

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

WILLIAM THOMAS
MARCH 29, 1999

HORNSBY: My name is Angela Hornsby and I'm here with Deacon William Thomas at Graves Missionary Baptist Church. The date is March 29th 1999. And we're here as part of the Southern Oral History Program's "New Immigrants" project.

And, Deacon Thomas, my first question is, if you could basically state your name.

THOMAS: My name is William Thomas. I'm the president of the Albright Community Association, which covers this entire community where the church sits.

AH: Can you tell me about how large that community is, Albright?

WT: Albright covers, in Durham, from Miami Boulevard going toward Holloway Street, the site where the school sits. And then it goes from there to—I'm sorry Gere Street to Holloway Street. And then it goes from Holloway Street to Miami Boulevard. So it covers—I never counted the blocks, but it's a large segment in northeast central Durham.

AH: And how long have you been president?

WT: One year and two months. What happened, Albright itself, Albright itself is a very old organization, which goes back into 1984 or '85 when it was organized. Northeast central Durham came into existence about five years ago. So the community based organization, they kind of withered away because everybody consolidated under northeast central Durham. But due to the—various things happening in the community: deteriorating houses, prostitution, drug activities and other undesirable activities the people in the Albright community came together and decided they wanted their

organization revised. So January 20th '98, the Albright Community Association was rebirthed. And they—I ended up being president of the organization.

AH: I want to touch upon more about Albright and your activities as part of the community. But I wanted to kind of get a little bit of family history. So, with that in mind, I was wondering if you could tell me about your family. Your grandparents, what did they do? Who were they?

WT: I'm a Durham resident and I grew up--. My parents moved here from Shelby, North Carolina when I was a year and a half of age. So I consider Durham as my home. I know nothing about Shelby at all.

My father, he worked at a place called Caralema Company and Watts Hospital for many years until he was deceased. My mother, she worked at American Tobacco, () Myers and then she also did a little housework here and there. Late in life she went into the ministry and began preaching. She pastored her church until she went in retirement. Afterward, bad health set in. So she expired about three or four years ago.

As for myself, I lived twenty-six years in New York. That's when I left Durham and relocated to New York. In 1971 I relocated back to Durham. But even in New York I've always been quite interested in communities, what was going on. I headed up a committee to organization in Bedford-Stuyvesant because the same identical thing that's happening here in Albright in northeast central Durham, it was going on there.

I've been involved with people practically all my life, community wise, work wise. New York I worked as a company foreman in the one factory which went around the clock, three shifts. We had Jews, which owned the business. Other Jews worked there. We had Italians. One of the Italians was a company general manager. I was the

company foreman. We had Puerto Ricans. We had Spanish. We had blacks. And what did we have? Oh, we had a few West Indies. All working for the same company on the same payroll doing different things.

So it's nothing new to me working with people. I have a variety of years of experience of working with the diversity, nationalities. And, fortunately, I've been blessed always to have a good relationship with people in general.

AH: You mentioned you did a lot of community service work in New York. Who influenced—who do you think influenced your, I guess, verve to do that type of work, to be involved in the community?

WT: I think it's more of a God given gift than anything else because I do not ask for these positions. But for some reason I end up being drafted with insistence that, "we want you to be the president." And it seems hard to say no because most time when they come at me like that they do not understand the answer, no. So I end up with it. But I have no problem with it because I notice the way things fall in line you know.

In New York we had two gangs in the community, a teenage gang, a girls' gang and then what they called, a junior gang, all in the same community. But we were able to rally up enough people's support that the message eventually got to them loud and clear that you're not going to take over our community. And finally, they got the message.

We were able to go after the police department. I think they are the 79th Precinct on Gates in Bedford-Stuyvesant. The policemen would start really fulfilling their jobs in the community with more street patrol. Summertime sometimes they would have a habit of sitting up in the movie house. We had two theatres in the community. You'd go in the movie, you'd see them sitting up in the air-conditioned movie theatre. So, finally, was

able to get to the right people that came out and started walking their beats. We began to get extra days' sanitation clean up from the sanitation department. Many streets where they had street signs and people, rather than stop completely, they'd slow down and come right through. We had two kids that were maimed by cars doing this. So we went after the police and traffic department to install traffic stop lights. And we were successful at that. So, the achievement was very great.

We were able to set up a food closet, food pantry, clothes closet. We just had a whole lot of things going for everyone in the community because we set up also with the YMCA there and the YWCA there. Here I think you only have the one, the YMCA. Am I right? But you had a YWCA there. And we were able to establish contact with those organizations whereby young people in the community could go in the afternoon for swimming and other activities and all. And so it worked out very well, very well.

AH: What time was all this activity taking place, the sixties or--?

WT: This was in the sixties. And one thing I left out--. We also were able to get people really involved in the community, which I was the president of the organization. I had a West Indies that was vice-president. I had another foreigner who held a position. So we had—.

In our organization, if you came to us with a house complaint where the landlord was not doing his part as far as house deterioration, we would send what we called, "ABA" inspectors to look at your complaint and your concerns. If they were justified we could talk with the rent commissioner there--rent control, I think rent control. Anyway, rent control commissioner, his office. And you did not have to pay rent until the problem was corrected. And this was a big influence with people and landlords and what we

called absentee landlords whereby they just come to collect the rent and wouldn't fix anything. But once you start holding the rent back then you got some action.

And that's a law in New York. I mean, you can not--. Like in Durham here, you cannot charge a person five and six hundred dollars a month rent for a raggedy house or a raggedy apartment, something that's worth maybe a hundred or two hundred dollars because of this rent control they have there which is the protection for the people. And we used that to the max. The people would be serviced. Hopefully, we get that in Durham. [Laughs]

AH: How did you end up in New York? You mentioned coming to live in Durham from Shelby, North Carolina so--.

WT: You know, through the years, especially at that time you heard so much about New York. Like the streets are gold and all that other good stuff to go with it. And so after so much years and other things, I kept thinking about it and decided I'd give it a try.

AH: When did you move to New York?

WT: I moved to New York in '49.

AH: And could you describe a little bit about your life in Durham before that time? Where did you live?

WT: Okay, in Durham I lived in the Hayti section. I grew up in Brookstown. After growing up, and marrying and moving out on my own, I lived in Hayti. I worked at east campus in food preparation.

AH: Duke University?

WT: Duke University, east campus. And east campus would close down in the summer months. And students that stay would go to west campus. So at the meantime, employees at Duke could get jobs other places, in the mountains, places like that. I had no desire of going to those other jobs.

So the boss at the time, a fellow called Mr. Cox, he wanted to know, did I want to go to west campus. So I did and so I went to campus. It was supposed to have been for the summer months. But not bragging, not boasting—but they thought my work was so good. I was a good worker. They wanted me to stay. So the two campus bosses directly negotiated that—and I agreed to stay on at west campus. So that's where () I ended up being until I left Durham and went to New York.

There I worked in the bakery department. I was in charge of the salad department. I used to make all of the dressings. All your salads were made fresh even frozen salads, congealed salads. We had a whole list of salads. We made anything, anything and everything: Thousand Island, Bleu Cheese, Russian dressings. We made all of that right in the salad department. And I ended up being supervisor over that. ()

Go in there like five o'clock in the morning and make sure the orange juice was made. No bought orange juice at that time. Everything was squeezed fresh. Many times I cut my hand and all that stuff trying to cut oranges. But the juice and everything would be ready for the students. If I'm not mistaken we had to be ready at six o'clock up there to serve the students for breakfast. It was always ready.

AH: And this is at Duke University?

WT: It's at west campus and east campus, both. Umm-hmm, Duke University, yeah.

AH: So, just back tracking just a little bit. Tell me a little bit about growing up in Durham. Your parents moved here? And did they settle in Hayti or did they settle somewhere else? Just tell me a little bit about growing up—

WT: They settled in Brookstown, in Brookstown. And Brookstown's a very close tight community. Like I said, as far as Shelby, North Carolina, I know nothing about it at all.

All I know is Durham and growing up in Durham, you know. It was a normal, average life. We had our little neighborhood teams and we played baseball, football, basketball. Anything that young people do today, we did it them. But the community was a very tight-knit community. Everyone knew everyone.

There were two churches in the community: West Durham Baptist and Mt. Olive AME Zion Church. I was a member—my family joined Mt. Olive AME Zion Church. But most of our activities and everything really was at West Durham Baptist. We had a Boy Scout troop at West Durham Baptist. I was patrol leader for the pack. I also became assistant scoutmaster at an early age. Even then, those days, I built a house for my pack to meet in. We had a big, nice backyard, plenty of room. So I built a clubhouse back in the backyard for my guys, for us to meet in and have fun and things, you know.

We'd camp at West Durham Baptist Church in the backyard overnight. Duke Woods, west campus and all of Duke Woods—we claimed Duke Woods as our woods because we'd be out there—. In the summertime we'd go out there and find blackberries and find the wild trees of peaches, pears, apples and whatever. We got enough for people in the community. We'd pick our blackberries, and bring them in the community and sell

them for ten cents a peck. I think that's what we called them. Made our little ten or fifteen cents. Everybody was cooking blackberry pies to sell, you know.

But it was a normal kid's life, you know. Very tight. We had ball teams that played other communities like Walltown, and a community called Hickstown. We used to play against them, you know. And we were pretty hard to beat because we were just tight buddies and all.

AH: What impact did segregation have growing up?

WT: On me? [Laughs.] Here's where I get in trouble. [Laughter] Oh, with me, very little. I'll tell you why. I guess it's a God instilled thing in me. I have never feared man. I hear a lot today about low self-esteem and low morals. But I've always held my head ever since I knew me. If you were wrong and you crossed me I would let you know where I stood even as a child. And that's a thing that's just always been a part of me.

I found that my growing up days, and even today still, I never feared white man nor black man. I can stand and look a man in his eyes and talk to him on a one-on-one and he will understand one thing. I'm going to respect you and it's best for you that you respect me because if you disrespect me, you've got a problem.

And so, really my problem racial-wise has always been a very minimum because I'm not into this racial thing. Me, I have no reason to be. I know some people--. Everyone doesn't have the same outlook. I'm aware of that. But my thing is a man is man and a human being is a human being. And I respect human beings. I treat you nice and at the same time no one should ever mis-under-estimate me and think that I'm going to be their walking post. You don't walk over me. And people that know me know this.

So I don't have no problem. I don't have the problems that a lot of—that I hear coming from a lot of people. Because even now I sit with a lot of different groups: the city of Durham. I sit with the housing, sub-standard affordable housing. I sit with Weed and Seed.

AH: Now is that—you're on these committees or--?

WT: Yeah. I'm also interim chair for northeast central Durham. So this means that from one meeting to another someone is meeting all the time. So I sit as an advisory committee person to the chief of police. I've served with Dave Thompson, the county manager. Zero tolerance committee. I've sat at the table with the city mayor, city manager, with the Weed and Seed project.

AH: What does Weed and Seed try to do?

WT: Weed and Seed. That's a project whereby northeast central Durham, for an example, was a target community. And so you weed out the bad, which is drug, prostitution, deteriorating housing, these things, and you seed them with a better, reverse, you know.

And so but even at these meetings and all sitting at the table with these different people and all, I mean, I fully respect my other comrades. And they fully respect me. When I raise my hand to speak, they listen. When they have the floor, I'll listen. So, as it ends up, it's a good relationship in general because even in these meetings they know me, too. Whatever I have to say, I say it and that's the way it is.

AH: Just quickly, how did you come to meet your wife?

WT: [Laughs] Well, this is my second marriage, okay. And I knew her before I left Durham. But on my return back to Durham—one visit I made back on Mother's

Day from New York. And you know how old friends come to see each other. They come back home. And she was divorced. I was divorced—I was getting a divorce. And so we talking about old times briefly. And then we went to new times. [Laughs.] And so from there the letters started coming to me from Durham and she started receiving letters from me from New York plus telephone calls every once in a while. So it continued to grow and grow. So finally we said, “Well, may as well.” [Laughs.]

AH: And you had children?

WT: Yeah. I had two. She had three daughters.

AH: Okay. And so, again, at a certain point you felt like New York was appealing to you. So when you went to New York where did you settle? Was it Bedford-Stuyvesant?

WT: When I first went to New York I lived in Harlem. Okay? And after seven years I relocated and moved to Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn. And from Bedford-Stuyvesant, I spent the rest of the years there until moving back to Durham.

AH: In '71?

WT: Yeah.

AH: Now you mentioned working with a diverse group of people. How was that experience?

WT: One of the best in the world because I find that people are just people. Now what do you mean by that? You talk about racial-ness and I've seen it among everyone. The company I was working with, we had some Italians there.

AH: What company again?

WT: This was Knit Form Mills Incorporated and Savoy Knitting Mills. They underwent two different names.

You had Italians there. We had two Italians that couldn't stand, hated, the Jews that owned the business, couldn't stand them. And everybody knew it. But the thing that was so dumb and stupid, you don't like these people, you can't stand them. But you're crazy enough to be working for them getting their check every week living off of their money, but yet run around talking about what you don't like. I mean, to me they were a bunch of nuts. Okay.

We had Puerto Ricans and we had Spanish. If you want to get into a real serious problem because they look alike, they all talk that same Latin talk. So listening to them talk and all you don't know who is who. Right? Okay. But you want a real serious problem, you mistakenly call a Spanish a Puerto Rican. You better be ready to fight because Spanish were so superior over the Puerto Ricans.

Now this one you wouldn't believe. Have you ever been to New York?

AH: Never.

WT: You wouldn't believe this one. The Puerto Ricans that grew up in the cities of Puerto Rico--and they had some Puerto Ricans that grew up in the country of Puerto Rico. Well, the ones that grew up in the cities, even though they're Puerto Ricans, they are superior to the ones that grew up, that came from the country part of it.

So the whole thing—people—I mean the whole thing just doesn't make sense to me, none at all. But I never did get involved in those things. I mean I had a good relationship with all of them. I was their foreman.

Down here you're called supervisors and managers. In New York, you're considered as a foreman. Okay? So my job was to oversee the operation and make sure you did your work right. And if you were () it made no difference. You're here to do a job. And no arguing, no bickering or nothing because we had a very strong union there. And any type of confrontation, you were automatically fired. Two things were not tolerated on the job--and this is any job, I'm sure--fighting and stealing. So you may have your little disagreement. But you'd better keep it as a disagreement and get your work done. If you don't you're out of here. And they knew this. So if you want to work, you'll work. You've got no problem, you know. Because I'd pick up the phone and send you down to the union hall to talk to a union delegate, you know.

AH: Now, while you were in New York, outside of the work place, did you have occasion to interact with Puerto Ricans and Spanish and--?

WT: Oh yeah, sure, sure. Sure, many times after work hours the general manager, myself, which is Italian—we would—at that time I'd go to a bar every once in a while. So we'd go to the bar after work hours and talk about one thing and all. And he lived in the Long Island area. But, you know, we'd be together. He'd be in Bedford-Stuyvesant with me, you know.

And many times there were—you know how New York is with bars and all. We'd go to bars after work hours, the Puerto Ricans and whoever was there. As a matter of fact the whole-- This is the garment district in New York so you have a variety of different nationalities working there. And I knew quite a few people around there, you know. So I would talk to whoever, you know. The only thing that irked you once in a while, you know these guys, some of them work with or you work around and you know

they speak English. And then sometime they come on and we would-- You know, and they'd kind of say, "I feel like jamming some back ()." But that was okay, too, you know. But, yeah, I've been in that company quite a bit.

AH: So, the kids that you had with your second wife and your wife's kids, they remained--? Or did they settle in Durham or are they sort of spread out?

WT: It was in Durham.

AH: Okay.

WT: What happened after we decided to really marry and all that--first we were looking around for a place in New York. But I didn't find anything that I particularly liked for a family and all. So then I decided I would come back to Durham. And so they were all ready in Durham.

AH: Okay, by '71.

WT: Yeah.

AH: And when you came back to Durham, where did you settle?

WT: Hayti.

JH: Hayti?

WT: Umm-hmm, Hayti section.

JH: And you may have been away during this time, but were you involved in any respect in the civil rights movement?

WT: Yeah. You know what? Believe it or not we were involved with these things before there was a Martin Luther King confrontation. What's the guy's name? It'll have to come to me. James Farmer—

JH: Yes, CORE.

WT: CORE. You know him? You've heard of him?

JH: Uh-huh.

WT: Okay. James Farmer CORE—it seemed though his—

JH: CORE ().

WT: Yeah. It seems like history has forgotten all about him. Okay? You never hear anything about him. But before there was a Martin Luther King there was a CORE and there was a James Farmer.

And we first formed our organization in Brooklyn. You had a branch, a CORE branch in Bedford-Stuyvesant. So knowing the strength of that organization, once we really got organized and got things rolling that was one of the first things on the agenda to hook up with the Brooklyn branch of CORE. Because knowing that we were going to need some additional support, okay. And so what happened, we went out and--.

You know we had these stop signs, as I said before, and kids had the fire hydrant on in the summer and were out there with the water and all. And cars would just—wouldn't stop completely—maybe slow down and shoot right through the streets. We had two kids to be hit by cars this way playing with water.

Now we'd been in behind policemen and—who was the mayor then? Mayor Lindsay, he was the mayor. And we'd been in behind city officials about these things for more safety, you know, stoplights and all. So after the third—it happened to the third kid, that's when we said, "This is enough."

So what we did—we planned a drastic plan of action. And we planned this thing that we would go out this particular day at this particular time—the busy time that people are coming in from work. We were going to tie up every traffic area in Bedford-

Stuyvesant. And we hit all of those corners. I don't know where all the people came from. We had ladies out there with baby strollers and men. We just had the whole Bedford-Stuyvesant tied up. And at this particular hour, couldn't nothing move.

So here come the policemen threatening to put everybody in jail. They brought the big padded wagon and all. There was a minister--. George Lawrence had a church he pastored on Green Avenue. When Martin Luther King came to Brooklyn, came to New York, George—Lawrence—he was King's spokesperson. And this was in Bedford-Stuyvesant, too. George Lawrence, that was his name. He was with us.

We called CORE for support and they came and supported us. So when the deal went down after a couple of hours out there with the policemen with their threats and everything else. Finally, another fellow came from the city, and talked and agreed to set up a meeting with all the city officials to hear our concern and our grievance. So we set this up for the next week.

They came and we had a list. And the fellow from the Commission of Human Rights, he was a liaison. And he came with us and he gave us all kinds of support. But even Brooklyn CORE then—and I never hear talk of Martin Luther King at this time. But CORE was their James Farmer.

AH: And this is in the sixties?

WT: Yeah, in the sixties, yeah. And it's no put down for King because even—you know next year somebody else will pop up. But I often wondered what happened to James Farmer. That the work that he's involved in, the civil right movement and everything else—why, you know. You hear so much about some of these other guys, but you never hear anything about him. I remember him well, him and his organization.

AH: He was a very important ().

WT: I've got ten minutes. I've supposed to be at the city housing authority at four o'clock. I've got a meeting there at four o'clock.

AH: All right. Let's see. In your opinion—I mean sort of focusing on Durham—what makes a strong community?

WT: What makes a strong community? I think that somewhere along the line we've got too modern. And I know that we're in a different day and things change. But sometime I think we need to step back and evaluate where we are. Where we were and look at where we are today, look at what we used to do and what we do today and see what's really going on because some of these new things are not working. The only thing they're doing are creating more problems and causing more headaches, more aggravation for families, communities and everything else.

And I'm talking about the day when--. I remember well when parents had some control over their children without all this other legal interference in family lives. When people in communities was a community where everybody knew each other and could look out for each other. Somebody break into your house that next door neighbor, somebody's going to see something. These teenage pregnancies, these kids dropping out of school, not going to school. And it seems like it's just totally out of hand now.

I was in the street five or six times today and everywhere I look I see the street full of children. They should be in school. And there seems to be no law to say that you got to go to school. I know, I mean the law is there, but what good is it? It's not being enforced.

Parents used to be held accountable for their children. But now, for these kids, these tough ones that go to school and have their way, doing their thing with no respect for teachers, school, nobody else. And everyone blames the school system, but nobody looks at the parents. And parents should be held accountable for their children's ways and their deeds they're doing.

So what I'm saying, these new things that we're into today—the only thing they're doing is destroying communities, schools, neighborhoods and makes the country look very bad in general because it's more than a Durham thing. It's a nationwide thing. And to me it just doesn't make sense. A child ought to be a child. And if the parents--.

Now, I remember one time--. I think it was something they called like a reformatory school. But see all that stuff they outlawed. And what I'm saying—don't put all the kids there. I'm not saying that. But I'm saying that some of these kids, you've got to do more than put a little band-aid on their little scratch. You've got to scratch them good and let them know that you cannot go around living in this society doing anything you want to do. And if you don't check yourself, buddy, we're going to put you out in that field and let you pick some cotton, you know, get some tobacco, do something. Learn some discipline. You're going to have a time to get up, a time to go to bed. You're going to have a time to read, to study, you know. It's something that's got to be done to bring some--. And you need to start with the parents, really. Parents need to start doing their job and taking responsibility and stop leaving it to the state and the school to raise their kids.

There were twelve of us. I'm the second oldest. No one but our mother and father raised us. It was not left to the school to discipline us. And we knew there were

some things that were not allowed, you know. I couldn't be in the street until twelve, one o'clock at night when I was a kid.

What is a kid doing in the street at twelve, one o'clock at night? And society accepts this. That's crazy. It don't make sense. And the only thing they do is continue to cost the taxpayer more money and more money. And then they keep talking about the high taxes. But it's so dumb and stupid. That's the only way I know how to say things is just say them the way I say them. [Laughs.] And it's just dumb and stupid.

Anytime—. Society needs to think about what we're doing. Anytime you got school kids—kids in a school—and you've got to take taxpayer money to place a policeman and two policemen and somebody else in the school to try to keep children in order, in line, something is badly wrong with this country. [Laughs.] Something is wrong, you know.

AH: Let me try to ask you really quickly about your feelings about the Latino, the Latino influence () and what you've been trying to do to address that.

WT: Well, this community here--. This will be the third community fellowship that we've had. And we're having one this coming Saturday which will be April the 3rd right here at Juniper Street. Right down the hill we have a community garden site.

We're going to start at eleven o'clock. We're going to have an Easter egg hunt for the children in the community, a cook out for people in general in the community. All events will start at eleven o'clock to three. We have a permit all ready to block the street off down there so cars won't be coming through upsetting anybody. In this we have fliers out in the community in English and Hispanic. Spanish has fliers, too. So

we're looking for a good turnout of Hispanics. We're looking for--. I wouldn't be surprised if we end up with a couple hundred people next Saturday.

Okay. This is the third time we've done this. The general idea is that we all live in this community together. And they are not going anywhere because they continue to come. Okay? We're not going anywhere because we've been here too many years. [Laughs.] So, the catch-twenty is, since that's the way it is. We're in this community—gather some way that we must live together in peace and in harmony without anyone being afraid or fearful of anyone.

I know we've had some problems in here. But policemen have been doing a very good job. We are doing all we can to build a good relationship, to bridge that racial gap that we are no better than you. And you are no better than us. We're just people trying to live in a community together. And so as well continue to bring the two races together, I think there's going to be a real asset to being able to really build a trust, confidence and work together. And help build a good community.

We are in behind some of these landlords or homeowners or whoever it is that have these deteriorated houses that they rent to the Hispanics and charge them all that access monies because, I guess, so many of them live in a house and they work together. So I guess it's no problem for them to pool eight hundred dollars a month, six hundred dollars a month. But our concern is fair play even to the Hispanics. Whoever it affects. And it's what the housing that I serve with, servicing the community.

We try to send a clear signal that the people in this community are to living in safety without fear in good relationship one with the other. Your beer and wine stores—

we don't want any in this community. Anything that deteriorates and helps bring the community down. We invited people to—

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AH: Okay, William Thomas, when last we spoke last you talked about a community festival that was going to take place which would hopefully foster more African American, Latino contact. Was there anything more that you wanted to say about that?

WT: Well, it will take place this coming Saturday, which is April the 3rd from eleven to three. We're in touch with the community, Hispanic community. And, as it stands now, the response is very well.

They will be there, I'm sure; hopefully, Hispanics and others. Whosoever will in the community will mingle and have a conversation, communicate and get to know each other. And once you get to know each other through an open line of communication, there should bring people a little closer together, you know, for better understanding of each other.

I know the kids, there's not going to be any problem with them because children, they seem to have a way of playing and mixing up with each other. So I'm sure they're not going to have any problem at all. But we've done it before. This will be the third one we've had. Before they were very successful.

AH: What tangible results came from the other two festivals that you could see in regards to contact with the different cultures?

WT: Well, such thing as we've had two community clean ups within the last year in which we were in their area, too. And the response after we were in touch with them. And they came out and helped and helped load the trucks, and helped do whatever needed to be done, you know. And it was a matter of working together. We're looking forward to some coming and being a part of the community garden. We offered them a spot in the garden to plant whatever they want.

AH: Where is the community garden?

WT: Juniper Street between Hyde Park and Calvin. It's right down the hill from Greater St. Paul Baptist Church.

AH: Is that part of the Weed and Seed program or is this something else?

WT: No, no. No, this is strictly Albright Association community garden. But we, you know, let them know that they're welcome to be a part of it. As a matter of fact, we want them to be a part of it.

AH: Is there anything in the years of your interacting with the Latino population, is there anything that you particularly like or dislike about these new neighbors?

WT: Not—I don't have any dislikes. But I do have a few minor concerns with some. You know, like around the house, the way things are. And I think it's a lack of communicating with them.

My understanding--. I do not know. I've never been to Mexico or places like that. But my understanding, from what I'm told, is that depending on what area you come from, a lot of people have a different life style. When they come to just being very negligent around the house.

AH: Could you give an example.

WT: You know, a lot of debris. Just whatever you decide to put out around your house, you know. And it doesn't make it look nice at all. I'm talking about appearance wise. But, hopefully--. I'm talking with a couple of other people, Hispanics, that's going to work with us on this project that--. They're kind of getting the message that we want to try to keep our community clean and looking decent and we need their help to do this.

AH: Do you have an idea about how many Latinos live in this community?

WT: I think the Albright community--. I couldn't count them, but there's a few thousand of them, I'm sure, from the way it looks. And they still--. It seems they're growing and continuing to increase. But there's lots of them. There's lots in Durham, period. But I'm dealing with Albright right now. There's quite a few of them right now.

AH: And how would you characterize just the relationship of the Albright community to the Latino community as a whole and has this changed over time or--?

WT: It's changed to a certain degree. Some houses were in better shape. A lot of houses went to rental property and Hispanics, they moved into this rental property. And a result of it—I don't know who's to blame for it—but it seems though a lot of the owners or renters, they don't do too good of a job of making sure the property's kept up. So it makes a very bad appearance in a lot of areas appearance wise. But other than that, I find them to be people--.

I mean they're no problem because from all I see in observing them, they kind of stick together. They tend to their business. I don't know of them bothering anyone, you know. There were little problems here and there whereby their homes were being

invaded. And I think that's cleared up now. The policemen did an excellent job of tracking down some that was involved in this. And for the last two or three months I've not heard anymore about that.

AH: Do you know if these invasions were by people in the community or do you think they were outside of Albright?

WT: No, I don't know. It was not Albright. And I don't know how many houses were affected in the Albright community. I'm told of two. But I know of other areas where it did happen. And, no, it was not a resident of Albright.

My understanding is it was one of those things whereby a lot of people are aware of the fact that they keep money in the house, don't trust the banks. But they have their reasons. They don't trust policemen. I don't know how much they trust us. I can imagine a certain amount of distrust.

AH: That's still there?

WT: Well, I mean, you know, I really don't see it, but when you come in a strange country, and you're working and trying to do something to better your condition, and then the news gets out that somebody broke in your house, and someone kicked your door in and came in with guns, and took your money and things of this nature, then you do begin wondering, "who do I trust?" "How can I sleep in peace at night" because I don't know when somebody's going to kick my door in. Those kinds of things. But, like I said, I don't hear of these things now like I did at one time. So I think it's gone down quite a bit.

AH: Okay. My last question is—you mentioned this distrust that you felt () the Latino community. Do you sense that Latino and African American share a common ends, common goals and if so, what's a good way of trying to accomplish that?

WT: To trade in a relationship. And I don't have the answers. I don't know how you do this. What we are doing now—we're just experimenting with different things such as this coming weekend with the cookout. And I'm looking for lots of those to attend.

But as far as the common goals. I don't know. I really don't know that much about them. I've heard different things about them. But from what I've seen and observed, they kind of like to stay among themselves. I don't see where they really break their necks trying to intermingle with us. They're smart as far as I can see. They're hard working people. I don't know.

I think really if you really boil it down, I think most races kind of have a thing whereby they feel more comfortable among their own. And I'm going back to the days in New York when I worked with these different nationalities of people.

I mean, the Italians they would usually—lunchtime. We had an hour for lunch. A lot of them brought their lunch with them. Some would—restaurants all around the place—would order in advance. Some would run out and get sandwiches and things. But they would sit around in this huge monster factory. And Italians would usually be with Italians. The Puerto Ricans would usually hang with the Puerto Ricans. The blacks, they had things over there that they are talking about. You know, this kind of thing.

So I think it's a human thing that people just feel more comfortable talking and dealing with people that share something in common with. So I have no problem with

that, you know, because, me, I talk to all of them. [Laughs.] I mean I had to because I was the company foreman.

So, you know, I had no problem with anything. I'd go to one or another whatever it was, talk in general, talk about a job, talk about the work, whatever I needed to talk about. But I'm talking about in general as a whole as I observed these things through the years. People are not all that good about intermingling with other people. And I say that because it's not a black/white thing. I think it's a people thing.

AH: Okay. Would you say you're optimistic about fostering better relations between the two races?

WT: Well, yeah.

AH: Okay.

WT: I see it coming to pass whereby we will be able to live in the same community. We will be able to probably do some things together. But when it comes to, let's say, that buddy/buddy system, I don't see that. It's very possible it might happen. But in going back again, my experience of being around different nationalities of people. It's hard to find that buddy/buddy system. Once in a while you'll find it. But it's rare.

My self and a couple of Italians, we'd be out sometime at a bar or something like that. Sometime I'd be with the African fellows, the West Indies fellow, you know. But, in general, just to say we're buddy/buddy. We were not buddy/buddy. We were just work associates [laughs] and that kind of thing. And that's the way I see people.

I look at all this fighting going on now. I'm kind of puzzled trying to figure what are they really fighting about. Why is America over there dropping all these bombs and stuff, you know, in these other countries. But, what I'm saying, everyone has their

culture. Everyone has their thing. And some of the things that I see, that I read about, to me, just don't make sense, you know.

I mean, if they're fighting over a piece of land because this group says this is their land. Somebody else says, "Well, your land stops here. If you cross over here I'm going to blow you up." I mean, it is worth it? Give them the land, you know, big deal. There's plenty for everybody. [Laughs.]

So what I'm saying, to make it short, people in general just have major problems. And I don't think anyone really, racial wise, has that kind of real sure enough close relationship with another nationality of people. And this country, as I say, is a good example.

This country, America, there's many other countries that despise America. America is not loved by all the other countries throughout the world. A lot of these other countries what they do, they use America for their self-agenda. And decide they need some billions of dollars and they'll come over and end up conning money out of America. And we are the good Samaritan, we just give it to them. My tax money, nobody asks me nothing. They just take my tax money. I'm like, "That's okay." Who is this guy gave all this time--? I think he was the head of Russia. Now I can't think of his name.

AH: Nelson, you mean?

WT: Yeah. I mean look at the way America is () of that country and stuff. You think they're in love with us. So that's people, you know. Everybody has their set agenda. I don't have an agenda. Mine is open. I accept people as people.

AH: Okay. Well, on that note, I would like to thank you on behalf of the Southern Oral History Program for taking time out of your busy schedule to talk with me. Is there anything—any last thoughts that you wanted to add?

WT: No. I hope, as I said something to do some kind of good. I don't even know what all I said.

AH: Oh no, it was wonderful.

WT: But anyway, that's just the way I see people, as people. And I know everyone has their own thing. I know the white man has his thing. But, hey, I know a lot of black people that have their thing, too. [Laughs.] You know what I'm saying.

I mean, my storage place out in the back has been broken three times within the last two years. It was not a white man, a white boy that broke in. You see what I'm saying? So that's where I am. And I've seen the same thing among the white race.

You wouldn't believe this. This is going to blow your mind. I've known this to happen. Especially in my earlier days right here in Durham. You had the Caucasians, that was like a little wealthy. Had money, nice homes and you know, the name Steward out front. And in Brookstown, where I grew up, right around Brookstown was where Caucasians lived. And they were poor. The have-nots. I know for a fact, the wealthy ones that had—they considered them as white trash. You ever heard that word before?

AH: Yes.

WT: So what I'm saying is, it's people. So it's not one race. It depends on where you are, what you have, that type of thing, you know. People are a problem. If you pay them any mind, they'll drive you crazy. [Laughs.] Like I think you probably had a little experience of that not long ago.

AH: Oh (). Okay, well again, thank you very much.

END OF INTERVIEW