow that -----,

Dolly: That's the plan

DM: I'd like to talk to you about the leaders, city leadership to discuss that site, I'd surely like to know.

JF: Ah, they would not allow us to be there because, they selected Atty. David,

MC: Yeah, David was there

JF: Who else?

MC: ahh, who else was there? McCoy was, I don't think McCoy

JF: I don't think McCoy was there, because McCoy was too much of a radical

MC: He, he was pretty radical (laughter), the was radical

JF: His hair is whiter than mine, he was an old man and spoke, he was a man of strong stature, I mean really, very strong stature and ahh, when he spoke, when he spoke as if EF Hutton was speaking (laughter)

Dolly: really, serious?

JF: Yes, I'm serious, you know cus, here's a man, everybody, if you can imagine being in a room where uhm, everybody, (counting) there's was like four white people, right that was at, in the auditorium that night.

MC: Oh, at, the uhm,

JF: There were about four white people, about four or five white people in a room full of black folk and everybody's scared expect him.

(laughter)

JF: I'm serious, now you think about this. Nobody else would say anything, even though they know what the issue was, this man stood up and said, Mr. President, we've got these young people here, who have done the work for us and we've asked to do it and they are acting as a committee for us and I believe we should hear the report. I don't care about who is here.

Dolly: Which is right.

MC: And he took the right position and the people knew it was right, but if he had not spoken up like,

JF: it would not have beennobody else would have, nobody would have spoken up.

? what did he do, what was-----

? was he an -----

JF: he was a, he was retired,

MC: He was retired by then

JF: He was a retired foreman for.....

? Was he the, I thought he, which one was the NAACP president?

JF: That was the same guy.....

? Yeah, after his retirement

JF: See, the great thing about McCoy, and I never, I, I, I always remember this about him, ahh, he was elderly, and he seemed to elderly in years at that time but he was always with the young people, right down the line, he was always with the young people. And it always seemed like he was on our side, and often against the committee of the adults. We just thought he was young and wild and crazy about us and all that stuff.

Dolly: I just have a question that I ummm, I just need to ask and then I'll introduce the students to you. So Asheville Middle School and Lee Edwards are not the same, they don't appear anyway to be comparable structures unless somethings changed dramatically.

JF: No, no, no you have to understand now see

MC: Now Asheville Middle is where,

JF: It used to be South French Broad,

Dolly: That's what I'm talking about....

JF: The recent riot

Dolly: I, I, I am comparing the right two structures aren't I

JF: Yeah, you see you have to understand.....

END OF TAPE