

START OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A

JAMES ATWATER  
FEBRUARY 28, 2001

JENNIFER NARDONE: So, this is Jennifer Nardone, here with James Atwater, February 28, 2001, in Tyson's Corner, Virginia. Mr. Atwater, can you just tell me a little bit about your family and your growing up in Chapel Hill, were you born there?

JAMES ATWATER: I was born in Chapel Hill, one of five, one brother, three sisters. I was born in Chapel Hill, and I think I might have mentioned to you, I was in Chapel Hill until the early 50s, lived regularly in Chapel Hill until the early 50s. Eventually I moved onto the campus at North Carolina Central where I did my undergraduate work, and after I left North Carolina Central, I went to Philadelphia for a short while, at University of Pennsylvania, but I was drafted at that point, and went into the service, and since that time, I have not lived regularly in Chapel Hill. I have been back on numerous occasions when my mother and father were still living there. I still have three sisters who live there now, so I go back to visit them, and obviously I tried to stay in touch with what was going on in Chapel Hill. But of the five of us, I was the eldest, and the five of us attended Lincoln/Orange County Training School, from first grade through-- well, I can't say that all of us attended it through twelfth grade because by the time it moved some of my younger sisters may have gone down to Lincoln on Merritteville Road. But in any case, we were residents of Chapel Hill, I was a resident for that long a period. And during that time, it was primarily a matter of, we can say, living in the African American community, and some of the things

that you mentioned, that you gave as background to your specific questions. And as I said prior to desegregation, it was to a great extent, two separate worlds, even though there was some interaction on a limited basis.

JN: Did you, did one your parents work at the university, or did you have an affiliation with the University?

JA: Yes, my father worked at the University, and during most of the time that I was growing up. Prior to that he had worked for some of the private firms in Chapel Hill, at one point he had owned a business, he had run a business with one of my uncles. But for the most part he worked at the university. Most of the time that I was growing up he was working at the university. And my mother also worked at the university after we had grown up because she had worked for a while prior to her marriage in Durham for North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company.

JN: Oh really?

JA: Yes. After she married, I think she may have stayed in Durham for a short while, but, continued working for them for a short while but eventually she became an insurance agent for them, she was working out of our home and in Chapel Hill, selling insurance for North Carolina Mutual there. As I said, after we, all of us, practically all of us, were at least in high school I think, maybe a little earlier, she worked for the University, for the hospital. She was at the hospital --

JN: Oh, okay, over at the university.

JA: Yes right, yes. Because of course the hospital, I don't know the exact date, but I'd say it's relatively new for me because it was not there I think probably, I may have been in college by the time the hospital was opened [     ].

JN: What did your father do at the university?

JA: Variety, a wide variety. His primary job was as the porter for the three women's dormitories: Alderman, McIver, and Kenan.

JN: Really?

JA: Yes, and of course he was responsible for some of the cleaning, we can say sort of the heavy cleaning, because they also had maids there, women who were there. But he was, his primary responsibility was to stoke the furnaces in those dormitories, because they were still coal burning, he was responsible for keeping that going. At the same time, he did one or two or three other things on a part time basis. He was the, I suppose his title would have been headwaiter, or manager of the Chapel Hill Country Club.

JN: Oh, okay.

JA: Because the country club at that time, was primarily for their, say, dinner dances on weekends. So on the weekends he was responsible for hiring the staff that would work there, cooks and waiters and so on, and getting the club ready, and getting the club cleaned up after that, so on Sunday--usually they'd have something on Saturday night, we'd clean up on Sunday. And in addition to that, he had I don't know how many responsibilities with individual families sometimes to stoke their furnaces. And he did that for a couple of people. He

would also serve as a waiter at the Carolina Inn, on weekends when he was available to do that. And, that I think was in addition to his normal [ ] wasn't directly related to his work at the dormitories. He also did something at the football games, because most of the football games in Chapel Hill are usually during fairly warm weather, even though it's September, October, it doesn't get colder till November, December. So, he hit on the idea--cause someone else had been doing it before he did it--but he would go to the games with a bucket of ice water and cups and he would tell people--people would ask him how much it was-- he says "it's free." It's free water, free ice water, but if you want to give me something, let your conscious be your guide and he did that for several years.

JN: Wow. So he worked a lot. Sounds like he worked a lot.

JA: Just a little bit.

JN: So you were pretty deeply connected with the university then when you were growing up.

JA: Well, yes, from that standpoint and of course most of the people at the country club were people from the university, so that was a connection. And then the people that he worked for, we can say, part time, on the side were also people from the university.

JN: Now, can you sort of tell me--I'm relatively new to Chapel Hill, been there since last summer--where you lived?

JA: Okay we lived on Church Street--

JN: Oh, okay. I know where that is. That was easy.

JA: Yes, okay. And ah, well, if your familiar at all with Caldwell Street, we were almost to Caldwell Street, I mean, we were south of that.

JN: So you lived very close to the Caldwell's cause they live on Caldwell street.

JA: Oh yes! Yes, yes, yes, yes.

JN: That's wonderful. That's great.

JA: Oh no, we were neighbors, contemporaries.

JN: Went to school together--

JA: Went to school together, sports, basketball, football, and other things. No--.

JN: So when you first started going to school, elementary school and junior high, prior to Lincoln, you went to the--.

JA: Well, that's just it. You see, everything was done in that one building.

JN: Oh really? Oh, okay.

JA: Well, I say everything--

JN: I thought there was a county school as well, that may have been later.

JA: Well, there may have been a county school, but for those of us In Chapel Hill, that was our school, from first grade. Now kindergarten, I went to kindergarten, which was a private kindergarten, across the street from my house, and it was operated by, say a friend of the family, or someone that we knew, we had known, by the daughter who had -- she had been to college, came back from college and she opened a kindergarten in her parents home. And I don't know what the enrollment was, but I think it was probably ten or twenty

kids who were in that kindergarten. But after that we went to what we called Orange County Training School, first grade, and I was there for first grade through twelfth grade. As a matter of fact, they added the twelfth grade while I was there, because for several years it went only to the eleventh grade.

JN: Really? So did you graduate after eleventh grade?

JA: Well people, those people who were there before, and I'm not sure when that ended, but that was one of the--.

JN: That's interesting. I hadn't heard that before.

JA: Oh really? That's one of the--

JN: So what are your earlier memories then, of going to Lincoln, when you were young? When you first started going.

JA: Well, I remember one or two things from the first grade. I remember going to first grade. And I remember some of the things from kindergarten, not much but some. But, going to first grade, the name of my first grade teacher--

JN: Who was it?

JA: Her name was Humphries.

JN: Oh, so Mrs. Humphries?

JA: Ms. Humphries. Ms. Humphries. But the other thing about going to Lincoln was from those earliest days, we often knew the teachers because they may have lived in our neighborhood and we at least could recognize them. We knew them, we saw them after school. We saw them before school and so on. And for me, Lincoln was a five minute, ten minute walk from home, so it was a

matter of walking to school, walking very close by, even occasionally being able to come home for lunch and go back to school. I don't think I did that in first grade, but eventually that was. The other memory is that there was a progression physically a progression from a standpoint that the room that we went to in the first grade was, obviously, next door to second grade. Then the third grade, and the classrooms on that end of the building, the elementary school end of the building, were built around our gymnasium, such as it was it was, auditorium or gymnasium, so we made the progression around--.

JN: Around the gymnasium.

JA: Around the circle, until we got there, till we got to the end, and then went on to high school. I think the other part of it was, that way, because we were all in that same building, we at least saw the other teachers at the upper levels, and we knew that eventually, once we went into those classrooms, they were not complete strangers to us because we had seen them around the building, we'd seen them around town. And one year, I don't know how many times this happened, but I remember one year, the teacher who was teaching the third grade, moved up to the fourth grade with the students.

JN: Oh no.

JA: Students were in the third grade with her, and when they came back in the fall, they were still with her.

JN: Still had the same teacher.



JA: So, maybe for some of them that was a wonderful experience. For others it was [ ]. I think maybe Ed Caldwell has mentioned that himself, you know, when we talk to one another. But, I think it's the familiarity of teachers whom we've seen before, who were in that same building. Of course, this went on even onto high school because not all the teachers stayed that long teaching in Chapel Hill teaching at that school, but many of them did. So by the time we went to high school, there were teachers there that we had known about, even when we were at elementary school.

JN: Even when you were really young. So, we had heard in the research we've done and the people we've spoken to so far in the class, that Lincoln High really was a very tight knit community, and that there was a sense of family. Can you give idea of or maybe some examples of how you remember that atmosphere?

JA: Well, I think it's, again it comes back to the physical, because one of the coaches for example, [ ] coaching football and basketball team, lived almost directly across the street from us. Within a block, what we'd call a city block, on Church Street. And we were with him in school, we were with him on the basketball court, or on the football field, but we would also go to his home. And I think the fact that he was available at those times was one part of it. The other part of it was that we knew that he knew our parents, he knew that we knew our parents--that he knew our parents. So there was a, I think, the kind of relationship that one wouldn't normally have with a teacher if the teacher had been living in another town, or been living in another part of town, so that was



one reason. And I think that the other thing was that again, this is probably, I'm sure at the high school level, another coach took several of us, on the football or basketball team, or whatever, he took us on a trip in his personal vehicle to a couple of black universities. And he did that I think so we could see what those universities looked like, what a black university looked like. But I think he also did it because exposing us to that was one thing, just from the standpoint of doing it as athletes, but it was also an exposure from the standpoint of students--academics and so on that this is what might be available to you if you work hard. And I think that the kind of, kinds of encouragement that we did get from the teachers was often related to that--to what we'd do after high school. And what we could do on an academic basis, rather than necessarily otherwise.

JN: So, you felt like your professors, or your teachers at Lincoln really encouraged the students to pursue college.

JA: Oh yes. Yes.

JN: But still at this point, your being so close to UNC, UNC was not desegregated.

JA: It was, it was still segregated.

JN: It was still segregated, right. It wasn't desegregated. I was double negating. Negating, I guess. So, it was still segregated, but you were still so close to this university, was there any--did you talk about that at all? Do you remember talking about how your options might have limited or not limited because of--

JA: Well, I don't know that we talked about it to a great deal, it was the status quo. And we knew that there were African American or black universities within reasonable proximity, and there were some that had reasonable reputations because our teachers had come from them. So there wasn't the idea that we were necessarily being deprived of something, other than the fact, well, this is an outgrowth of segregation. And we're part of it and we'll go along with it, we can say for now, but by the same token, and this is something I mentioned to Bob Gilgor, many of us had relatives who were say in the North or West somewhere, and we--our family had relatives in Philadelphia, we went to Philadelphia, my grandmother lived in Philadelphia, couple uncles, aunts. So, we went to Philadelphia from time to time, and we saw the difference. I mean, when we were kids, we saw the difference in the things we could do in Philadelphia we couldn't do in our hometown. So, we knew there was something else other than what was going on in our [ ]. And the other thing was, I know that my mother especially, made a point of letting us know about what I think, we can generically call progress. When there was an African American who moved into a situation in which African Americans normally were not found, either because that person had shown the ability to do, or because somebody opened some doors. And I think that the other thing was that there was a good deal of encouragement, from some whites in the white community. Some of the--I think in all honesty we have to say is because they wanted to be able to preserve the status quo. But some of it was, I think, was well meaning from the standpoint of

they wanted to see progress, so the specific example that I take is--I don't whether your familiar with the program, that several Southern states established during the period of segregation. If a black student wanted to study a certain subject on the college level that was not taught in the black schools, they would get a scholarship to go to a white school, in Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania, wherever.

JN: And for college?

JA: For college. For college.

JN: Wow. No I hadn't heard of that.

JA: I don't have extensive that program was--

JN: But it to a northern school.

JA: It took you to a northern white. And this was, the idea was, they would keep us out of their schools.

JN: Right.

JA: But they would let us get an education. So, it may have lasted only a short while, but I know that that was a program. And I heard for a short while people talking about it, because I also worked as a waiter at the Carolina Inn, and the conversations, well, we can get into that. But anyway, I remember hearing some person say, a white person, I don't remember who it was, but they said, "well who won't take that," rather than going, staying here and going to UNC, when you can go to the University of Michigan on a scholarship. Well, all right. Well, that gave us an opportunity to get out, but it also kept them out. Kept us

out of those schools. So I think that's-- the other thing is, when they saw that we had opportunities, there usually was encouragement from them to take advantage of them. And I don't want to dwell too much on the personal--

JN: No, that's what we're here for.

JA: Well, I know that--in any case, I was nominated for a couple of fellowships, when I was at North Carolina Central, and one of them was the General Education Board, and the other was the Woodrow Wilson Fellowship. And at the time, one of the members of the committee ... well, I don't want to go that far, because I--the details are a little hazy, but at that time, my father was working, I think it was the dental school, or one of the other schools. He was no longer at the dormitory. He'd been moved to--one of the professors there knew about where I was at that point and time. And he mentioned to my father, that I had a pretty good chance. I don't think he, I don't think he did anything but obviously he was aware of some of the things that were going on in making that decision. So, I don't want to say that the fact that he knew my father played any role, because I don't know that, but I know that he did say to my father that he thought I had a fairly good chance of getting one or the other. And in addition to that, related to one extent, after that happened, after the decision was made, my picture was in the newspaper. And, one of the businessmen in Chapel Hill, white businessman in Chapel Hill, long time, born and bred in Chapel Hill, had run a business for years and years, knew everybody, knew everything. Saw my picture, and of course he stopped my father on the street, and said,

"saw your son's picture in the paper, who are you?" Well, meaning who, what's the background on your family. And of course, he had my father go back to my father's father, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

JN: Go ahead.

JA: No, no, he said, "oh I know who that is," he said, "those are the Smith N-word's." Meaning, my family origins came from a white family named Smith, which, the slave origin, was with a white family named Smith.

JN: And that's how they would describe that--inwards. That's--

JA: I'm sorry.

JN: Inwards. Smith inwards--is that what you said?

JA: No, the N word.

JN: Ohhh, the N word. I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I hope this isn't the part I have to play for my class! I'm sorry, I misunderstood what you said. Oh, okay. Oh, wow, that's a whole different--

JA: Well, that's the way you knew about the family, you knew about this black family, once you've been given these details from my father.

JN: Right.

JA: This was somebody, I don't know if he's the unofficial historian of Chapel Hill or what.

JN: Can you say his name?

JA: Oh yes, yes. His name was Eubanks.

JN: Eubanks.

JA: He had a drug store. Eubanks drug store.

JN: Where was that?

JA: It was on Main Street, and it's near where, I think one of the banks is there now, it's about midway--it's across the street--between Jeff's--you know where Jeff's is? Old Jeff's?

JN: I don't, I'm sorry.

JA: Okay. Well, anyway, it's about in the middle of the main block of Main Street, and the theater, the Carolina Theater--

JN: Oh, I know where that is.

JA: It's just east of there. And there's bank, a bank building there now, and I think there might be another movie theater, and that building. There's building parking on the other side, on Rosemary Street, and so on. But it was just about--it was one of the main drug stores in town, it'd been there for years and years. And the other was Sutton's.

JN: Sutton's.

JA: Sutton's was there. But that's the kind of thing, that is if, people knew about, you could say, about us, they knew about the black community, they didn't have all the details. But they, I think, kept up with it to a certain extent. And this was because often the people who were working for them were from the African American community [ ].



JN: Well that sort of leads me to one of the areas that I'm interested in, which is, you said you walked to Lincoln, the whole time you went. Can you tell me just at that time, Chapel Hill--Chapel Hill's small now, it was even smaller then,

JA: Oh, it was small.

JN: About some of the kinds of the interactions you would have maybe coming to and from school. Did you ever pass white students walking to Chapel Hill school? Did you walk with other Lincoln high--?

JA: Very seldom. Very seldom. Because the residential pattern was such that we were all--that area's called Potter's Field. And we were Potter's Field and Sunset. Students came mostly from Potter's Field and Sunset. So, whites were east of Caldwell Street. Some of them were on the eastern edge, eastern end of Caldwell Street. Airport Road. Out in that area. So I did not. Now, some of the students came from an area called Windy Hill, I don't know if you've heard about that. Okay, well, Windy Hill is east of Airport Road, and mostly, they walked from Windy Hill to school. Course they probably walked past our schools on the way to Chapel Hill High. But I did not. I mean, normally, no, we didn't see any.

JN: Can you think of any kind of interaction that you might have had with the white students at Chapel Hill high?

JA: Oh yes. Well we, as I said, whites were living east of Caldwell Street, actually they were a little bit east of Church street, on the eastern side going toward Airport Road. Wasn't quite Airport Road. And there were a couple of time we -- cowboys and Indians, we played together. And so, that -sure, we did

that occasionally. That's from my personal standpoint, but I know also that one of Ed Caldwell's cousins lived on Main Street, East Franklin--I guess it's really West Franklin. And they were a block away from a number of white families, and they had much closer interaction, I think than we did. They knew some of them, they were really neighbors. They were really living very close. So, there was interaction from that standpoint.

JN: So when you were younger you would play, with whites. Black and white students, children would play together.

JA: Yes.

JN: And then, can you remember a time maybe when that stopped? Around a certain age, or--.

JA: Well, I don't remember specifically, but I think probably by the time we got to high school, we didn't do it very much. I think it was probably--

JN: And do you think that was a result of just growing awareness of the differences? The racial differences?

JA: I would think that it probably was. It probably was. But it's difficult to say that that was conscious. And on our part, we were in a position where we would accept an invitation, but we wouldn't necessarily invite them to play with us. So I think they may have made more of the decision than we did.

JN: So, what about when you did get to high school. I didn't mean to cut you off.

JA: From a standpoint of--

JN: Well, were there certain events or celebrations or anything that you can remember where the students would come together from the two high schools? Or was it basically completely separated?

JA: Well, I don't want to say completely separated, but there are very few things that I can recall we did together. Now, again I go back to the younger days. I know when I was a Cub Scout, as a Cub Scout, one of the churches, one of the white churches, and the church--the pastor of the church was a controversial individual because he--he eventually became a controversial character in Chapel Hill and I'm sure there are things written about him--Charles Jones. And he invited our Cub Scout troop to a Christmas gift exchange between a white--between our Cub Scout pack and a white cub scout pack. And that was fairly unusual, as far as I knew, that wasn't a regular thing. You did that, I think it probably worked out only that we did it at that Christmas party. I don't know if very much came of it after that. But, of course that's at the Cub Scout age, which is pre-twelve, before age twelve. Otherwise, I just don't remember very many organized things. I mean, unorganized, playing basketball somewhere in the neighborhood, and we got together, but formally between the teams, none that I have? You did--the university of course, again, because of the personal connections, the trainer, or you could say, the waterboy, for the university team was an African American, Morris Mason. And he worked out things so that the university helped us with equipment, neighborhood facilities. It's personal, his personal relationship with the coaches at the university and the administration.

JN: Which sport did you play? Which team did play on?

JA: Well, I tried basketball, football.

JN: Wow, so you were class president, your senior year?

JA: Well, student body president.

JN: Student body president. So that was 1948, 47-48?

JA: Actually I graduate 49.

JN: Oh, okay. So it was 48-49. And you played basketball and football. Were you involved in other activities at Lincoln?

JA: At a school like that people can't escape multiple--but, no, the choir, the band, the drama club--

JN: Wow, all on top of the classes.

JA: Well, yes. And, as I say, many of us did that, because, at my graduation, we were sitting there in rows, we got up, sang in the choir, go sit in the band, go back--

JN: Like musical chairs.

JA: Yes, because the school was so small.

JN: Yes. Well, you say that you don't remember there being a lot of organized interaction between Chapel Hill and Lincoln. Do you remember how you sort of viewed Lincoln, I mean Chapel Hill high when you were in high school? Did you know about what was happening at Lincoln high? Did you care about what was happening?

JA: You mean Chapel Hill?

JN: I'm sorry, I'm sorry, yes. At Chapel Hill High.

JA: Well, not to a great extend, but it was easy to see--bigger building, seeing that the facilities seemed to be much better than ours.

JN: Did you ever go inside Chapel Hill high while you were a student?

JA: I don't think so, I don't think I ever was in the building. I think I may have been on some of their athletic fields, outdoor, but I do not remember going into the building, but it was on Main Street, of course we saw it all the time.

JN: So you don't remember really having a lot of knowledge about what they were doing as students or--

JA: No, no. Not really.

JN: Well, a couple of years after you, well, you graduated and you went to Central. What did you major in while you were there?

JA: English.

JN: English.

JA: Well, I started out in business, and took a couple of courses, a couple of required courses in English and the instructor, my instructor, who was also chair of the department was also my, well he wasn't my advisor, but he told me one day, the kinds of things I was able to do, I should maybe think about changing my major. And I liked it. Reading and writing I've always enjoyed anyway, but I was looking at business more from the standpoint of, maybe this is something that would offer more opportunities than being an English teacher. But I became an English major.

JN: So, did you become an English teacher?

JA: Well, yes, I spent a few years teaching English. I taught for a couple of years at--I taught for a couple of years in Africa, in a French speaking country. Then I taught for a couple of years at Howard. After that, I went into the Foreign Service and spent over, well, over twenty years in the Foreign Service. I retired in 1988, and I taught from 1988-89 until a couple of years ago at another university in the Washington area, Bowie State University.

JN: So you went to Penn for your Ph.D.

JA: Graduate yes, Masters.

JN: For your master's. Were you in Durham when Brown vs. the Board of Education came down in '54 or had you already--

JA: I was in the service.

JN: You were in the service.

JA: I went into the service in '53, and I was in the service until '55, until 1955.

JN: So you, well, I don't know. Did you have any reaction to that when you heard about it?

JA: Oh yes. I had a reaction--

JN: You obviously had younger siblings who were in school still at the time. Do you remember feeling like okay, now, it's all going to it's all going to merge together. It'll happen, now it's going to happen.

JA: I think I can say that was my general feeling, but I also had some misgivings about it, from the standpoint that I was not entirely sure how it would be



handled. Would that mean that all schools would simply be integrated or would it mean that black schools would disappear? And I think that that was the general fear among many people, many African Americans who saw it because whatever the quality or merits we had built up a parallel, and somebody mentioned, does this mean that won't be anymore black university presidents? Does this mean there won't be anymore black principals? And anymore black teachers, because I think the fear, justified or not, was that once that decision was made, it would be made, excuse the expression, on our backs. So, it was a mixed feeling. How fair would the process be, in determining who goes and who stays. Obviously, there's going to be duplication.

JN: Right. Right. There's been a lot discussion--in the discussion we've had in class about this sense of how important the black schools have been to the black community. At the same time, this knowledge that there's something missing, just in terms of numbers and financing, and things like that. But it had somehow transcended that and become something more important.

JA: Well, I think that the, well, I want to say time will tell, but, I think that again, from a personal standpoint, we, meaning the North Carolina Central family, is going through that process now--where do we go from here? Because North Carolina, the state of North Carolina legislature is saying you have to justify your existence, you have to diversify, etcetera , etcetera, and many people use the example of West Virginia State University, I don't know if you're familiar with that or not.

JN: I don't know--

JA: Okay, West Virginia State University was an African American school, at the same time that NC Central was, but once desegregation occurred, I think now it's a predominately white university. And of course, they're serving the area, and its history, African American, blacks, were coming from where ever to attend West Virginia State. But now, so, the good or bad, it's part of progress, but I think it's a matter of weighing which is done in extent--still questions.

JN: Well, you know another discussion, ongoing discussion we've had in our class, and there's a bit of a disagreement among some of the people who have come in and talked to us, about whether or not Chapel Hill during segregation and desegregation was kind of typical of the South or not. Some people say well, segregation is segregation, and there's you know, that the oppression that was felt in Chapel Hill was same as it was, there's an overall quality. Other people have said though that the black community was able to fight for rights, and actually achieve some of them, long before the South in general did. What are your thoughts on that?

JA: It's difficult for me because I wasn't there during that period.

JN: Well, when you were there, what was your sense--

JA: When I was there, I think when I was there, I think there was no doubt that there was an atmosphere that seemed to be more conducive to establishing relationships and using those relationships to help each side. Now, what I think happens is, the problem is that some people put limits on that without saying so

at the beginning. They watch it, and they feel it's going too far, then, and there's a vote, a secret ballot or whatever, you get an entirely different impression. But I think that, as I said, I don't want to bring the word paternalism in it--

JN: Go ahead.

JA: Well, but it was a bit of a paternalistic approach because almost all of the African Americans in Chapel Hill were either working directly for the university, or indirectly. So the people at the university, the university we can say felt it was a global entity, felt it had enough control to do whatever it really wanted to do. So, because they felt confident of that control, they were willing to let people do a few more things they might have been able to enjoy. At that time, some people would contrast Chapel Hill with Carrboro, cause of the economic, social not quite the same level. So the people in Chapel Hill thought that they were a little more confident with where they were and their status, they didn't feel that threatened by African Americans as probably people in Carrboro. Cause people in Carrboro, not quite the same economic level, the jobs that they had, not really jobs that African Americans couldn't do. The ones in Chapel Hill probably thought that way, so they thought they had a little more leeway. And, I think that was what perhaps helped Chapel Hill more than many other cities, and you have to say, a university, people at most universities, they're more liberal in their outlook.

JN: Well that's the sort of image of Chapel Hill that we play with when we think about how things really work. Well, can you remember when you were growing or when you were a teenager, feeling, not so much fear, did you have this sort of knowledge, this awareness of where you could go, where you couldn't go, where your limits or boundaries were because of segregation.

JA: Oh, pretty much. Pretty much.

JN: Was that something you talked about out loud with your family or with brothers and sisters or with your friends, or was it something that you just sort of took in?

JA: Well, you took it in, from the standpoint that we knew these were limits we had to learn, we had to respect. And of course, we talked about it, talked about it from the standpoint of making sure that we understood exactly what they were, and where they were, and so on. But I don't think it was oppressive, from the standpoint that you're always worried about the wrong step or doing the wrong thing.

JN: Physical danger or something.

JA: Or going to the wrong place. Just be careful. You want to be careful. Of course the other thing was that there were always, there really was a clear demarcation. White entrance, colored entrance. Or restaurant--restaurant would have tables in the front for whites, and back entrance for blacks and black tables back there. I remember one restaurant we went to in Durham, we went there regularly to go to Durham to go shopping and so on.

JN: Was that the city? Durham?

JA: Yes.

JN: No, I mean you thought of it as the city.

JA: Yeah, they had a partition down the middle of the restaurant. Blacks on this side, whites on the other side.

JN: Do you remember what restaurant that was? I'm just curious.

JA: Yeah, well, I don't remember the name, but I'm sure it was a Greek restaurant. A Greek who ran it. It was fast food, had hot dogs, that sort of thing.

JN: Now your mother must have gone to Durham a lot if she worked for Mutual.

JA: Oh yes, yes.

JN: So you went back and forth a lot between Durham.

JA: Yes, well, there were times, almost every weekend, because for shopping. There was just not that much of a choice in Chapel Hill, so.

JN: I'm curious also sort of about the differences between what students learned in, at Chapel Hill and at Lincoln. I wonder, when you were at Lincoln, did you take anything like African American history or did you read African American literature? Did you feel that there was a sense of trying to give you a sense of history, and teach you. You said your mom used to point out to you when there was step in the color--

END OF TAPE ONE, SIDE A

## START OF TAPE A, SIDE TWO

JA: (he was talking about taking African American history) ...it was a week. So, there was that. I don't think we had any classes as such. But during that week, of course during that week, of course there were events, library exhibits and so on that made a special effort to let us know about things there. Definitely.

JN: Did you read African American authors? While you were in school?

JA: Well, yes. One of my classmates did a--it was a regular presentation that she did. Either Langston Hughes or Countee Cullen. And she would do it, she would memorize it and she would act it out on stage. And of course, she was very good at it, very good.

JN: Well you said you were, I'm sorry I didn't mean to interrupt. You said you were in the Drama club. What sort of plays would you do?

JA: We did some one acts, some three. Usually, I think probably, we would say, straight forward, slice of life kinds of things.

JN: Musicals? Did you ever do musicals?

JA: No.

JN: No?

JA: Well, musicals we probably did probably very early, first grade, second grade, third grade that kind of thing. I didn't do any musicals myself in high school, I know. One of the things I did in high school, was a, it wasn't Thomas Wolfe but it was a kind of *You Can't Go Home Again*, where a guy leaves his home town, goes to the big city, doctor, physician, well known, comes back



home. Decides that that's where he's really suppose to be. We did another one that was a mystery, a one-act play, and I think I remember the name, *Drums in the Night*, that we eventually took to the state festival.

JN: Oh wow. Now when you did things like that, did you ever do that with the chorus or anything else? Go to a state wide--or with the athletic team, go to a statewide competition?

JA: Well, a couple of things--the basketball team played in some tournaments at state, or regional tournaments. The football, no, but the band, the band was fairly new when I was, I think the band started when I was probably a junior or a sophomore, so we'd only been a couple of years. I was only there a couple of years with the band. But the band, I don't remember that the band went anywhere. I once went to what was suppose to be a state wide competition to become a member of a band representing the state of North Carolina. And we would have gone, if I had been selected, would have gone to Tuskegee, for what I think was then called the New Farmers of America. But that was the year we had a polio outbreak in North Carolina. And they cancelled all kinds of things like that--kids getting together.

JN: Well, do you remember those events, like say, plays and concerts and football games and things like that, was there, were those important to the general African American community in Chapel Hill, would you say?

JA: Oh, very much. Very much.

JN: Even people that who didn't have children or who had older children. Was that, those were community events?

JA: Oh yes, very much so. And I think that the athletics always attracts people. Attracted people who had played themselves or had kids on the team, but I think the others because it was an opportunity to watch a game and so on. And I think the plays especially because not that many of us had that many of us had much of an opportunity to go to the theater. So even though it was their kids, or maybe they had a kid or maybe they didn't, but they did get to see a play, so I think that attracted them in a large.

JN: Do you remember if the white community ever came to those events? At all, just as spectators? To the sporting events even?

JA: I think some of them may have come say to the football games, cause football obviously is outdoors. I think we have had a few people there. Basketball, indoors, I don't think, I don't recall.

JN: So it really was sort of an insulated community event.

JA: Yes, yes.

JN: Do you think there was--this may be speculation asking you this question, but do you think that the rest of Chapel Hill, the white community, understood what was going on in the black community? Or not? Do you think that they were generally interested in what was going on or do you feel like there might have been, I guess a better way to say it is--a little bit of freedom there to, sort

of, do what you wanted. Have your events, have your community come together.

JA: Difficult to say. Difficult to say. I think though that you go back to this idea, that practically everyone in the black community--

JN: Was connected--

JA: Was connected either directly or indirectly to the university. And I think many of the people did, say ask, how the families were doing, and I think they had a general idea of what that family was doing. Now, some of them probably went into more specifics to try and get an idea what that family was doing in the context of the black community and say, have kind of a picture of what was going on in the black community. But, I would have to say, people who had probably more interest than anybody else--law enforcement. They probably wanted to know. At that time, no black was on the police force, so they probably wanted to keep up with the kinds of things that were going on.

JN: Do you think that that worked both ways? Do you think that the African American community had a sense of what was going on in the white community?

JA: Oh, I think they did, yes, I think they did. Because again--

JN: You had to--

JA: Well in a way, yes, you had to, but from the standpoint that domestic servants--some people, perhaps occasionally, that the servant doesn't really understand what we're saying or what we're doing. But, often, the servant does.

And of course if a servant who's just a bit discreet, they'd never indicate, but they know exactly what's going on.

JN: Right. Right. Well you said that you worked for a while at the North Carolina Inn yourself. Did you experience that while you were there? That sort of, hearing and knowing what was going on or being--

JA: Yes, that's what I was saying. That's what I meant a while ago because a couple of time maybe the political discussions of what we need to do and so on, and this waiter doesn't know, he's not paying attention to us. Or they don't even see the waiter. Yes, have you read *Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison?

JN: I've read it several times.

JA: It's that same kind of thing. Well, that's not exclusive to whites or anyone else, but I think in the southern, I think we can say at one point in the South.

JN: It was like that. Well, I wanted to ask you, just sort of a few more questions about life at Lincoln. What do you remember as or who do you remember as your favorite teacher? Or a beloved teacher who was there that you might--

JA: Well there were several, but one that really stands out is Mrs. Turner. I don't know if you've heard that, in reference to her--

JN: Vaguely.

JA: Okay. She was the English teacher. She was also the French teacher. She was also the Drama Club advisor, and she certainly encouraged me from the standpoint of writing and academics in general. And we stayed in touch after I graduated. I went to see her after she retired, we corresponded until her death

and I think the interest that she took in all of us was something special about all the teachers. Many of them took, of course, an interest in us, but I think she was quite a bit above the others.

JN: So did she stay in touch with a lot of the students after they left? Do you know?

JA: I don't know about a lot, but I think she did stay in touch with several. I think she did stay in touch with several. And she was available, or she let it be known that she was available to those who would come to see her or would get in touch with her. When she retired, she moved to Raleigh. She had come to Chapel Hill from Raleigh, because she, I think it was her husband who was either a professor or a dean or maybe the president of Shaw. My memory fails me exactly but, you know, she had had a long relationship with Shaw and she went back to Raleigh after she retired.

JN: Well, you were, president of the student body, which says to me that you must have been very well known among the students probably, knew everybody, knew what was going on. Can you tell me a little bit about what was going on at Shaw (meant to say Lincoln). What it a cliquy place, were there a lot of groups, or was there a general feeling of everyone knows everyone and everyone's friends with everyone, or, were the athletics in one group and the really smart kids in another?

JA: No, I don't think so, I think, I have to think about it a moment. But I don't

remember a cliqueness. The school was so small, that for someone to have a clique--

JN: It'd be like, you and me--do you remember how many students were in your graduating class?

JA: We were in the twenties, twenty-two or twenty-three.

JN: So, did you have a lot of interaction with the other grades and students. For example, would high school students ever do something with the elementary kids, or help them or tutor them or anything like that.

JA: Not a great deal, I don't think. I don't remember any organized program. I think we were always available if someone were to ask us something specific, but that's, we can say, just from the general perspective. But I didn't, I don't want to say I didn't have any choice, but all of my siblings were younger, so I probably helped them or be available to them when they were in elementary school.

JN: What about your parents? Were they very involved with what was going on at school?

JA: Very much so. Very much so.

JN: Was there pretty much an open line of communication between the teachers and the parents and the community?

JA: Yes, yes.

JN: Did that keep you in line? Keep the students in line, to a certain extent?

JA: Yes, that the community, really. Because, we can say, everybody knew



everybody, and we knew everybody knew everybody, so when someone saw us in a situation that might not have been the best for us--"I'll tell your mother."

But, now my mother was president of the PTA for a while, and she was a regular at PTA meetings. As I said, because the teachers lived in close proximity to us, we saw many of them at church. We went to church together, so we saw them at church, saw them at other social events, so yes.

JN: May I ask you, what church you went to, while you lived there?

JA: I was at St. Paul AME.

JN: I'm not sure where that is.

JA: Well, it's on again, Main Street by the car wash.

JN: Oh, okay, I know where that is.

JA: Crook's Corner.

JN: Oh, love Crook's Corner! Love Crook's Corner!

JA: Yeah. It's right across the street from there.

JN: Okay, well let me think, is there anything I haven't asked you about, that you want to talk about?

JA: I don't think so, excuse me, I made a couple of notes, after your email.

(PAUSE)

JN: Well, actually, let me ask you one more thing, I may be digressing, but I'm just really interested in how life moved on under segregation. When students from Lincoln High would on dates, say, where would you go?

JA: Oh, well--

JN: I'm sure you had dances and proms and things like that--

JA: Yes, dances and proms. We had a community center. You know the history of that, it was built--the African American community began building it just before World War II. During World War II, the Navy used the university for naval pre-flight training. The Navy had a band, which was African American. All of them were African Americans. They needed a place to house that band. Couldn't put them on the campus, so they asked us, if you give us permission to house our band in the building, we'll finish it for you. And they finished it. And after the war, it became a community center. But even while the band was there, the band made it a kind of a community center. They were open to us, the African American community. And after the war, of course we used it, and we've been using it since then. And there were dances and parties and so on there. The other thing was we had an African American movie theater in Carrboro. Well, it was on the line. Again the car wash, leaving the car wash going west on the right is an import car garage, anyway, before you get to the intersection of Rosemary and Main Street, right along there was an African American movie theater.

JN: So--

JA: Which was owned and operated by whites.

JN: Oh, really?

JA: One of my cousins was the manager.

JN: Wow. Did they movies at the same time that the other theater would? I

mean, would you see movies as they came out?

JA: I don't think so. I think it was probably a little later. But the main thing was that Friday and Saturday, cowboys and Indians. One of the first movies I saw there was the original *Imitation of Life*. I remember seeing that. But I don't think they got the first run.

JN: I'm sure getting my second wind now, but I won't keep you over, so just let me know if we need to stop. But, you know, a lot of what scholars and historians and people who think about segregation talk about as one of the, or cite as one of the important, kinds of cultural tools that African Americans had was music and performing arts, you know, more cultural sort of things. Do you remember what kind of music you listened to when you were in high school? Did you buy records? Was there a place where you could go buy records?

JA: Oh yes. I don't think I bought a great many, but there was a place there where you could buy them. I had a 45 collection, and probably the most that it was in high school was and it continued while I was in college, was, we had some 78s. We played them on the Victrola at home, and of course you had the radio.

JN: What kind of music was it? Was it jazz or blues?

JA: A good bit of jazz, but I also had some opera, I had *Carmen*. I had heard those, so some of those. And a good bit of it was jazz. Jazz started more in college than when I was in high school.

JN: Do you remember, did you have a television while you were growing up?

JA: Well, growing up, again--

JN: Or do you remember getting a television?

JA: I remember we did get a television, yes.

JN: Do you remember when that was?

JA: I don't remember the year, but I know that, it goes back to probably the beginnings of Ed Sullivan, Jackie Gleason, I remember especially watching Jackie Gleason. And Milton Berle.

JN: Do you remember seeing African Americans on television at all? And that being a huge deal?

JA: Well yes. I think--

JN: That was one of the things your mother pointed out to you.

JA: Yes, because the specifics was, the June Taylor dancers, with Jackie Gleason, when they had their first black dancer. She would point her out to us. And I don't know what year that was. And of course, Nat King Cole had a show, but that was fairly late.

JN: I think that was in the 50s.

JA: And of course, on the radio, we used to listen to Jack Benny, because of [ ]. And, of course, Jack Benny was eventually on TV, but we were all familiar with him from the radio.

JN: Wow. So you would listen to those radio serials that they had.

JA: Oh yes, the serials. But the other thing, a couple of Robert Penn Warren pieces were done on the radio. One regular radio show, I think it might have

been Sunday afternoon or whatever, and "Pale Horse, Pale Rider," I remember hearing that on the radio, and that was something I especially liked, as well as, "Inner Sanctum," "Mr. District Attorney."

JN: Was that something students would do? Was that something that kids would do together, was listen to those shows? Or was that just--

JA: Well, I think some of them would, but you know, also at that time, the soaps began. Many of them were regular soap opera--

JN: Listeners. Not watchers.

JA: No, listeners, listeners.

JN: No, to the radio. When they were on the radio. One other thing that struck me, at the beginning of the interview you said that you had family that lived in the North, in Philadelphia, your grandmother, and you went to see her and you could tell differences from the South.

JA: Yes.

JN: Can you talk a little bit about what those were specifically, or maybe if there was one particular thing that stood out in your mind as "wow, this is different here." We don't have this at home.

JA: One thing was, the amusement park outside Philadelphia, which is, it was Woodside Park, I think. And we would go to that park and get on any ride that we wanted to, at any time. Carnivals would come to Chapel Hill, for two or three days or a week or whatever, and I don't remember that the carnivals really segregated--we got on the Ferris wheel, we got the ride or whatever, but I think

the atmosphere probably just wasn't the same. We had to stand around and wait until you felt it was safe to try this or try that. And the other thing was in Philadelphia--we didn't go to that many restaurants, but any place we went to, we just went there, paid our bill and got whatever we wanted. No signs on the doors or in the bathroom or getting a drink of water out of the water fountain. In Durham I remember especially Sears, in their store, the water fountains were right at the entrance, near one of the entrances to the store, clearly marked, "white" "colored." I think one day I dared to drink out of the white fountain.

JN: Really? Did anything happen?

JA: Nothing happened. Nobody was there.

JN: You were alone?

JA: No, I think I was with somebody at the time.

JN: Did they say something to you, do you remember?

JA: I think it happened so fast they didn't have time to say anything. Getting on the bus in Chapel Hill. My grandmother took my brother and me to a summer camp one time, and the summer camp was in I think it's called Bricks, North Carolina. Yes, okay. I don't know if it's still there or not. Anyway, we took the bus from Chapel Hill, went to the bus station, and it may have been the first time I'd ever gone on a bus. Of course, I got on before my grandmother, and the first seat I saw, I sat down. And she said, "no, no, you can't sit there."

JN: How old were you? Do you remember?

JA: Probably ten. Nine or ten, I'm not sure.

JN: Did you ask her why, or did you just already sort of know?

JA: No, I don't think I knew. She probably said "no, we're gonna sit back here," or something like that. And there I could see, white people got on, they sat up there.

JN: Another thing that struck me when we were talking about more, kind of cultural things, that Durham had a pretty successful black baseball team. Did you ever go see the teams or anything like that?

JA: I'm not sure if I did or not, because I'm not a great baseball fan.

JN: Oh, okay. Well, it's an acquired taste.

JA: No, football, basketball, but baseball--so I'm not sure that I went to see them or not. Probably did not.

JN: Okay. Just wondering. And another thing I was wondering about, is you left the South really right as the Civil Rights movement started. Did you have an involvement with the Civil Rights movement at all from where you were? You said you left the country for a while.

JA: Yes, yes. No, very little because I went into the military. I went into the army for a couple of years, until '55. I came back to graduate school, stayed in Philadelphia for a couple of years, and then moved to Washington, when I started working in Washington. And then, within a couple of years after that, I was overseas. And I went overseas for a couple of years, came back for a couple of years, back overseas, two, three, four, five, six years. So, no not really much direct involvement. I tried to follow what was going on but--



JN: Well, I guess this will be my last question. What do you think when you go back to Chapel Hill now? Do you see it as a different place than where you grew up? Or do you still sort of see that imprint of a former way of life, of segregation, on the town, on the community as you go through it? Do you know--am I being clear? Sometimes I'm very obtuse!

JA: No, I think that the changes that have occurred in Chapel Hill that I see, are primarily the physical changes, in terms of the size of the city, the number of people who are there, and things that have been built, and so on. And, I think that for the most part, the attitudes that I see in people, I think have changed also, but I'm not sure to what I need to attribute that change, because is it a change that I knew, that I grew up with in Chapel Hill or is it a change in the people who have come to Chapel Hill since then? Because I know there's been a lot of influx. But, I think many of the people in Chapel Hill, who have been there since I was there, probably have changed to a certain degree. I don't know if it's a complete change or not. But, I think they at least, make the effort to give the impression that they have changed. Because once upon a time, you walk into a time, you walk into a store, a business, anyplace, "what do you want, boy?" And nobody does that now, and it's almost always "sir", "yes sir," "may I help you sir?"

JN: So you do feel the change?

JA: Yes, yes. I definitely feel a change. I don't there's any doubt that there's been a change.

JN: To what extent.

JA: To what can you attribute that change? Is it the new people who brought that in, or is it the people who were there? I think there's been some degree of change, I don't think there's any doubt about that.

JN: Well, I'll say then again now, if there's anything that you think I've left out or that you'd just like to add--that you can think of--

JA: I don't so, I don't think so at this time. But you are going to do a transcript? And if you want to send that to me--

JN: I can certainly do that. I can send you copies.

JA: There may be some things that I can elaborate on then. Or may be some things that you want me to elaborate on. I can do that. I do plan to be in Chapel Hill, probably sometime after the twelfth. Probably for a couple of days, I'm not sure how long.

JN: I'm going to turn this off now, if that's okay, and we can talk.

JA: Alright.

END OF INTERVIEW