

INTERVIEW WITH WADE BOWICK, 4-9-99

ANGELA HORNSBY: My name is Angela Hornsby, and I am speaking with elder Wade Bowick at his office at First United for Christ Church in Durham, North Carolina. The date is April 9, 1999, and we're here as part of the Southern Oral History Program's New Immigrants project. Mr. Bowick, I was just wondering if you could state your name for the record.

WADE BOWICK: My name is Wade Charles Bowick.

AH: When and where were you born?

WB: I was born in the Brooklyn Jewish Hospital, Brooklyn, New York.

AH: Were you named after someone in your family?

WB: Well, I was supposed to be named after my grandfather, but I ended up with his middle name, which is Charles. It was supposed to be my first name, but my mother had the better sense to change that. I don't like that name for some reason. I ended up with Wade Charles.

AH: I was wondering if you could tell me a little bit about your grandparents and parents.

WB: Well, as far as we know, the family is traceable by photographs and oral history back to my great-great-grandmother on my mother's side. They originated in Virginia, Richmond, Virginia. I investigated some property there that was passed down to my grandmother and found out that my great-great-grandfather purchased the land in lots from the previous slave-owner. So it was pretty enlightening experience. The deed was hand-written, with wax seals. He bought it in four portions. It was handed down through this family, and my mother, I think, was the last one who was actually born in the house, which is still there. It's still standing. On my father's side, they are from East Orange, New Jersey. Again, it goes back to his mother's mother, as far as traceable history. Here, lately, with the Internet, I'm beginning to find, or family members are beginning to find me now. So it's getting interesting. I've had some calls from New Zealand. Interesting things. But basically, that's as far back as we know the family could go, and actually know the members from that point on. Now, what has happened since then: my grandmother and my mother passed away, and with them passed away all the phone numbers and the contacts, because they're the ones who kept close contact with the families. The rest of the family is all over the country. So I guess the only chance we have now to regroup is through the Internet. So that seems to be what's happening.

AH: What was the occupation of your parents?

WB: My grandmother was a seamstress in New York in the unions, and she worked there for many years making baby doll clothes. Then she decided she didn't want to do that when she was sixty years old. She quit, went to school, and became a baby nurse, and did that until she wasn't able to work anymore. And my mother was a seamstress, again, working in a union shop, and she did that all her life. My father was a bus driver, long-distance is what he ended up with. He started out with the trolleys in Brooklyn. He was a correction officer for a brief period of time, and then he became a professional bus driver. And that's what he did for the better portion of his life.

AH: Did you have any siblings?

WB: One sister. She's here in Durham. As a matter of fact, she moved here before we did, about five years before we came. We're all here because we got sick and tired of New York. At that time it was just getting crazy.

AH: What was so crazy about it?

WB: The quality of life was just-it was just a rat race, you know, crime and rushing and subways breaking down and expensive...Too much trouble. So we decided-or, as a matter of fact, I was working with the New York Times and a job opened up on the staff in North Carolina, and I applied for it. Since my sister was here in Durham, we moved here, then I commuted to Sanford until they sold the company.

AH: What did you do with the New York Times?

WB: I was in their book division. It was [] Press, a publishing company. And I transferred down to Microfilm Incorporation, which was a division of the New York Times, as a purchasing manager. And I did that until they sold the company.

AH: So you officially came down from Brooklyn what year?

WB: 1981.

AH: Backtracking just a little bit, I was wondering if you could give me a flavor of what it was like growing up in Brooklyn.

WB: Well, my father left home when I was four, so I was sent down to Richmond to live with my aunt and uncle. I was four, and before I left we'd lived in a middle-class project which was pretty well segregated at the time. A very nice neighborhood. And I went to Richmond from the age of four until the age of ten. So it was six years spent down there, and I was kind of rough around the edges coming from New York when I got there. And I learned discipline. We went to church. My aunt got sick and eventually passed away with cancer. My uncle was a brickmason, so he was unable to take care of me, so he sent me back to Brooklyn. Now, by that time, my mother and father had split up, and we ended up in the low-income projects in this place called Brownsville, Brooklyn. Which is kind of noted for gangs and trouble. And that's exactly what was going on when I got back. It was a horrible transition for me, to come from a ten-acre piece of property with chickens and cows and farm life to a little cubicle in a 110-family project, and get involved with the street gangs and the fighting and all the crazy mess going on at that time.

AH: Were you involved in gang activity?

WB: The thing about it at that time was that if you lived in the neighborhood, whether you belonged to the gang or not, you associated with--the neighborhood and gang were synonymous. So whether you belonged to the gang or not, and they found out, you know, they called it territory. 'You live over there, that's your turf', you know. It was an automatic thing. Actually, you had to travel in groups for protection. Illustration: when they had a certain supermarket in the wrong territory, they used to have chickens on sale all the time, and my mother would say, 'Go over there and get some of those chickens.' And it was an adventure, because you could get killed going to get some chickens. So it was a transition, and like anything else you get used to it. You get there, there are signs, 'Keep Off the Grass', 'Don't Climb the Trees', when you come from the country, you know. And then the winters were cold. So it took me maybe two years to get adjusted to that life. For instance, I have a story--well, my sister never left, she stayed with my mother during that period. And I came out in the park to play--I'd been there a couple of days. And my mother calls for dinner: 'Y'all come on up and eat!' As you can see, I don't miss too many meals. So I get ready to go, you know, I was collecting my gloves and stuff, and they started jumping on me, 'inchy-pinchy', you know, and I'm going, like, 'What are you talking about?' So the rule was that you couldn't quit. They called it inchy-pinchy. So they had to give you either fifty punches or a kick in the jaw. So when I was leaving, you know, they started hitting me. So I'm fighting now. My sister's yelling, so I'm going, 'Get my bat!' [] yelling, you know. So after all that went down, we ended up being the best of friends. But the rule was, inchy-pinchy meant that if you quit anything, then you got fifty punches or you [] for a kick in the jaw. I'm talking literally, you know. So you learn that kind of fast. So then you just join in with the rest of them. It was kind of a tough life with the gang environment, even though I did not belong to a gang. Just

living in the neighborhood associated you with the territory. So you had to defend yourself. I remember days running down the railroad tracks, trying to get the subway tracks, the third rail, get in the way, and shooting, and all kinds of crazy stuff. But being a man of faith, I just thank God that I'm still here. It was rough.

AH: This inculcation of faith, did that come from the time you were in Virginia, or were your parents really religious?

WB: Well, at that age, you know, if they were, I didn't know about it. They sent me down to Virginia, and my aunt and uncle-well, actually, my aunt was a schoolteacher, and when I got there, it was a two-room schoolhouse. They had three grades in each classroom, with a pot-bellied stove in the middle, right off from cemetery, to heat the school.

AH: What time period are we talking about here?

WB: That was kindergarten, because I was four years old.

AH: Around what year?

WB: '52, '53, somewhere in there. And then, I think, after a couple of years of that, they built a new brick school. Everything was still segregated at that time, so it was a black school. I mean, it was a real school, so that was interesting. But she had the qualifications to become principal, so she ended up as, I believe, the first black principal in that area down there. So that was a big deal.

AH: Is this Richmond?

WB: Yes, Richmond, and [] County. Also, that's when I was introduced to Mount Calvary Church and to the Baptist church. So I knew something about religion at that point. Before she died, she'd made my mother and grandmother promise that they would keep me in the church, which they did. That was an experience, in the Baptist church in Brooklyn. I stayed there until I decided to leave-seventeen, eighteen years old. But some things happened in my life to bring me right back where it started. You know, the Bible says, train up a child in the way that he should go. I think when my mother passed suddenly, I guess my spirituality was grieving, so that was the impetus to bring me back into a closer walk. It was some other things, you know, but basically, I got a call-my oldest son, we had his birthday party, and we got a call from a neighbor. And by the way, she was packing up. This was in September, maybe 15 years ago, I forget the exact date. She was packing to come because I gave her an ultimatum; I said, 'You are leaving and you will come down here.' We found her a job and everything. The neighbor called and said, 'I just dropped your mother off at the emergency, and I don't know what's wrong.' She said when she walked through the door she started to drag her feet. So we were calling the hospital like crazy. Of course, they don't give you any information on the telephone, so we all hopped on the plane, and when I got there in the morning, she was in the morgue. She had passed away. And of course, something like that-no history of being sick, had gone to the doctor a week before, and was planning to go somewhere. We had just talked on the phone. That was quite a shock.

AH: How old was she?

WB: Fifty-seven, I believe, when she went. It was just something, you know....And we were involved with the church here, the first church that we came down, and the people here were so supportive. They drove up to Virginia, because we had her funeral in New York, and then the family burial plot is up in Virginia, so we came down and had a second service, and they came up with us and all that. So it was a humbling experience, let's put it that way.

AH: I was wondering if you could give me an idea of what going to school in Brooklyn was like and whether you were involved in any type of community activities in Brooklyn as a young kid.

WB: I don't know where it came from, perhaps maybe the values that were instilled in Virginia, but I always tried to get involved with things at school, extracurricular activities. I played sports, I was on the safety patrol, in junior high school I got a service award. You know. I always had an inclination to do more than the average, for some reason. I don't know why, because at that time it was, you know, just get by and get out. I tell you what: New York is supposed to be a melting pot, but there was such a difference. We went to a public school three or four blocks away, and I did very well in my classes, but when we went to junior high school, which was in a predominantly white neighborhood, George Gershwin, I was so far behind. Well, let's back up a little bit. When I came from Virginia, I was in the fifth grade, I was supposed to go into the fifth grade. So coming from the South, they wanted to put me back a grade. Because we were supposed to be, you know, such country bumpkins. So anyway, I passed the test so they put me in the fifth grade. So I didn't lose any time. And from then until junior high school age, I did very well, and I ended up in 7-11. Now, there's twenty-two seventh grade classes, so to me that's telling me I'm average. Then they had about five or six SP classes-this was special children; I think they call them advanced now. And they were predominantly white. And then you started with your 7-1. So it got dumber and dumber as the numbers went up. 7-22 was the lamp makers, you know, we used to call them, all they had the ability to do was something like that. So that's when I found out how far behind I was in education. And then as you get older and you find out that you'll have the hand-me-down books, and you're already behind-even though you're doing well, you're still not up with the rest of the country. So anyway, that opened my eyes a little bit. I went to the New York School of Printing because I got introduced to printing in junior high school. I had a teacher who happened to care about students, and he thought I had the ability to do that type of work, and I did, and I liked it. So I applied for the New York School of Printing, which means you have to take a test and all that. So I took the test and got in the school. Went through that, and my ambition was to become a four-color pressman, which at that time was paying a lot of money, in a trade, because I didn't have any reason to think I was going to college, because the money wasn't there, and I didn't have any scholarships being offered to me. So I was going to take a trade. So I went to school, so I did well in school, and a guy says, "Well, why don't you go to school?" You know, I'm going, "What school?" So I ended up in the community college, for graphic arts and advertising technology. And while I was in school, that's when I got the job at the New York Times.

AH: What community college was this?

WB: That was-what was the name of that thing? New York City Community College, NYCCC. And I went there at night for four years, got the associate degree. But I was working, I think in the last year I started working at the Times, and I stayed there for thirteen years, then transferred down here for another two years.

AH: And do you remember what year you began working for the Times?

WB: 1967 or '68, somewhere in there. And I worked for them fifteen years total. Three years of that I was down here transferred with the company called Microfilm Incorporation, which was a New York Times company. That's how I got down here. After they sold the company to a Michigan outfit, I didn't want to go back to the snow, so I stayed down here, and that's when I had all these odd jobs until I got back into my trade and I ended up at a place called AMI in Burlington. American Multimedia, which did CDs and cassettes, but also they had a print shop, and I was the, I guess you want to call it office manager, purchasing manager, estimator, and a whole lot of other things-scheduling, ...And I stayed there until I came full-time into the ministry. So basically, that's my work history.

AH: Wonderful. So, just going back to Brooklyn, I kind of wanted to get a sense of how you came to meet your wife. Sort of give me a flavor of that.

WB: Well, I guess I grew up to be, I wouldn't say a hardened criminal, but I wasn't an angel, let's put it that way. And there was always hustles going on, and what I mean by hustles is, a friend of mine, Jim Fitzgerald, that worked at the Times, ran into a guy that made slugs that would fit in the token booth, you

know. So we got into selling slugs, bags of them for ten, fifteen dollars, you get a hundred of them. Just little...they'd fit in the subway. So anyway, apparently we weren't the only ones selling them, and the transit authority found out about it, and one of the girls that was in the office had bought some, they caught her going through the turnstile and they made her undress. I mean, it was a really embarrassing experience. So she came in late crying and all upset, so we kind of stopped that. But things like that, you know. We used to call it hustling, making extra money. Selling this, selling all kinds of stuff. So by no means was Wade Bowick an angel. I did my little dirt too. But I never did anything that, you know, any harm against a person, or any robbery or anything like that. I did my share of things that could've landed me in jail, let's put it that way.

AH: Could you describe the slugs?

WB: The slugs? Well, in New York, when I first got there, I think tokens were ten cents. And they were small, the size of a dime, and they always had a Y stamped right, you know, the shape of a Y space through it, so when you put it in the turnstile, that's what would click into the machine. Then people started duplicating it, so they changed the size and price. I think now it was a dollar seventy-five for that same ten-cent token. But the slugs were sort of a magnesium, lightweight type metal, the same thickness as the tokens that were being used, but they didn't have the Y slotted, but we found out that they would work. OK? And I guess whoever was doing this in the machine shop was just stamping out these things, putting them in a bag, and selling them. So at that time, I think it was about fifty cents apiece, and if you could buy this thing for ten or fifteen cents and get on the subway, then you were way ahead of the game. So that's how that racket-I call it a racket-started. Some other things I would not put on tape because they might arrest me. Anyway. So we used to call it hustling, selling stuff and doing things to make extra money. I started to play semi-professional football when I was nineteen, with a team called the Golden Knights in Brooklyn. And during that period of time, the discotheques were up and running, and several of the guys on the team used to do-we used to bounce at these clubs. So I ended up with three jobs, there, at one time. I was working at the Times, I was working in the liquor store part-time, and I was bouncing at these clubs. So I was doing well as far as making money. One night, we're at this club, and we're downstairs, there's one way in and one way out. And this guy comes by, he's young, he's got sneakers on, the show was on, it's about midnight, and we wouldn't let him in. So-took him upstairs, next thing I know there's shooting going on. The place was near Linden Boulevard, which is a big street through Brooklyn, goes all the way to Queens. And it has a service road, and it just happened that a police car was coming down the service road and heard the shots. When they pulled up, those kids had a shopping bag full of guns. They dropped the bag and scattered, and the guy that did the shooting ran right into the police car. He was high off of some kind of drugs anyway. So they caught him. But that's when I realized that my life was worth more than \$75 a night. So I kind of got out of that business. Always, you know, trying to do something extra to get by. That's called life on the streets, you know. Never bothered with any drugs or anything like that. Not as far as selling them; I tried a few things, but...mainly alcohol and cigarettes was what I did. And like I say, I did some other things that I'm not proud of. But I have repented for all of these things. So basically, that's what it was. It was street life. Sometimes you had to fight, you know, to survive. For instance, Broadway Junction on the subway was a place where just about all the trains merged, coming from all directions, and you make your connections going to whichever neighborhood you're going to. And after school, it depended on how many gang members collected at the station, who ruled the station. See what I'm saying? So everybody had to come upstairs to where all the trains sort of had a little-that's why they call it the junction-and you have to come upstairs to this one particular area before you can make your other connections. And that's where the majority ruled. So you never knew what gang was up there that particular day. And if something had happened a day or two before, somebody got beat up from one gang or the other gang, they'd be looking for a particular group, you know. So that's when I experienced--I don't know if you've ever seen the subway or ell. The ell was above ground, and when you look down between those railroad ties, you see the street. You're running up there on this little three-board catwalk, trying to get away from something, it's real dangerous. And some people didn't make it. So I've been in some places and some life-threatening things and all sorts of little things.

AH: What have these experiences meant to you?

WB: Well, coming from that environment, I can somewhat understand some of these kids, what they're going through in these projects and these neighborhoods. And when you understand something, you can help. I never look down my nose at anybody, because, you know, I've done some things I'm not proud of either. And I realize that you can come from that environment and make something out of your life, with a little push, a little help in the right direction. And that's why I'm involved with this child evangelism, as far as the body is concerned and not from a church standpoint, because I think when blacks and whites and other races get together and go into the neighborhoods and say the same thing, then you have a better chance. And what's happening here is that all the churches, the Muslims, the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Baptists, the Full Gospel, everybody's going into the neighborhoods and they're telling the people that you need to do this in order to embrace my religion. And we're telling them, you need salvation in Jesus Christ, and then you can decide what church you want to go to. It takes the confusion out of it. So that's what I'm fighting for. But a lot of people can't get past there, because they don't understand those kids. They don't know what makes them tick. They don't know what happens when they're looking out the window and they see somebody get shot, or somebody in their family, you know. It's traumatic. They feel like they're losers, that they can never win. And I know that myself, and a lot of us have made it out of Brownsville. A lot of us made it out, made good things in life. Some went to Hollywood. We had one, John Redwood, that ended up as an actor, and we had some basketball players. A lot of good came out of that. So what it gave me was an understanding of what happens and what life means, living in places like that. Because I was there.

AH: I want to get a quick account of how you met your wife.

WB: Well, I had a friend of mine-most of my friends, at that time, we all played football together, so we all kind of hung out together. And he had a girlfriend that was having a party, and it turned out to be a divorce party for my wife's sister. So I ended up meeting her at a divorce party for her sister. So we met, and I don't think she liked me too much, but I certainly did like her. And we ended up-well, actually, we shacked up together, I'm not proud to say, for a while, and then she again being a woman of faith who had gotten away from it, it didn't feel right, you know. She wasn't...So she kind of insisted that we get married, and we did. So like I say, I wasn't an angel all my life. We got back together, and she was wanting to get away from New York, but I told her I was getting a transfer, and she told me, "I'm not going down there in those bushes! I don't know nobody down there! I'm not going!" Now when we go back to New York, she won't spend more than a day and she's ready to come back, so she's acclimated and happy, and glad we made the change. Again, being people of faith, we realized that there was a purpose in it, that we ended up here in Durham. And it turned out to be the ministry.

AH: So when did you two get married?

WB: 1977.

AH: And you had four children?

WB: Yeah.

AH: Do the children live in this area?

WB: Yeah, they're all here. My oldest son, Alfred, he's kind of like his father, he's doing newspapers, he works in the school, and he's got a barber shop. So he's working, he's married, he's got two children. My oldest daughter, who just left, she worked for us and she was going to work in the prisons, so she's in transition right now. My youngest son, he was the one at the desk there, he just made us grandparents, so him and his wife, they both work here. She works as a teacher downstairs, and he works here as maintenance. And then my youngest daughter's still home, Dionne, she's thirteen, and doing very well in school, I might add. She has an ambition to be a doctor, and I think she'll make it.

AH: Wonderful. So they're all in the Durham area.

WB: Oh, yeah.

AH: OK. Just trying to get a sense of race relations, your take on race relations up in the North versus what you may have experienced in the South, living with your aunt and uncle.

WB: Well, in Virginia is really when I got a taste of racism, pure, outright hate. We'd be walking down the road to the school and they'd come by in a car and throw a bottle at you and call you this and that.

AH: "They" being-

WB: White folks. You know, just outright attacks. With the segregated bathrooms in the restaurants and all that kind of stuff. And that's when, you know, coming from the North, you didn't really see it that way, but it was there. But when I got to Virginia, that's when I really experienced the division among the races. And basically, that's all it was. It was just black and white; you didn't have many immigrants or anything at that time. People in the South that are really from the South do have more of a problem when immigrants start to come in, because they're just not used to it. Now, in the North, like I said, segregation was kind of hidden. And yes, we worked together and all that, but when you got to Broadway Junction, the white went to the white neighborhood-you see what I'm saying? There were some neighborhoods that-for instance, when we moved to Brownsville, there was a lot of white people still there. But as the blacks started to come in, the whites started to move out. And the only ones that were trapped were the elderly, because they had no place to go. Then after the blacks [], and Eisenhower made that thing over in Puerto Rico, then the Puerto Ricans started coming in, OK, and then, you know, you kind of feel you're getting pushed upon. But then again, we all started getting together and understanding each other and becoming friends.

AH: How did that happen?

WB: You mean as far as friends?

AH: Yeah, how did that process evolve?

WB: Mainly by going to school. When you go to school, everybody's thrown together. Then what happens is the neighborhood thing. You get back to the territory, and it doesn't matter if you're white, black, blue, or green, if you live in Brownsville, you gotta get back home. So we all pulled together, you see. So it's kind of a funny thing that happened there. Then what happens is you begin to know each other, and then you start hanging out together, you know, you become friends. When I went to high school, the guys that I hung around with, one of my friends, Pamo, was Italian; Barios was Puerto Rican, and me. And we were the Three Amigos. And we hung out all through high school. I'd like to find those guys; I don't know what happened. I know Pamo went into the Marines. Went to Vietnam. Barios I lost track of. But, I mean, we were really friends. We went to each other's house, which was an experience, because they were living in different neighborhoods. But basically, we all got together and got along together, you know. So that's why I'm saying coming from the North is more tolerance for other races with different people coming in. I think down here people perceive that as a threat, or a competition for jobs, but this area is low unemployment, so there's work for everybody. So we had a problem in this neighborhood where there was a certain segment of people-well, black people were preying on the Mexicans.

AH: Could you explain that?

WB: They would rob them. The Mexicans are known for carrying their money, keeping their money with them, because they don't trust the banks, because of what's happening in Mexico.

AH: What is happening in Mexico?

WB: I went down there, we went there a couple of years to Cancun for vacation, and the exchange rate depends on where you go. We went to the bank once because they, at this particular bank, were giving the best exchange rate for dollars. And I'm not sure what the mistrust stems from, but they don't do a lot of taking their money, and I'm saying hard-earned money because these people work hard, and I do have respect for them as a race. When we're riding down the street, and the work that's being done here with backhoes and automated equipment, they're doing with picks and shovels in that hot sun. These are hard-working people. And I guess when they get those pesos, they want to keep those pesos that they got, and they don't want their money fluctuating every day, it's worth less, it's worth more. So I don't know what it is, but perhaps to further the study, that would be a point to find out. But somehow they have a mistrust for banks, and they keep a lot of cash on them, they keep a lot of cash in the house. I don't know if they're still doing that, but that was what they were doing when they first came, and people knew that, so they would rob them. So they finally caught this group that was preying on them. And I haven't heard too much about stuff going on. We are in a high-crime area, here, and we're here for the neighborhood, which we're trying to get these people to understand. A couple of weeks ago, they called me four-thirty in the morning, kicked the front door in.

AH: Who's they?

WB: Somebody, I don't know. Somebody came in to rob something. But we're here to give to the neighborhood. You know, we've paid rent, we've paid heating bills, water bills. We're not here to block out the neighborhood, we're here to embrace the neighborhood. But whoever this person is had to have been drugged out of their mind. The door says, "ADT Security", so the minute you kick the door in, the alarms go off. So they didn't catch him, but he didn't get anything.

AH: When did this happen?

WB: This was about three or four weeks ago. We've had several attempts around here.

AH: Had something like this happened at the church before?

WB: Oh, yeah. They've tried all kinds of stuff. But you know, that's one thing we're trying to get across to the neighborhood, is we're not a church that sits inside the walls. We go out, we talk to people, we help people, we have clothes, we have furniture back here that they're welcome to have. All you got to do is ask for it, you know. So it's-I guess it gets you down sometimes, when you see people do stuff like that, but then you have to look at the reason.

AH: What's the racial composition of the area in which the church sits, would you say?

WB: I had a survey somewhere. It's predominantly black. Still has a good portion of Caucasians, I would say, still above 25%. A small Indian population. Those were the last census figures, but I'm sure now there's quite a few Mexicans added into the pot. And they've concentrated in certain areas within this northeast central Durham.

AH: Do you have a sense of where those areas of concentration are?

WB: Yeah, because Saturday when we're riding around to pick up, we do pick up quite a few Mexican children. Liberty Square, which is on Austin Avenue, is just about all Mexican now. What's that, Juniper Square, is just about all Mexican. That's right down the street right here. There's a high concentration of Mexicans in this area as far as houses and apartments, but they kind of gravitate to these large, low-rent apartment areas. From my experience in Brooklyn, a family will come over, and they'll hook up with their cousins, and they'll get an apartment, and there'll be fifteen people in that apartment. And people will talk, "Look at them people over there," but within a year, they all have cars, some of them have stores, you know. Brooklyn was known-well, New York, period-for, we used to call them, Puerto Rican stores. They'd get a store, they get a cab, they see the opportunities that we don't see, you see. And then people somehow,

when they get ahead or when they surpass them, then they're mad. "Look at these people, they can get this." Well, you can do the same, you've been here, you were born here, why can't you have what you want?

AH: Have black residents communicated that to you?

WB: No, around here I don't have too much of that, other than what the neighborhood itself was doing. Now, this church, we embrace everybody, and we don't have any Mexican members, but we do have some Mexican people that visit occasionally. We have given food and milk and bread and clothes to Mexicans, as well as anybody else that would ask for it. Caucasian, it doesn't matter. But we believe here that we must love everybody, so as far as this church is concerned, we embrace everybody, don't turn anybody away, and we don't teach that. Because the Bible says that you can't hate your neighbor and love God []. So I don't know what these people think, but people are people. Now, the blacks are stereotyped, you know, we're muggers, we're this, we're that, and so is most other races. I think people resent

[END of Tape 1, Side A.]

[BEGIN Tape 1, Side B.]

WB: Whether you're right or whether you're wrong, and by right or wrong I mean-we were looking for a child one day on Sutter Avenue. Traffic was heavy. We're in a stopped situation. The car in front of us pulls up, and this car rides coming up the wrong way on a two-lane street, he's facing us on the wrong way, and he got out, and it was a Puerto Rican man who was drunk. On the sidewalk was-we were in a Puerto Rican neighborhood, so they were playing dominoes, and playing the guitar, and drinking, you know.

AH: Again, this is in Brooklyn.

WB: Yeah, this is in Brooklyn. And we called it the Puerto Rican neighborhood because, you know, everybody has territory. So this guy gets out and he's telling us to move the car. "You gotta move your car." Now, we got traffic behind us, we're all in the right. We realized the man was drunk. So he takes a swing at my friend. So he ducks him, you know, we're not trying to get in no trouble. So they start looking. So he hit at him again, so Melvin hit the guy. And the guy, his head went on the windshield, then blood started coming out of his mouth and out of his ear. So then they, you know, "Aah!" Then they looked, and they started coming over, and they were gonna be on this man's side. Seeing what had happened, you know. But the thing was, it was a black-Puerto Rican thing. Whether the man was right or wrong, they were going to stand with him, you know. And black people don't understand that. I might as well say it: we just have a problem helping each other. I look at that, even though the man was wrong, they stick together, they help each other, they buy each other cars, and they help each other, you know, do better and rise above. And we look at that as a character flaw, but it's not. And if you look at other races, that's what they do. They help each other. So I think as far as the black race looking at, not only the Mexicans but other races, we have a problem with that. Because we don't help each other. We're getting there, you know, we're getting there. But that's a whole nother story. But I think there's generally a mistrust within our culture-

AH: The black culture?

WB: Yes. I mean, to be truthful. I don't know what it is. I have my ideas of what it is, and it's deeply rooted, but we're not talking about that.

AH: Well, you can if you want to.

WB: Well, I think that, as a race, what happened to us when we put into the slavery situation and separated, the way that we were, there was already tribal warfare going on before we got here. So if they found you to be of the same tribe, they would split you up. So here you are with an enemy. So you're not going to trust

that person who you've been fighting for fifty years over in the homeland, and everybody's, you know-. So that takes a long time to get out of, you know. And there are some theories about gangs and tribes. You know, people feel safe in a gang. People feel safe in the tribe. So anyway, that's another story, but I don't let people tell me that. I don't let slavery affect me now. That's got nothing to do with, you've got all your rights, you've got the ability to do anything you want to do, nobody owes you anything. And people, "Well, you know, they're trying to beat"-you know, the mentality has to change. And I think it is, slowly.

AH: This mistrust that you talked about-have you seen this manifested, just in terms of this area here, through your work, either with the children or-?

WB: I've heard some things. People will say, "Ah, you know, them Mexicans, they've got this, they're taking over this, they're doing this, they're doing that." Yes; what are you doing? You're sitting back watching them take over because you're doing a lot of this, talking, but you have the same opportunity, if not more. So yeah, it's like-well, back in Virginia, there was a segment of society they called white trash. And they hated the blacks more because they felt threatened on that level. You know, they were competing for the same type of jobs. So therefore, they were like the rednecks or whatever you want to call them. You see what I'm trying to say? So there's always a segment of society that's going to be at each other's throat because they feel threatened by each other. But I don't allow that. For instance, these kids, now-well, the Muslims are kind of backing off from that hate thing, you know, "The white man's a devil and he's a...."-I said, look. Now, see, when I got to Washington, I could get to the front of the bus, but from Richmond to Washington I had to ride in the back of the bus. So now that you have the right to ride in the front of the bus, what are you doing? Smoking, cussing, bothering people. You see what I'm saying? What are you doing with the rights that you have? Nothing! But yet you complain when somebody else comes over and gets ahead.

AH: So you think that in some cases there may be a lack of black initiative.

WB: In some cases, yeah. And I think it goes back to the white trash and that. We're down there in this barrel, fighting for these jobs, and here come these people getting these jobs, but if you really wanted that job, or if you wanted to better yourself, you have the opportunity. Instead of sitting around talking about it. But I think that's kind of disappearing somewhat. But there's still a large segment of that still around.

AH: Of this mentality, within this neighborhood. You mentioned, just in terms of the demographics, which is really helpful in terms of some neighborhoods making the transition to predominantly Latino. I was just wondering, as this transition is taking place, are the black residents choosing to go somewhere else, or are they-?

WB: Well, apparently, most of these-I know that, what's the name of that place, it's on Austin Avenue, I go there to pick up some kids on Saturday-but it used to be black. Now it's all Puerto Rican. I have my theories about that too. I see houses, when I come on Roxboro Road, that had been emptied, but now there are Mexican families in them. And I think, this is only what I think, I think that these landlords prefer to rent to a Mexican person, because they know they're going to get their money. It's unfortunate. Well, it's not unfortunate that they rent, but like I say, these people-now, there are some out there that drink, but that's in everyplace, you know, there's always some bad with the good. But these are hard-working people. They know that the only way they're going to stay here is that they have to pay their way. The landlords know that if I rent this property, I'm going to get my money. So when they apply for these places, they have a reputation for that. And that's the same thing that happened in Brooklyn. They'll come, and they'll all gang up together for a while, but when they get strong, they move out. But while they're ganged up together, they're going to make sure the rent's paid, they're going to pay the bills, they're going to buy that 25-pound bag of rice and some beans and they'll have something to eat, you know. That's what helps them survive.

AH: Well, that's a perspective I hadn't heard of before, just in terms of the motivation behind...

WB: Well, you know, I call it the poverty mentality, and that's what we fight against here. You know, got the system, getting your food stamps, and I see it here, with certain information that we try to collect that we can't get because people are getting these vouchers, they're working and driving these big vans, you know, well how do you-? So people are still trying to get over this poverty mentality. And they don't have that mentality. If we went to Mexico, which I don't have enough guts, I couldn't go to another country and try to start over, or try to get a job and make my way where I didn't speak the-I wouldn't want to do that. They're coming because there's opportunity, OK? And they know that you have to work, you have to earn your way. And that's what they do. As far as the business community is concerned, I know I was doing a little painting there for a while, and they were getting a lot of jobs, because they were undercutting the price. I don't have no problem, I can't do it for that price, you know. So now, it becomes, "Well, those Mexicans are coming, they're getting all of our work." Well, there's work for you, there's work for the Mexicans-the work is here, you see what I'm saying? You just have to find something else to do. But people look at that as a threat when it's really not a threat. And then when they say, "The prices, how can they do that?" Well, they can do it because they're all living together and they pool that money together, even though it sounds ridiculous to you, to them, it's a living. You see? So I understand what they're doing. If I could do it, I'd do it, too. But we don't want to do it. So that's how they get to where they are. They come, they go to an auction, they'll pool their money together and buy a car, they all ride around in that car until they work some more, they go buy another car, and to me, that's the way you're supposed to do it. And people resent that. They see them getting ahead and moving out, and then they go back to Mexico a millionaire. I just don't have a problem with other nationalities moving in, because I've lived with that. In New York. As a matter of fact, [] help me get where I got, because of this quota system that was back in the-that's really why they hired me; they would never tell me that, but they had to have a certain amount of blacks in positions. So that helped us out a bit. But I don't think I'm by myself in this opinion, but I think that's exactly what's happening here in North Carolina. Again, Durham's Research Triangle area is sort of a melting pot area. So it's kind of unfair-I guess if you get out into the more rural areas where it's mainly black and white, there would probably be more of a problem there. But I can't speak about that. I'm just going by what I think. Because you're introducing something totally new, you know. And as I travel around these farm areas, there's a lot of Mexican people that are willing to live in those little trailers and work on the farm, and we're not going to do that, you know. So they'll take opportunities that we see as-I don't know what we look at them as, but-and people appreciate that, you know.

AH: I was wondering if you could just give me a little dose of your family leaving Brooklyn for Durham in '81. Where did you settle when you got here, in terms of neighborhood, and-yeah, where did you settle?

WB: OK, we came down and got involved with a real estate man, Jarvis Martin. And actually, I was looking for an area that was close to the highway so I could get down to Sanford every day, without a whole lot of local traffic. And we looked around Austin Avenue, which is Highway 55, which connects me up to US 1. And they took me into some nice places, some not-so-nice places. Well, we ended up on Riddle Road, which was a block off of Austin Avenue, Highway 55. So all I had to do was shoot down, go down south a little bit, hit US 1, and I was in Sanford in about an hour. So people thought I was absolutely insane crazy because I would ride an hour, and I said, "You get on that subway for an hour and you'll see what the difference is." It had gotten so bad, I got on the subway one stop away from the last stop-or the first stop coming to work, and the last stop going home. And the train was packed. And we'd go two stations, everybody off, train's out of service. Now you got a whole trainful of people that's got to get into another whole trainload of people. And it was just, you know, it was a mess. So when you travel like that for several years, to me, driving down a nice scenic highway for several hours is a pleasure. But they didn't quite see it that way. So I did that for three years until they sold the company, and odd jobs in between. Ended up in Burlington for 8 years, going down 85. So anyway, we ended up on that side of town. I lost my job, I got into a lot of financial difficulty, we had to leave that house, and we moved over into Umstead Street, which is another Dodge City part of town.

AH: What year was that, do you remember?

WB: '83. And that was sort of like, back to the ghetto again. But it allowed us to get on our feet. It was a big old house, drafty and windy, but we made it through. And I was doing security work, I was working seven days a week, for two years, and still not making the money that I was. So I got a call from a guy and ended up in Burlington, pretty much back where I was financially. And one night, I just heard some bullets, I said, "We gotta get out of here." And my credit had gotten so bad, I ended up over on Pineland, with a rent-to-own situation, one of those Bobby Roberts houses?

AH: What's a Bobby Roberts house?

WB: I guess we better not go any further with that. But he's a construction man, built a lot of these houses in Durham, and what he would do, he would allow you to move in as a rental with the option to buy. And he took a chance with the credit history that I had at the time, so it was a good thing. So we were able to get into that three-bedroom house. And we stayed there until the ministry bought the house that we're in now as the parsonage. So we located where we did on Riddle Road mainly because of the access to the highway going to Sanford. And then we had to move from there because of financial situations to Umstead Street, which was back in the hood, if you know what I mean. And then we moved out to Pineland, again, which was a pretty quiet neighborhood, and now we're out off of Old Oxford Highway, on Mazeywood Lane, which is a very nice area.

AH: Is that outside of-?

WB: No, it's still in Durham.

AH: But outside of this neighborhood.

WB: Yes. Well, it's exactly twenty minutes away, to the north. There is a house on the property, but pastors, you don't live in a house connected to the church, you'd never sleep. A lot of pastors don't even live in Durham. That property became available, so we moved out there.

AH: And when did you do that?

WB: I guess it's going on three years, now.

AH: And I was wondering if you could give me the genesis of how you became involved in the ministry at this particular church.

WB: OK. That's another story. OK. We started at Orange Grove Baptist Church. And my wife was ordained-no, she was licensed to preach at that church, which was kind of a-you know, they weren't too into licensing and ordaining women as ministers, which is changing. I was a trustee at the time, and did my job and was faithful and did what I was supposed to do. There was a big fight, a church mess, a big split. The pastor left, and I stayed, and my wife left. You know, because I'm a trustee, and I want to help them. So anyway, I went to a meeting one day and they started doing some things that, as far as I'm concerned, you know, getting up, calling each other liars, this and that, in a church meeting, that was the end of it for me. So I left. Now I had no church. So my wife had started going to the Full Gospel circles. And I went with her after several months of prodding. "Next week..." So anyway, I finally went to a church over here, not far from Monroe Evangelical. And we were introduced to the Full Gospel, as opposed to the Baptist. Now, here again, there's 5900 denominations. But the difference in the Full Gospel is that we just believe everything that's in the Bible. Everything, from cover to cover. So I got there and people were doing stuff and praising God and I'm going, "What are these people doing in here?" Coming from the Baptist mentality. Then I really had an experience, and I really-I call it, I found the Truth, let's put it that way. And then I really started embracing a little bit more, studying, stuff like that. So I was made a deacon, and my wife eventually was ordained a minister in the Full Gospel circles. While that was going on, we were having family devotion every Saturday at eight o'clock, and if you're not there you get your legs broken, as far as my children were concerned. So we did that. Then, here comes another church problem. So the

pastor left again. So now we're going around, trying to find another church, but in the meantime, we're having this family devotion. Here comes people: "Well, can I come to your family devotion?" So now we look around, there's fifteen people sitting in the living room. So God just spoke to my wife and said, "Look, you need to start-this is a church, this is not a family devotion." So we started over there at Campus Hills Community Center with eight people. And we stayed there for about three months, then we moved to a quieter place over here on Harvard Street. It was called East End Community Center. It was more of a private-you didn't have the swimming and everybody looking through the door. And we grew to about fifty members there. And then this church on Avondale and Markham, which was a Church of the Nazarene, was for rent, so we ended up getting in there, and we grew to three hundred. And we-there was no more room, people were sitting on the windowsills, you know. Then, this is really the miracle, getting into this building. They wanted a million three. Then they went down to \$790,000, and that's when we actively tried to pursue the finances. When they looked at our history-

AH: Who's "they", again?

WB: The banks. They said, "Well, who are you? I mean, you're not even on the map." So, anyway, it turned out we couldn't get any finances. We went to Self-Help, they were willing to give us \$300,000. So anyway, we went back and forth, back and forth, for quite a while. Ended up with a bond issue. And with the history that we did have, we made them an offer of \$450,000. Which they accepted, which is a miracle. And we did that through a bond issue. So within a year's time, the bond issue paid back the bank, because we had to borrow our money from the bank to pay for the property, and then pay the bank back through the bond issue. So within a year's time all of that had been accomplished. The bank was paid back. Now, what we have now is a fifteen-year sinking fund to pay back the bonds. So it's working very well. We've already taken out another bond issue, and we had some pipes and sprinkler systems we had to put in, so that's all paid for and done. So what we consider our mortgage now is actually a sinking fund that we pay back the bonds on, and that's working well. And most of the members belong, so everybody-it's a seven- to ten-percent interest, which no bank is giving. So it was a good deal all the way around. So that's how we got in this building, and from three hundred-

AH: And what year was that?

WB: That was about three years ago. Now we're to about six hundred and three. And still going.

AH: In terms of membership.

WB: Right, right.

AH: That's great.

WB: There's no telling what's going to happen on this corner. That's sort of the short history. I mean, we have a vision from God that he gave us, and he's providing for. It's happening, you know. So we've started a day school, last year, with K-4 and K-5, and we're going to add first grade this year. We opened up our infant center last Wednesday. And we have a day care that we started about a year after we got in. So hopefully we can take them from six months to the twelfth grade at some point. And we hope to build something across the street. So like I say, God gave us a work to do in this neighborhood, and he's providing for it. He's making it happen. And that's what we're here for, the neighborhood. We're not here to entertain each other. We're going out these doors and evangelize. And we work with other ministries.

AH: I guess one very important component of your work is child evangelism, children's evangelism.

WB: Well, we also have the adult evangelism. Tuesday night, they have classes out here in the trailers, and what they do is a thirteen-week course, and they teach people how to evangelize adults. And what they do, actually as part of their training, they go out. They get in their cars, and they go into neighborhoods, and knock on doors, and they put their lab work to actual practice. What's happening, it's changing the

neighborhood, you know. Some people came in here last night from a couple of houses up here, and got saved. They said, "We just live right up the street." So, you know, the more doors you knock on, the more people that you touch--these people over here are starting to come around, that house right there. We couldn't get that, we just didn't have enough funds. We got everything else except that house right there. But it's making a change, you know, it's making a change. So we have the guests with the child evangelism and the adult evangelism group, because I believe that it's a body ministry. And what's happening now is that, like I said, we have an evangelistic group called 'Taking it to the Streets'. So they'll go over to the projects and set up some hot dogs and this and that, and give them a word, and sing a song, and do some stepping or whatever. And twenty people get saved, but then the next day, you can't find them. And you got the Muslims coming in, and you got this group coming in, and you got that group coming in. And 'You can't come to my church unless you have a suit'. Or, 'You can't come unless you wear all white.' Or, 'You can't wear earrings and necklaces or lipstick to my church.' You know, it's not about *your church*. And that's what I realized. So we're out here with the fruit. Well, they just heard another message from the Full Gospel. Now, tomorrow they'll listen to the Baptists, and they'll listen, you know, and what do you have? You have confusion. Now, if we all get together-and [chuckle] that's another thing that we can't do, churches, God's people. What's wrong with the Baptists-now, as far as the Jehovahs and the Muslims, I have no agreement with them, so we can't walk together. But as far as the doctrine of Jesus Christ, there's a whole lot of denominations that fit within that umbrella. Why are we not over there talking about salvation and Jesus, and then let them make a decision as to what denomination they want to join, instead of joining a denomination first, you know? So hopefully-and I'm not trying to overpower anybody, I'm just trying to come with a consistent message. So what both of these groups do is, they follow up. If we pick that kid up on Saturday, then the previous Friday night, somebody's been to that church. "How you doing, we've come to check on you, you coming tomorrow? Sign on the sheet, we'll be here with the bus." So they're getting acquainted with a face. It could be a white face, a black face, a blue face. And when people say, "Oh, these people, they're consistent, they're coming and they're checking on us, they might care about us." So what's happening now is that each Saturday, two or three or four or five begin to understand what salvation is about, who Jesus is, and they begin to accept Him in his life. Now, what do you do? We are saying that this church is available; Mr. Brown's church is available; First Baptist, and that's about the only two active churches that we have in the program right now. So if you're willing and if you want to, sign up on the sheet and we'll come pick you up and bring you to service.

AH: Now, how is the whole-because I know Mr. Brown, who has really reached out to kids, and-

WB: That also includes the Mexicans, because we do have Mexicans.

AH: Yes. I wanted to see if we could touch upon that. How does your-or how did you two guys, you and Mr. Brown, come together as part of this effort to reach out to black and Latino children?

WB: OK. Now, Mr. Brown is the one who contacted me about it, because John Blake, who runs this thing, was out of town. So he was handling it for him while he was away. And he approached us with the child evangelism thing, and they were having a meeting over at Greater St. Paul. So I grabbed my youth department, and we went over there to the meeting. And I liked the concept, and so did many others here in this church. And they agreed to be a part of this thing. This was about, maybe a year ago. And what happened is, they saw a program in Brooklyn where they bussed the children in, and they played games, and they'd teach them, and they'd have a little-you know, it's a good time, but it's also a learning time. And somehow the message gets across to them. So they went up there and checked that program out, and that's what we're implementing now. And it's working. So I guess after that meeting, again, about a year later, then they were actually ready to start. So then we had a series of meetings here to get the people back together and involved in it, and the room was packed. Now, when the first Saturday came to go pick these children up, we're back down to the skeleton crew. You know, these people talked a good game-some of my members, too, and I'm still beating them over the head. "Yeah, we'll be there..." And I have two that are actively participating in this area, but there could have been more. So now it's at the point where the children are really, in small groups, they're coming around. They're professing Christ, they're getting themselves saved. But now, they need to join somebody's church or get involved with somebody. And

that's where we are now. So hopefully-and they're working on these lists and things, so between First Baptist and us, we'll take them if they're willing to come. Not forcing them, but we'll be glad to have them, let's put it that way.

AH: So you also, along with Mr. Brown, drive the church vans.

WB: Well, I drive one of the buses, because that's what I volunteered to do. I don't really have the time to do the counseling and knock on the doors. But I agreed to drive the bus, and I do what I agreed to do. And I have two of my deacons and one other guy that drive faithfully on Saturday mornings. So basically, what I committed to was transportation, and that's what we're providing. And I'm out there, like I say, I put my money where my mouth is.

AH: When I spoke to Mr. Brown, a concern of his, which you voiced as well, was that there was not nearly enough cooperation among the various churches, including black churches.

WB: Here's what we find-and I do have some friends in the ministry, and I don't think it's a totally selfish thing, but what I realized, they haven't realized yet, is that you can't do it by yourself anyway. And if you do, then you're going about it the wrong way. I understand if you're a Baptist church, you're a Full Gospel church, they're mainly talking doctrine, you know. And what's happening, when you get all these different messages in your head, you're talking about religion and not about Jesus Christ and salvation. But somehow they feel that, well, we're really doing this. Like Liberty, the church that was here before. They're still picking up children in the neighborhoods and taking them out to their church. So we said, "Look, why can't we get together?" "Oh, no, we're already, we pick up hundreds of kids, we're doing this and we..." Well, as long as they're getting Jesus, you know, that's not such a bad thing. But we got people from Raleigh, Eagle's Nest, I think they come over twice a month, and they're picking up kids in the neighborhood. But why don't the neighborhood churches get together and go over there and say-All I'm saying is, Say the same thing! And give the people the right to choose where they want to be church. That's all I'm saying. And then you eliminate all that other stuff, you know. But they just, you know, they just feel that they've been doing stuff for years and it's working, and this and that. You know. Well, is it working? The groups-you're picking up a group, and you've got that group acclimated, fine. But what about the ones that are not acclimated, the ones that are still confused? And you've got a lot of people already going in that neighborhood, you know, why can't you help reach out to others, instead of just, "I got my group"? There's more. So I don't know, I really don't know. So we just go along with the faithful few. Not that this is the only program and that it's the only one that is working, because it's not. But I feel that if you're going to really get some fruit, then you can do it on a less confusing basis. And then everybody still can benefit, if you're looking for members. You know, we're not-we have members, but we're not out there advertising for members, you see what I'm saying? And then everybody can't deal with these people, you know. They'll send money, but you know, "I don't want to be around children", you know. But somebody's gotta do it. Somebody took time with me. And I know that all they need-they may not embrace it, but if you even plant that seed now, somewhere in their lives they heard about Jesus. See what I'm saying? So, I don't know, we're just going to continue to do the very best that we can. I think as this program develops and as they get some-I think they're going to do some videos and things, to, I guess if you want to say, help persuade or show people what's actually happening, and not out there competing for souls, you know, or bodies, or whatever you want to call it.

AH: Just based on your knowledge, I was hoping if you could assess how much outreach had been done by black churches to really reach out to Latinos or to sponsor activities to try to bring black and Latinos into the same environment.

WB: We are trying to equip ourselves. We have a couple of people here that speak fluent Mexican, and like I say, Paul, who is a minister, he's one of our youth ministers who runs the youth missionary team, went down there, oh, it's been a year ago or more, and invited them, and offered any kind of assistance to them. And we haven't heard from them. We have--some people have walked in; well, we have some Mexican people in the day care. And some that come in with some needs and clothes, and we help them with what we can help them with. So we are embracing them, if they want to come. I think First Baptist probably has

a better ministry to them, as far as communication. But we're trying to develop that now. So probably what we would suggest is that they would go over there first, because they are more equipped to get the message. You know, my thing is not so much the people, it's salvation. It's really changing your life, you know, that's what it's all about. And where they get it from, I'm not concerned. But we are not at the point now where we can really effectively, I think, minister to them. We can help them, we'll do anything possible to help them, but I would steer them to somebody that would more be able to reach them, you know what I mean? Now, the ones that understand English or something, it's not a problem. And we do have a couple that come, mainly through relationships with women. I haven't seen him around lately, but he was coming kind of faithfully at one time. But he doesn't stay long enough to help-you know, we can't snatch him in to help us. So it'll come eventually.

AH: So you think a language barrier might be part of the-

WB: Yeah, for us. And the way that our service goes, for somebody to translate while the service is going on and all that kind of stuff. So we just have to find a way to reach them. And we will.

AH: But you are, to the extent of, if they're in material need, there are things that you can provide.

WB: Yeah. We'll give them milk and bread and clothes, and we've got a whole trailer back there with furniture and cribs and mattresses. People need stuff, you know. So that's what I'm saying: don't kick the door in, come ask for it.

AH: Within the context of the changes that have taken place in northeast central Durham neighborhoods right now, I wanted to just get your conception of what makes a strong community in general. Or where this community needs to go to reach that point, if it's not there already.

WB: I think what makes any community stronger is good morals, good moral character. And to be frank, the schools are not giving good moral character these days. So where do you get that from, other than the church? There are a lot of churches who will remain nameless that don't go outside the doors. They just have their service, and if somebody comes and joins, fine, if not-. I don't know, maybe that's the vision they have or, I don't know. But the Word says, "Go out unto all the world." So this church is here for the neighborhood. We are here to help, we are here to offer salvation to people and teach them about Jesus, that there's another lifestyle, that you can replace those guns with a Bible. And that you don't have to live that way. And our slogan is, "Changing Durham for Christ, one prayer at a time." And that's what it takes, one person at a time. And every one of these people that we reach around here, or that whoever reaches-I don't care who reaches them! But somebody has to come outside these church doors and deal with these people. A lot of churches have foreign missions, they run all over to India, Africa. But I've seen kids come out of these places that look like they just ran out of Haiti or something like that. So there's work right here in this neighborhood, as well as the entire Durham area, but I'm saying we're not in the entire Durham area, we're here for this neighborhood. And I think, and I've seen it, you know, we have kids here that we picked up from these same neighborhoods years ago. Their parents started to come, they don't live there anymore, they're driving cars, they're getting off the welfare, they're getting rid of the food stamps, you understand what I'm saying? Because they are bettering themselves, because their moral character has changed. Their lifestyle has changed. And they want to better themselves. And at one time our van had to make five trips. Now we can hardly find anybody to pick up, because they're all driving nice cars. Just coming out of those same-[] Gardens and all these places. So that's why I know it can make a difference. Because it's already happening, you know. And I see kids that I had to stop the van and read the riot act to, you know, now they're right on in with the rest of them.

AH: Is there a way to get a perception of what kids' mindset is to diversity, to different ethnic groups? I know you've talked about an adult mentality. But have you been able to observe kids in interaction with other kids different than they are?

WB: Yes, because when I do pick up some Mexican children, I kind of feel that we have to protect them somewhat, and then when I look at it, you don't. I know when we go over to, it's one particular place, and there are three children we pick up there, and they look like little doll babies, you know. And they get on the bus, and they're quiet, you know, they're not behavior problems. And you know, at first, "Oh, we're getting some Mexican kids," and blah-blah-blah, and then one girl says, "Oh, they're cute." So you kind of feel a little overprotective towards them because you don't want something to happen that would keep them from coming or something like that, but then again, when I look, I get into my route and I look back, everybody's on the bus riding. So I don't know how to put my finger on it. I guess it's a strange thing. I think anytime you introduce something different, especially to children...

[END of Tape 1, Side B.]

[BEGIN Tape 2, Side A.]

WB: What I notice as I'm driving, you know, I look through the rear-view mirror to see, and they're sitting there quietly, and some of the other kids are slapping each other and hitting each other and whatnot, but they're not bothering the Mexican children. So my apprehension really didn't pan out, you know, because I thought that, well, we'd make sure they'd sit around so nothing could happen to them. So I think once they get past the difference, then you realize at some point that people are people, even though the language may be different or the skin color may be different. But we're all the same. And that's what we're having all this trouble with, because people don't believe it.

AH: I guess that's sort of a major issue: how do you get people to believe that? Because, like you said before, it's so easy to articulate things, but...

WB: We are stereotyped. The Mexicans are stereotyped. Here, lately, they have some programs on the TV that actually portray what really happens, but most of it's-you know, they want you to see a certain thing. Black people are violent, they're lazy, they don't want to do this, they don't want to work, they want to get over on the system-and that's somewhat true of all races. You have the certain segment of the society that the Bible says, the poor will be with you always. And they will. And not necessarily because you're poor means that you have the poverty mentality. Some people are poor-I got poor because I didn't have a job, and the money I was making couldn't pay the bills. So one day you're up, the next day you're down. That doesn't make me a robber and a thief. I'm poor, but I still have my character and my morality, OK? And that's what you have to realize about people. People say, "OK, blacks are this way, period." Which you know is not true, because you see black people in every area of life, every walk of life, every profession. So how did they get there, if they're supposed to be in this little box? In Brooklyn, Puerto Ricans had--their stereotype was, to the black folks, that they were hotheaded and passionate and would cut you in a minute. But so would some of my black brothers. You see what I'm saying? So what are you talking about? What's the difference, you see? And somehow, we can't get ourselves out of these boxes, even though there's countless examples from all races that have proved this thing can be wrong. We just have this thing in our mind-like Jewish people, "Jewish people are this way".

AH: Do you think that also runs true for Latinos, in terms of their perceptions of blacks?

WB: I think so. They look at us the same way we look at them. And again, I don't want to get into the divisions among the black folks, but there are, and we might as well be truthful about it. So it's not something that you can put your finger on and diagnose it and say, "Well, if we change this, everything'll be all right." But I think all people deserve a chance, now that they have a chance. See, when I was a kid, when you were in Virginia, you didn't have a chance. Because the laws were against you. So now, I don't want to hear you crying and telling me that the white man this and that, because you have the opportunity now to go to school, to do something with your life, to be anything that you want to be. So don't come running to me about what happened five hundred years ago. Get over it, please. I don't want to hear that no more. So now we're attacking, we call it, small-minded people. And if that's where you are, we're not throwing you in the garbage, but you need to come up, you don't need to stay there. You need to give those people back their stamps, you need to get a job, you need to break the curse. Now, what's happened is,

families have come up, mother, daughter, mother-all they know is go down, get on the system, and have babies. When you gonna stop that? Somebody's got to tell you it's not right. And if you come here, you're going to hear it. So it's not about just spirituality; it's the whole man that we deal with, as well. The whole person. And you don't have to stay where you are.

AH: Has your daughter, your younger one, has she had much interaction with those of different cultures?

WB: Well, she was born here, but I guess mainly white people would be more, if you want to say, of other races, that she has interaction with. Friends, and in school. The other thing I tell my daughter-see, I challenge my daughter, and I haven't had much time to do that with my other kids because I haven't had the time because I was out trying to make a living, and I regret that. But none of them are suffering for it; they have morals, they know right from wrong. But this daughter, I've had more time to have input with, as far as her projects are concerned, I challenge her. She came to me one day and said, "Dad, that school is terrible." She said this and that and this and that. And I said, "Oh, you're kidding." So one of the ladies here invited me to come sit in on her son's class, because he was in some trouble. I couldn't believe what I saw. I just could not believe-. And I'm an open-minded person, I've been through a lot, and I couldn't believe what was going on in that classroom. And that's another reason we started the school here. I don't want to get into all the details, but it just blew my mind. So then I said, "Well, now I understand what you're talking about, daughter." So now, the question is, well, you can get above that by applying yourself to these special classes that they offer. So if you want to get away from the idiots, then you have to learn something. So I challenged her. Now she's taking these advanced courses. Now she's in a group of kids, at least in the classroom, that want to learn. And that's what I tell my Sunday school class, I say, "Look, I don't want to hear that 'Well, they do this.' Well, all you have to do is apply yourself. Get above the crowd. Yeah, you're going to have to deal with them in the lunchroom and the hallway, but in your classroom, you're going to be in there with people that want to learn." "Oh!" So now, I have tutors coming, to try to bring them up. Like I say, we have to address the whole person. So, "Do you want to do this?" "Yeah." "OK." So we get the tutors. Now, they're trying to work on really getting into their studies so that they can get to the point where they want to be with some people that can learn so they can get ahead. Everybody's not going to do everything perfect, but there are some that are doing it. So if you want to beat the school system and get away from them, then you gotta get away from the adage, like when I was going to school, "All you gotta do is get by, you just pass and you're all right." You can do better. And they're doing it. So now, you're in a class with people who want to learn, as opposed to people who want to throw spitballs all day. So it's a lot of stuff going on around here that is not only addressing spirituality, but it's also addressing the practical side of life. And we go down there to Science and Math on Tuesday and Saturday and pick up those people to tutor, and they come out for it. So like I say, it's not just about talking about what you need to do; it's also helping them get there.

AH: Since you've been here at the church, we've talked about sort of conceptions about race across-Latino and black conceptions. Have you noticed a change at all, in terms of this mindset, or is it the same, do you think, in terms how-

WB: Within this church, I think there's a tolerant attitude, because that's what we teach. So I can't necessarily speak for the neighborhood, but from what I see in this neighborhood, there's a lot of interaction between the whites, the blacks, and the Latinos in this neighborhood. I see the young ones, both white and Mexican, walking with the baggy pants and the hat turned around, whatever they're doing out here. So I think that basically they're getting along. But there are some pockets of mistrust, and I think that comes from the older, more established Southerners. I think the younger people handle this stuff differently. As I was saying from what I observed on the bus. I think it's the outright born-here Southern people that are having more of a problem with this thing. But just from what I observe in the neighborhood, the younger guys get together-you know, even the white guys are riding by here, with the black and whites hanging out together. So the younger kids are on a better level.

AH: And this is even applicable to Latino kids?

WB: Yeah. Now, they're usually living in groups together, but there are some areas down here on-what's the street down here? I think it's Ash Street-where there's house, house, house, and there's Mexican, black, Mexican, mixed up a little bit, and I noticed one Saturday when I was on the bus, there was an altercation, but I think it was about some furniture somebody had sat out in the street, and the black and the Mexican were arguing about who was going to get it.

AH: Are these residents?

WB: Yeah, I guess they lived in the houses on either side of the one that had the furniture. I really don't know the details, but that's what it looked like. So it wasn't any other kind of thing. It was something about an object they were arguing over. But again, I think there's mistrust on both sides. Standoffish kind of attitude. But on the other hand, you know, when they do mingle, they get together.

AH: That brings me to my next question. Do you think that Latinos and African-Americans share common ends, common goals?

WB: [pause] I want to say no on this question, because the Puerto Rican perspective in Brooklyn was, you come over here, you work hard, you get ahead, and you go back home. Because the money that you can accumulate over a twenty-year period of time, I mean, it was like 8 to 1 when I was over there. So if you go back home with a hundred thousand dollars, you've got a million pesos, see what I'm saying? So I think that when you leave your homeland to go somewhere, you're kind of leaving your heart. And it takes kind of a courageous person to do that. Like I said, when I went over there, I wouldn't want to go over there trying to make a living for myself in a strange land. So I don't think they're coming over here because they hate their country. I think they're coming over here because of the opportunity, just like any other new immigrants-the Italians, the Irish, came here for the opportunity. And they see the opportunity where the blacks that they're competing with, if you want to call it competing, don't see it. Or are not willing to deal with it. So what to them may be a low-paying job is like, you know, it's like the top of the world. Five, six dollars an hour. When you make five, six pesos an hour, you know. So they look at it as opportunity, and I think they look at it as, "OK, well, I'll go over there and put up with that for whatever, then I'm going back home." Some of them do, some of them don't. So I think their main focus is on getting ahead, accumulating something, and then, eventually, going back home.

AH: So you believe that there are two different mindsets, and that there's not any point of intersection where the two groups sort of meet eye to eye on some things?

WB: I think where they meet eye to eye is competition for work, or-I'm trying to find words for this thing. Let's say they had two different viewpoints. But yes, there are some common places where they're going to come together. OK? But I think the end results are different. I think that black people generally want to achieve. Coming out of the stereotype box. Most of us want to do the best that we can do. Most of us want our children to have lives better than we had. But there's still that segment, and I go back to the white trash segment, that's down there in the trenches competing for those low-cost jobs, because they can't do any better. Or don't want to do any better, because the opportunity is there. And I always say that. "Well, I didn't finish school." "Well, go get your GED." There's countless stories about people who didn't finish this and didn't finish that that are now employing hundreds of people. In other words, I don't want to hear your sad story anymore. I've got a sad story, everybody's got a sad story, what are you going to do about it? If you want to stay down there, stay down there, but don't knock anybody else because of your decision. But they're looking at it as, they're taking away my opportunity. My little Burger King job is now going to a Mexican because they're willing to listen and do what the man tells them to do. And you're coming in there with this attitude about, "You're only paying me three dollars to flip these burgers." To them, man, you know, "Hey! I'm ready to go!" And you're going, "Well, this is all I can do." So it's an attitude thing. And it's not really a threat, but you see it as a threat. So. And then there's some little truth to some of these things, that as far as discrimination financially against blacks, because there's documented facts that they hold back from us finances so that we can only get so far. And that's a fact of life, and life is not fair, and that's the first thing I teach my students: life is not fair. Especially my daughter and my kids. So, get over

it, it's not fair. So what do you do about it? That's where I'm at. I'm just about truth, and if it's not the Mexicans, it's going to be the Alaskans, you know. There's always going to be somebody moving into your neighborhood. And when I talk about other groups, for instance, when I was in Brooklyn and the influx of Puerto Rican people came, we had one family in particular that would just come to the window and throw the garbage out the window. And we just thought that was-of course, we had an incinerator in the building. So finally someone went there and said, "Why are you doing that?" And they said, "Well, where do you put the garbage?" And they said, "Well, we have this thing back here." So then when you go back to their life in Puerto Rico, they've got pigs out in the back yard, they just throw the garbage out there or burn it. They just didn't know. So we're going, "Look at those people! They're this, they're that!" But they didn't know that you open up the thing and put the trash in it. Nobody told them. So again, that's how you get stereotyped. "They're all that way." No, they're not all that way, because if you go into Barrios' house, it's clean, it's neat. They have things just like you have. They have couches, they have chairs, they have beds. They have food in the refrigerator. They're just people, you know. So like I said, after the Puerto Ricans, now here came the Haitians. Now, what are they saying about the Haitians? "They don't wash. They stink. They don't use deodorant. They don't do this." But it's the same thing. They stick together; next thing you know, they own a house, they got a cab, they own this, they own-. Because they see the opportunity and they seize it.

AH: Now, you mentioned these two things that are sort of parallel but maybe perpendicular to each other, in that African-Americans and Latinos are coming together, they are interacting, but yet there's still this mistrust going on too. How do you overcome the mistrust?

WB: I don't know. Because, to be frank, black people are together, but there's still mistrust within the race. You see what I'm saying? We live with it every day. And the only way you overcome that is when you interact enough and you begin to do the things you say you're doing and you begin to act the way that you're supposed to. Then there's no other choice but to believe each other, because you're doing what you're supposed to do, you see? That's why I'm saying it's hard to describe this thing. Black people are stigmatized as far as business is concerned. And I'm just going to say it: when I hear complains sometimes, "Well, I'm going to take it to the white man next time." And here again, you've got all of your black businessmen stigmatized because there are a few out there. But there's also a few white bad ones. There's also a few bad Mexicans. You see what I'm saying? But you take your car, or you get the black to do something for you, but you're not sure he's going to do a good job. Because we, as a race, have a bad reputation for being bad businesspeople. So, all right, you took your car there anyway, the guy did a good job. "Oh, phew, man, I'm glad." You take your car again, he does a good job. "Oh, man, I'm glad." So now, hey, this guy's all right. So he's proven himself.

AH: So you think again, it's this interaction, this continual interaction, that needs to take place?

WB: There's interaction, because there has to be interaction. But the trust doesn't come until you actually see that these things are going to be fulfilled on a consistent basis. You actually see that he's not going to pull his knife out and cut your throat because he got mad at you. Or you begin to eat with each other, and you begin to talk with each other, and you begin to see that you have things in common. "Oh! Hey! This is good!" Just like that mechanic fixed your car seven times without a problem, without doing anything wrong. So now you've built up a trust. But first, you're kind of apprehensive. Because you don't know what that mechanic is going to try to do. You don't know if he's going to try to get over on you. Or whether that Mexican is trying to make friends with you because he wants this or that, or the black wants this or that. So after a certain amount of time, the situation will prove itself. See what I'm saying?

AH: So initially, when I asked the question, do Latinos and African Americans share common goals, and you noted some important distinctions, just in terms of the mindset and other things. But you also talked about, when people come together, they can see their commonalities. So do you think there are commonalities among these differences between-?

WB: Well, like I say, Barrios to me, Pamo to me, we were friends in every sense of the word. He was at my house, I was at his house, we were all in each other's houses, we knew each other's parents, I ate a broccoli sandwich. I said, "What is that?" He said, "Oh, this is a broccoli sandwich, we eat that all the time." So. And I liked it. So we shared different foods and stuff. And then you'd get to saying, Man, this ain't all bad. You'd get to experience other cultures and stuff they do that you don't do. And you begin to know the person, you begin to trust him. And that's what it's all about. But a lot of people don't let it get that far. "Well, those Mexicans, I'm staying away from them, they ain't no good. They ain't this, they ain't that." Or, "they're dirty." That's another thing you hear. I never see as many people walking up-all you need to do is take a videocamera to their laundromat around there, they come with the clothes, they walk half a mile down the road with their little bags. You know, they keep themselves clean. Where did that come from? So here, again, we're saying things about people that we don't know. We're just assuming it because it's what people say about them. Now, a Mexican goes for a job, and a black goes for a job. Now, the man says what he knows about black people, "Well, you know, they try to get over on you, they this and that and that and this, they're going to try to get money from you. And I look at this Mexican, and I say, well, they're hard-working people. Maybe I can give him fifty cents less and he'll be happy with it." Who do you think he's going to hire? And it may not be true at all. Because when I'm looking for-And I mean, I've been there. When I need a job, I need a job, you know? And it's up to me to settle for whatever you're going to pay me. And if I can't deal with it, then I'm going someplace else. So there's a slot. Now, whoever that man hires, he hires. But that still doesn't deny that you can't get a job someplace else. I could see if unemployment was, you know, ten, fifteen percent; we're talking about two, three percent unemployment. So there's work, if you want it. So I don't see that as a threat. So people are going to make decisions on what they perceive, or what they know, or what they think they know, about other people.

AH: Are you optimistic that both groups of people can overcome these stereotypes, to get out of the box?

WB: I've been living kind of long, and I've been seeing-and I'm talking about the black race-I'm working for us to get together, OK? And until you really get your own self together, until you love yourself, you can't love anybody else. OK? That little boy in the project, you know, "Well, I never win anything." I listen to them on the bus. "Well, I'm always this, and I can't do this, and I can't never get nothing." They have this attitude that they're losers. So if I'm a loser, then how am I going to embrace someone else? So you have to change the attitudes. And again, this is a process that's going to take-it may take more years than what we have, to tell you the truth. But there has been some progress. Now, from a Christian standpoint, and I was involved in the Promise Keepers, and a guy came over to me right there in Washington, and he said, "Man, I'm sorry for what we did to you." I said, "You didn't do nothing to me." I said, "Before there was a Promise Keeper, I had to love you in spite of it, because I want to get to heaven." So when I look at things from my perspective, I'm looking from a Christian's perspective. And my Bible tells me I must love everybody. And I try my best to do that, OK? Whatever race or creed we're talking about. And that's what we teach here. So we don't look at it as a person-and we have some Caucasian members-we don't look at it as far as race. We look at it as the body of Christ, as people. Even though we may have a different color or a different language.

AH: And getting that message ingrained in the black community, that's the challenge.

WB: See, I'm looking at it from a moral standpoint. So if I change your attitude, you're not a loser. You're worth something. You are somebody. And I'm not trying to say that everything that we're doing, or that we have all the answers, because we don't. I'm just saying that with Jesus on your side, you can do anything, OK? And you can have self-respect. And you can even love yourself. You can like yourself. And when that happens within you, then you can like somebody else. I don't care what happens; if you are down on yourself, if you don't like yourself, then how on earth are you going to like your neighbor, when your life is so miserable and lame? You see what I'm saying? So that's what has to be changed. Now, even with all that, yes, there's interaction, because you have to work together, you have to live in the same neighborhood, you're going to have to talk to each other, so again, the trust factor will kick in at some point. So yeah, there's going to be some interaction. But it's going to be, both groups are going to approach each other with caution until that happens. There's a lot of work to be done.

AH: Well, this has been wonderful. I just wanted to ask if there is anything that you would like to add. Any final thoughts or observations?

WB: Yes. I guess what I would like to say is that people need to start looking at each other as fellow human beings, without the color, without the language, those barriers that somehow separate us shouldn't be factors. I know that, living fifty-one years on this earth, that perspective is changing a little bit. But people still judge you by your color and your language. It's a fact. When you meet a group of people, you will categorize those people before you say a word. Going back to Brooklyn, we'll call it, like, street language. You will categorize a person by the way they dress, or what particular hat they have on, which sort of indicates what neighborhood they come from, and you'll make a whole lot of assumptions before you meet that person. And most of the time they're wrong. So all I'm saying is, morally, people have to change if they will, to accept one another as we are. And yes, there are bad elements in every race that's on this earth, and there always will be. And yes, there's poor among all races, and that will also be. But there should not be any reasons why we can't live together on this planet in harmony. Building a trust factor. And a lot of times we don't give ourselves enough time to build that trust factor. Also, we have to instill in our youth that they are worth something. And that they can accomplish anything that they set their mind to do, or their will to do. So I believe that morals have to be changed, and that's where the church comes in. Where we need to get off our rusty-dusties, get out into these neighborhoods, put your money, your time, a little sweat, into helping these people better themselves. Sitting around talking about it and making plans doesn't, I guess, negate the fact that you have to get out there and do something. Put all the talk, put some money in it, spend a dime, to help somebody. You never know what buying a kid something means, that he never had before. To change his attitude. This loser mentality, this poverty mentality needs to be attacked from all sides. And it takes a community, it takes a church and people that are willing to get out there and do it.

AH: Thank you. Well, on behalf of the Southern Oral History Program, I want to thank you very much for taking the time out to talk to us, and I appreciate your wonderful insights and comments. Thank you.

WB: Thank you, and I appreciate it, and I hope this study accomplishes what it's set out to accomplish.

AH: Thank you.

[END of interview.]

[END of Tape 2, Side A.]