

Interview

with

BRUCE JONES AND GERALD SIDER

January 22, 2004

by Malinda Maynor and Willie Lowery

Transcribed by Sharon Caughill

The Southern Oral History Program  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Index and tape on deposit at  
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Citation of this interview should be as follows:  
"Southern Oral History Program,  
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Wilson Library,  
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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

BRUCE JONES AND GERALD SIDER  
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TAPE BEGINS IN MID-CONVERSATION

MALINDA MAYNOR: Dad was saying last night, he made the point about Darlene getting fired, how Jimmy should have done that on the quiet before releasing it to the paper. He should have gotten it approved by the tribal council before it getting out. And I agree with that, but on the other hand Darlene, it's not like she has any real base of support, I don't think, that's going to get upset.

BRUCE JONES: Well I was wondering because they said that when Leon came Monday that the tribe did some kind of walk out, or some kind of—.

MM: The employees? I heard that there were some people from Raleigh that came down and held a thing in the parking lot, but I didn't know about an employee walk out.

BRUCE JONES: I've got the follow up, and if it's the same group, that group did that at the Housing Authority.

MM: Oh.

BJ: And I called them all together and terminated them. I sent them all home because there ain't no way an employee starts telling Lee and I—there's nothing, any kind of protection that I know that an employee can decide that they're not going to show up for work and boycott the organization.

MM: [LAUGHS.]

SOMEONE MALE: [GROAN.]

BJ: And not have to reap any consequences.

MM: Any consequences. Probably not.

WILLIE LOWERY: What about Pearlean [Revels]. What was the deal on her.

BJ: Here's the situation that I know about Larry [Townsend]. Larry is a fine man, but his intensity in what he sets out gets so high that he loses moderation.

WL: Yeah.

BJ: And so he was arm twisted, I mean, I don't know this. I'm oing to play it out with what I think I know about it. Pearlean said, "I'm sorry, Mr. Townsend, but I can't support you as the speaker of the tribe." And Larry says, "Pearlean, I'm this, and I'm that, tell me why can't you support me?" "Well, I don't have to. I don't have to tell you nothing." So I understand that when Donald [Bullard, the Tribal Attorney] charged them Larry was so intense that he knew that he didn't have the votes Thursday night to get the speaker's job, and he just thought he was being cute, but apparently it had gotten to Pearlean, either direct. And when they were coming off that stage he, as it was told to me, he hit her on the back with a folder and said something to the effect, "It's your fault that—."

MM: That he didn't get the speakership.

BJ: "That I didn't get the speakership." And she came out—I was a personal witness of this. She came immediately to her husband and, I think Doc Locklear. Isn't he the husband of the former clerk of court's wife?

MM: Yeah.

BJ: She came to him because they're from Saddletree, and she was trembling. When you pique people's emotions to the level she was at, she was shaking like a leaf on a log because I was holding her. She said, "I can't believe I almost did what I—that Larry

Townsend almost caused me to just knock the fool out of him.” She said, “That wouldn’t have been ladylike on my part.” Here’s a woman dealing with her emotions. It was a public gathering and all of this, and she’s in pure tears. I said, “Pearlean,” and then she got her husband upset, and he went looking for Larry with his grandchild. Where does all this translate into—how does this grandchild interpret tribal affairs the rest of her life? Here I am. I said, “Pearlean, do not stoop to that level. Don’t give them or anybody the satisfaction that people—” because I’ve been there with what they’ve done to me several times. As a matter of fact I’ve been up there at the high school when about 10,000 after Julian Pierce, and [motioning to Gerald Sider] your good friend—Mac Legerton was behind all that—had me and the governor of North Carolina just sit up, what have you. The governor specifically sent me there to communicate to him that he doesn’t want the people making statements that didn’t he want to hear what was going on. They said the governor wouldn’t respond, and he said, “Bruce, I’m being misrepresented. I want you to go there and tell them that that’s not my intent.” We had folks down here about to riot. That’s why I can’t get too excited Mac Legerton. Some of the things he does it’s okay, and when you go way out there on me, I’m just that much conservative, I guess, that.

[EVERYONE TALKING AND LAUGHING AT ONCE.]

GERALD SIDER: Well, I’m not responsible for all...

BJ: This is not why you guys are here...

MM: Well this is leading around to it

GS: I’m not even married to him.

BJ: But the thing is that I just hate, and maybe we’ve got to go through this, maybe it’s a part the process.

MM: It is. It is. I think every tribal government has been through it, still goes through it.

BJ: When I came along, started getting into Indian business, and I went out west and saw Indians, I said, "People said we weren't Indians!"

MM: They're just like us!

BJ: I said, "Oh, Lord!" I said, "There ain't a bit of difference between this is and what I call troubl."

MM: I know. I know. I was struck by that when we did some shooting at Hopi. I just said, "Gosh, these people, they're the same." Men talk to women the same way. The tribal government operates the same. It's incredible. They all talk about the same things. Exactly the same, but that does kind of lead us to why we're all here. I was thinking this morning about what to talk about specifically because I know we don't have a lot of time. Is there a certain time you want to be out of here?

BJ: I don't need to get back to Raleigh— I've got to go back tonight. I don't want to get back real late because Peggy worries about me on the highway.

MM: Yeah, right.

BJ: I somehow don't worry too much about myself, but there was a time that I had problems with cataracts. I had problems with night blindness, but I've had very successful operations on both of my eyes, but Peggy still deals with that. I wish I had a quarter for every time I've spent on that [Interstate] 95 going back to Raleigh after twelve, one.

GS: I've got to, I'm taking Bruce out to supper tonight, and then they're putting in place the new president of the Lumberton NAACP, and I've been invited to go on down to that. I don't know.

BJ: What time is that?

GS: I've got to be down in Lumberton with a sports coat on at a quarter to seven. I don't know if I'll make it or not. I may make it. I may not.

MM: Okay. Well, it's five—

GS: You may interview Bruce a while, and I'll come back some other day and do it one day.

MM: I think both of you will want to comment. I'd like both of you to comment on the things that I want to talk about, so let's make sure we're done by five after six.

BJ: All right.

MM: Does that seem okay? About forty, fifty minutes or so?

GS: Well, let's try it.

MM: We'll try. So basically the topics I was thinking about going over were voter registration and the '60s, sort of sixty-seven, sixty-eight, through 1970. That time period.

BJ: He'll have to help you with that because I wasn't party to any of that.

MM: You weren't part of any of that, okay.

BJ: I knew that it was going on, and it really was part of LRDA's earlier thrust, but it was more the players that were involved in LRDA were the same players that were involved in voter—

MM: In voter registration.

BJ: Right. Isn't that a fair assessment?

MM: Is that accurate?

BJ: Like Thadis, and Tommy Dial, and Gerry was involved in that.

GS: It was more than voter registration because we were fighting against the Welfare Department at this point, too. It was just a really much broader based struggle than simple voter registration in those days, and rightly so. I remember one day, one wonderful day, Horace Locklear, and Woodrow Dial—.

MM: Why don't we turn on the tape recorder. It should be on. Is it? Oh, great. Okay.

GS: Horace Locklear, and Woodrow Dial, and Rod Locklear, and myself were in Rod's Mustang, and we were going down to Lumberton to talk the bank about why they didn't hire any Indian tellers. There was a grass fire somewhere just before we got to Dr. Brooks' house, or we just passed Dr. Brooks' house, and it had gotten out of control. People were fighting the grass fire, and we got out of the car, and we all were fairly well dressed up, and we rolled our pants up, and we went in and helped fight the grass fire. Then, an hour later covered with smoke and ashes we got back in the car, and we drove down to Southern National Bank, and we knocked on Hector's [McLean's] door, and said, "How come you don't hire any Indians?"

He was trembling. He was shaking with four of us. He said, "Well, who do you represent." Rod, I think, came up with the notion. He said, "We are going to start an employment agency, and we want to know," which was pure nonsense. We were not going to start an employment agency. "We want to know."

Now, part of that was high spirits. Just plain high spirits. We laughed all the way home. We laughed ourselves silly. Part of that was high spirits. Part of that was squeezing and seeing what we could get away with. Part of that was a conscious effort to broaden the struggle so that it wasn't just voter registration, because you talk to people about voting and they—the biggest thing was, I think the overwhelming fact of political organizing in this county as I saw it in those days was that people blamed themselves.

In those days, in '66, '67, the school at Union Chapel, they were being allocated \$24 a year for school supplies for the first grade. There were no shades on the windows in some of these schools so that the sun came beating in. Parents tried to collect money. You'd go talk to people, and the law still said that the family could keep you out to work on the farm. In those days you still could keep out of school to work on a farm any day your parents asked you to. And, of course, the landlord always said to the tenants, "Keep your kids out."

People would always blame themselves for their trouble. They'd say, "I didn't work very hard in school so I left." Or, "I didn't study." Or, "I had other things." So they'd always blame themselves for their problems.

I'd go registering voters with Mr. Thadis. I spent a lot of time with him. He kept trying to tell me, "It's not you. It's the system. It's not you. It's the system." So what we had to do, we felt, was to show that getting together could make the system work for people a little bit. A bit self-centered of me, but I kept telling them—I was going to these meetings all the time. I was telling people like, my grandmother's story over and over again.



My grandmother landed on the docks of Ellis Island. Didn't speak word of English. Didn't have a job. Was scared. Was young. Was absolutely lost in America. She's met on the docks by a worker from Tammany Hall. That was the Democratic political party machine in New York City. They met the immigrants on the docks, helped them find a place to stay the first night. Helped them find an apartment. Helped them find a job. My grandmother voted straight Democratic when she was so senile she didn't remember my name. Every two years she'd vote until she died. I'd tell people the story. I say, "You do things for people."

When my grandfather got sick and couldn't work, the Democratic Party sent a basket of food to the house. I'd say, "You gotta do things for people." So we go down to fight this fight, too, with the Welfare Department to get people on welfare. We go down and ride on Hector McLean to get people jobs.

BJ: I think that kind of involvement led to—and they were meeting like we are right here tonight, brainstorming, and I don't know what led, they'll have to tell you that, but, "let's get Bruce involved in this." So I came down, and they then wanted to put together an organization and get what he set the stage for in place, to where if the question was asked, "Who do you represent?" then you've got some legitimate group that you can point to, and that they can point to and know that it exists, and that you're not out here like they're saying whistling in the wind. That this is a group to be reckoned with. We brainstormed and thought about how could we do that, and it was to form what we did at the first stages of LRDA, but it wasn't LRDA, it was Lumbee, it wasn't Lumbee, it was Regional Development Associates, because it was the associates.

So then Gerry and I were talking about today how when we started this, we went over to Shoe Heel today where I went, and he got out his notepad and was writing on the trunk of the car. And when we put together this group he did some penmanship on the Regional Development Associates' charter that we went and we filed with the Secretary of State's Office and incorporated as a non-profit corporation. And really what we used as the model was some of the experience that Gerry—and he talked about Woodrow Dial and Rod—was with the North Carolina Fund and they had a spin off corporation that I had gone to work for—MDC.

MM: Minority Development?

BJ: No, It was called the North Carolina Manpower Development Corporation.

MM: Manpower Development Corporation. Okay.

BJ: And the Manpower Employment Service threatened suing us if we didn't change our name, so we changed our name to Manpower Development Corporation. That's where MDC came from. Well, my speculation of how they involved me is when I was at the North Carolina Fund, and Gerry, and Rod, and Horace—there were two federally funded projects at the North Carolina Fund by the Department of Labor. They were working with relocating employees outside of the target area, and my project that I was associated with was developing the skills within the target area. When I left here I went to be the deputy director of that, but then I later became the director of that state-wide program, and then I had to get it refunded for the second year. It had about ninety-five employees and a million dollar project.

Our initial effort was to do what Gerry said, put pressure on the system to bring about social change to rectify some of the inefficiencies that we as minorities, blacks and

Indians, were encountering. It was so ironic that we were a social change agency to put pressure on the establishment, funded by federal dollars to do that. But then in order for me to get refunded here was my charge: My charge was to go back to these same people that we had put pressure on to bring about change, which they weren't excited about doing, is to get them to agree to allow us to continue another year's effort. Well, these were some of the community action agency directors and agencies in Nash County, Craven County. Maybe I shouldn't mention names, but Tri-County Community Action where these projects were working out of.

I'll never forget. It was on a Christmas Eve, George Esser made an announcement to the North Carolina Fund staff, the MDC Program has gotten refunded, and I had gotten all these very conservative people to let us continue, when there was someone who had us federally audited because they said we were using techniques of brain washing, and what have you. They brought social psychologists in on us, and audited us about this. Now, I suspect that Gerry, Horace, and Rod observed that and said, "Well, Bruce has been through this up there at North Carolina Fund, and we're a sister project. Let's bring him into this." And they fed my ego and made me chairman and president of the group. I then started interfacing with them.

By that time I had moved from the North Carolina Fund to a spin-off corporation, the Manpower Development Corporation with George Autry. Well, George Autry was a favorite son of Senator Sam Erwin, and he and Rufus Edmonston was part of the Watergate thing and all of that. Well, George called me in one day, and he said, "Bruce, Senator Sam loved the Cherokees. I don't see anybody doing much for the Lumbee and the tribe you come from." And George had met Helen Schierbeck because Helen was

George and Rufus' boss one time with Senator Sam. She was like his administrative assistant or something. She had a role with the senator. And that's how they interfaced with each other. He said, "Let's get Helen on the phone, and let's charge Helen with trying to help us bring about what these guys had set the stage for." We were looking at where can we get funding to make us a legitimate group.

So we got Helen on the phone, and Helen says, "Well, the National Congress of American Indians has got a grant from the Ford Foundation to do outreach work in literacy," like adult education, "and the former director of the Commission of Indian Affairs for the State of New Mexico, Clarence Sequoyah, is the project director for that project, and I'll contact him and see if I can get Clarence to come down there and talk to you about how to get organized and how to submit a grant application."

Well, then we got together as a group of the four of us that had incorporated, and we said, "Well, we can get a small grant, and what we'll do with that grant, what is the best thing to do?" Well, what he was saying as I understood it was, we needed an outreach effort, somebody that could communicate this core thinking. We looked at the community and somewhat like what's going on now but a little differently, we looked and said, "What are all the factions that tend to divide us, and who are the personalities in those different groups?" Would you believe we came up with fifty-some elements that tended to fragment us.

MM: Such as what?

BJ: Education versus uneducated. The political stronghold that the school system had on who was employed, who could work and who couldn't get a job. Back then, and there was so much graft in the system. Like if you didn't pay somebody, or it was said if

you didn't pay somebody to get you a job, you just didn't get a job teaching in the system. We were turning out more educators, and how that led to the college—at one time we developed the college to train teachers, Indians, to teach in our own school system. But then the thinking was, here we are. We've developed a system that's developing more teachers than we've got jobs for these people, and now this graft has come in.

MM: Because of the demand for jobs?

BJ: Yeah, and if we wasn't being taped I could say something about this very house that we're in and who that.

[BOTH LAUGH.]

MM: Why not?

BJ: I can't.

MM: I understand.

BJ: I told Gerry that I didn't want to knife myself. I'm too old and been through the hackles. I don't need something hanging over my head that I can't sleep at night. But anyways, and I would hope that you would trust me, that you would delete some stuff.

MM: There's a form that you can sign that you can put any sort of restrictions on it.

BJ: That I don't want to—.

GS: Can you say what it is? You're doing an oral history of the civil rights.

MM: Right.

GS: You're doing it for whom?

MM: I'm doing an oral history of the long Civil Rights Movement as it's been called, what most people consider to be the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement, but

is actually in real terms the heart of the Civil Rights Movement, here it was the late 60s, 1970s, after the assassination of Martin Luther King, after the marches, Montgomery and Selma, what's popularly know as the Civil Rights Movement. And it's for the Southern Oral History Project at UNC-Chapel Hill and the Lumbee River Fund which is the effort that I'm coordinating to collect and preserve Lumbee history and culture to be deposited at UNC-Pembroke. So the tape will go into the archive here at Pembroke, the Lumbee River Fund Archive, and the Southern Historical Collection at UNC-Chapel Hill. I plan to interview about forty people or so. I've interviewed maybe nine so far, just to sort of tell the story particularly of school desegregation, but all of this, what you just said for example about the school system is intimately related to voting, to politics, to the economic situation and the war on poverty, and the different opportunities that Indians here had to get federal money to execute services for Indian people.

BJ: The reason I bring in the point I'm trying to make and bringing it around to that is that our base financial resource was teachers. So the system, like with Thadis, working with him, he was a young former teacher or was a teacher at the time. When Gerry came along I don't know whether he stimulated it, he'll have to speak for himself, or whether the time was right that we were speaking out.

For instance, there was one of our leaders, on the point that Gerry made of not having blinds in the school, he went down to the superintendent's office and pleaded for blinds to be put in the school system at Prospect, and was getting literally nowhere, and went over in the superintendent's office and pulled blinds all the way up to the top, and the sun shone in, and the superintendent couldn't look at this gentleman and he's



squinting his eyes, and he said, "You don't like that, do you?" He said, "Neither do my children at Prospect like it any more than you do."

So where I'm coming from, and what I'm trying to say, and I'm awful rambling, you're going to have to go through whole bunch of stuff that Gerry's saying, where is this going to take me? But what it was is really to develop a vehicle that would have some autonomy that the system couldn't really control or get at.

MM: The local system?

BJ: Right. Exactly. That it could speak out. So we brought all of those people together down in Lumberton at the Old Foundry [restaurant] and announced that we had gotten a five thousand—now listen to this, boy, big money. We'd got a five thousand dollar grant to do an outreach program, and we had before that hired Miss Vera Lowry, Mr. Elmer's Lowry's wife. He had, and most people that know anything about the history of Miss Vera, she was going on her own. She was a good friend of Thadis' and she was going out on her own putting pressure on the system.

A lot of our people couldn't get driver's licenses. Well, she would take them, and carry them down, and move them through the system, like Gerry's talking about going and moving them through the welfare system. We just didn't have anybody who would stand up and question the system. We'd have people go down, and stand in line, and wait days for the system to react, and it just wasn't happening. Where I'm taking this, and Gerry can take you with the other things that he's been involved in, but that was the impetus that led to LRDA but it was regional.

Your grandfather was at one of those meetings that we held later, and he said to Waltz, your dad, "There's nothing that ties this to the Lumbees. This is Regional

Development Associates. How can we tie it to the Lumbees?" That led the group to go back and redefine LRDA to Lumbee Regional Development, not Associates, but Association. At the Old Foundry when we brought all these diverse—we invited people that when they got in that room, they were people that wouldn't speak to each other out there on the street.

MM: Indians?

BJ: Yeah, Indians. The only non-Indian that was there was Mr. Mangum, and he was there because church—I don't know. Church and Community Center?

GS: He was pastoring up there—.

BJ: —Sandy Plains. But anyway, out of that group came an advisory council to the board members, Gerry, and Rod, and Horace, and I. We were the incorporators of that.

GS: And Reverend Johnson. Reverend Joy Johnson. Don't forget him. He was one of the original incorporators .

BJ: So then out of that grew a nucleus and five thousand dollars which was not much money. The Town of Pembroke gave us an office for Miss Vera to have in the town, and then that started the effort of meeting. That group of advisors met on a regular basis and took subject items—and Gerry can help you more with that—because at that time I was the director of operations for MDC, and we had operations in Asheville. We had them all over. I spent some time, but I had a major responsibility just within MDC. I was director of operations for MDC. MDC provided my time, and Rod's time, and other people's time and resources. It's too sad that George Autry has passed on now, that we didn't give him any kind of recognition, but the record should show that he was involved.



One point, and then I'll just shut up and then interface with Gerry, some other point that you want to know. Along the lines to show you at the time, we had a Schoolmaster's Club here. It was, again, male chauvinist, it was all of the male teachers, Indian teachers, would go around per month to the various schools, and those schools would put on a dinner, and it would kind of give that school a chance to showcase itself to these male, Indian principals.

Well, there was a big bond issue that was coming up, and I was president. I'd gotten myself elected as president of Schoolmaster's Club. There were some other folks involved that sent me a message that it was going to be an unusual meeting, and that as I presided over the meeting that they felt I needed to be aware of. I was teaching at Magnolia at the time. Someone was going to get up and really just let it all hang out in terms of an effort to defeat a bond issue. Again, that ties back into what Gerry was talking about of how do we put the pressure on the system to change?

Lo and behold, I got there, and all the politicians were there, and you would have normally thought that the president of the club would have a seat at the front table, right? Well, I didn't. These guys that had called me and alerted me that something was coming down kept waiving for me to come over there. Well, I didn't want—I'm playing Mr. Cool—I didn't want to get over there and be associated.

[SOUND OF TELEPHONE RINGING AND ANSWERING MACHINE.]

MM: Wait a minute.

BJ: And so, sure enough, they got up, and they're friends of your dad and mine, ( ). And it happened.

The next day, to show you how the system worked, the next day Mr. Epps calls me in his office. He said, "Mr. Jones, don't you think things got a little out of control last night?" That's how fast the system worked. I said, "I don't know, Mr. Epps." He said—

MM: Mr. Epps is the principal?

BJ: He hired me at Magnolia.

MM: At Magnolia, yeah.

BJ: I was working for him at Magnolia.

MM: Okay.

BJ: And that's how the system was used. I said, "Well, Mr. Epps, let me put it this way. For the meeting I'll have to admit it wasn't a surprise for me, and so I did a little homework, and I looked into the history of the Schoolmaster's Club, and I found that it's just a social organization, that it's really just a concept. It's just Toastmasters, and I haven't found any documents that lay out any kind of rules or orders that you follow." And I said, "Mr. Epps, if you invite a guest to your house, and you just invited an array of folks to come to your house, and they're in your house, and they're socializing, and someone got up and wanted to say what was on their mind in a social gathering, would you have called them out of order or would you have had any reason? Don't you think that if they got to that occasion how would you have, really? Now you tell me how I could have handled it any different? If that situation avails itself in the future then I'll know how to handle it." He said, "Well, Mr. Jones, you've got things to do, and I've got things to do."

I would hope that the record would show that that kind of thing of Mr. Epps, but I don't mind the fact, and the bond issue didn't pass. A lot of people can go back, but what I think, and I'll cite just one other occasion, but there are a lot that we could talk about.

Save Old Main. Mr. Danford Dial, one of the most outstanding educators we have, stood up on the steps at the college with the platform of Save Old Main. He stood up against another Indian, English Jones, who, I don't know but was told, that English wanted to replace Old Main and build a new auditorium where it existed.

But Mr. Danford did that as an employee of LRDA. At that time he had moved outside of my arena that I was still in, working with the school system, and it brought about a vehicle that the system couldn't quiet him like it had normally quieted people for not following the traditional role that we were supposed to do.

And what that led to, as we all know, is Governor Holshouser coming to Old Main while it was still smoldering, and stood on those same steps that Mr. Danford stood on, and Janie Maynor Locklear was an employee of LRDA, and he pledged that Old Main would be restored, as the governor of this state, and set up a Save Old Main Commission.

When you look how those kind of things that Gerry set the stage for this conversation in place, these are some of the dynamics that unfolded hand and parcel with the existence of LRDA.

MM: Well, that's exactly the kind of thing I wanted to know. To change the direction a little bit and talk about schools specifically a little bit more, I was wondering if either of you would comment on some of the differences between the struggles that Indians and blacks had with the county school system. I've gotten a number of people to

talk about the specific incidents and details of Indians and the desegregation issue, but not much about the differences between these two so-called minorities groups.

BJ: I'll talk a little bit about what Gerry said, and then I need to be quiet and listen in because most people say, Bruce, shut your mouth. It's a matter of how do you get meaningful stuff.

I was principal of Rex-Rennert. When Gerry was talking about how much they set aside to run the schools, my janitor came and he wasn't putting out what I felt was adequate supplies in the restroom. I said, "Why are you doing that?" He said, "They come in and inventory how much we've got on hand and how much they'll let us have. They told us this is what we got."

GS: It's like the jails where they ration the toilet paper. They ration toilet paper.

BJ: This was toilet paper, and this was hand towels that kids had to wash their hands to go eat lunch in the lunch room.

GS: Yeah.

END OF 1, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

MM: Okay. Go Ahead.

BJ: Now here is the situation about jobs. To my knowledge, there were little or no Indians working on the maintenance to service all of these schools out of the central office. So I said [to his janitor], "Just lock it [the maintenance supply closet], and don't let them in there." So when they got to my school, these are white maintenance people, they said, "We want the key to your supply room." I said, "What for?" "We want to look at your supplies." I said, "You don't need that. Just drop off the supplies that you've

allocated for us. We'll take care of getting them in the supply room." "Are you telling me that you're not going to let me have the key to the supply room?" I said, "I guess so." Well, as an Indian principal I wasn't supposed to take a position like that to a maintenance worker, who was working for the county, who happened to be white, and I happened to be a principal with a Master's degree from one of the leading colleges in the United States. I didn't have those rights.

I got a little telephone call, "Come down, and let's talk." I went down. We talked about everything in the world, about making decisions when it snowed, the whole thing, but they didn't bring it up, and I didn't want to laud over it that I was taking this stance, but that was the stance that I think we all felt that we had to stand up. That meant that when I would go someplace and hear another school ran out of toilet tissue, "Well, how in the world do you run out of toilet tissue with children in a school?" And somebody in some central office making some determination on something like that?

And the next incident, and I'll just absolutely close. The other incident is that they hired an architect to build this new school at Rex-Rennert. When I went there, there was a lot of things that needed to happen at Rex-Rennert. One of the things, I think we were probably breaking more windows than maybe all the other Indian schools together, just lack of proper supervision at recesses. They had for aesthetic value put in a certain kind of opaque window in the hall that would transmit light from the classroom into the hall, but that you couldn't look through the window into the classroom. But they were putting plain glass in that you could look in.

I said, "I'm sorry. That's not the glass that needs to go in here. This guy says, "I beg your pardon?" I said, "The people who designed this building designed it this way,

and it's my job as the custodian of the building to see that it's kept this way. I'm saying I want—" "Well, we'll have to make a special order." I said, "Hey, what's the problem with that?" "Well that will take some time." I said, "Well, we'll just have to endure." He said, "Naw, we'll just go ahead and put the glass in." I said, "Well, if you put it in there'll be an order when you get down to the office for you to come all the way back out here to put another one in, and you'll keep doing that until the right one is put in." He said, "Do I hear you correctly?" I said, "I don't know what you hear, but I'm telling you that that plain glass is not going in the window here."

Well, it might sound like that I'm a real radical and what have you, but the stage had been set, and there were certain actors that had to act the part if we were sincere in the commitment we made to ourselves and sincere in bringing about social change.

Gerry and I stopped at a, I assume it was a black restaurant, today.

GS: Yeah.

BJ: And he looked a Gerry, and Gerry talked about these things we're talking about, and he said, "Man, I'm looking at two courageous people," and in the back of his head and the back of mine, I was saying, "Or two fools." I'll end here.

GS: I want to bring in some other aspects of this whole situation because if you're doing a long run history of civil rights I don't think you can understand in the long term without seeing its contradictions. I don't think you can cover the history of civil rights by saying there was this battle and we won or lost, and there was that battle and we won or lost, etc. You can't do it.

I think the starting point for civil rights is on the one hand people, particularly in rural areas. Remember in 1965-66 there was no Indian lawyers here. There were no

black lawyers. There was no decent media coverage of anything. I'll come back to that with this photograph. There was no decent media coverage of anything. Out of the limelight, I mean as bad as thing were in Birmingham and Selma, people paid in these rural areas a far, far higher price for their civil rights struggles.

I can tell you stories about Thadis. Thadis Oxendine is one of the chief ( ) organizers. His kid got suspended from school, his senior year in high school, for a shoving match. Nobody even got hit, and the kid got suspended. They were getting even with Thadis. How the tax people came in and investigated stores of civil rights workers. How people lost jobs.

I sat in living rooms in black homes in Lumberton and people crying, a husband and wife crying, debating whether or not they should send their kid to the white high school back in the choice days [freedom of choice], because the guy worked in a gas station and he knew he was going to get fired, and the woman worked as a domestic and she knew she was going to lose her job, and yet they wanted their kids to have a decent, better education than the under-funded, royally under-funded black school. So should they choose? People sitting there crying trying to figure this stuff out.

Out in the swamps people paid the staggering price, and what they won after this price was a modicum of dignity. A modicum of respect, a modicum of dignity. Despite that, that's why I had to start there, despite that civil rights to my mind, and I'm saying this because I've to be clear so people don't misunderstand this when they listen to the tape. I fought my first civil rights struggle in 1951. I'm still fighting it now, a whole life in it. Civil rights has to be understood as a fraud, a fraud and a heartbreak at the beginning, and a fraud and a heartbreak at the end, now. And I think the clearest, the



clearest indication of the fraud and the heartbreak that civil rights in some sense is fundamentally about, is designed to be about, and I'll come back to that, the clearest indication of the heartbreak is the utter displacement of African-Americans from the labor force because a black person and civil rights is a contradiction in terms.

You hire a Mexican in these turkey plants, you hired a Mexican in the hog packing plants because precisely what you want is someone who has no civil rights. It's not the fact they want Mexicans. They don't want people who speak Spanish. They want people without civil rights. When the blacks did all this struggle to get their civil rights you get rid of them, and you bring in people that don't have them.

Now, the more complex question is why was civil rights a fraud at the start, and how did it in some sense betray people? And there, I think, a whole history can't be done here. If you woke up in places like Bertie County which has a horribly poor black population and where I did a little bit of organizing, up in Bertie, you were getting in the early 60s sharecropper strikes. You were getting barn burnings. You were getting cattle poisonings. You were getting sharecroppers who had said, "Absolutely enough of this economic oppression. Absolutely enough of this cultural and political oppression. We've had it. We're fighting back." Confrontational politics.

That in the mid '60s all got turned into voting. This history of the modern civil rights, it begins partly with all the civil rights struggles of African-American peoples to move forward and their own struggles. Partly it was given to us, and you can't believe after two hundred years of utterly oppressing blacks and Indians that the U.S., the white male Senate woke up in the 60s and said, "Oh, gee. We've made a mistake. We shouldn't have treated human beings like that. We should be nice to them." If you



believe that it's pure naiveté. It's pure innocence to think that in the early 60s that these same rotten human beings who had been sticking it to blacks and Indians for two hundred years in the mid-60s woke up and said, "We made a mistake. We should be nice to them." Uh-huh. Uh-huh. That's not going to happen.

So the question is why in the mid-60s did they decide they needed integrated schools, to enforce the civil rights decision of '54, why did they decide that they needed more justice? What the question becomes, to understand what's going on, why then, and not assume that it was about decency. And there, I think, several factors.

One is they were sidetracking some really fundamental struggles for economic justice into the political arena where I'm not sure that could work. We'll come back to that.

And secondly, and this sounds in some sense really weird, the mechanical cotton picker doomed segregated education. Segregated education is a device for keeping people sitting in cabins starving six months a year for the chance to chop cotton the other six months a year. There is nothing you can do with segregated education besides chop cotton or an equivalent job, cutting pulp wood, cut lumber sticks, because the law said, the law was designed to do that. The education laws in North Carolina, worse in South Carolina, worse in Georgia, the education laws were designed to screw people out of an education. They were not designed to give people education.

When I came down here in 1960 the average education of an Indian male over twenty-five was fourth grade. In the 1960 census, you look at the census, fourth grade education was the median education for an Indian male over twenty-five and sixth grade for an Indian woman. The reason women got more education than men was very simply

the law said then that any kid could stay out of school any day to work on a farm under the direction of the parents. And I've talked to sharecroppers, '65, '66, '67. I'd talk to tenant farmers who'd say, "The farmer," the white farmer or the supervisor, "would come out and say, 'keep your kid home we're weeding in the back forty. Keep your kid home we're doing this. Keep your kid home'."

Parents who knew they shouldn't had to because tenant farming was declining, and they' get thrown off their farm. They'd never get another job. It was declining in the face of beef cattle. It was declining. Tenant farming was just finished by the '60s, so they knew it was wrong to keep their kid out of school because they knew the school was the kid's future, but the only thing they could do when the boss or the foreman came around, or the supervisor came around and said, "Keep your kid out of school for weeding. We're doing this. We're doing that," they had to comply with that.

Very precisely you have to understand that segregated education, all the education laws in North Carolina were designed to keep people of color from getting an education. Now, in that context you get cotton pickers. You get woods workers. You don't get factory workers, and you don't get a military, the draft. You don't want to draft white middle-class kids from the cities. You want to draft people of color from rural areas because they don't question. They obey the orders.

And you've got to remember, you absolutely have to remember that in Vietnam more officers got fracked by their own troops, more American officers got injured or killed by their own troops than got shot by the enemy. If you look at the first lieutenants, the casualty statistics. That was the urban kids. That was the urban blacks with political savvy saying, "We're not taking this shit." The rural kids, for the most part, just went and

behaved themselves. You can't get a modern army if they're illiterate, and the segregated schools, to be honest about it, were producing illiterates.

All of a sudden in the '60s they've got to clean up the school system so they give the kid an education to make them military or make them factory workers. All of a sudden in the '60s they've got to divert this really serious economic justice. You've got to ask yourself, "What the hell is civil rights?" They're building a Wal-Mart in Pembroke. Kiss civil rights goodbye. What's civil rights to a woman making \$5.65 an hour? You think of this. I get so worked up about this I don't know what to say.

The U. S. Department of Health and the U.S. Justice Department both come out of the same statistics. One woman in four gets seriously beat by her husband. One woman in four gets seriously beat by her husband, and a woman who gets hit by her husband gets hit on the average of five times a year. Now, you tell me what \$5.65 an hour at a Wal-Mart in Pembroke—they should never let that store come into this town—what \$5.65 an hour would do for a woman who's getting beat by her husband? What chance does she have to walk out of that marriage? What chance does she have? She's got to stay there and stay getting beat in order to survive economically, in order to feed her kids because she cannot feed her kids on \$5.65 an hour period. There is no way in the world to pay the most miserable rent and feed your kids beans on \$5.65 a hour. Without economic justice, without a minimum wage of \$7.50, \$8.00, \$8.50 an hour there is absolutely—the civil rights stuff is bull shit. It is absolute bull shit. It tears my heart apart.

You go to Martin Luther King. I remember Maxton when the black people were outside the borders of the town. They drew the town boundaries so the black people were outside the border. That means the Maxton that I knew in the 60s, there are these little

rows of houses in the black neighborhoods, and the outhouse is behind the house, and the well is in front of the house thirty feet away, and you're drinking your own shit. They've got a row of houses down the street, and every house has the outhouse behind it, and every house has the well in front of it. It's a recirculating system, and the kids are getting sick. The non-white infant mortality rate in a place like Maxton is three times the white infant mortality rate. Look at the statistics.

You want to understand the history of civil rights you look at the infant mortality statistics as late as the 1960s for towns like Maxton. They're horrendous. They're three, three-and-a-half times the white infant mortality rate. Okay. Now, you fight that. You break it, whatever. You name the street through town Martin Luther King Boulevard, and you expand the town boundaries, and you bring water to the people there, and then you pay \$5.65 an hour?

And then you let Campbell—Campbell's Soup is flouting the law. The law says you hire temporaries, what is it? Four months? Five months? You hire temporaries four months, five months, and you have to take them on permanently. Campbell's Soup hires people \$6.00 an hour, no benefits, no vacation, no health care, no pension, no damn nothing, and every four months, or five months, or six months, when their time runs out they let them go for a week or two weeks, and they hire them right back as temporaries. And everybody knows it's happening.

You talk to people who work in Campbell's Soup, and what they tell you, what the people who work in Campbell's Soup—and I say to them, "Why don't you damn organize? Why don't you damn go for their throats?" They say, "Because if we did

they'd hire Mexicans." So they hire blacks and they hire Indians as temporaries. There's no civil rights there. That's why it's a heartbreak. It's an absolute damn heartbreak.

MM: So you're saying essentially that the political aspects of civil rights, for example, what most people consider to be what civil rights was about have been a failure in light of the fact that economic justice has not even achieved?

GS: Absolutely. Absolutely.

MM: Okay.

GS: Not a total failure. A contradictory failure.

MM: Just a second. Just a second.

GS: Because it's dignity

MM: Right. Well, tell us then getting to the schools issue what you feel like has been accomplished or not accomplished by the desegregation of Robeson County Schools.

BJ: My comments were not as strong as Gerry's. All I guess I was saying is that I viewed my role as an advocate for the parents and to take a role that produced some kind of policy change for a betterment. Gerry's going way—.

MM: Well, he's got an analysis of the situation.

BJ: Right. Right, that I don't have.

GS: He lived that.

[EVERYONE TALKING AT ONCE]

BJ: So my comments are along the lines of advocating change but not the full impact that I think he was saying because today when we were visiting and what we were looking at now is even though we made those inroads, in terms of the real results of

economic benefit isn't there. And over on the border of South Carolina and the rural areas down there, it's even, if you take where he's at, we saw two people standing at a service station that echoed his same point of view that out here where we're at, and we're in rural North and South Carolina, none of that's impacting us.

GS: I would answer your question this way that I think one of the most fundamental changes among the Lumbee since the '60s has been what you can only call class formation, has been the emergence of a really substantial number of quite affluent Lumbee, a fairly large upper middle class, and then a bunch of, on the other hand, really poor people whose situation is getting markedly worse every year. People live in a thirty-year old trailer, it's falling apart, and have no chance of doing anything. You always had this small group of Lumbee elite land owners, Prospect, whatever, small, and deeply, deeply tied into the community because the characteristic fact of this community was how kinship tied this elite into their ordinary brethren, and the churches did that because people didn't have cars in those days as much, and so they walked to church. They went to their local church. They didn't drive to the elite churches or whatever.

Okay, now, the school system has become an absolutely crucial pivot of class formation. This poor guy standing by the service station said to me, "The school system gives you two kinds of education down here. It doesn't educate you at all so you can work in the fields, or cut wood, or work in a factory, and it educates you, or it educates you to leave." He said, "Those are the only two kinds of education you can get here. You can learn nothing so you wind up working in a factory or the fields, or you can get the kind of education that lets you leave." He nailed down the school system. If you have



middle class parents, if they have the resources, and the skills, and whatever, they'll get you up and out. And if you don't, you're screwed.

MM: Now, Bruce, is that what you all wanted out of desegregation?

GS: Of course, nobody wants that. Nobody wants that.

MM: Okay, how would you describe what it is? You're coming out of the late '60s and being a principal, and resisting the problems of segregation. You're encountering that. Here's an opportunity for whatever it's worth to potentially change the system, what was the opportunity that you saw in it?

BJ: I felt like Gerry, that we were going to raise the level of the total populace. We asked them [the men at the service station] about program delivery, about LRDA or the tribal council. These people said, "Are you kidding? This is not impacting us at all." So I guess my naiveté was that I hoped that it would just raise everybody and everything higher.

GS: In some sense it did. You've got to understand, I'm telling you like half the story, the half I want emphasized. I sat in Thadis Oxendine's kitchen one night after we lost the election. We got our asses beat down in Rowland. We worked like dogs in that election, and I sat in his kitchen with him crying, crying for over an hour, late at night while he told me what he had to do to shield his wife and his kids from hearing him be called boy in a store. How he'd pretend, or how he'd try and go into a store and leave his wife. I mean these are country folks. He'd talk about going into a store to buy feminine napkins for his wife because he didn't want her to be called auntie or insulted by some dumb-ass white clerk. A whole lifetime of this kind of fiddling, of this kind of maneuvering to try and shield his family from the insult that you got from these punk

whites in Lumberton. That kind of stuff doesn't exist. Even if there's going to be a Wal-Mart in Pembroke, the scum, you'll still get called Mr. and Mrs. in that store, and that matters. It matters intensely.

The school system will give you the kind of education where you can really read. There's no more of this stuff—I remember people saying, "I didn't know what the words in those books meant." People couldn't read in the '60s. Forty years later they can read. So the education in some sense did work, and the politics did work. But then I think the extent to which it doesn't work, partly because a very large part of the impact falls on women, and to put it absolutely straight, nobody gives a shit about what happens to women. Like this domestic violence. I think it's one of the absolute, crucial political issues of today. Breast cancer. Nobody cares about it. One woman in seven in America gets breast cancer, and nobody even notices anymore until just recently. Because I think women pay the brunt of the suffering for the low wages, and the bad education, and, and, and, that Indian, and black, and white men can just sort of write it off as if it was only a success. What I'm trying to say, it was a success and a heartbreak simultaneously, one just as much as the other.

MM: That makes sense. I think that's much of what we're learning about this. It's different people. It's not just me working on these interviews. People are working in Charlotte, and Chapel Hill, and other places, but they're learning about the same kind of dual results. One the one had it's lifted people up. On the other hand it certainly dragged us down. The last issue, and we're out of time already, the last issue that I want to just address really quickly if possible, is how school desegregation has affected Indian identity. Because from my reading, from my talking to people at Prospect especially, the



school was the key to the whole thing, largely, school and church, family. Those are the three things, and they still are to a large extent, but at that time facing a potential huge loss that's what people shaped their whole argument around in terms of maintaining Indian identified schools. So having gone through the process now and having some two decades or so of reflection on it continuing, how do you think the desegregated schools have affected that sense of Indian-ness that they seemed to sustain prior to desegregation?

BJ: Gerry, do you—?

GS: [SIGHS.] You called it right. You said I'm a professor, and I come down here with an analysis, but also you've got to understand that I've spent an awful lot of time out in the homes of what Pembroke folks call swamp Indians. I spent a lot of time there. Some of my closest alliances are back in the back parts of Union Chapel, or Alfordsville, or whatever. [SIGH.]

There's not an Indian identity. There's multiple Indian identities here. Part of it is the deeply ambivalent pride and rage against these Brickhouse Indians. The schools haven't touched that, or they've reinforced that in you because the schools have helped a bunch of Brickhouse Indians to get bigger brick houses, and bigger brick churches, and bigger brick whatever. If I ever moved to this county I'd open a brick factory. The schools haven't touched that. On the other hand, what the schools have done that the Lumbee don't want to talk about is put the kids together in an interracial setting.

Now you've got to understand. I think this is ambivalent. When I first came down here, in 1965 the Civil Rights Act, the Voting Rights Act, was made effective. In '64 it was passed. In '65 it was made effective. Early 1966, late 1965 a group out of Atlanta, much of it was the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, I think it was

SCLC, financed Martin Brooks, Dr. Brooks, to get a—do you know what Martin Brooks named the first civil, do you know what the name of the first—

MM: Lumbee Citizen's Council.

GS: Lumbee Citizen's Council. Do you know the ( ) of that name?

MM: The White Citizen's Council

GS: Absolutely. There we go. And the black people—I know I was working with Joy Johnson down in Fairmont. I was working with Reverend Edwards and Reverend Fairley up in Maxton, black people were freaking out. I won't say the word. What are they doing? Lumbee Citizen's Council? And they want to work with us? Because it was the White Citizen's Council.

But then when Martin Luther King got killed Dr. Brooks paid for an ad of tribute out of his own pocket. It was run in *The Robesonian*, it was run in the Laurinburg papers. There was one in one of the state-wide papers. Out of his own pocket he paid. So it's this ambivalence between on the one hand, say, Lumbee Citizen's Council—Jesus, I'm out of my mind with that name—and on the other hand paying for ads of tribute mourning the loss.

That ambivalence of—partly what it means to be an Indian is about being an Indian, and partly what it means to be an Indian is about sticking it to the blacks. And that ambivalence started to change with the school system because Indian kids and black kids were dating each other out in what's now called Purnell Swett. But the bad teaching and the horrible administration of that school—I'm not blaming, it's the whole package of administration that never really reached out to the Maxton community to really integrate the black kids into that school, that school, that bad administration of that

school—I'm not blaming the principal. I'm not blaming any particular—it was the whole lack of vision to say, "Okay. We've got black kids and Indian kids here together. We've got to do something about that," has now exacerbated the tensions between Indians and blacks to the point where this younger generation is really growing up—many of them, not all of them. You can't marginalize, but they're really growing up with a more antagonistic sense of ambivalences.

What I'm saying, the point of the Martin Brooks story was that Indians have always been ambivalent about blacks. I got out to these meetings. I was supposed to get Indians to vote for black candidates and blacks to vote for Indians. We non-whites have to stick together. Now you colored, you be sure to support us. Geez.

But that ambivalence somehow in those days, forty years ago, was a softer ambivalence. It was a gentler, if I can use the term, ambivalence than the kind of stuff that's coming out of South Robeson, out of Purnell Swett High School now, where you get on the one hand, still, black and Indian kids dating each other or romantic flirting with each other at least, and on the other hand—and I'll tell you something. I'll tell you where that comes out. The kids who get pregnant from these interracial alliances, the ones that drop out of school, the kids who get pregnant from some of the same— that's how you know there's trouble, because the drop out rates of the pregnant girls are from one whose boyfriend was the other. That's the ones who are dropping out. That's how you know that that ( ) smells trouble. Because either they all drop out or none of them drops out. The ones that are Indian/Indian, black/black they don't drop out. They stay. That has introduced—there's still that positive sense. They're dating each other. They're romancing each other, whatever, and there's still this antagonistic sense that's now more

violent and angrier, and tougher, and I think in the long run is going to be politically disastrous, disastrous, because this county is just beginning to see the effects of economic injustice. It's going to get far worse here. Far worse, and then that antagonism is going to be deadly.

MM: And that antagonism is largely because of the lack of management?

GS: It would have been a rough thing to fight. It would have been a rough thing to fight, because the black came into it, but they should have known. They should have gone in to Maxton. The blacks in Maxton tell me they were furious about losing their school that they fought so hard for and brought into Purnell Swett.

WILLIE LOWERY: I learned a lot listening to you all. I wanted to ask a couple of questions, though. For instance, Indian people around here, there was two problems with school integration. Number one was we had boundaries. We had like Pembroke versus Prospect versus—.

BJ: Magnolia.

WL: Magnolia.

MM: Union Chapel.

WL: Union Chapel. Above the integration of different races that was more important around here, I think, than the fact that integration, blacks and whites mixing, was the fact that we were breaking down boundaries that had been created years and years back.

GS: Yeah. Yeah. That's something that's the integration of the towns. But I think you lose the support, to a very important point, but you lose the support of the community—I used to know fairly well. I still know fairly well, Barto and Geraldine

Clark. She taught out at Rex-Rennert, or whatever, and she would tell me about how the community would hold bake sales for this, for that. Communities. I think that keeps up in Prospect. It's still kept up by the community.

WL: Another thing you mentioned, fourth grade education, fifth grade education. The local people, I think, was even working on that because Mr. Lowry, you know, went around the schools demanding that kids stay in school. I don't know who furnished the money for it, but they don't even have that position no more.

GS: Derrick Lowry?

WL: No, no. I'm talking about Zeb Lowry. What was that position Zeb had?

MM and BJ: Truant officer.

WL: They don't have a truant officer no more.

MM: Well, Derrick didn't have any enforcement capabilities, that's for sure.

Derrick, you know, was the drop out prevention person, but he had no law enforcement powers.

WL: Zeb back then was working on trying to get people to not drop out of school because of farming and stuff like that.

MM: Um-hum;.

GS: Oh, Lordy.

MM: I'm going to cut off the tape.

GS: Yeah, please.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

TRANSCRIBED BY SHARON CAUGHILL, FEBRUARY 25 AND 26, 2004