

Robert Smith

Side 1:

He was born in Asheville and lived most of his life here. He went to a private Catholic school and Western Carolina for college. He has worked with people all of his life. He was a Big Brother for a Group Home and became the Group Home Director. He worked with Logan on the Federal Compliance Community Organization. For 11 years he has been the Director of the Community Relations Council. (see enclosure re: Delany)

[23] He attended St. Anthony's - a colored mission, grades 1-8 (see Marjorie Maxwell tape) and the Asheville Catholic High (see Sister Winters tape). These schools no longer exist because there was not enough money. He was taught by nuns (Franciscans in Elementary and Dominicans and Jesuits in High School). He almost went to Notre Dame because he was so impressed with the teaching. Expectations were high, and you "kept going until you got it" - there were no excuses. Two grades were taught by one teacher in each room.

[50] He knew the Delany family well. Logan Delany's son is a stock broker. Smith worked for Logan 16 years ago. His death was a loss to the community and history.

[80] Logan brought sensitivity and knowledge to his job. It hurt him to have to relocate people and knew what community meant. While he was sensitive to the dislocation the change would make, he knew this was a unique chance, with Federal funds, to improve the living for the Blacks. He could grasp the small and the big pictures.

[105] I refer to comments made by Marjorie Maxwell, Glenda McDowell, Minnie Jones, Lettie Polite (see tape).

[115] The blacks were isolated. They lived in a ghetto, and while they were poor they didn't know it. They had a pool hall, gas station, and social areas. The houses were in disrepair, but many were owned by the occupants. The people had to depend on each other. They felt safe in the community. Whites were only seen in bad times - to collect rent, harass, to sell butter, or look for prostitutes. People looked out for the children. When he was looking for his uncle who was in a 'Honey Hole' (bar) he wasn't allowed inside - someone went in and brought the uncle out.

[155] Integration knocked the prop out of the buying pattern. With a choice as to where to spend dollars, the blacks no longer went to the black stores. The biggest loss, however, was in loss of neighborhood and schools. Students saw their teachers in church and stores. They aspired to be a teacher and held the profession with respect. With integration the black teachers were pushed away the whites considered they were the experts and knew what was best.

[181] It is difficult getting black teachers now, and the whites don't seem to understand the makeup of black children. When he was growing up, children walked to school, people visited on porches. His grandmother "orbited all over the neighborhood."

[200] There were good results with urban renewal - water ran, there was heat in houses but it was bittersweet. People were uprooted, and discontented. Old folks were dying in high-rise apartments and didn't feel at home in Montford.

[220] He heard about the depression period. His grandfather hunted for birds and worked as a sharecropper in order to survive (see Hollifield tape). The family was on welfare - then called relief. Boxes of canned meat and cheese came periodically.

[247] He has been involved with the YMI. We talk of Baxter tapes (see Silveri interview of Baxter) (see Margaret Fuller tape).

[259] The Jr. Chamber of Commerce members have been working hard (see Whitesides tape). He is in his office because he has hope - but it "seems we don't 'get it'". In the end result the minorities don't get a piece of the pie or access to the table. Marches are relevant but they are in the same predicament. He tells his son that choices are unlimited but they don't know the direction. The young minorities are not getting results.

[317] The welfare system ricocheted and caused problems. Hindsight is easier than foresight "could have, should have, would have." It is important to figure out how to go in a direction without swinging from one extreme to another. He was on relief and in public housing - he worked to get out (see Glenda's tape). He worked in the Juvenile Education center. The professionals thought they were doing well but the "kids kept messing up."

[351] The present welfare system isn't working. If we penalize folks when they begin to help themselves, how can we expect them to do any better. When they go to work their benefits are cut. The biggest penalty is that kids can't get free care anymore - and you can't get childcare on minimum wage jobs - so they go the route of the underground economy - food stamps - public housing - free medical care. "As long as they stay there we have a bureaucracy we have to feed."

[369] The basic issues are 1. Daycare. 2. Transportation. 3. Job training. There is very little real affordable day care - very little real job training for adequate jobs. People must be given incentive to help themselves, an access to training and opportunity at the end, and "not make it so comfortable to stay where they are."

[412] When they begin to help themselves, the props are pulled out. Day care and medical aid should continue to be subsidized but rents gradually raised - with the money set aside in escrow for a down payment on home ownership. If, at the end of 3-5 years, with classes in home ownership, taxes, insurance, etc., this money is put into a home. Many people would choose to "jump out" of the system. He suggested this to Jones 20 years ago.

[463] We discuss Montford housing (see Mathews tape). The majority of people in the Housing Authority are on low incomes. It won't cost less money on the front end, but for people, if his ideas are followed, most will opt for home purchase - for those who don't, you "make it worse to stay than go."

[501] He tried talking about his concept, but because of State and Federal regulations, he was told it was not workable. The meetings regarding this have not been fruitful.

[587] The proposed development of the South Biltmore area could unify the blacks and give them a place of their own but he is skeptical - one must trust the expertise of the developers. The YMI has a potential for more outreach. Over the past 10-15 years cultural activities have been stressed but it has not been a vital community center.

Side 2:

The YMI should involve more people - it should be "jumping with events" - there should be a scheduling problem: clubs, sororities and fraternities, pageants, choruses. Legwork by dedicated foot soldiers is needed. Right now it is more reserved and elitist ; i.e. Ebony Fashion Fair. The Gombay Festival is a once a year affair and lasts a couple of days. More is needed than that (see Fuller tape) (Rev L. C. Ray YMI Director - see enclosed).

[2/55] Regarding black stores: for a number of years Bacote had a thriving business making paper garments for doctor's offices, but the contracts dried up. There is the Greens Mini Market of Depot Street.

[2/73] Stores are moving back to the center of the city (see Rantzos and McGuire tapes). Blacks need an access to capital.

[2/85] The Blacks own the YMI, but there has always been the suspicion that the whites want the property. He was on the board for a while. There was tension about the connection on both sides (see Whitesides and Fuller tapes - also John Baxter interview by Silveri).

[2/115] The Community Relations Council has been around for about 30 years. It's objective is to look at all kinds of problems to do with integration. The council is made up of 18 (or more) dedicated people. A third of the members are appointed by the county commission, a third by the Chamber of Commerce and a third from the council itself (see 1993 report pg. 6). Bi-monthly formal meetings are held with the Executive committee meeting once a month. They look at all kinds of issues i.e. discrimination in schools, the objection to the placement of proposed projects i.e. M. L. King Blvd. and West Asheville. They have acted as mediators before the mediation center started (see Glenda McDowell and Phyllis Sherrill tapes - Sherrill interviewed by Sylvia Robin).

[2/154] He has been trained over the years in workshops and has given workshops to many different kinds of groups: i.e. real estate agents and lawyers. He has been in his position 11 years and his office is one of 13 across the state that has a paid director and staff.

[2/196] He 'networks' informally across the state regarding salary structure and programs. His office helps with the M.L. King Jr. breakfast (see Simmons tape) and sponsors the "woman of the year" award (see enclosed) as well as an Essay and Poster program involving 1,500 children. There are formal and informal programs regarding fair housing. The public is reached through flyers, T.V., radio, and a telephone tree. The board is very effective. Schell has been involved

with money and time in many social causes. He is one of the council's most supportive members. He is a big "D" democrat and knows a lot of people, "calling a spade and spade."

[2/279] The Woman of the Year is judged by independent judges [Hazel has been working for clean water - see Jeff Fobes tape].

[2/312] The council tries to do "a lot of good news stuff." The Essay and Poster Program on Brotherhood theme (up to 300 words) is judged. The 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place winners are taken to dinner and get a trophy. Recently, outstanding teachers were honored and pictures were displayed in the County Court House. Everybody comes out - a big cake is donated by a bakery and the banks give a \$50 savings bond. (see 1003 report).

[2/349] He is on the steering committee of the Building Bridges program (see Tomes tape). He doesn't worry about how much good it is doing - just the direction "If its right, work on it."

[2/404] There is no one area to be addressed first - things must be worked in tandem. He is putting on a major conference on violence the first weekend of April. Students will tell how violence effects them. He doesn't want to "pick young people to say what he wants them to say." There will be a national speaker or two and workshops (see enclosed 5/21/95).

[2/480] The issues that go over his desk concern individuals having problems with landlords, housing discrimination, etc - see p35 of annual report, 1993). Some problems come in the mail; the city hall or council asks him to look into a situation - he sees everyone. He is on the Mediation Center Board for Conflict Resolution, but this is not competing with his activities. Ninety percent of theirs are court referrals.

[2/510] His agency is known through the phone book, churches, United Way, City Council, County Government, Commercials on 'deadtime' on radio, the annual report which is mailed to 100 organizations and, of course, word of mouth. He feels he is "sort of soft on P.R." and doesn't like to "beat the drums."

[2/571] He sees the end of his services in the department. His sons are 16 and 6 (see page 25 in annual report). His wife has started a one-person landscaping business. He wants to develop more mediating skills and may teach. He has made all the contributions he can here and will leave the agency better than he found it.