

Robert Brunk

Side 1:

[3] He graduated from the University of Michigan in the mid-60's where he was involved in social change activities.

[10] In 1966 he was hired to work in Madison County and later in Asheville as a neighborhood services organizer. He had a staff of 12, mostly Black, and was fired after a year and a half.

[23] He was a professor of Anthropology and Sociology at UNCA for 5 years.

[25] He and his wife moved to Barnardsville, NC, where they farmed and he later became an auctioneer.

[30] In Asheville his job was to help tenants organize themselves to solve their problems. While there were no race riots here, as there were in larger cities, there was a 5-month renters strike. The leases in all of the Southeast read that rights for a hearing were waved if a person was evicted. Terms of the lease were rewritten and the Director of Public Housing resigned. Within the Black community there was a "great sense that the country was angry and they wanted to vent their feelings."

[38] In the Hillcrest housing development there were changes

1. An evicted person had a right to a hearing.
2. Undocumented charges and over-charges were addressed.
3. Public insults were stopped.

He was threatened, followed by the FBI and some felt he was leading a "Black Army."

[105] Hillcrest is still segregated [attempts to move white families into this area and keep them here have been unsuccessful] and there is unrest in the Asheville High School.

[121] He wrote the history of race in Asheville for his Model City proposal (see enclosure).

[129] Up to 20 years ago many educated Blacks moved to New York or Washington.

[159] He was viewed as a high-risk employee. No group was behind him (whites, newspaper, Chamber of Commerce) and Blacks were suspicious.

[190] The city manager had a comfortable and familiar way of doing business. [Weldon Weir]

[210] His staff of nine blacks and three whites was inherited when he was employed. He organized youth activities and Head Start. Helping poor people find ways to make viable decisions and help themselves was his goal.

[239] Washington grant writers required citizen participation and many community meetings were held.

[255] Because of the strain on his family he let himself be fired. This was done by eliminating the position.

[263] The "community action" part of the Poverty Program was doomed structurally. People went to the agencies making demands but these were the very agencies that had hired him. This situation was duplicated across the nation and ultimately phased out. Head Start and the Neighborhood Youth groups are still in existence.

[303] He felt that, while change is hard to measure, there is more pride in the community - that the streets and houses look and feel different.

[352] In the beginning, the projects were physically isolated, i.e. Hillcrest. There has been an effort to scatter housing throughout the city.

[381] From 1968-1972 he taught in the Sociology and Anthropology department at UNCA. He had no PhD and could not continue but loved teaching.

[428] Regarding the University he said there were gaps between faculty expectations and community expectations. Students were concerned with making money and the faculty wanted to teach inductive and deductive thinking - which doesn't directly translate into paychecks. UNCA was called "Harvard of the South". He had great respect for Highsmith, thought he was a good leader, and their intellectual differences did not interfere with their relationship. [William Highsmith]

[543] He had only three rules in class. When randomly called on a student could say:

1. I'm prepared for class but lost.
2. I'm not prepared.
3. I'm bored - and leaving.

He applied the same rules to himself and, if he could not get the students to think and take responsibility, he would walk out of class.

Side 2:

[2/10] His teaching method was very effective. Some of his students became sociologists working in the Black community.

[2/34] He bought a 100-acre farm in 1971 in Barnardsville, N.C. where the family led an agrarian life (cattle, goats, oats, etc) for 15 years. What he lacked in skill he made up in energy. He still owns the land. His daughter is in law school in Chicago, his son is in New York City buying and selling paintings and antiques. He moved to Asheville 7 years ago.

[2/67] He lived in Sugar Creek Cove and was interested in pre-industrial culture. He interviewed many people on tape and collected 800 chairs. He logged, sawed, and finished his own wood and went into woodworking. The Smithsonian wanted to buy a cradle he made to use in an exhibit.

[2/79] He discovered an Indian site and tools from 5-7,000 B.C. [Dave Moore]

[2/87] He was asked to evaluate furniture and, since he loves furniture making and research, decided to go into auctioneering.

[2/101] He covers a 15 state area and sells on consignment, specializing in the 18th and 19th century European and American objects. His wife is a nurse practitioner in women's health. [Robert Price]

[2/130] The most significant changes in Asheville came when the railroad came through and later with the interstate highway.

[2/147] The slum relocation and urban renewal made significant changes in the community - residents of Livingston St. and Southside were moved to Montford.

[2/166] He is concerned with the stereotype of the rural native or mountain culture. Considers there is a Lil' Abner edge that is troublesome. His problem is in equating change with progress. [George Vanderbilt, Roger McGuire]
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