

Tape Index/Transcript, Sam Holton Interview, March 28, 2001.

SOHP Series: Desegregation in Chapel Hill Schools

TAPE INDEX / TRANSCRIPT—Sam Holton

Interviewee: Sam Holton, Chapel Hill School Board and Professor of Education

Interviewer: Jenny Matthews

Interview Date: Wednesday, March 28, 2001

Location: Holton's home at 411 Holly Lane in Chapel Hill

Tape No.:

Topic: An oral history of Dr. Sam Holton and his role in the desegregation of the Chapel Hill public schools. Holton was on the Chapel Hill school board from 1968-1974 and had four children that attended the Chapel Hill public schools. He served on the board with Mary Scroggs, Peachie Wicker, Betty Denny, Ed Caldwell, Norman Weatherly, and James Howard. He was friends with Joseph Johnson, William Cody, and Robert Hanes, who were all superintendents of Chapel Hill Schools. He was also on the school board during the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and during the school "riot" or "disturbance" of 1969.

Holton grew up in Durham and graduated from Duke University. After joining the service, he returned to Duke to get his Masters degree, and later got his PhD. from Yale. He joined the faculty of the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in the fall of 1948. He retired from the University in 1987. As a former Professor of Education, Holton offers a socio-economic analysis of achievement gaps.

TAPE INDEX / TRANSCRIPT

[Cassette 1 of 1, Side A-Tape No.]

- 001 Opening announcement: Jenny Matthews interviewing Sam Holton on March 28, 2001 at his home in Chapel Hill. We will be discussing desegregation in Chapel Hill public schools.

- 004 His wife asking where the county seat of Northampton County is, and asking about Roanoke Rapids. She tries to keep up with the geography of North Carolina.
- 010 Mr. Holton talks about growing up in Durham. His father was on the faculty at Duke. His family has been in North Carolina for several generations. He attended the Durham public schools and graduated from Duke University. He went into the service, came back and got his Masters degree from Duke and his Phd. from Yale in 1948. He joined the faculty at UNC-Chapel Hill the following fall and was principal for two years at Yanceyville, North Carolina, during which time he was on leave from the University. He retired from the University in 1987.
- 030 He enjoyed going to school in Durham. The schools were segregated and he lived on Watts Street, a block away from the East Duke campus. The Durham population when he was in high school was about 50,000.
- [038] Jenny Matthews: So, what would you say your role in the Chapel Hill, the desegregation of Chapel Hill schools was?

Sam Holton: Well, we had four children in the Chapel Hill schools. We moved from Durham. My wife and I lived a while in Durham after we were married and we moved to Chapel Hill in 1965. Of course, as a professor of education, I was considerably aware of the Chapel Hill schools. I had student teachers in the schools. The superintendent was a former colleague of mine and a very close friend.

JM: Who was that?

SH: Joseph Johnston. Then when he, when he left the superintendent--I don't think I'm neglecting somebody there-- it was Bill Cody. Who was a very fine, able, professional superintendent. I was, my wife and I were active in the local PTA's. I was the President of the PTA, of the Chapel Hill PTA council for a couple of years. I ran for the school board and was elected, I believe it was in 1968, may have been '66, no it was '68. So, the initial steps toward desegregating the schools had started before I actually joined the school board. They had my, one of my children had Frances Hargraves as their fourth grade teacher. Frances, at

that time was the first black teacher to teach in a predominantly, well, in a white school. She was teaching at Glenwood. And we were very good friends of Frances, and her nephew was later on the school board with me—Edwin Caldwell, Jr. They were a Chapel Hill family and they lived in the Northside community. I did, on occasion, do observation with my undergraduate students in the Chapel Hill schools, both in Chapel Hill High School, and the junior high school, and then Lincoln, Lincoln High School, which at that time was the black high school. When they decided to move to a-- Well, they built a new high school which is the present Chapel Hill High School. They built the new high school on Homestead Road. They decided that they would offer the opportunity there for the black students that wished to attend to attend. And so many of them decided to attend that they decided to close the Lincoln High School. The Lincoln High School-- There is some misunderstanding apparently in more recent times as to how that happened. () Some people coming in were under the impression that there had been a unilateral move on the part of the school board, and it had not. I was not on the school board at the time, but the school board had raised the issue with the black community as to what they wanted, and the individual parents indicated what their, what they wanted their students to do. So, that aspect of it probably was handled correctly.

Now, the black high school was much smaller than Chapel Hill High School. The black population in Chapel Hill, not perhaps like Northampton County, but the black population in Chapel Hill was, I reckon about twenty-five percent as large as the white. Maybe less than that. Over time, there was some tension among the high school students as to whether the traditions of the Lincoln High School were being lost in the process of combining the school. The school newspaper kept the same name, the mascot kept the same

name, and that sort of thing. One of the early issues was how they were going to select marshals for graduation. And the final solution there was to have a black marshal and a white marshal. So, they had co-marshals. Later, or perhaps along about the same time, the other questions with regard to their trophy case, with regard to the name of the mascots, and that sort of thing. So, they did change the name of the mascot to something that was not identical with what they had earlier. I think they kept the same school newspaper and yearbook titles. So those things which the adults probably hadn't thought much about, became big issues with the students.

Now, shortly after I came on to the school board, there was a--well, I wouldn't call it a riot--a disturbance in the hallways in which the black students were demanding more attention. It occurred on the day that the school was undergoing its visitation for accreditation. So, we had a lot of visitors, both black and white--members of the accreditation committee. I was amused later. There had been-- I had overheard a comment on the part of one of the junior high school principals, a black principal from Charlotte and one of the associate superintendents--I think he was an associate superintendent at the time--from Wilmington, said that kind of thing would never happen in either of those places. Well, both of them (laughter) had more, (laughter), serious disturbances over some of the issues.

So, our situation, it was a tense situation. It was not too long before the assassination, and I'm—I don't know whether it was a year, or a part of a year, or maybe two years—assassination of Martin Luther King. And the black communities, I don't know whether you had—well you weren't old enough to have been around for that occasion—but you probably had a different kind of situation in Northampton County than you, than we have had, we had in the Piedmont area. The community-- Well, they had curfews in Durham, and Charlotte,

in Greensboro. And they had some actual vandalism arising out of some of that tension. Actually, we had school board meetings in the elementary school over at Northside. And we had instructions from the chief of police, I reckon. I know it was the chief of police or the sheriff. We had instructions to lock ourselves in the building and then to notify him when the school board meeting was over to provide an escort out of the Northside community. Things were that tense. Now, I don't know that any of us were really as frightened of it as the perhaps the authorities were. To be sure, there was no real problem.

In connection with the so called-- Well, in connection with the disturbance there were a half a dozen or so black students who had been violent enough to require some discipline, and I don't remember what it was, but in the process the-- I was elected school board the same time Howard Lee was elected mayor-- so you get a little better sense of the racial situation in Chapel Hill when you remember this was happening at the same time. It wasn't white against black, [there were] I suppose some traditionalist perhaps, on both sides. We were invited to come to a meeting in the First Baptist Church, which you may be aware is the black Baptist church on Rosemary Street. And we, the school board, sat in front of the audience and listened to the concerns of the black parents and other members of the black community. It was, it was a little intimidating in that here we were--five blacks, five whites, and one black school board member looking across an audience that was completely black with no way out of the room (laughter) except to go back through the crowd. So, that's a memory we have of that...

JM: What sort of things did they ask you?

SM: Well, they were concerned whether we were being fair and they didn't-- Well, I can remember the grandmother of one of the children, I reckon she was the guardian of the

child, was making a very impassioned plea for considerable leniency in dealing with her grandson. It--. I don't know much more to say about it except to say that it was obvious when you visited the schools that the black students tended to be on one side of the cafeteria, and the whites on the other. The same thing was happening at the university. The polarization of the student body, or the self-segregation, or whatever you want to call it. They--. My children, all of them had black friends, usually students that you would think of as upper middle class students. But, they also were sensitive to the tenseness of the school situation. There was no, aside from that one day--. I've forgotten how much damage was done to the building, a little in the hallways there. From the standpoint of the students there was still more tension than they were comfortable with. But these were our older students, our high school aged students. We had two in high school at the time, and one would have been in the junior high school, and one in the elementary school.

JM: And they were--. So they weren't there while the disturbance took place?

SM: The two that were in high school would have been there. They were, I think their teachers kind of rounded up as many of the students as they could and locked themselves in to the classrooms.

JM: What kind of disturbance was it?

SM: Milling about, some breaking of glass, and that sort of thing.

JM: And this was during the school hours?

SM: During the school hours, during the visitation. (Laughter)

JM: That's right. So, were you there then?

SM: No.

JM: Oh.

SM: We were notified sometime later in the day as school board members that there had been a disturbance. And we had meetings to see whether there was anything we could do to calm the situation down. The visit to the black church was one of the things that was decided to do.

JM: Do you remember what happened to the students that started it?

SM: Very little. Maybe two or three days suspension, or something of that sort.

JM: And this was before the Martin Luther King incident?

SM: It was about the same time, and I would have to go back to the newspaper or something and figure out the exact relationship.

JM: Were there also disturbances then?

SM: Not as far as I can remember in the school itself, except the general tension and the black and white relationships in the general community. More fear of what might happen than anything that did happen. Chapel Hill, as I remember, didn't have-- Well, they may have had a march, or something of that sort. But they didn't have anything that was particularly threatening. Ninth Street, over in Durham, they had, they had some plate glass windows broken and that sort of thing. My wife was taking classes at UNC-G and had trouble leaving (his wife says "Good luck" and shuts the door), had trouble leaving the campus at UNC-G to come home, and then had trouble coming home. They had road blocks up to control; I don't know what they were going to control...(laughter). Control whatever needed to be controlled, I suppose.

I had a meeting—I didn't know anything about the curfew in Durham—I had a meeting over in the Hope Valley area, and went over and knocked on the door of the person I was supposed to be meeting with, and they peered out of the window, "Didn't you know

there was a curfew on?" I said, "No." He said, "Well, come on in and we'll have our meeting." Well, then I started back; I had the same explanation as to why I was moving about with a curfew. And I said, "Well, I've been to a meeting here, I didn't know about the curfew. And, I'm going back to Chapel Hill" He said, "Well, go directly." (Laughter) So, ...

JM: Do you want to put that down? I don't want you to have to hold it...Do you think it will sit up here? (talking about the microphone)

SM: I reckon it would.

JM: If that becomes a problem...

SM: That doesn't...

JM: So, were there any other problems that you had to address as a school board member?

SM: Well, I...you might do better to see if you can get a hold of the minutes.
(Laughter)

JM: I looked at some of them.

SM: (Laughter) My recollections are not very clear on that. Basically, the concern we have had throughout is to avoid neglecting the lower socio-economic groups, not just the blacks. Though blacks made up most of it in Chapel Hill. But, in the fact of a university community and a strong emphasis on college preparation, as to be sure we had programs enough to take care of people that weren't going on to college. When we developed the Chapel Hill High School program for the new campus, we had a strong vocational program in areas like horticulture, and pre-nursing, and things of that sort, that I think were--well auto-mechanics. The, when they combined the faculties, the faculties from Lincoln, and the

faculties from Chapel Hill worked very well together and several of the black teachers were recognized as very strong. R.D. Smith was the man that usually dealt with the auto-mechanics program and other vocational programs of that sort. Mrs. Ruth Polk was a very outstanding home economics teacher. And, went out of her way to set up programs for black males to develop skills that could be translated to work in restaurants, and cooks, and things of that sort. The-- Mr. Smith was the assistant principal of the combined schools, and I'm sure was very helpful in relating to any problems we had with the black students, largely with the black males. The males seem to have more problems in high school than the females anyway. (Laughter) Or their problems are more likely to be acted out. (Laughter)

JM: That's probably what it is.

SM: So, that's a recollection. We probably had more of that sort of problem than the same student population had at Lincoln. That is black males getting in trouble with school regulations and that sort of thing. And I assume that represents some dissonance between the idea of black pride and the idea of desegregation, and the effort to integrate. But otherwise, I'm not sure there was any other serious problem. The-- I'm sure the questions were always raised about achievement gaps and differences in expectations. Though I doubt those differences were as great as some of the white parents thought they were. (Laughter) You have to remember, you are not just desegregating, integrating the school, you are also integrating the parental view of the world.

JM: So, were there immediate achievement gaps?

SM: Well, yes. I think what you have to think about the achievement gaps... Achievement gaps were more related to parent education levels, and social class, rather than to ethnicity. So, you probably had achievement gaps that included whites as well as blacks,

but the basic educational level of most of the black community was not the same as basic education level of the white community. So, you were going to have, yes, you were going to have that disparity. And you can have a pretty well desegregated school system, and the fact of desegregation in terms of ethnicity isn't going to solve your achievement gaps that are based on other cultural and economic circumstances. Now, I think simplistically, we just assume this is a persistent effort to deal only with white students. If anything the school board and the faculty were () leaning over backwards for that not to be the case. The achievement gaps were largely cultural and sociological.

JM: What measures did the school board and faculty take?

SM: Well, of course you depend on your superintendent and your instructional staff to do the things they need to do in trying to rectify any differences that are occurring. Now, I think we've had a very concerned staff and faculty along those lines. Now, aside from the efforts to be sure that we were providing attractive programs for both blacks and whites. For instance, we had a Black Gospel Choir very early in things, because there was a student demand for it. It was something they had at Lincoln. Where very few whites were interested in it, but (laughter)..() get one or two.

JM: Do you know how that got started?

SM: I expect by students themselves asking some faculty member to sponsor it. I don't even remember who sponsored it. I don't remember whether it was a black teacher or a white teacher, or whether it was just somebody in the music department that wanted to do it. It may have, on the other hand, it may have been one of those things where the faculty or principal said, "Well, we've got to find extracurricular activities for our whole population, and this is essentially a segregated activity, but it's self-segregated." (Laughter) If you're

going to say you can organize any kind of club you want to organize as long as it is, isn't too exclusive. So that anybody that wants to join can join. I don't know how else you can do it.

JM: How was achievement determined then? Were there tests?

SM: Well, it would be the same. As far as class achievement-- Well, you've got— now we have statewide testing programs that make it relatively easy to identify who is doing well and what the gaps are. They had achievement testing, and I don't remember what. There again, you'd have to go back to school records to find out. But, I don't think there was any question that there was a larger proportion of the low-income population that were having difficulties.

Though the schools had had probably the smallest drop-out rate in the state for some time. Back in the, back when I was on the school board, I had been teaching courses in secondary education and expressing concerns about the drop-out rates, and the superintendent said, "Well, you're talking about somebody else." (Laughter) He says, "our drop our rate at that time was maybe five percent." So, whereas in Yanceyville, where I had been, between the first grade and the twelfth grade, you dropped off seventy-five percent of your population, or between the fifth grade and the twelfth grade, you'd drop out. Same thing would have been true in Northampton County, in 1950, 1955. But-- So, we didn't have a large drop-out problem, but the drop-out problem was always with the students who were doing less well, which typically was the lower socio-economic group.

I had a number of graduate students do dissertations on school persistence. And, in fact, one of them pointed out, one of the dissertations pointed out, that if a sibling finished high school, the odds were much higher that the younger siblings would finish. If the parents had finished high school, the odds were pretty high, were exceedingly high, that the children

would finish high school. If the parents had gone to college, the odds were pretty good the students, the children were going to go college.

So that, here again, these studies, most of them, most of the dissertations I worked on there were, were prior to desegregation. So, you have an achievement gap any time that you have a large disparity between the social levels, the educational levels, the economic opportunities within the population. Now, you got a reasonably homogeneous population, as you might find in let's say Iowa, then that is less true, because basically the whole community has about the same education level. Now, it's not necessarily very high, but (laughter) it is similar. Whereas in our setting, the, or in any semi-urban area, you've got a wide disparity, economically between the haves and the have-nots, and educationally, it follows somewhat the same pattern. So, it's a more complex kind of a problem than to simply say it is the result of blackness or whiteness.

Now, I suppose it is convenient to recognize that as long as there is that disparity between the black population and white population, that there is going to be some tendency to re-segregate along other lines. But, I think that the proposition that the blacks were here and the whites were here is not totally accurate. We did have middle-class blacks, and they were achieving in either the black school, or in the white school. Now the number, the proportion of the black graduates of Lincoln for instance going on to college was probably much smaller than the proportion of white students going from Chapel Hill High to college. Part of that represents the fact that we are in a University community and the principal employer is the University. (Laughter) So, the proportion of parents who went on to college was much greater.

Now, whether that would have been true in Yanceyville, and I assume in Northampton County-- The only college graduates in Yanceyville was the professional classes: the lawyers--well it's the county-seat town, so the lawyers--*the* doctor, the people that worked, the school nurse, and the people that worked for the county, the school teachers, and that pretty well did it. The principal-- Well, the owner of the Ford Motor Company for instance, had never been to college. Now, he was a relatively wealthy person and very supportive of schooling, but he was also an older man who had gotten started in business in an era in which college education was not particularly important. His wife—he had married the school teacher. (Laughter) It's an interesting...all right, I don't know if I've taken care of that question for you...

JM: Yeah. Well, I was going to ask how did the tracking and ability grouping play out before they were desegregated, and afterwards?

SM: Well, the amount of tracking, it was true when I was in high school, you had a college preparatory curriculum, and you had a vocational curriculum, and you had a general curriculum. Now the college preparatory--and they tended to be hierarchical--the college preparatory was for the brighter students, the vocational program was for those that were bright enough so that the vocational ed folks thought they could do something with them, and the general tended to be those that just didn't want to be bothered with the Latin, or the Algebra, or whatever, French, whatever was in the, Physics, whatever was in the college preparatory curriculum.

Which was part of the problem we had in Yanceyville. We had a ten-teacher high school, and we didn't have a large enough high school to offer much other than the college preparatory curriculum. So, students who didn't want that... Now, we did have, we had

vocational agriculture, and we had vocational home economics. So, the people who really wanted to graduate from high school and have something in the way of a skill, could stay in and do it. And we had a fair number, though many of those were planning to plan to go on to college. But in terms of just-- Well, if you are going with ten teachers, you are going to offer enough college preparatory work to get your students into Carolina, or Duke, or Wake Forest. You are going to have to offer Physics, you are going to have to offer Chemistry. Now, you offered them on alternate years in order to conglomerate enough students to justify it. You had to offer Algebra II, you had to offer two years of Spanish. The decision was made on what kind of teacher you could find. If the teacher had just resigned had been teaching Spanish, and they already had Spanish I, you looked real hard for somebody that could teach Spanish II. Now if the last year you offered was Spanish II, you could take either a French or a Spanish teacher. But, she had to be able to teach English or Social Studies, or something else. So, that was part of the explanation. It's a chicken and eggs proposition. If you haven't got an elaborate program for them, why stay in school? If they don't stay in school, how can you offer the program? (Laughter) So, it was-- Now we didn't have that problem in Chapel Hill, because we had a large enough population. And the Chapel Hill curriculum followed very much the same pattern. It had changed in the twenty years between the time I got out of high school and got on to the school board. But, it was essentially the same kind of program. Probably not too different from the one you had in ...(laughter). How many students in your high school?

JM: I think in my graduating class, there were 113.

SM: Well, that's not-- That's a nice size school.

JM: Well, and then in freshmen class, was like three hundred.

SM: Well, you see there. There is the same, same thing is working.

JM: So, do you think that when the schools were desegregated, the black children were automatically put in the...

SM: No, I don't think so. They were put in the programs they were, their parents were willing to have them take. There was no effort to segregate them.

JM: So, they were free to choose?

SM: They were free to choose. Now, my son was very much interested in auto-mechanics, and he went into the auto-mechanics program. And I think there was one other white student in that program, but that wasn't any decision made by the school board. That was, sort of self-selection. And I don't, I think... [625]

[End of Side A, Tape 1]

[Side B, Tape 1]

SM: There may have been one that had been offered in the Lincoln High School and had not been available at Chapel Hill High School because they hadn't had enough demand for it.

JM: You mentioned before that Dr. Cody, the superintendent--?

SM: Yes.

JM: Was a good superintendent? Do you have any other comments?

SM: No, he was very--. He went from here to Birmingham. And I suspect he got that job because he had done a good job here and they were recognizing that they had some desegregation problems that needed to be worked on. I don't know that. I am hypothesizing there.

JM: Do you know of any specific decisions that he made?

SM: No, no. Nothing that--. Generally, he was working to make it work. I couldn't identify anything particular. I'm sure, I'm sure he was urging his principals and his staff to do the right thing and that sort of thing. But, I don't think they needed much urging.

(Laughter)

JM: And Dr. Robert Hanes followed him?

SM: Yes.

JM: How was he?

SM: Bob is a good old friend of mine. (Laughter) He and I had taught together when I first came to the University, and he was a graduate assistant, and I was a new instructor. Bob was probably one of the two or three best superintendents in the state. And we were very fortunate to be able to keep him as long as we did.

JM: Do you know where he is now?

SM: He is in Charlotte. He is retired, but he is very active. He comes up here for the football games. He and his wife were both alumni.

JM: And brought Dr. Charles Rivers here?

SM: Yes.

JM: He was the person I interviewed first.

SM: Yes.

JM: How was that? What did you think about him?

SM: He's a very fine person. Somewhat quiet, but Charles did a good job. He was working largely with curriculum issues. Though, Dr. Hanes was a strong person in curriculum himself.

JM: How did the community, and specifically the white community, react to Dr. Rivers coming?

SM: I had no--. The part of the community that I was with had a lot of respect for him. He and his wife were both very fine members of the community. They had two sons who were delightful young men.

JM: One of my colleagues in my class is studying the dynamics of the school board through the late sixties and seventies. Could you talk about that at all? About how the decisions were made?

SM: Well, most of the decisions were made with split votes. But, I don't remember what they were splitting over. Usually, it may have been just typically an academic, a bunch of academics that had strong opinions about whatever happens to be the issue at hand. But, they--. There was never any degree of disagreement within the board that was likely, for instance to want to fire a superintendent or anything of that sort.

There were more issues over, well for instance, the location of the Ephesus Road Elementary School. The school board had bought the land for the school when Mr., Dr. Johnson was superintendent, with the idea that the land would--. And Estes Hills were pretty well filling up, and we were going to need another elementary school, and closing the Northside School was part of that situation.

Now, the Northside School was, on the one hand was a, had started off as a private effort on the part of Negro citizens--and that was a term they were using at the time, I'm not reverting (laughter)—to provide more for their children than was otherwise available for them. And then when, I reckon in the thirties when the state took over all of the school systems—before that, each school district had been somewhat independent, and it had an

independent tax. In other words, Chapel Hill would have a school district, and Carrboro would have a school district, and White Cross would have a school district, and that black school would have a school district and that sort of thing. Well, when they, when the state took over in the thirties, and part of it was that most of these school districts were going broke, the depression just wiped them out. So, when the state took over the school systems, things got tightened up a little bit, and I think it was about that stage that the Northside School was essentially taken over as a part of the Chapel Hill School District. Now, I may be wrong. It may have occurred in the twenties instead of the thirties, but it was sometime within the twentieth century and probably in the mid-twenties or mid-thirties.

It was built on a very small site, a very hilly site. If you want to see how it would be to try to get an adequate size school building on that site, you can go look at it. But the school board decided that the building was not adequate in size or in location. All right, then when, if we are going to build a new elementary school, are we going to build it on that site? Now, the other problems of that site is that there is only one road into it and that is Church Street off of Franklin Street. You can't turn a school bus around in Church Street. And you couldn't turn more than one bus around on school property and have a string of other buses. In order to get a second entrance, you would have had to have built a bridge across Airport Road. (Laughter) And that didn't seem very feasible.

Well, there was one segment of the school board that was bound and determined that we were going to build a school on that site.

JM: Who were they?

SM: I don't want to call names.

JM: Oh.

SM: (laughter) And...

JM: Was this in the interest of the black community?

SM: Well, I don't think it was as much an interest of the black community as it was an interest of the liberal white community, of the very liberal white community. I think of myself as a member of the liberal community, but there was a group that were supers. Well, if we had decided in the desegregation proposition to maintain a black-white ratio that was within 5 percent of each other. All right, now, if we had built a school on the Northside site, and let's say the black population of the time I think was about a quarter. It may have been twenty percent, but it was on that order. You would have had to build a school big enough—you want an elementary school to have five or six hundred children. All right, let's say you would have had to bring in--let's say we use the six hundred figure--and figure well, a quarter of those would have been a 150. You would have been busing white children into the black community, and black children out of the Northside community to go to some other school, and that didn't seem to make sense. So, the vote to build Ephesus Road School was four-three.

JM: And you voted for that?

SM: I voted for it. There wasn't any, there was no logic to building back on the Northside proposition, except just the sentimental concern. Now, what we did do was to arrange that the school buildings, we had one relatively good building there--the other, the older one wasn't even that good--would be used for community purposes. In other words, we weren't bulldozing a school in the middle of the black community. And it became the site of the Senior Center, the first Senior Center, which was largely a black Senior Center. Now, the...some of the welfare offices were there. There were a number of services that were

appropriate to that particular neighborhood. But, the idea of trying to build a school on that site, just logistically didn't make sense. Well, nobody remembers it now. They--.

When we got ready to work out our attendance districts the questions were raised about which black community would come into this school. Well, the Ephesus Road community was obviously, the whites were likely to be upper middle class. You didn't necessarily, while the closest black students were the housing development off of Estes Drive. They, one of the blacks pointed out, he said, "Look, don't create this disparity by bringing housing development students in on top of an upper middle class community. Let's find some blacks that are middle class to bring in to that situation, and you can have some of the others, but don't load them in to that situation." Well, this made sense, and we worked it out actually.

What you ended up doing trying to work out your desegregation--. Your black population lived there at the end of Chapel Hill and the beginning of Carrboro—far end of Rosemary Street going toward Carrboro, the far end of Franklin Street, the area around the railroad siding there, represented most of the black population. Well, what you ended doing

was sort of doing a pie shape kind of situation, so you were busing. Now, this was an issue in the black community, and yet, neither we nor the leadership of the black community could figure out really what to do about it. If you are committed to the proposition that you don't want more than 10 or 15 percent of your population to be black, you want a chance to get them integrated. You don't want people, you don't want the whites to begin to move in to the areas where there was a low proportion of blacks. As long as it was 15, 20, 25 percent, the whites could learn, learn to live with it. If it got to be 75 percent....(pause)

JM: White flight?

SM: White flight. The elementary school I attended in Durham is now 95 percent black. Now, there is still a lot of white families within walking distance of the school. I say there are a lot, I don't think there are a lot. I think those houses are now occupied essentially by middle-aged people who don't have children in school. But the reason may relate to the population of the elementary school. But we haven't solved that problem yet. But Chapel Hill has been right successful in--. Every time now, it's a concern. Charlotte is having a discussion right now, over just this issue: why do they have to continue to have what looked to them like racial quotas to keep their schools desegregated? And the people on the school board know very well why they have to. Otherwise they are going to revert to a segregation pattern. And, it's a--. So, Chapel Hill is--. A person coming to Chapel Hill can be reasonably satisfied that the instructional programs and the quality of the program, the student population, proportions of the population that represent disproportionate needs for attention. In other words, I think a lot of the people--. You have to think through that you're not saying that you don't want quality programs for the blacks. What you are wanting to say is you want quality programs for the black, and you want them () the opportunity to operate

in a desegregated, if not yet integrated environment. And that a parent coming to Chapel Hill is-- The Carrboro Schools are no worse or better than Ephesus Road, or Glenwood, or Estes Hills. But it is a fight every time we get ready to desegregate, I mean to--what is the word I was using while ago? To redistrict.

JM: Could you talk about Ed Caldwell's part on the board?

SM: Ed was a very important member of the board. The first place, he was an alumnus of Lincoln High School; he was a leader in the black community. He had his; he was trusted by the black community. This is the other side of the coin. We could depend on him knowing what the community wanted, and the black community could depend on him to see that we understood what they wanted. So, he was an ideal member of the board. A very effective one.

JM: Was Peachie Wicker on the board when you were there?

SM: Yes she was.

JM: What was her role?

SM: I'd rather not talk about all of my colleagues. (Laughter)

JM: I understand.

SM: Peachie is a good friend of mine. We frequently voted on different sides of issues.

JM: And was Mary Scroggs the chairman then?

SM: Mary Scroggs was the chairman. Mary was probably the best school board chairman of the state at the time. She is a well-informed person. She is a skillful chairperson. She, she devoted a tremendous amount of time and energy to it. She was working at the University at the time. Her husband was a faculty member, and she was a

significant administrator over in the Physics Department. But, she put in a tremendous amount of time and energy into the school board. When the county commissioners would discuss their budget, she would—and budget hearings are all supposed to be open—she would be sitting on the front row with her knitting, so they would be aware that they couldn't run down the school budget without her awareness they were running it down. She-- If some question was raised as to why we need this in Chapel Hill, in Chapel Hill Schools, she intended to be there to say why we needed it. And she was a leader in the State School Board Association, and she was a very skillful chairman. She could handle a split board and keep everybody moving on target. Call down somebody if they really need to be called down...in a very nice way.

JM: How many-- What were the dates that you were on the board?

SM: 19-- I think it was 1968, may have been, yeah, I think it was 1968 to 74.

JM: Was Norman Weatherly--?

SM: Norman Weatherly was on the board. Norman was a very conscientious school board member. No, the problem I had with Mrs. Wicker and Mrs. Denny.

JM: Who was that?

SM: Mrs. Denny, Betty Denny. Was that, they were, they seemed to me likely to go off on what I thought of as a tangent. (Laughter) And, so they were both very nice people. And as I say, they were very good friends of mine. We just didn't always agree on the school board. I think they were-- James Howard was the other board member when we were in the process of voting to build the Ephesus Road School. [263]

264 He continues to be interested in the Chapel Hill Schools, but hasn't had any impact on

policy. He doesn't know much about Butch Patterson or the Blue Ribbon Task Force, because he had already left the University. He thinks the present superintendent is outstanding.

295 He remembers that he told a group in the 1970s that they were fortunate to have had the Civil Rights Movement because most geographic situations that try to maintain two separate cultures, like Ireland and Israel, have trouble. If we had not had desegregation, we would probably be fighting now.

326 He says that if I want to get at some of the tensions and solutions that would help somebody understand why things happened as they did, then he doesn't know of any other questions to ask. He says his recollections aren't as good as they used to be.

344 He thinks people need to be careful when they assume that all of the achievement gaps
can be easily solved simply by getting more integration. The problems were there before desegregation and will require considerable attention and money. He talks about the recent court decision to help the inequities between the low-wealth counties and the urban counties. He thinks that the funding should be equal among counties, but that the decision was too simplistic. There is nothing to be gained by reducing to the lowest common denominator. He does not think that money should be taken away from college preparatory classes to be given to pre-school. Instead, more money should be provided to do both, not just one or the other. Teachers need more money, class sizes in the early grades should be smaller. Music, art, foreign language, and literature are too important to be dropped. [419]

[End of Interview]