

**TRANSCRIPT—JAMES ATWATER**

Interviewee: JAMES ATWATER

Class discussion with James Atwater; 29 March 2001.

Length: 2 cassettes; approximately 125 minutes

[NOTE: TAPES ARE MISLABELED, I THINK. SHOULD BE TAPE 1 OF 2 AND TAPE 2 OF 2]

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

BOB GILGOR: This is March 29<sup>th</sup> in the year 2001 and this is a recording of James Atwater's lecture given to the Southern Oral History Program class of Jacquelyn Hall's.

JACQUELYN HALL: We've got a full three hours today, so let's go ahead and get started. We're very fortunate to have with us today Mr. James Atwater, who's interview with Jennifer, you've all read. I'm going to let Jennifer introduce him and lead off the questions, if you permit it. I also want to say that we have back with us Ed Caldwell and Bob Gilgor, so I hope that the two of you will jump in and add questions. If any of you want to pick the brains of these two gentlemen, you can direct questions to them too.

And also we have Sarah Thuesen with us, who is a graduate student in the history department who is writing a very important dissertation on segregation in public schools in North Carolina. One reason that I wanted Sarah to come, partly I thought that Sarah would be very interested in meeting Mr. Atwater and hearing what we have to say, because she's looking at an overview of the era of segregation from about 1920 to 1960. We've been talking about how she can layer into that some rich case studies of particular schools and particular communities. Chapel Hill could be one of the places that she could draw upon.

But also, I wanted to—in the last part of the class we're going to be trying to brainstorm and to put together a kind of narrative of the story as we've been able to understand it so far—and I wanted Sarah to be involved with that and help us do that. Because one of the things I've noticed—it's probably just the language we use—I think that language betrays a misunderstanding of historical processes that we've been looking at. People tend to talk about "forced" busing and "forced" desegregation, and don't really realize

the degree to which segregation was the "forced" system. A desegregated society would be a "normal" society in which people were moving around, (considered ? ) equally as citizens. One of the themes of Sarah's work is about the way in which the State of North Carolina established and maintained through constant effort and struggle strict segregation in public schools. This didn't just happen one time and then it was just like that forever. It had to be maintained. She's also looking at how, within that maintenance of segregation, African-American teachers and students and parents both created strong schools and interacted with the state bureaucracy and with the foundations, the northern philanthropies that funded African-American schools, to try to make as much as they could out of what the white power structure was willing to provide. Is that fair? I hate to summarize other people's work.

With that, let me turn things over to Jennifer to introduce Mr. Atwater.

JENNIFER NARDONE: Ok. This is Mr. James Atwater. I will give you a brief biography, and please correct me if I get anything wrong. And, like Mr. Caldwell, Mr. Atwater's family has been in Chapel Hill for many generations. And, in fact, Mr. Atwater grew up, I believe, just houses away from Mr. Caldwell. So they came up through the same town and community. He graduated from Chapel Hill High in 1949 as student body president.

JAMES ATWATER: Lincoln--.

JN: Oh my god, I'm so sorry. He graduated from Lincoln High in 1949. He was student body president. He was in the choir, in the band, played football, played basketball, was editor of the newspaper. Am I missing anything? He was just an all-around Renaissance man. When he graduated, he went to North Carolina Central in Durham, where he started as a business major but was quite enticed by English. So he defected to English. After Central, he went in the Army for a few years, in the early '60s. After that he came back to the United States. Where were you stationed?

JA: Okinawa. Texas and Okinawa.

JN: So he came back to the United States, went to graduate school in English at U. Penn in Philadelphia. And then joined the Foreign Service and traveled all over the world. I thought it was so interesting: the first time I called Mr. Atwater I got his answering machine, on which he says "Please leave a message" in English and repeats the whole thing in French. And I thought, "Well that's odd." As it turns out, Mr. Atwater's wife is actually from the French West Indies and he has a bilingual household. You

retired in 1988 from the Foreign Service and started sort of a second career as an English teacher at Bowie State University in Maryland near Washington, DC. Oh, I missed a little bit: you taught, before the Foreign Service, at Howard for two years. And retired for a second time in 1998 from Bowie State. I was particularly pleased that he agreed to come to class because I thought that he had a—like Mr. Caldwell did—he had a great way of conveying what it was like to be a student at Lincoln. He has a keen memory for some of the details that help us put that story together. People forty years later aren't necessarily that familiar with it. And also about Chapel Hill in general, because his family is very entrenched—his father worked at the university, right? Worked at the women's dorm, Alderman, Kenan?

JA: ( ).

JN: Back when they had coal furnaces, he stoked the furnaces and heavy cleaning. I thought you would be a wonderful person to come to class and talk to all of us about that. In fact, I thought to start off you might tell the class—and don't worry about repeating things that we talked about, because I can always use a second round—you might talk a little bit about your parents and your dad in particular and what he did at the university.

JA: Thanks Ms. Nardone. Thank you, Professor Hall, for inviting me. This is the kind of opportunity that I must admit I did not expect. I didn't anticipate being on this campus in this capacity.

The first time that I was on this campus, of course, was when my father was working here. As a matter of fact, my mother also worked at the hospital for a number of years. She retired from the hospital, working in the hospital in one of the labs. My grandmother worked for the University of North Carolina laundry for a number of years and she eventually retired from that. Even though early in her life she had been a teacher, it turned out, economically, that was a better situation for her. For me to come before you, a distinguished group of graduate and undergraduate students on this campus to say a few words here is an honor, and I am as humble as it is possible to be to have been invited to speak here.

I think that what you are doing in this class, what Dr. Gilgor is doing in his project, is something that I believe will be beneficial not just to you as students or in this classroom or to the university, but something that has a much greater import from the standpoint of creating greater understanding of the things that divided us once upon a time, and of course the things that linked us at the same time. Because when we look at Chapel Hill as, we can say, a small example of what was going on in the South, it was not

so much a matter of the impact of segregation and discrimination as it was a way that people on both sides made accommodations to that situation so that they were still able to grow. I hate to use too many personal examples, even though you're already quite familiar with some of my personal life, but for my friend and neighbor Mr. Caldwell and myself, my brother and my sisters, others of those in my family or my generation, to have been able to attain what I would refer to as a modest degree of success in life despite having come through that crucible, segregation, means that, obviously, we had some help in doing that when we think of the possibility that those who were in the power structure had a number of means to deny us even what we were able to achieve under that situation. I think that many of them did it out of a sense of—perhaps we can use the word compassionate concern. That's already been co-opted by some people.

But especially when we think of the situation as it existed in this small university town. Because, what did the relationship at that point represent? I'm sure you've heard the expression "town and gown." Well, "town and gown" meaning coexistence between a university and usually a very small town. At that point, when I was growing up, when we were growing up, our parents had very little choice economically except something related to the university. If they were not working directly for the university, they were working for someone usually who was in effect obtaining their economic wherewithal from the university. So the university dominated. The university had a laundry, the university once upon a time had the telephone system, the university had the electrical system, the utilities. Everything was the university. So the university was something with which we had to contend in our daily lives. But by the same token the university was providing some kind of sustenance to us. So we look at segregation, discrimination in Chapel Hill and it is not exclusively a matter of—excuse the expression—white and black. It's a matter of a university which dominates a city and the population in a city, some of whom happen to be white, some of whom happen to be black.

So I want to at least try to get to some of those points when you ask your questions. I'm not going to try to take up all the time talking. But I have—with apologies to Professor Hall, you said don't prepare, just come prepared to answer questions—but I have at least five reasons why I couldn't do that. I'll give you only five, not the David Letterman ten. So here are my five.

First of all, as a resident of Washington, D.C., I can't escape what happens in Congress, as much as I try. So when you see a congressional hearing on TV, you know what happens: the person who's on the

hot seat comes in with a prepared statement. They have aides all around them and they say, "Mr. Chairman, I'd like to read from my notes." And what they're doing is, they are deflecting some of the questions they know are likely to come. So that still is going to give that senator or that representative a chance to get in his five or ten minutes so he gets his sound bite on the evening news.

Number two, I did spend several years as a teacher, as Ms. Nardone mentioned. I had to have lesson plans if only because once in a while somebody decided they needed to evaluate Atwater so they'd come in the door while the class was going, sit in the back of the room and watch what was going on.

In my federal government career, I had to prepare briefings for the people who were higher up on the ladder than I was because they wanted to know, first of all, if they were going to congressional hearings they wanted to have something prepared for that. So I got into the habit of preparing briefings. Everybody wants to get into the act in the government. They want to have at least some say, if it has anything to do with their responsibilities then they say, "Well I need to see it at least so I know what's going on."

I spent some time in the military: I also attended the Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. The Army does everything by the numbers—anybody who's been in the service here knows that—one, two, three steps to get to wherever you want to go.

And then I left—I'm confiscating some of your time for questions. Ok, I'll open it now for questions and we'll see where it goes.

JH: Do you have any further briefings ( )?

JA: Well, maybe stop me if you've heard this. I think it will fit this audience at this level, gender and so on. Because I heard it from a minister in my church—not my church in Chapel Hill but an African Methodist Episcopal Church somewhere else—when she was delivering the sermon she said, "A car is going along the highway very very slowly, very very slowly. Cars are piling up behind it, people are trying to pass it. Eventually a trooper comes along, pulls alongside the car, says "Pull over buddy." And the driver is a lady of a certain age. And he says, "Why are you driving so slow?" And she says, "Well I'm going by the speed limit. The speed limit is twenty-two." And he says, "No, lady. That's not the speed limit. This is Route 22." And then he looks around. In the car there are three passengers in the car. And they're all sitting there petrified. Nobody's moving. They don't say anything. And he says, "What's wrong with your passengers?" And she says, "Well, officer, we just left Route 123."

I came down last night from Washington. I came down on 95 and 85, but I assure you I watched for the speed limit. So that's my story. And I think that it can fit any audience because of where I heard it. Well, today I'd have to go a little bit faster than that because I do need to leave at about 4:30. I'll try to cover some of the things that I had, that I did put together. I'm trying to anticipate your questions, I admit that. I talked with Ed beforehand. I thought about the class. I looked at the title, I think it's Southern Oral History? And you're concentrating on Southern, Chapel Hill.

It would seem to me that one question you would have is, "Are you bitter about segregation?" Or, some people might put it, "How bitter are you about segregation?" Because we build in assumptions to questions. And to say, "Are you bitter?" is only a yes or a no. But "How bitter are you?" then we're assuming the person obviously has to be bitter about segregation. We have to be bitter about it. And that raises another issue, which is an issue of, what happened in the aftermath, when there was desegregation, integration. We can perhaps look at it from the philosophical standpoint and try to answer the question, what happens to those who have been excluded from a group or from an opportunity, what happens when they get it? What do they do when they are finally accepted, when they are finally brought into that group? How do they react? Do they come in and simply accept the values, the ideas of the group from which they were previously excluded, or do they come in and try to change that group so there are no other exclusions? Do they try to change the perceptions of that group based on the reasons why they were excluded in the first place?

Well, from my standpoint, reverting to the personal, no I was not bitter about it. Simply that is not my nature. Some people may have been; some people still may be. To put it in the context of Chapel Hill, to put it in the context of the university, a number of things happened during segregation which led to some feeling of—again, excuse the expression—loyalty to the university. The university was an employer. The university could have taken some other tack and not have employed African-American or blacks, but they didn't. Therefore, even at that point, there were some relationships that were built on what may have been concern by individuals for those who were being excluded. What do I mean by that? Sometimes there were situations—some of which were personally familiar; some of which I know about through hearsay and may be distorted—where individuals in the university community took it upon themselves to provide some kind of assistance to, let's say, their African-American employees. One story that I heard—I can't verify this but

I believe essentially it's true—that one employer provided advice on financial matters that permitted the employee to establish some level—not necessarily independence but at least not as much dependence on direct employment as was necessary for many other people. People took an interest in us as individuals.

And you may have heard this expression—juxtaposing two major regions in the United States—the North loves the race but hates the individual; the South loves the individual but--. No. Right. Hate comes from the other side. The North was constantly concerned about the way that the South was treating the Negro race. But when the North had to deal with one individual, then of course, there was something wrong with that. The South attempted to give the impression that they didn't want anything to do with the race. Therefore segregation. But, when it came to an individual—well, this is someone who works for me, this is someone who takes care of my children, this individual is someone that I like. And that was manifested, as I say, in ways which permitted—again, this was a form of discrimination—but it permitted some African-American individuals to achieve a greater degree of progress than some others. Because a white family was providing for them.

And of course that takes us back again, when we go into the historical environment, to what happened under slavery. Because, as you are probably already aware, relationships were established between the slave master, male, and the slave woman, which produced children. And what happened to those children? Those children were often given responsibilities which placed them at least within the house, the big house, as opposed to being in the field. They were not brought into the family, not made into a member of the family.

And of course the evidence for that—again excuse the personal reference—but it's in this room, between Caldwell and myself, my brothers and sisters, my father, my mother. We see that the physical characteristics—what are the anthropologists are saying nowadays? 99% we're the same?—but there's that little difference, that small percentage, which creates that physical difference that we see outside. What I'm getting to—I think you understand, but I want to give you the opportunity for questions—is that we today are living in a situation that is an outgrowth of a previous situation. There have been changes—and one change is that you're here listening at least for a few minutes to what we have to say—but much of it was based on the decisions that were made by individuals to change a situation that existed. And I feel to

change it for the better. We need to look at the history, just as I'm sure our historians with us today will assure us—because unless we know our past we don't have a roadmap for the future.

And to take this one more general step along, what do we see around the world? I spent a good deal of my time, as Ms. Nardone mentioned, outside the United States, most of it in Africa. If you think of Africa, if you look at the newspapers, I know what you see in the newspapers, I know what you hear most often. But what do you see when you think of Ireland? What do you see when you think of Kosovo? What do you see when you think of the Middle East? What do you think of when you think about the former Soviet Union, Russia? Conflict. Conflict between people who are very similar, but they have one or two ideas that clash. And because those ideas—they may be religious, political, economic, sectarian, whatever—they're at each other's throats. And we hope, by studying what happened in Chapel Hill, to take something out of that that will be helpful somewhere else around the world.

Questions? Please, may I ask you, when you ask your first question, to identify yourself so I have an idea, name, status—graduate, undergraduate—perhaps a bit of your background, just to put it in context.

KATIE OTIS: My name is Katie Otis. I'm a graduate student in the history department. We're very pleased to have you here. My question would be, many of the interviewees we've been talking to, at least thus far, are all residing in Chapel Hill. I'm wondering—you just spoke about spending so much time overseas and how you're a ( ). How has distance—only four and a half hours as well as time—how do you think that has changed your perception of the town? I'm wondering if you could compare that to some of your classmates or friends from Chapel Hill who have mostly resided in this area.

JA: I think that the perceptions from here as well as from elsewhere, when I go overseas—again from my personal standpoint—my perceptions have changed from comparing what I see when I come to Chapel Hill with what I've seen overseas and what I see in Washington, D.C., and so on. But as far as what I see that changes in Chapel Hill, the changes I see, the longest period I spent away from Chapel Hill was probably not more than three years or so. Because I came back periodically to the States and practically every time I came back to the States I came here because my mother and father were still living. I still have sisters who are living here now. And I feel those ties to the town. So I came back fairly often. But I have seen change.

The major change was after desegregation. We would have to say the '60s, even though the *Brown* decision was '54, we'd have to say the '60s. On the surface, the change was one of attitude, and the people with whom I dealt on what I like to refer to as an anonymous basis. And this is small potatoes perhaps for you, but I would drive into a gas station, and the attendant—this is when they still had full service—the attendant would come out and say, "Can I help you sir?" I'd walk into a store down on Main Street and the clerk would say, "Can I help you sir?" What were they saying before I left? "What do you want, boy?" "What do you want, boy?" I didn't have quite as many gray hairs as I have now, but I was a "boy" even though physically I was a man. So that is small to you, I'm sure, because you obviously grew up in an entirely different situation. So that was one change on the surface.

Obviously the other change—and this again we can say is on the surface—is the size of the city. I refer to it as a town, because I grew up in a town, the town of Chapel Hill. Now, of course, they made it a metropolis or whatever. And there have been changes and I don't know whether those changes have necessarily occurred because of the change in the mentality of Chapel Hillians. Which it may be, but I don't know whether that is because they simply desire to change or the newcomers brought new ideas to which they have decided they will subscribe.

But again, I don't want to make this a political discussion. But my memory goes back to Frank Porter Graham, as president of the University of North Carolina, as a senator in Washington, D.C. But who defeated Frank Porter Graham? Why did he have to leave the Senate? He was defeated by a man named Willis G. Smith. I still consider myself a North Carolinian, so I am not going to make any reference whatsoever to any other North Carolina Senator! [Laughs] ( ) change, or it's not the same old thing.

You had an election here, those of you who were here a few years ago, you had an election campaign. During the political campaign, pollsters can be wrong—as we have recently witnessed. They had their polls, asked people how they were going to vote. They stand at the polls, at the election, ask people when they come out, "How did you vote?" People say "I voted for so-and-so." But the reality is when the votes are counted. So we had a campaign a few years ago. It was North Carolina—people like to say it wasn't Chapel Hill, it was the State of North Carolina.

So there are changes and I recognize that there are some changes that are profound. And those profound changes did not come overnight, I don't believe. Because the atmosphere in Chapel Hill as far as

I can see it had been different for a long time. I think many other people across the State recognize that. Chapel Hill earned a certain reputation. Universities often do that for whatever reason. Does that help more?

KO: Yes. I was wondering, were you unusual as a member of your class, spending so much time away?

JA: Right. That was the second part of your question. Yes. For those remaining here, I have to admit I've not had enough time to spend with them as I would have liked. Usually my trips to Chapel Hill have been rather brief. This one I came down yesterday, I'm leaving tomorrow. This time, other responsibilities, family responsibilities to sort out. The other times when I've come, I've not been able to spend much time with them. I think that Ed can help me on this. I think that those who have remained have seen change. I think that they would say that there have been changes in Chapel Hill. There certainly has been great participation in the political process, school board. What else? You talked about what your personal-- And I think that being directly involved, having influence within the political process was one of the major changes.

And also administrative positions. It's one thing having elected officials, but in order to get things done, it has to be at the level of the people who actually administer programs. So I think there have been changes there, and I think those changes have been positive.

ED CALDWELL: One thing about Mr. Atwater, he's very humble. One of the things is, he has roots here. Once you leave Chapel Hill, you get called "Chapel Hill" as a nickname. A person said, "leave Chapel Hill?" Always find something to draw him back. His family drew him back. He still has family here. But also he still has ties to North Carolina College. He goes into the library here, he does research, whatever. Personally I think he just loves being here in Chapel Hill even though he lives in Washington. I think his son—I talked with him; I'm very close to the children—they didn't grow up here. They grew up all over the world, really. But you know, deep down—I talked to the young gentleman, I talked to Greg—there's something about Chapel Hill that they want to come back to. And I'm sure they didn't know your parents that much but they had to get something from you and the rest of your family. So I think he's very humble, but something drives him back here, drives his brother back here, his brother's son here, and his brother's daughters think about coming back to Chapel Hill.

I don't know if it's in the water. But there's something about Chapel Hill that everybody can name Chapel Hill. And when we go to other places, we talk about Chapel Hill. We're very proud to have come from Chapel Hill. And I say to Bob, people that come from Chapel Hill, there's something different about them when they go out into the world. I don't know if it's the influence of the university, or what it is.

JA: The two favorite teams of our younger son are the Washington Redskins and the Tar Heels. After every basketball games—not football games so often, but basketball games—I know as soon as the game is over I'm going to get a call about what happened in the game. On my way down here last night I caught just a snippet of a radio show where Coach Doherty was answering questions—I heard only the question, I didn't hear the answer because the radio signal faded out or something, anyway—when my son called me after the last game, Penn State, we were on the phone for an hour. I was listening while he asking me, "Why, why, why? [laughs] Why did Matt Dougherty do--?"

But there is something obviously that draws me back. I use the excuse of my sisters, my three sisters—two of them live here, one lives in Durham. And of course at North Carolina Central I try to stay fairly close to them.

But from our family lore, this story, my dad had to tell me about it. But he said we were sitting at one of the football games down at the end of the visitors' section. This is before they had the bleachers up, I must have been two or three or something. He said everything was quiet in the stadium, and I said, "Let's go Carolina!" I don't know where that came from, but he said I said it so I'll take his word for it.

And this is before—maybe none of you know about Section K. Section K was a section of the bleachers, one of the first bleachers built. And it was built just in front—what is it the Old Field House now?—the Field House that used to be, what, the south end, the south or east end of the Stadium? And it was for us. It was for the African-American employees of the university and any other African American who wanted to come to a football game. So that was our section for a Carolina football game. We liked to see the football team.

I am absolutely sure that no one in here knows about George Stimweiss, Jim Lalanne. Maybe you've heard of Charlie Justice, Jim Tatum, Carl Snavely. Jim Tatum and Carl Snavely were coaches. And that was my era. I was here for the football games. We were on campus for all kinds of things—some authorized, some not authorized [laughs].

But the university, we felt we were part of the university. Nobody told us that we were. I worked as a dishwasher at Spencer Hall, my brother and I. I was a vendor in the stadium. I sold soft drinks. At that time we still had glass bottles. And they had to be picked up after the game. We would get in the game, and after the game we had big wooden crates, twenty-four bottles to a crate. We took those crates and we went through the stadium picking up bottles. And then we carried them up to the central receiving point where they gave us two cents a crate. Two cents a crate of twenty-four bottles! That was money for us. We were kids. After every home game, that's what we'd do.

We were on the playing fields from time to time. A couple of guys from our neighborhood played tennis. Very few people that I knew played tennis. But they would play tennis here on the court at the university. They weren't students. But no one chased them off. When no one else was using the courts they would let them play tennis. Some of them were caddies at the golf course. My father—Ms. Nardone asked me to mention my father—my father's first job was at—[tape stops.]

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

JA: --several of the university professors. During the summer, he might cut grass, or usually my brother and I would cut the grass. He was also the headwaiter at the Chapel Hill Country Club. The Chapel Hill Country Club was primarily—this was the old Country Club; I don't know whether it probably doesn't exist anymore--.

EC: It's still there but it's not the Country Club.

JA: Ok. But this was just off Raleigh Road, 54, and it was a golf course Country Club. Weekends, they would have dinner-dances. He was the head waiter for that. He'd hire the other waiters and cooks and so on, manage the Club, we would go out on Sunday morning and help him do that. He also gave away free water at football games. He'd go there with a bucket, ice water, cups. And when people said "How much?" He'd say, "No charge. The water's free. Let your conscience be your guide." People would usually give him a tip. Many of them were more concerned about getting ice and cups than they were about water.

Because they had their own liquids to put in there [laughs]. Those were some of the things that he did, all of which were connected either directly or indirectly with the university. And we helped him with some of those things, so we were in the university community for some of that.

Excuse me, I do have to watch the clock. But I do want to mention a couple of other people unless there's another question.

( ): I have a question about your school experience, at some point I want to ask.

JA: Lincoln you mean?

( ): Yes.

JA: At Lincoln, the atmosphere was one of extended family in the sense that the teachers lived in the community. I know that we've mentioned this with Bob Gilgor and Ms. Nardone. I'm sure that Ed also mentioned that.

As you know I was living on Church Street. Half a block from me, two or three of the teachers lived with a family which had a fairly large house. And other teachers lived throughout the community. The teachers were members of our churches. They came to our churches. The relationship with our parents was one which, shall we say, greatly enhanced the flow of information. So if anything was going on in school that the teachers thought our parents needed to know about, or if anything was going on at home that our parents thought the teachers needed to know about, that information went back and forth pretty quickly.

This extended beyond the school into the community. This is a point that has been brought up previously and I don't know if I want to dwell on it. But the other point about the experience in school was, first of all, the teachers did take a very genuine interest in us as individuals. The teachers tried to help us to develop whatever talents that we had. And the teachers also tried to steer us away from those that the teachers felt were not necessarily the ones we wanted to cultivate for the rest of our lives. So it's a matter of watching for reinforcing the positives and trying to deemphasize the negatives.

And the teachers also took it upon themselves to steer us toward college, toward further studies. They did not put it in the context of either you go to college or you're going to be nothing—it wasn't that. But it was, if you feel that you had the potential, and were willing to go, then they wanted us to go. Many of them went so far as to take us on tours to colleges. I went to several with one of our football coaches. He took a group of us. We left Chapel Hill one night in his car. We went to Hampton. We went to Virginia

Union in Richmond on a weekend trip. So that we could see what a campus looked like. Of course North Carolina Central was right across in Durham. We played games at Hillside in Durham. Once or twice we played games on the campus of North Carolina Central.

So our teachers made it a point to, first of all, emphasize the possibility of continuing our education, and, of course, of introducing us to possibilities for actually doing it by letting us know about college opportunities. A & T in Greensboro was similar.

I mentioned—again to Ms. Nardone—how small our school was, how small the student body was, so that we had, one might say, multiple opportunities to interact with teachers not only in the classroom but in the extracurricular activities: drama club, the newspaper, all the others. Teachers were advisers to those groups. And the school was so small, we had to belong to several groups in order for each group to have enough people to carry out its activities. So we were in the band, or we were in the choir, or we were in the drama club, or we were in the newspaper. We ~~xxxxx~~dominated. We came out of school with those positive attitudes.

I don't want to give you the impression that life—even in our enclave African-American group—was idyllic. Of course it wasn't. There were problems. They were not problems which defined our community. They were problems which you'd recognize—alcoholism, et cetera. Criminal activities, maybe some violence. Never anything at an extremely high level. But the adults made a sincere effort to try to shelter or shield the children from that kind of thing until they felt that the children were mature enough to be able to perceive what those differences were and what effect they could have on our society. I don't think that was defining.

One other thing that I wanted to mention was what I feel was the defining moment from the historical perspective and the changes that occurred in Chapel Hill and actually the changes that occurred throughout the nation. I may be going off on the deep end by bringing this up, but World War II provided the major entry point into the money economy for women as well as for African Americans. And this was throughout the United States. Because what happened? When most of the—excuse the expression—able-bodied men were put into uniform, somebody had to carry on back here. And women and African Americans had the opportunity then to move into salaried positions. And I think that especially for African

Americans, that took many of us out of the fields, off the farms, to work in factories. There was a munitions factory in Carrboro, a large munitions factory in Carrboro.

Again, on the personal side, I became a newspaper delivery boy. My brother and I, we were delivering the Greensboro *Record*. And the reason we were given that opportunity to move into what had been a white male dominated profession—if you could call it that, even though there were some girls. I think one of them, I'm not going to try to recall her name. But I know that one of the boys who was doing it was from the Athas family. Chapel Hillians probably recognize the Athas family. One of the daughters in the Athas family became a fairly well known writer.

( ): Daphne.

JA: Right. Her younger brother was also delivering. But anyway, we were recruited to deliver that newspaper because the Greensboro *Record* couldn't find white boys to do it. White boys would do the Durham *Morning Herald*, the Raleigh paper, so the guy from Greensboro came to us and wanted to know if we could deliver the paper. We began delivering newspapers. My brother and I did that for several years. We also worked in one of the grocery stores downtown. It was still A & P. A couple of fellows from our school, older, worked as—excuse the expression—they worked as soda jerks. You've ever heard that? They worked on the counter serving sodas and sandwiches in one of the white drugstores downtown. Two of them. The rest of us African Americans could not go into that drugstore and order a soda or sandwich and go in there and eat it. But they hired those two young fellows. They were still in high school. And this was because of World War II.

JH: What about African American soldiers coming back from war? Did you have people who came home and were more unwilling to accommodate to things as they were than they had to before they went away?

JA: Absolutely. Definitely. There was one major incident, I think in South Carolina, where an African-American soldier had come back I think from Europe. And I think he wanted to get on a bus. I don't want to get into too many details, but I think at least he was blinded. I think they put out both his eyes. I'm not sure whether it was worse than that. But I know this was in South Carolina.

JH: You didn't notice that particularly in Chapel Hill?

JA: No. I was not aware of it in Chapel Hill.

EC: One other thing is that, once we became educated, we went off to school and received an education, there was nothing here to do. I worked at the hospital. It opened up but they weren't hiring African Americans with degrees. We were either going to work at the Carolina Inn as a waiter or we were going to utilize our education. So you'll look and see a number of African Americans that had to leave and go somewhere else to work. So I found it had to happen. Just a migration north.

( ): That actually leads to a question that I was wondering for either of you, or both. It's kind of a vague question but it's getting at the issue. You were talking about segregation, you spoke of sort of an integrated existence between, a complicated relationship between the university and the African-American community and loyalty. Bonds being created. I was wondering if you felt that changed with desegregation. I'm sort of feeling like you're saying that there was an opportunity for African Americans to get educated in Chapel Hill. So that responsibility only went to a certain--.

EC: Let me just—I finished Hampton in Chemistry. And there was nobody going to hire someone to work in the laboratory here. His mother started working for the hospital, but that was in the '60s. So I went north. I went to New York. I worked for Columbia University. I became supervisor of the biochemical lab. I did that because I worked harder than anybody else and I learned things that I didn't let them know what I was learning. So I became very—they depended on me. They began to see where I could save them money. So I worked there for about five years.

I came home every summer. If you're black and you stay in the city and you spend your vacations at home. That's what your parents expected. And while I was here, my father was working on me, because I had graduated. "When are you coming home?"

So a job opened up in UNC Hospital for someone to take over the chemical lab. I had very good credentials. The problems that they had, I knew quality control because I had worked with it at Columbia. The fellow offered me the job. If you're African American, you just don't apply for one job. I applied for two. Research Triangle Park had opened up. So I had a job there and I had a job at the university. I preferred to work at the university because I really felt like I was going to be the first black to attend the university. I don't know why I felt that way. I think it was my relationship with the DKE house. But I thought that I would be the first to attend. I always wanted to work for the university. So I accepted the job at the hospital. And when I came, and they found out who I was, that I was black, even though my

credentials were good, the fellow came and said, "I really apologize to you but your application has been held up. I will never be able to get it—the logjam ( )." First thing, I was black. The salary was too high [laughs]. So I went to work for Chemstrand in Research Triangle Park.

After that, there were blacks that began to work in the labs. Once they got in there and they saw the quality of the work they were doing, they became head of the department. There was ( ) Renwick that took over one of the labs. His mother was very dependent upon. They began to see that we did have talents and we were good. Things began to open up at the university.

We have an expression that, when blacks finish school, they catch the Chicken Bone Special going north for economic opportunities. Well, things in New York and other places deteriorated. So people started catching the Chicken Bone Special coming back home. You got a lot of people that went north and decided to come back home. Jobs opened up. The school system ( ). Other things. We found a lot of persons coming back. I don't know if I answered your question.

JH: Do we have time to ask more questions? It's four thirty.

JA: Yes. I'm afraid I do have to leave. Just one more question.

JH: Do any of the students have one more question?

EC: Let me mention one other thing. Jim would never give you everything about him. There was a teacher called Mrs. Turner--.

JN: English and French?

EC: Right. And she was his mentor. And there was a special kind of relationship. There were other people in town. Like a person by the name of Mr. ( ) Caldwell. He was the first Eagle Scout.

JA: Almost, almost. Life.

EC: Life Scout.

JA: Right.

EC: ( ) He went to the Jamboree, which was unheard of. There were certain accomplishments. When I was in the service he was studying in Paris on some kind of fellowship, right?

BG: Weren't you also president of the student body at North Carolina Central? [Laughs]

EC: And I think you finished, what, cum laude?

( ): We don't even know you any more!

EC: So, coming out of Lincoln, we were very proud of the accomplishments that he had made. We were very proud of the accomplishments that other blacks had made. His brother was manager of Baker's shoes. So we kept up with the accomplishments of persons that went north and worked their way up. I needed to throw that in there. He wasn't going to tell you that.

BG: Can I squeeze in a question? You described a certain set of characteristics to Orange Country Training School/Lincoln High School and I wonder where they came from. Did they come from the community? Did they come from the church? Did they come from the school administration? What defined the character? What gave that character to the school?

JA: I think it was a combination. I think the combination was—a part of that combination was the parents, the churches, the school administration. I think I'd give a great deal of credit to the school administration and to the teachers. The principal who was there when I left, Mr. McDougle—and I know you've heard many things about him—I think that he was certainly the driving force behind that because of the attitude that he took toward the students. Taking that attitude toward the students meant that obviously he encouraged the teachers to convey that message to the students.

And I think the churches, because the churches certainly in our African-American community and in many of the other African-American communities provide a kind of support that we simply could not find anywhere else. From the standpoint of the church programs; the availability of the church facilities for things that the schools might want to do which they can't do at the schools; the provision of Sunday school, Bible school, Bible study held during the summers, which provided an outlet for the students.

And I think the parents certainly provided a great deal of support. Much of it positive, some of it perhaps passive from the standpoint that they were not constantly at the school but the school knew that it could count on the parents for support in whatever capacity they might need the parents to provide. Especially in monitoring the behavior of their children and monitoring the children as far as their preparation was concerned.

So I think it was a combination of all those things. And I think that the reinforcement for that came from the idea that education provided the greatest potential for the students to realize their potential eventually. That is, the opportunities that were open to us would be open only if we obtained an education,

if we stayed in school in the first place, in elementary school and high school, and we continued as far as we could after that. Those were the things that were really motivating factors.

One last thing, if I may, from my personal experience. Once upon a time, I was a member of a group of American students in Paris. I was invited to join that group because I attended the American church in Paris. The American church in Paris was nondenominational. I'm not sure it still exists in that form, but this was a number of years ago. Anyway, most of the students in that group came from what at that time were members of an elite: Harvard, Yale, Princeton, maybe there was somebody from UNC, I'm not sure. But for a student to be spending junior year abroad in Paris, at that time, economically, was an expensive proposition. And we were in Paris, about twenty or so.

And the church had a regular program: Once a month, they would serve dinner for us—I can't remember if we had to pay for it out of our pocket—but they would serve dinner and they would have a speaker after dinner. And the speaker would be told that he or she could present, lecture to the group and then the group could ask questions. One of the speakers, and this was the first time that I met this speaker, was Richard Wright: writer, native son of Mississippi, in exile more or less in Paris, he admitted in later years he was a communist. During his talk, Richard Wright said, one of the most pressing requirements for Western Civilization at that time was to ensure that the world would never again see another Holocaust. Another Holocaust. He did not say slavery. He did not say that the Western world never again goes to Africa or any other part of the world and colonizes and makes slaves out of those people.

Now, why didn't he say that? I don't know, I didn't ask him. I think that what he had in mind was that there's no turning back to slavery. The world cannot return to the kind of slavery that brought our ancestors here. I think that that's what Richard Wright had in mind. But he was still thinking that in Germany—which now is a member of the European Union, one of the leading participants with France, Italy, et cetera—would never again be permitted to create a fascist regime, the kind of action that Germany had taken twice during the twentieth century, the First World War and the Second World War.

So I say to express my hope, my belief, that here in the United States we will not go back. As much as some people-- I don't think we'll go back to segregation in the form that it was practiced when we were growing up. But perhaps the only guarantee that we won't is that you, you, you, you, you, take lessons from this class, from this project, which you can use for yourselves, for your children, for all of our

children, so that we don't see that kind of mentality here in the United States again. It may happen in some other parts of the world. We have taken a leadership role here in the United States some times whether we wanted to or not. Why can't we do it again on this issue? Thank you.

JH: Thank you [applause]. Why don't we take a five-minute break and we can reconvene.

[informal talk between JH and JA].

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

BOB GILGOR: This is March 30<sup>th</sup> in the year 2001 and this is Bob Gilgor interviewing James Atwater at the Chapel Hill Public Library.

Good morning, James.

JAMES ATWATER: Good morning, Bob. How are you?

BG: I'm well, thank you. I appreciate your spending time on this hectic two-day trip here to allow me to interview you. And I know you've been interviewed to death probably. I just will get started right away with an open-ended question, and that is, what was it like growing up in Chapel Hill and when did you grow up in Chapel Hill?

JA: My growing up period probably extends from the mid-1930s until the 1940s, late 1940s because I graduated from Lincoln High School in 1949. During the earlier years, memories of course fade from the very earliest years. But one of the memories that I do have specifically about what I think was representative of the attitude of my parents was that I was taken to Woollen Gymnasium when Franklin Roosevelt made what turned out to be his only visit to Chapel Hill as president of the United States. My mother took my brother and me down to Woollen Gym to see him. I have been to the archives at the university to check the dates. I don't have the exact date in mind but I do have it in a short paper I've written about it.

In any case, it was the 1930s. He was probably campaigning for his second term as president. My mother felt that it was important for her to take my brother and me to see a president of the United States. We saw his motorcade come up Pittsboro Highway. He had stopped over in Southern Pines on the way

here. We did not get into the gymnasium, into Woollen, because the crowd was already there. And I'm not sure that we would have been allowed in as spectators in any case. Nevertheless, we could hear his address over the public address system, which they had set up for those who were outside. We had to do that in the rain because it was a rainy day, I remember that. Just a bit chilly. But I think that that was something that my mother thought that she wanted to do for us perhaps for our memory or at least she could tell us that we had been there. But I do remember that we did it.

And I think that was representative of the attitude that she took to exposing her children to the political process, to the important things that were going around in the world around them. And she carried that attitude throughout our early school years because one of the things that she did was to stop working. She had worked for a while. She had worked at North Carolina Mutual. She had been a secretary there. She had also sold insurance for North Carolina Mutual in the Chapel Hill area. But she decided to remain at home during the entire period we were growing up in school. She probably remained at home until my younger sister was perhaps at the age where my mother thought that she could more or less be on her own.

So growing up for me was primarily the experience of having my mother at home whenever we needed her. She did things such as prepare breakfast for us in the morning before we went to school. We were close enough to the school—we lived on Church Street—that we could come back home for lunch. We did that for a number of years. Occasionally, we would take a lunch to school or we could get a lunch nearby because there were small pre-7/11 stores in the neighborhood between our house and school. But what characterized it for me was the atmosphere at home of a mother who was there, a father who was there fairly often. I grew up in an atmosphere that was characterized by the home experience.

One of the other aspects of growing up in Chapel Hill and my personal situation was that obviously we knew most of the other kids who were in school because of the fairly small school. But a number of our schoolmates lived in our neighborhood. We were in what we called Potter's Field at the time. We had relationships with those children that we could maintain very easily because we were in walking distance of one another. It was very easy to maintain the physical contact.

We also built, in our back yard, we put up a couple of basketball goals. And this came primarily during the high school years. That proved to be an attraction for many of the kids in our neighborhood and also from the other neighborhoods because they came to our house to play basketball. Sometimes we'd

have, especially on Sundays, a group of twenty, thirty, forty kids who were playing basketball at our house. So things rotated to a certain degree around our house and around the homes of other neighbors and other friends that we made as we went along.

So it was an experience that transcended the physical location of our home but, even in that transfer from one physical location to another, it was still a matter of being in someone's home. And being in someone's home, you're usually under the supervision of an adult.

The other aspect of it as I grew old near high school, we spent a good bit of time in other areas around Chapel Hill. We had swimming holes during the summer. We'd go there as a group, practically everyone knowing everyone else. We spent time at UNC for example attending football games primarily during the football season. But there were other things that were going on on the campus to which we had access. I remember, this is from the high school years, we went to the Forest Theater on one occasion. A company had come in from out of town to film a movie. They were using UNC—I don't remember the name of the movie—but they were using the Forest Theater for one of the segments of the movie. And I read about it in the newspaper. I mentioned it to my teacher, and my teacher took us on a field trip so that we could sit in the Forest Theater and watch that.

This is the high school years but it's representative of the fact that the university provided a facility for us on an informal basis. For that particular case, no one invited us to see that, but when we went no one prohibited us from coming and sitting there and watching that.

And from the work standpoint, my father was working at the university as you know during most of that period. I would go to the university with him from time to time to help him. My brother and I often would go to help him with some of his duties. That meant we were on the campus. We had the opportunity to observe some of the things that went on on campus.

BG: Are you saying that the university had a profound influence on your community?

JA: Absolutely. This is one of the aspects, I think, of the size of Chapel Hill at that time. And of course the size of the university. The university was obviously not as large then as it is now. But proportionately, the university dominated the town. Not so much assuming a role of dominance, but simply the fact that they were the largest employer as far as direct employees are concerned but also from the indirect standpoint. People who were faculty, administrators, staff at the university often had as employees

in their homes or as auxiliary personnel people from the community of Chapel Hill. Directly or indirectly, the economic aspect of it was a reflection of the size and the economic wherewithal of the university in this town.

And I mentioned this earlier: the university operated utilities, a telephone system, water, electricity, there was a university laundry, et cetera. So that from that standpoint, the university relationship with Chapel Hill was one that Chapel Hill was a support mechanism for the University of North Carolina.

But, by the same token, the personal relationships that were established between the university and some of the people in Chapel Hill also provided some kind of support mechanism from the standpoint of the advice that people might receive as individuals.

BG: Can you tell me more about the community? It seems as though you grew up in a stable home with a mother who focused her attention on raising children, didn't work outside the home. Was this typical of the community?

JA: I would not go so far as to say it was typical of the community. A number of families were in similar circumstances but I think that the economic realities of the times would not have permitted most of the African-American families to be in that type of situation. I knew that several of my close friends were in similar situations. But I know also that there were families which did not have—I don't want to call it that luxury—but there were families which did not have exactly the same advantages that we had by having our own mother there.

The reason that we had that advantage was because my father made an extraordinary effort to provide economically for his family. I've mentioned this before, but his primary employment was with the university. But even being at the university with several part-time responsibilities, sometimes before he went to work at the university, he might have already done something for someone—say, a private family. After work, it could have been the same thing on the weekends. He had some light duties at the university on the weekends, but after he finished those he might be doing something else. That was simply the attitude that he took as far as providing for us.

Now, from the other standpoint, some families I know were obtaining compensation for work that the mother was doing at home. For example taking in laundry. The mother may have been doing laundry at

home. She could be at home, she'd do the laundry, she'd prepare it and so on, maybe deliver it or someone would pick it up. But she was bringing in income to the family but she was also at home for the children.

I think when we get into this area, the issue of single-parent households probably comes up. Personally I'm not familiar with that many. I just don't remember, I think there probably were some. One of the circumstances at the time goes to the policy of the State administration, we can say the Welfare situation. I'm not sure when I was growing up whether this was the case, but I know in later years, a policy decision created a situation in which fathers sometimes had to abandon their families in order to permit their families to qualify for welfare assistance. Sometimes there were single-parent households that were a reflection of that policy. But there were also cases where the father—perhaps more often than not a father rather than a mother—who was not available for whatever reason. Perhaps he did not take his responsibilities, or left, or separated from the family, and did not provide the support that the family needed. I just don't recollect many situations like that, but I'm sure they did exist.

And we had students who were truants. Students who got into difficulties that eventually led them to reform school. You recall the juvenile facilities. Reform schools, just as an aside, Orange Country Training School, the name, as you probably already know, was one that was also used for those juvenile facilities, for reform school in North Carolina. From time to time, we would be automatically tainted with that when we went to other cities on sports. People would think, "Well this is a reform school." Of course we weren't.

Again, as an aside, my mother was one of the prime movers behind the campaign to change the name of the school. She was president of the PTA at the time. I was the first from my family to graduate, and she said, "No son of mine is going to graduate from a 'training school'." We were just going to have to change the name of the school. We went looking at various possibilities and came up with "Lincoln."

In any case, I do know personally of boys and at least one girl who wound up in reform school because of difficulties that they had with the law. And they didn't necessarily, as I can recall—one of them came from a two-parent family, I think the mother was working. Another came from a family, and I think that it was a situation in which the father was somewhere in the city and the father had acknowledged him—I'm not sure about his mother—but it was very difficult for anyone to control him. He had his own way of thinking, doing things, and eventually he did wind up in reform school. I know of another one who

went to reform school. Again, he came from a two-parent family. The mother and father were together. I'm not sure whether the mother was working or not. Things like that did happen.

The redeeming factor in this perhaps is that parents in general, the community in general, either tried to shield or shelter the children from the reality of that kind of situation when they were children and perhaps not yet mature enough to put that kind of thing in perspective. And when the children were old enough, I don't think there was any effort to shield anyone from that. Those things did happen.

Alcoholism, there was some alcoholism, I don't think there's any doubt about that. I just don't think it was a defining characteristic of the community. Even those who were considered alcoholics, some of them that I know personally attempted to maintain some kind of stability in working at least from time to time rather than consuming alcohol and becoming completely inebriated and of no value whatsoever to the community. Things like that happened, I'm sure, and if we go into the history of children out of wedlock, yes, I'm sure there were children out of wedlock.

Usually, though, for most of the situations that I can recall personally, families made an effort first of all to put those children into a situation which was family oriented. For example, an aunt or uncle or grandparent might ostensibly adopt a child or might even claim that child as their own. Perhaps most people in the community knew what the situation in the community was, but they tried to put—if not necessarily legitimize the situation entirely—not to let that kind of thing serve as a stigma to the extent that the child was abandoned to its own devices or that the child would end up living in an orphan home.

Once we get into issues like that perhaps it's inevitable that someone brings up the issue of abortions. I don't have personal knowledge. I don't think that that's something that was widely practiced in any case. People probably tried to avoid that to the extent possible.

BG: We could spend more time on the community, but our time is limited, so let's move on to the school. I would like to know the activities that you were involved in at the school. Then get on to the teachers and the principal. But I know that you were involved in a lot of activities, so if you could tell me some—or all of them, I'd love to hear all of them.

JA: I will preface that by saying that our school was so small that practically everyone had to play multiple roles. We simply did not have enough people to go around to have the kinds of programs that we wanted to have.

I was on the basketball team, for one thing. I was on the football team. I didn't play a great deal but I was on the team for a couple of years or so. I was in the drama club. We did one or two plays, usually one three-act play a year and occasionally one-act plays. One play we did take to the State festival one year, in which I had a role. I was also active at the newspaper for a time, the *Campus Echo*. And the band, I was in the band, the choir. And I served in student government, student government president one year when I was there.

I think those were all of the activities. As I said, the size of the school did that. My major interest was in perhaps basketball, I enjoyed that perhaps more than anything else. As I said earlier, during high school and even before high school we had a little court in our back yard so I had a chance to play a bit more basketball. Of course we saw Carolina games from time to time.

The student government was one of the more interesting aspects from the standpoint of what I feel was an interest in politics and working closely with the school administration.

And moving on to the teachers and the principal. The defining characteristic was the personal interest that the teachers did take in us as students. The teachers made a genuine effort to know as much as they could about us as individuals and to try to help us strengthen the positive and to eliminate or at least reduce the negatives.

I know that the name of Mrs. Turner has come up before in some of the conversations. I feel that Mrs. Turner from my own personal standpoint encouraged me to a great degree because of my interest in reading, because of my interest in the French language—she was also the French teacher. In addition to that she was the adviser to the drama club. She was de facto the director of the plays. At least in those three areas, she encouraged me to try to develop what talent she felt that I had in those languages and reading and understanding literature, writing, understanding as much as I could not just the French language but French culture when I was still in high school.

Again, that was a characteristic of most of the teachers. One of the teachers who is still living in Chapel Hill, Mr. R. D. Smith, also took that kind of interest in us as individuals. I took courses under him in shop, some of the agriculture courses. He was also the advisor—maybe I have to add one more activity—and that activity was the New Farmers of America. The New Farmers of America was the African-American equivalent probably to Four-H Clubs. But there may have been another organization in

white schools. But the New Farmers of America was a national organization of high school students who were interested in agriculture. In addition to the activities that we did at our own school, it was a national organization, so that we, on at least one occasion, I was supposed to attend a national New Farmers of America convention, which would have been held in Tuskegee, Alabama, at Tuskegee Institute. If I had attended it would have been as a member of the band, which was being organized in North Carolina, to go as a North Carolina representative to the national convention in Tuskegee.

But that was the year when we had a polio outbreak. And the polio outbreak caused the organization to cancel that national convention.

But the other benefit of the New Farmers of America from my personal standpoint and from the standpoint of my other friend and classmates who were in it was that we had an opportunity to practice parliamentary procedure. Because the New Farmers of American had a very organized procedure for opening meetings, for closing meetings, for following rules of order and so on. Mr. Smith sat in as the advisor for that group. Some of the students who were in that group were still living on farms. Many of us were not living on farms. I happened to be living in Chapel Hill, the Town of Chapel Hill. In the past we have had domestic animals and so on before regulations were invented in Chapel Hill. But in any case that also gave us the opportunity to learn a bit more about agriculture. We learned about things in class, but in the New Farmers of America we learned we could go beyond what we were doing in class. This was an extracurricular activity that gave us the parliamentary procedure and also introduced us to a good deal about agriculture.

I'm saying that Mr. Smith, in his capacity as the agriculture shop and agriculture instructor took his responsibilities in the classroom very seriously but he took his responsibilities with the New Farmers very seriously. He was also a member of our church. He was at church, we'd see him at church on Sunday. He lived in the neighborhood. Mr. Smith, you may already know, lived on the street with the Caldwells. My street, Church Street, intersected with that.

And another thing: he made his choice based on his personal values, but he went into the military after he had been here for just a year or two. In any case he came back to Chapel Hill afterwards.

BG: Jim, can you tell me both the positive and negative aspects of the school? I'm somewhat fearful that the school is being portrayed as a Shangri-la. It certainly wasn't that. But it was a positive force

in the African-American community. So if you could hit on that issue of the positive and the negative aspects of the school, I'd appreciate it.

JA: Well I think that perhaps from what I've said earlier, the positives definitely outweigh the negatives. From the standpoint of the interests of the instructors, the interests of the teachers and the students, the efforts by the teachers to integrate themselves into the community, to remain as aware as possible of the circumstances under which students were coming to school. What was the home situation, and how does the home situation affect their performance in school?

I think from a negative standpoint, I'm sure some would say, that the discipline was perhaps a bit harsh because of the contrast for some people between previous principals and Mr. McDougle, if you want to refer to an individual. Mr. McDougle came following more than one principal whom I did not know as well as I knew Mr. McDougle. I have to say that in my effort to be objective about it. But I think some of the students who did know, knew better the earlier principals, might have thought Mr. McDougle was more of a disciplinarian than the others had been. And I think to a certain extent that was one of the few ways he could establish himself, and that is by being different in that way from what he felt the situation represented when he arrived, what he saw when he came there. And in doing that, to some students, as a reflection of the situation in their homes, where they perhaps were not being disciplined the way they should have been, they saw the contrast between what was happening at school and what happened at home.

I think there may have been also—and this I may be going way out on a limb in saying this—there may have been an attitude on the part of some of the parents that was more adversarial toward the school than for many of the other parents. And that could be explained on the basis of the fact that we were still in a situation where many of the students, especially in high school, may have been the first one in their families to, if not graduate, maybe even to attend high school. Because that was not that much of a pattern in the African-American community. That is, a small group went to school, remained in school.

But because of the economic situation, many children were obliged to leave school or spend less time in school because the family lived on a farm during harvest time or that the family requirements were such that they needed someone else to bring in an income. And the students had to drop out. Sometimes dropping out was not necessarily because the student was bored with school or just didn't want to go to school anymore—it was some kind of pressure from the family.

So we had, at that time I think—and I hesitate to say this because I don't have any documentation for it, and I must admit I was not making a study of it at the time—but I think there were probably some parents who were saying to themselves, "I didn't finish high school, but I have a job, I have an income. Why should I let this child do it?" I think that was a minority, but that might explain some of the reaction to the kind of discipline that Mr. McDougle, in the eyes, of some people, may have seen.

On the other hand, I just did not have the impression that the discipline was that harsh. I think I have to say that. My mother and father had already told me that they didn't want any problems coming home from school. I think I had the motivation. I wanted to learn as much as I could because I thought that I wanted to go on to college. I certainly thought that the whole time I was in high school. And I was being encouraged to do that by family, friends, teachers.

One of the teachers I mentioned earlier was the band director, music instructor, Mr. Pickard, who, near the end of my senior year, we had the group of us, all of the seniors who were in the choir or in the band for a session in his office, he said to us, "You need to look around you and take this moment in because this is the last time that you'll ever be together like this. You're going to graduate in a few days." Then he went around the room to each one of us, saying, "You should go on to college. What you've done in the band, what you've in music, what you've done in whatsoever." He said to me, "You play basketball. Maybe you want to go try to get a basketball scholarship, an athletic scholarship. You've been in the band. You can try that. Student government, et cetera." He felt that all those avenues were open to me as an individual because of what he had seen in high school and not just based on what I'd done in the band. He did that to practically everyone in the room based on what he had seen us achieve in high school whether it was with him or not.

BG: Was he typical? That was a tremendous compliment to that man, what you're saying.

JA: I tried to name three people, choosing those three people. I wouldn't say it was typical of all of the instructors. Those three certainly were outstanding as far as I was concerned personally. I think the attitude in general was like that. Many of the teachers looked to us really as individuals. The school was so small in the first place that they could know us as individuals.

So we have to put into context the discipline issue. If the discipline was harsh, I think what Mr. McDougle was trying to do was to correct a situation that he inherited. And from the other standpoint, to

make sure that we were taking as much of the positive in us as much as we could as opposed to the negative. I don't know whether that explains it entirely or not. I think that the negatives that would have to exist in any situation, some of them were there. There is no denying that there were some negatives there. Trying to think of some specific examples other than the discipline issue.

We can go to lack of resources. Compare what we had with the white school. Obviously we didn't have the same thing. Why didn't we have it? Of course, one reason was that some people just didn't want to give it to us. Some might say that one of the reasons was that our administrators just didn't work hard enough to get it. You can say that, but no. Those are all suppositions that people can bring into a situation like that, but without strict documentation I hesitate to say that any of that existed.

Trying to go directly to the issue of Shangri-la, we have to realize that in any situation like this, this is revisionist history, isn't it? We're trying to reconstruct what went on—I know in my mind—years and years of it. My memories of it, my positive memories of it overwhelm the negative. That's the way I see it and certainly I walk around now with that perspective.

BG: One last question. What was the value of teachers visiting your homes? Or was there value, excuse me?

JA: I think there was value. There was value from the standpoint of establishing a channel of communication with the parents. I know that I cannot say that every teacher visited every student's home. First of all, they let the parents know that the teacher had enough interest in the child to come to their home. It was also an invitation to the parents to come to the school if they wanted to come to the school. I think that another value of it was that the teacher could see the facilities that were available, the support, books and magazines and newspapers and so on that were available in the home. And I think that the teacher could also see to a certain extent the dynamics of the relationship between the parent and the child. I don't know of very many visits of teachers to our home. I know that my mother went to the school, my father went to the school. There were times when I went with them, to PTA meetings or sometimes a special program at school at night. This is when I was fairly young.

Those are some of the primary values and I don't think we had a-- Well, we had a lunchroom at school. The earliest I remember was a lunchroom which was operated by Miss Pope, the home economics teacher in the home economics classroom. There was a small number of tables I think. Lunch. maybe it

was a soup or sandwich or something. I don't remember how much it cost. But you I'm sure are aware of the fact that now many schools in the inner-city—Washington is the prime example of it—there's never breakfast for the kids. Many of those kids are coming to school without breakfast. They may be coming without dinner [tape ends].

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE B

JA: --doing something like that at school, was doing something like that today at this stage.

BG: She also taught at night, didn't she? She taught sewing at night to the adults so she could earn some more money?

JA: Right.

BG: I know your time is limited. I could go on for at least another hour but--.

JA: I'd try to dredge up more but [laughs].

BG: Thank you so much.

JA: You're very welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE B