

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

DON RANDOLPH
December 7, 2004

DAVID CLINE: Okay, this is David Cline. I'm in Louisville, Kentucky on the 7th of December 2004 and if you could just introduce yourself for the record.

DON M. RANDOLPH: I am Don M. Randolph, 7704 Apple Valley Drive, Louisville, Kentucky.

DC: And can you just for the record sort of briefly say what your role in this topic I'm talking with you today was.

DR: Okay, I served as pastor of the Green Acres Baptist Church, 5189 Popular Level Road, for twenty-three years. As pastor of that church a principal came and asked me one time would I run for the Board of Education. I reluctantly said no. He came back the second time. I checked with the leadership of my church and they said okay and I ran and surprisingly I was elected. My next chore in the four years that I served on the Board of Education, they rotated the chairmanship and it came my time when the merger of the Louisville independent school district and the Jefferson County school district was necessary, put the two big systems together. Plus that the court had ordered to us to integrate by busing to reach a tip ratio in every school, so when these two mandates came down to the Board of Education I happened to be the chairman of the board, both boards, appointed by the governor. I was appointed by the governor to be chairman of the two boards when they were merged together.

DC: Okay, all right, so there were actually two at a certain point?

DR: There were two different boards and we had to serve until their time elapsed, their time ran out. So the governor appointed a chairman from the two boards

to be the chairman of the combined boards and the governor appointed me to be the chairman of the boards.

DC: Right, so when you ran you didn't know that this was going to be your destiny?

DR: I never dreamed this was going to reach this plateau, did not, especially all that you know that went on. We had a great difficulty in merging the two systems because we had to keep everyone employed. Sometimes we had two people on the same job. And sometimes whoever had the highest salary we had to raise the other one up to equal. It was a perplexity. But the busing came in, integration under the Omnipotent God. Integration is no problem to me. It should be. I wish I had my friend Charles Elliott here today. He is pastor of King Solomon Baptist Church and he could tell you, if you could have a chance to go talk to Charles Elliott, King Solomon Baptist Church, he will tell you how our church and his and my relationship really came to. At one time I was in Charles' church, he had a nurse there. I called her up. We did it the Indian fashion. I pricked my finger and he pricked his finger, we put our blood together and we became blood brothers. He can tell you many stories of how integration is essential. It's important. I had problems then and I have problems now of the cross county distant busing as the way to integrate. I just have deep difficulty of the waste of money. If you've read recently, Central High School in the West End, one of the good high schools, is asking that they ignore tip ratio. They'd like to have their high school back to be able to have a community thing. I thought then and think now there are more valid ways of giving equal competent education to all students than moving them from one end of the county to the other end of the county. If they

would have followed that approach, I would agree in education that the teachers choose the best areas. My position would have been we assign the teachers to where they go, not let them make the choice. And therefore, quality teachers were put out into these other areas where we're still having problems with some schools that we don't have quality education even with busing because we don't have good quality leadership that is there.

DC: So you think it could have been addressed through resources and personnel?

DR: Many ways, yeah. Well, my position in that time was this: Society don't own the school board, the responsibility of integrating the people. That is not the approach to do it. If they wanted to do it, why not have the sub dividers, the people who build, if they want an integration, sell certain many houses to this group and certain many houses to this group. Now in the church where I pastored they took one community and regrettably, this street was for white, this street they were selling to blacks. The white flight started. As soon as they started selling these people moved out. You don't know how many of my people I pleaded with. Don't run, let's stay and see what we can do. And yet when I look at them and their children and everything, I don't know that I can blame them, you know. "I want the best for my child. I want the best out there for her." But I did not then [and] I do not think now that society can pass the responsibility of an integrated society upon the school system of mixing them all together and by bringing them together. Unless we get quality teachers in these new other schools we will not have quality education. It just will not happen.

DC: I want to back up just for a minute and have you tell me a little bit about where you were raised and what your upbringing was like.

DR: Okay. I'm out of Harlan County, bloody Harlan in the 1930s. My dad was a police officer and as a police officer he was called out one Sunday morning and they had set up an ambush for him. You take some time and read that [indicating newspaper clipping, copy in file] and that's the testimony of Congressman Gene Siler on my dad. My dad was killed. There were five of us children, my baby sister born one week after Dad was killed. She never did see him. Mother could not take care of us. She placed us in what was called the Kentucky Baptist Children's Home at Glendale, Kentucky. So from the age eight to the age sixteen, I was in an orphanage. There were two hundred and twenty-five of us there. Don't mind telling you we got Bible for breakfast, we got Bible for dinner, and we got Bible for supper. We got Bible at night before we went to bed. So much of my background in religious training I owe much to them. We had two hundred and twenty-five of us there. After came home at sixteen I came one year of high school here. My last year of high school, I went to three different high schools. Didn't think I was going to graduate. In fact, I was fortunate to get back to Harlan. *The* name used to be in Kentucky Wallace Wa-Wa Jones. [He] played basketball for Harlan and for University of Kentucky in football. I was a senior when Wa was a freshman on Harlan team. We got beat in the finals of the state tournament, basketball tournament. And that's a highlight for any boy in the state of Kentucky to play in the state tournament but we got beat there.

DC: And you were on the team?

RD: Sir?

DC: You were on the team?

DR: Yeah, I played with Wallace. We got beat here in Louisville by Lafayette out of Lexington in our final game. We beat the best team in the semi-finals but we were so tired when we came to the finals. We just gave out and they beat us. Yes, I was on the team and played. I try to tell everyone that I taught Wallace Wa-Wa Jones everything he knows about basketball but nobody believes me. But he went on to be All American both in basketball and football at the University of Kentucky.

After I graduated World War II was on. I went to Mobile, Alabama really trying to miss the draft. Got a job in Alabama Dry Dock Ship Building Company. From there I got a deferment for six months and thought I had it made. I came back to Harlan and my wife of sixty-one years now. We've been married sixty-one years.

DC: Congratulations.

DR: We got married and went back to Mobile for me to go to work. Then I got a drop, "we still want you," and I had to come. So I was drafted. I served with General Patton's Third Army in Europe, hundred and seventy-eighth combat engineers. I have eight major battle stars on my combat ribbon. I was in Crossing of the Rhine. I was in the Battle of Bastogne delivering the 101st there. I was in the Battle of the Bulge in all of those experiences there of World War II. I received a special commendation from the Twentieth Corps Headquarters in keeping them up close to where they could command the Army in the war. Came back from there and lost this ear through a mine explosion. I hear nothing out of it. Sorry to say, I can't get the VA or anybody to do much for me in being a disabled vet. They did furnish me with a hearing aid. But after that I came to Louisville and got a job at Federal

Printing Company. But I remember an experience I had back in World War II and if I ramble too long you just stop me.

DC: Okay.

DR: A jeep driver and myself were out on reconnaissance. We were going up a road, something exploded over there, something exploded over here, something exploded behind us. The lieutenant came up and said, Sergeant, do you know what's going on? I said no sir. He said there's a German 88th Battalion over there and they're going to hit your jeep in a minute. And I can't use the word he used. He said get that jeep out of here. We found a fence, put the jeep behind it. I don't know what the driver did but I prayed and I made God a promise: "If you'll bring me home I'll do what you want me to do, I'll be what you want me to be." We lost some of our men. I came back home and was looking for a school and made a mistake by not going to my high school coach to play basketball because with my own humble ... they say there's only one fella in Louisville more humble than I am. That's Muhammad Ali. He's a little more humble. But I was a fair basketball player and I think I could have made a college team but I could not find an opening. So I went to work for Federal Printing Company and worked with them for a while then we went away. I've had nine years of education beyond the high school. Bob Jones University of Greenville, South Carolina, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and then Lancaster School of Theology of Lancaster, Pennsylvania in preparation because God called me. God reminded me when I was looking for that college; "I kept my promise. You have to keep your promise to me." So I've been preaching the gospel now for fifty-eight years. Longest tenure was twenty-three years here in Louisville, Kentucky. In the

twenty-three years here I checked not too long ago, we had four thousand people to unite with the church. Of those four thousand twelve hundred were on their professions of faith in Jesus Christ. So that's basically who I am and what I am.

DC: Right. What's the name of the congregation with which you served this long period here?

DR: Green Acres Baptist Church, Poplar Level Road, Louisville. If you read the article that the newspaper used it will give you one or two statements of some of my members. Some were for me when I was on the Board of Education. Some were not so much for me. I told the principal of the high school that that's not what God called me to but he gave me one or two situations. He said we need somebody on this board from this community who will help us. He gave me one or two situations, which he thought some board members were trying to do, so I yielded and surprisingly was elected. Later on I went to Monticello, Kentucky and was pastor of Emanuel Baptist Church there my second time and they asked me to run for the Board of Education and lo and behold, I got elected there.

DC: Oh, you did?

DR: Yeah and I served there about three years of the four-year term before I decided to retire about my third time. Education is one of my interests.

DC: At Green Acres your congregation there, is that mostly a white congregation or is there a mixed congregation?

DR: Well, now if you go over to that area right now Green Acres is in a low socioeconomic community area. My last year at Green Acres a black man was my assistant chairman of deacons. So we tried our best to integrate the church. We just

could not. We were not successful in it in getting them to come. We had many programs for their children that they enjoyed but getting very many of the adults to come, I just could not do it. We tried and visited and made overtures to them but I'll say predominately then and now, seventy-five to eighty, maybe to ninety percent were white, yeah. But it was not because of our desire. Really it was not, because Albert Johnson was my assistant chairman of deacons there my last year there and as fine a man as I've ever met in my life.

DC: Now did you have children yourself in the school system?

DR: Yeah, my daughter Donna who lives in Shreveport, Louisiana graduated from Southern High School. She went to Okolona Elementary School and she graduated from Southern High School out on Preston Street.

DC: And what year, if you know, what year she graduated or approximately?

DR: I'd have to holler to my wife. I don't know.

DC: Was it while you were serving on the board or was it?

DR: Yes.

DC: Yes, it was, so it was around that period [around 1975]?

DR: Uh-huh.

DC: So she was in the schools when busing [started]?

DR: Oh, yeah. No, she never did have to bus. I'm trying to say that she graduated before busing started. She graduated before busing started.

DC: Okay. All right, sorry I just wanted to go back in time a little bit there and get that, but let's talk about you're on the board and when is it that you first start to hear rumblings that this might be coming down your way?

DR: As soon as the newspaper publicized the fact that we were going to have to integrate. My time I think mostly was 1975-76, in that area. You go back a couple or three years the rumor and the rumblings came in to the fact that there was going to have to be a merger and there was going to have to be an integration. I don't imagine the Louisville independent school and district would appreciate it but their basic problem [was] they were going bankrupt. Many of the industries that supplied their money moving out in the county beyond the city limits, it just left them holding a bag they could not handle. It really was unfortunate and we had to take them. We hassled a little bit a long time of trying to be equality or some on their board wanted us to come in and they be the overseers, but Kentucky law recognizes county Board of Education. The other independent school districts have the right but Kentucky law recognizes the Jefferson County so therefore they had to come under our wing. This was what we had to do. Now the rumblings about busing I guess began two or three years back. Really the issue faced me when the judge appeared in the *Courier Journal*: there's a-going to be an integration. Now how are you going to do it? There were so many ideas that came up of how to do this. Busing ultimately ended to be the only criteria. Our attorney that we had, I'm sure a well worded man, in my position and I said this at that time to his face, he told us he was schoolmate of the judge, he was schoolmate with other people, it would come out this way or let's go this route, let's go this route. It didn't come out like that. It just didn't do it. I told him at that time to his face. He said I didn't tell you that. But he did tell us certain conclusions that would come if we went this route or the route he suggested. My concern has always been, I may not like the legality of the law but I will abide by the legality of

the law. That's the position I took on the school board. Whatever the law says that's what we're going to do. We'll do the best that we can.

DC: Right. What other routes were there, possible ways of addressing the issue?

DR: Well, busing, I don't think there were many other ways of this. One of the directors of the board said, well, all this long ride from here thirty minutes, forty-five minutes, an hour, we'll put microphones and we'll put things on the bus. We'll do teaching on the bus. (Laughter) And she was a doctor, but it was just, you know, we will utilize all of this time. And then we tried to organize around the tip ratio, how we could, you know, make the relationship there and there was not a way in the world we could adjust to come down. The judge said you've got to have this many whites, this many blacks for this many whites. And there's no way we could get around it. We just had to do it upon that basis.

I believe in a community school. I live in this community, I ought to be able to send my child to this school. I believe if a child lives in the West End or over here on Poplar Level Road now, which is a low socioeconomic area, I believe the Board of Education ought to assign their best teachers with the best equipment, best libraries, best whatever they have, into that school to give them a chance to make sure they get properly educated. Forcing them against their will, and it wasn't only the whites, it was many blacks who didn't want this, forcing them against their will is not going to automatically make it satisfactory. We live in a nice community here but we've got, I see about a half a dozen black men walking, doing their walking process right out here. It's no problem living with people that is there but right now I just don't think

then and now giving the responsibility to the local boards of education as to the responsibility of making sure integration works is going to be the solution. I just don't.

I just came from Southern Baptist Seminary from a luncheon and I raised the question there and one or two of them looked at me a little bit. But the churches during this time did not take their place of leadership as I thought they should. The most segregated hour in the week is any Sunday morning at any Baptist church. I used to do this a lot. You don't have to tell a preacher when he's preached a bad sermon. He knows it. My wife and I would stand at the door and as soon as the last person was out we'd head down to King Solomon Baptist Church where Charles Elliott's people were and we would go down. They started at ten-thirty, same time we did, but they got out at two-thirty in the afternoon. They know how to worship. Used to [be] when I'd walk in and Charles would see me and hadn't started preaching, he'd make me come up and preach. So I timed my time. He had to be in the pulpit before I walked in that door anymore. But I've been down to King Solomon many times because they know how to worship God more than most white congregations do. Yes, they do know how to worship Him. The churches I think should have at that time vocally spoken. The president of the seminary at that time, I was at a meeting and he looked at me twice because I had made the statement: the seminary, the leading churches, are not speaking to the issues to help society to integrate itself. They just did not in my judgment at that time do it.

DC: Do you see a value then in people of different races and different cultures getting to know each other then?

DR: Oh, I think its background. This is what I just said at the seminary at the luncheon. Most problems we had was not only the West End, the blacks, we had as much problem with the rednecks out Dixie Highway and out Preston Street. They were opposed to it. They burnt tires and everything out there. There were a few nights that they had to guard my house. I got all kinds of threats from people. They had to guard my house because of threats that came to me. If you read that article I've been called anything from Hitler to the Messiah. But legality was number one, one of the number one priorities, and responsibility to Omnipotent God. God does not love me as a white man more than he loves Charles Elliott as a black man. He just doesn't do it. They're just equal in His sight. My problem that I found then and I find now and some of them are clergyman, they're activists and they'll create situations to keep themselves notarized and they're going after things that really this is not what the people want. This is not what they desire. There are differences between, well, I guess all nationalities, I don't care what you are. There's just difference between all nationalities and trying to make them come together, and what we're doing in the educational system then and I'm afraid now, we're trying to make them come into our system and become little white people. And that's not the answer. Let them be what they are. Let them be. One of the major problems we had after integration was expulsion. I served on the group that we had to evaluate every expulsion that came up and the reason for it. Sadly so, there were more blacks than whites but I can honestly say the committee looked at them on the value and the merits of why, not because of their color of skin.

DC: Why do you think there was that level of expulsion for black kids?

DR: Because they were put in places they didn't want to be in. They were uncomfortable. They'd never been here before. They had not been that way. Number two is I guess their background of what they had been, you know, coming out of, their background of how things [that] were okay in their neck of the woods, may not be okay over here in this community. There are just, you know, some things that they take for granted or habitually do because of their background. Expulsions were higher with blacks than it was with whites. But I can honestly say the committee did not look at color of skin. They looked at merit of what was the cause of expulsion.

DC: Right. I don't know if you would know this but how did white students who were bused into schools that had been mostly black before, how did they do academically? Was there any change there?

DR: That's what you went out Preston Highway and Dixie Highway about. They were opposed to it and they let it be known without question.

DC: Can you describe what you mean by that?

DR: They were as opposed to it as the blacks were I guess, some of the blacks. The opposition wasn't just blacks. I think the general concept was everything that we're doing in busing was to be advantaged to the black student in getting a better quality school and a better education. But that was not necessarily always the end result, not because the school was not better but because of this student coming from a different elementary background, everything into a completely new category and he had to fit into it. Now the only thing you can say, and I'll tell you this, I went to a Male and Fern Creek basketball game the other night and watched them play. Do you know where Fern Creek is?

DC: I know where Male is. I don't know where Fern Creek is.

DR: Okay. Fern Creek is right on out here on Bardstown Road, generally a big white community. Every boy on Fern Creek's basketball team, fifteen of them were black. They've learned to play basketball and football and they've learned the sports, but they also have to do the academics. I don't want to leave the impression, it's not their color of skin or anything like that, that makes them, you know, different educational-wise in any sense. [Pause] Well, like me spending eight years in an orphanage, it was a traumatic transformation for me, and a challenge when I came out into the real world and had to be on my own. I did not know what life was about or anything. Let me give you something else here. This will, let's see if I have a copy of that. This is one of my prides that I have. [Indicates a newspaper clipping] That young lady was valedictorian in high school. She was going to study to be a beautician, nothing wrong with beauticians. That's what my wife was. But I took her over to Cumberland College and she was academic excellence. They immediately gave her a full scholarship. And she tells you what else it became.

DC: Can you just briefly for the tape just describe what this story is that you're talking about?

DR: Yeah. [Reading aloud] While pastor of Emanuel Baptist Church Sylvia McGinnis came to our church. Not a member but came regular. I heard she was graduating from high school and I hear she was valedictorian of her class. I asked Sylvia one Sunday, where are you going to college. She said, college? My mom and dad won't let me go to college. They don't have any money. They can't do anything about it. I said, Sylvia, let's go over to Cumberland College over in Williamsburg,

Kentucky and let's see what we can do. She said you've got to talk to my mom and dad first. I went and talked to her mom and dad, no way, no way. The only way I persuaded them to let her go, it will not cost us a penny. We don't have the money. So my wife and I took Sylvia over to Cumberland College and talked with them. They immediately looked at her academic background, gave her a full scholarship. She went four years to Cumberland College and graduated from there and came back and she writes in this little article here, I did not become a beautician because, there's nothing wrong with beauticians. Now she is one of the reporters in the *Wayne County Outlook*, a weekly reporter. And she writes an article every week and I've written Sylvia and told her you ought to keep these and put them in a book. They are worth publishing. And she writes this in an editorial thing saying thank you, Brother Randolph. If you and your wife had not shown an interest in me, I would probably end up being a beautician, so forth.

[Long Pause]

Education is still, it's not, Moore High School right over here in my neighborhood ought to be one of the best high schools because we are in an upper middle class community. But right now it's one of the poorest high schools in the whole Jefferson County system. I don't understand why. I haven't gotten too much involved in education, although I still can walk in the office over there and I think the thing I'm most happy for and proud of, let me see if I can find it real quick, I offered one time when one of the board members resigned and went and ran for this, I offered to serve again but they somehow chose somebody else. But they give me that each year.

DC: Athletic pass to all sports.

DR: Any sport I want to go to I can get to and I'm a nut about sports.

DC: That's terrific. So let's talk a little bit about some of the more contentious things I guess that would have happened when you were on the board in terms of parents letting you know how they felt one way or the other about this. Would parents come to meetings that you had?

DR: No, most of mine was by phone call and to board meetings. I learned that there was no way in the world you could appease people when their mind was already preset before you came. So there's no use of getting in there and, you know, doing it. I kept an open ear to any person that wanted to call me. My phone rang often and they told me their pros and cons. I don't remember, now here again, my wife at eighty years of age tells me I'm all the time forgetting everything, but I don't remember many calls that came in favor of the busing process. I remember many in opposition both black and white that came in opposition. We used to get nightly calls from somebody and we couldn't get them to answer. They'd say some things. We never could find out who was doing it. And it's a hard thing when your phone rings at two or three o'clock in the morning and somebody was just playing.

I remember a man came by one time. I was living up on Emily Drive. I had to do some repair work on my roof and he says I've got a summons for you. You've got to appear as chairman of the board. I was up on the roof and he said all right, you have to sign for it. I'll just let your wife sign for it. I said no sir. He said, well, you've got to sign for it. I said well if you want me to sign for it, you'll come up this ladder on the roof for me to sign it. He had to come all the way up. It got disgusting

at times because the courts to my mind did not have insight to the perplexities that were facing the community. They were rigid, legalistic and rather than to look at it, in fact, Jeff Gordon who was our judge, I have visited him two or three times when he was in the hospital room sick and he made judgments there. And when he retired he gave up every case that he had except the Board of Education. I thought it was not very fair for him in the condition he was in the hospital room, for him to try to make judgments on the Board of Education of Louisville, Kentucky. Now every other situation may not have been like that.

DC: Why do you think that was?

DR: Why do I think he did that?

DC: Yeah.

DR: I don't think it was his interest in the board's case as much as I think I understood for him to keep his statute in place he had to keep his hands on one or two cases here or there or the other place. I think maybe that was his background. I think when he got ill and he retired he should have given up every bit of his cases and turned it over to somebody else. But for some reason he did not give up the Board of Education. He just did not do it.

DC: So in the article where it says people called you the Messiah and people called you Hitler, what were the circumstances? Do you remember what those particular occasions?

DR: Some black lady didn't like what we were doing and called me "that curly headed thing sitting up there" and said, "You act just like Hitler."

DC: Was that at a meeting?

DR: That was a school board meeting, yeah. This is where we got most of it, at school board meetings because at school board meetings the board was fair in letting everybody speak and say what they wanted to say whether we accept it or, you know, agree with it or not. We gave the right for them to come and speak their piece. Sometimes I felt for the people, but again, there is the legality of the law, which you have to abide by, whether you like it or not. On the back of that thing there it says Chairman Randolph was opposed to busing. I was opposed to *busing*. I was not opposed to *integration*. I believe it ought to happen, should happen and I tell a lot of people a lot of truth. Hey, if we can't get along down here together and can't get together, we won't go to heaven and get together. It's not going to happen. It just won't happen up there if we can't do it down here.

If you ever get a chance to talk to Charles Elliott and see what our church did with his church, not for it, then you'll find out my true attitude towards integration and relationships. I'll tell you just one story about Charles Elliott. He ministered to people that seemingly nobody else wanted to minister to. He needed a larger church. Virginia Avenue Baptist Church in the West End was just depleting. They were going to close. They wanted to sell their building. Charles went over there and said we need your building. I've got the people to fill it. So [it] happened that one or two other black churches wanted it also. So they had a meeting down there and they accused Charles of being a racist, an activist, and everything like that. He said I'll just bring my members over here and we'll join the church and we'll have the majority and take it over. And they started abusing Charles in such a way I went with him, both black and white, from the state higher up echelons, and I finally said Charles, we don't need

this. We don't have to take this. Let's get out of here. Let's get out of here. It finally ended up Charles didn't get the church, another black church got it, but Charles needed it because he was reaching a level of people that other black churches I don't think wanted to reach. And right now you go down any Sunday, he's got a new building in the same location and he fills it every Sunday. He fills it every Sunday.

But integration's no problem with me. Busing is a problem, was then, still is, of trying to take people and do it. I see buses come through here. Another problem I have and if I were on the board we'd stop it quick. First, second, and third grades in the darkness gets on a bus. There ought to be no way any child like that gets on a bus before it's daylight, whatever we have to do, whatever we need to do. There are a lot of things in education that I think can go. A young man that's over at the Board of Education now, Joe Burkes, Jr., is head of all the high schools in Jefferson County. He grew up in my church. I knew him very well and he was principal at Male at one time and his dad was football and basketball coach out at Southern High School. I know them very well. But there are other avenues that they need to deal with to give quality education. I think we have the equipment. I think we have the staff, the teachers. Right now the teachers union I don't blame them for supporting their teachers. One time we were negotiating for a contract. I was over at the board. My wife and I decided to go up to a movie after it was over with. Somebody followed us up. I can't say it was a teacher, but somebody broke in my car and tore up everything inside of it. The only conclusion, I had just left that meeting when we were negotiating and they did not get what exactly they wanted and it was a real frustration.

DC: So you stayed on the board despite all these personal difficulties?

DR: Didn't bother me a bit, things don't. Really it did not bother me. I think by faith in my God and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live it by faith and I live it for the glory of God. So with these consolations I'm trying to do my best for human beings out there. Sometimes human beings will come to you and they don't want to do what's best for them. They don't want to do what's best for them. They want to do what's best for them in their own concept and way. But those four years were difficult years, not just for me but for the Board of Education. We had to make decisions realizing that the judge up there's going to tell us something different. And so, therefore, I had to keep in mind the fact that we were trying to do the best for the people according to the mandate that the courts had handed down to us. And I think the courts and society both are wrong in giving the brunt of the load on the back of the Board of Education to bring integration about. This is not the way to do it.

DC: Lincoln Cosby, was he on the board then?

DR: No, I know Lincoln. No, he was not on the board.

DC: Were there any black members of the board?

DR: Oh yeah, we had one man there. Now I'm trying to think of his name. And he went on to be a state senator. He and I, I guess, disagreed on some things. But this experience happened to us. He quoted, the *Courier Journal* was interviewing him, said well now, Chairman Randolph, what do you think about him. His response was, well, I can't say it publicly. We were in a board meeting and he raised a question and I said to him well now, since you couldn't say it publicly, maybe in a board meeting you can tell people what you think about me. (Laughter) He grabbed up his

stuff and left. But honestly my opinion, right or wrong: even today you have black activists who are leading their people in the wrong direction.

DC: Was he pro-busing then, this individual?

DR: We all had to be pro-busing. Yeah, we had to. We had to be. Really I never got down to it individually basis. I would never let the board members be put on the spot, which of you.... I came out publicly and made my statement.

DC: You did? You personally did?

DR: Yeah. But I would not let the other board members be put in that position unless they voluntarily did so. Because at that time many, many of the black people except the radical activists felt like busing and tip ratio was the best thing for black people. They felt that way. Now they're looking back and find it hasn't been the answer. Busing just not has been the answer for quality education. It just has not been.

DC: Why do you think you felt compelled to come forward and say how you really felt about [busing]?

DR: I came forward and said what I was about because the white people, Melvin Brakeman who was one of my deacons at that time, in the article said well, there are a lot of people think that Brother Randolph ought've to come out and led marches. He ought to have come out and been the leadership of the sign. I simply made my statement. I am for integration. I don't think busing is the answer to the problems. And the *Courier* many times publish things, they don't publish them correctly and everything. I remember one time in an editorial one of the men took something I said completely out of context. I can't recall what it is. Another place in

his paper they published it right. I called his attention to it. Oh, well, I'm so sorry. Next time we publish anything we might publish it right. *Courier Journal* is not one of my favorite papers. They are way out left, have been, will be, always will be.

DC: But you wanted people to know how you personally felt about it?

DR: I wanted people to understand, yeah. I made the statement back then that it was not the responsibility of the Board of Education to supplement for society integration. It's not fair to put that on the Board of Education. I wanted the people to know then that busing people from this thing all the way down to the West End or from the East End backwards and forwards, this was not going to be fair to the students. It was not to be. In some families some students were bused and some students were not bused. Some students started going to their own community church. I believed in integration but I do not see the wisdom of busing as the answer to tip ratio. I just did not. And when the lady came up with well, we won't waste that time. We'll put a teacher on that bus and she will have a microphone and she can teach. But she didn't understand that you had people from three, four, five, six different grades on there. What are you going to teach them? It's impossible. It's just impossible. Now I think the tip ratio has dwindled a whole lot and they don't have to go as far as they used to but in the first venture of busing some of those kids had to go long miles. They had to go a long ways.

DC: And encountered some serious resistance in the beginning.

DR: Sir?

DC: Encountered some serious resistance, protesters, etc., in the beginning.

DR: Oh yeah, there was resistance. There were resisters to it. There were demonstrations. There were requests of reasons my child should not be bused. We had to deal with all of those.

DC: Were there safety concerns?

DR: Sir?

DC: Were there safety concerns?

DR: Yeah, I think sometimes there were safety concerns about it. I think sometimes there were safety concerns because I cannot remember specific incidents but again I go in locations and most of them are South End areas where there could have been a lot of dangers to people.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

DC: Which were the places, the schools that were the most difficult in that way?

DR: I don't recall anything happening at schools outside of fights and things, discipline, like that but I do recall in the back of my mind some "accidents" that buses had and things like this that questioned why did it happen. Why did it happen? There were a lot of people, and again I'm in trouble when I say locations because I go out Preston Street to church every Sunday morning, out into Bullitt County and I get into locations, there were some people who then and still now, as wrong as I think they are, don't like integration. Our church out where I go, ninety-nine percent -- and they have about fifteen hundred on Sunday morning -- are white, very few blacks. I don't know

if there are any of them up there. See after I retired I instead of stay home and watch television I did a lot of substitute teaching out in Bullitt County school system and I taught just about every subject. One of the most ones I took one class for thirty days, special education, because they couldn't find a teacher and I enjoyed it. I had seven kids in there, seven kids in there and we tried to help them along and to teach. In fact, teaching them mathematics, I tried to teach them their multiplication tables. They just could not do it. They had calculators, so I finally told the principal we're doing away with the multiplication tables. If they go out and go to work they need to learn how to run this calculator. So we did all of our math on calculators. We didn't worry about the other. When I finally gave it up before they found somebody I told them I said now, principal, I have seven fellas in here. Three of them I think you can help. The other four need a good belt to their bottom. That's the only thing that's going to help. He says you know I can't do that. (Laughter)

DC: Do you remember in terms of like when you were on the board and parents coming to the meetings and all that, do you remember specifically this group call United Black Protective Parents?

DR: No, no.

DC: Were there any organizations that formed?

DR: My problem as chairman, they identified what group they represented. I blocked it out because if I listened to what group they represented I would not hear what they were saying. So I looked at them as an individual. So they may have been there but I did my best when they came and they represented this group and they clearly identified who they represented, but when they did that I blocked that out. I

would not listen to that because I wanted to listen to them as a person, as a human being to what they were saying and then I could understand their feelings. Because if they come just to represent a group that I may have had problems with their with their whole motive, then I could not hear what they were saying. I just could not.

DC: I understand. Was there a Klan presence back at that period in this area?

DR: I think there was but I never did see it. I think there was influence. I don't recall a demonstration but I know the philosophy of the Klan and therefore the philosophy coming out of a person pretty well, hey, I know where you are. I never did see one, never did hear of a meeting, but I saw a lot of the philosophy of the Klan that is there.

DC: So in terms of people speaking to you?

DR: Speaking, uh-huh. I won't get into where, why, where, for or when but just this past week when they found out that I was one time the chairman of the Board of Education, I won't tell you what the man said and he comes out of a "Christian relationship," but his opinions of the differences between white and black are not pleasing to God, cannot be.

DC: So you still hear it?

DR: It's still there, yeah. It's still there.

DC: How do you feel about that as a pastor and a religious person?

DR: I think he's wrong. I told him he was wrong. I told him he was wrong. Not right. Hey, God loves the Communists in Russia as much as he loves me. God loves the blackest man in Africa as much as he loves me. Living in America does not give me any right to think that God loves me more than anybody else. Person in

China, God loves him as much as he loves me. He doesn't love me because I'm white. I'm just fortunate and World War II, you don't know how thankful I am to be born in America and be raised in this U.S.A. And I was talking to a group of clergymen this morning, hey, if we don't do something radically, we're going to lose America because when you remove God, which the attempt is right now, out of America, and the pledge of allegiance of the flag with God in there, when you lose God you're going to lose America. God help America during the future if we don't keep our faith and our trust. Listen, I fought and would fight again for the right of every person to worship God as they choose. I may differ with their religion, will tell them in every way and I'll be aggressive in my position and understanding of the scriptures, but I believe even to the Muslims they have a right to worship but Allah and Jehovah God are not the same. They're just not the same. But I would fight again today for Muslims to worship. But I'm reading the Koran and I'm reading another book, *More Than A Prophet*, by a converted Muslim and when you read those books, their religion has no place for Christianity. We're the devils. That's their belief. But I still think they have a right to worship. I do not take that away from them. That's the great privilege of America.

DC: But you're reading that. You're trying to understand.

DR: I'm trying to understand why they do or what they believe because I believe that the Iraq War is a religious war. We're not fighting the Iraqi people. We're fighting Islam. Islam will rule this world. More than five million Islam Muslims in America, not all of them black, white. Now they're getting in position.

Did you read recently where a boy out in California asked to be released from school early so he could go to a prayer?

DC: No, I didn't hear that.

DR: Just recently. Did you read recently they had to expel two girls I think in Philadelphia because they would not let them wear the, cover their face? They had to expel them because they wanted to do it, their privilege. In education we have not seen yet the influence of what Muslims are going to do. I commend ... I was watching, in West Louisville we recently have had so many murders and the black Muslims in Louisville they dress in suits and bowties and you have to admire them and respect them and they march down the streets and say, hey, we're going to stop this stuff. I commend them but I cannot follow the leadership of Muhammad the Prophet Allah. They're just diametrically opposed to what the pilgrims and the people who came to America discovered. I will fight for their religious freedom but they don't believe in our freedom.

DC: Do you think that in the process of desegregating the schools or busing that Louisville lost something or gained something?

DR: Louisville lost a lot of students. They went to private schools. When I was chairman of the board we had about a hundred and ten thousand. Now if we have ninety thousand I'm surprised. The private schools systems and the surrounding counties, Shelby County, Bullitt County, Spencer County, maybe Harlan County, some of these counties picked up a lot of students.

DC: What they would call white flight?

DR: Mostly it's white flight. Just like in my church, my church best we averaged seven hundred and fifty one year and that was a large church in those days. It does good now to run a hundred and fifty. White flight, I just could not keep my white people. I've seen some of my people lose their doors and lose their whole house because they did not want to live in mixed neighborhood and you go over into that area now and you can almost understand why. It's a problem community.

DC: Would you talk about this issue from the pulpit? Would you talk about this?

DR: Oh, sure I did. I have no problem about that. People know my position in this. I have no problem about sharing with them this, pleading with them not to leave. One situation, he was principal, his wife was a teacher at a different school. They had a teenage daughter. They came to me and said Brother Don we're moving our membership. I said please don't. Why? Well, our teenage daughter is becoming sweet on a fella and we think we want better for her. Wasn't a black fella. It was a little white fella. Best he could wear to church was his tennis shoes, overalls with holes in them. That's the best. They said we want better for our daughter. So they moved. White flight struck us to the wind. I stayed until I prayed to the Lord. Lord, I'm not succeeding here. Maybe if another person came in they could. So I left Louisville and went to Knoxville, Tennessee. I think it was a mistake now but can't look back and wonder anything. The white flight just happened. I think somehow court wise there could have been alternative solutions for integration without saddling the boards of education with those responsibilities. I just don't think that's the answer.

It's not working now. You go down to Central High School and they say we don't care if sixty percent of our students are black. We want our school back.

DC: Did your leaving to go to Knoxville have anything to do with your relations in the community or anything from being on the board?

DR: It might have somewhere. I won't discount the fact. It might have. My problem was our church was declining and I did not see any way of me stopping it. I felt that maybe after twenty-three years, a former president of the theological seminary there, he's a little more, shall I say, "liberal" than I am, he made a statement and I agree with him. He said usually the tenure of a preacher at a church is about ten years. About fifteen years he ought to move. It will be good for him and good for the church. As I look back at it now, I think he's a hundred percent right. After you stay so long, I just felt like Lord, maybe a younger man or a different man can come and motivate, you know, in this direction. I won't say that somewhere underneath it all that the Board of Education experience did not have some influence upon me.

DC: And you did end up retiring and moving back to Louisville?

DR: Yeah, yeah. I've traveled from Louisville to Knoxville to Florida to Longview, Texas, back to Kentucky in Monticello. My grandson graduated from high school, we moved and I wanted to go to Florida but my wife said she wanted to come to Kentucky. In fact, she actually believes when we go out of state and come back, when we cross the Kentucky line I'd have to stop the car, she'd get out and kiss the ground. She's says I'm on holy ground. And we've been back here eleven years now. Our daughter lives in Shreveport, Louisiana and she's doing her level best to get us to move out there. Eighty, I know, maybe we can number the years [remaining]. Right

now both of us are in good health. One day we may not be and we really have no one here to care for us so we are giving some consideration about doing that but it's hard for an eighty-year-old man to move anywhere. It's just awful. I've been here eleven years now. We'll be going out there middle of the month and spending til New Year's Day with her for the Christmas holidays.

DC: Well, you look terrific. I would never know you're eighty.

DR: They tell me I don't look eighty and I tell them try not to act. The other day somebody says the older you get the crazier you get. Little kid looked up at me and said you must be mighty old. I said thank you, thank you, thank you. (Laughter)

DC: That's great. I like that.

DR: God is good to me. Even with two or three by-pass heart surgeries and two stints and some other major surgeries, I feel excellent. My last checkup the doctor says I can live to be as old as Methuselah.

DC: Well, anything that I didn't ask you that you thought I might ask or that you wish I'd asked you?

DR: Well, the only thing I say, it was an experience in going through. Our major responsibility was doing what the law says. I will say that I don't think always our attorney gave us the best guidance in my opinion. Now others on the board may say different. I don't think he gave us the best guidance. We ended up, or at least I ended up trying to lead the board to make conclusions in our responsibility to the law. This is what we had to do. I was for integration. I think my life with Charles Elliott and his church and the black community ... one of the scariest times I've ever had in my life, Charles called me one time and said, Brother Randolph, I need you to go with

me. I said okay, Charles. We went downtown and he took me over to a room and in that room sat the leader of the black Muslims in the community. One either side of him stood two big tall fellas to protect him. Charles, littler than I am and me on the other side and my knees were knocking. They were trying to persuade Charles to become a Muslim. After a while Charles stood there and defended his faith in Jesus Christ. I finally said Charles it's time we'd better go. I don't know anything about it.

But integration is important. If we want to mix in heaven, which we will have to, we better learn to get along with each other down here. Better learn now. I don't know what the answer is. Maybe there's too much traditions, you know, built up in people in which we were brought up. I know my bringing up in the orphanage there were so many things I did not know how to cope with when I got out in life. My wife and I have been married sixty-one years and I embarrass her a lot. I tell her I was fifteen when she asked me to marry her. (Laughter) But the hardest whipping I got when I was in the orphanage, I went down to speak to my sister. There was a road here and then there was a path down there and you'd better not go across it. I saw my sister down there one time and thought I'd go down to say hi to her and talk to her. They caught me and said uh-oh. I said but that's my sister. You know the rules and they applied the rules to me.

But I look back and this, God has been so good and the only thing I can tell you, before the Board of Education, on the Board of Education, now, the life that I now live in this flesh I live for my faith and I live for the glory of Jesus Christ. That's my whole life. One life soon to be passed on and that's what you do for Jesus Christ for life. And whether they agreed with it, and there were some whites who disagreed

with it as much as the blacks, on the Board of Education we tried to give a fair hearing in everything but we were tied to what the law said. You have to have fifteen percent black or twenty percent black in every school. That's what we had to do. I did not agree with the method in which we were doing it of taking kids from one area to the other. I bought in this community because I like it. I don't want to have to go to a grocery store way over on Brownsboro Road or way down to the West End. I don't want to have to. I don't think it's fair to make kids go out of their community to go to school. Now I don't know that I have the utility to how do you do it otherwise but I think there at least ought to be a lot of consideration of how we do it. Hey, I would raise all kinds of contention. We have an association in this subdivision and if I ever heard that they would not sell to a black family or any other racial family, you'd find this fella on the warpath real quick. They have every right to live in this community. They have to be able to afford it. They have to be able to do it.

I have found this -- and my evaluation may be wrong -- when you get proper education regardless of whether white, black, yellow, purple, whatever it be, if you get a person through a college education their whole approach to life is different. Their whole approach to total life is different, the quality, the things that they like and dislike, everything is a complete different situation.

But I get hold of the board occasionally. I don't know what their answer is. They're having multiplicity of frustrations now. Ann Elmore, I think is her name, is a black lady on the board and she's still fighting for the black cause and maybe rightfully so. I don't know. But she still is a very fighter for the cause there. It ought not be black or white. If the education is down in Shelby Street or if the education is

out on the West End or if education is here, we ought to have the best quality teachers. Right now the teachers choose and the principals choose and they get to pick. To me it could be some type of assignment. You're the best teacher we have. Here are the poorest students we have. We want you to go here. That may be an answer. I don't know. But I'm sure you would never get the teachers union [on board]. I come out of Harlan County where they had that John L. Lewis United Mine Workers organizing. I saw the National Guard march a thousand miners about eight miles. They were striking and they told you, you don't go to work. If you go to work we shoot you and they meant it too. So the teachers union today they have a lot of power and I don't know that you could ever get it. I do believe this. I think the teachers are the most underpaid people, professional people we have in this world. They're the most underpaid and to me it's a shame. Lebron Jones, I don't know, he plays basketball for—

DC: Lebron James?

DR: Yeah, James, he got two million dollars just signing a contract. I think it's pathetic that a high school student can come out and get that and do that and our teachers have to struggle. Our values, one thing I think we may be beginning to learn in this last election regards to who you are for, values meant an important difference in the election and if we don't turn back to some values we're going to find problems. But there's not an athlete anywhere worth a million dollars for the whole year, for a lifetime, much less two million dollars just to sign your name. I think it's pathetic. Education has to become one of the priorities in our society. Keep qualified people there and pay them adequately enough so that we can get our kids educated. I don't

have the answer. It's the biggest problem right now and I don't have the answer. I have not been in contact with it that much. But right now we're dragging so far behind in math, in English, and other things in scores. I'm a public school man. I'm not a private school man. Although, they're telling me the private schools do much better in testing and things like this, I don't see how. I drove by Saint Nick's High School. You know St. Nick's?

DC: Uh-uh, no.

DR: It's a strong Catholic all boys school and you can't do anything but admire them. I had to wait til they all got walking across. All the boys came out with uniforms. They all had ties on. They all looked nice and everything. You can't but help admire what they're doing up there. In fact, out in Bullitt County, I was teaching the high school out there, the principal was a retired Army man. Went back and got his certification to be a principal. After three years he quit and went back to his home state. He told me, he said, Preacher, if I can't get some corporal punishment back in the school there's no way I can control it. I can't control these kids and I'm not going to stay here and take their abuse. I'm not going to do it. And he left and turned it over to somebody else.

DC: That was a public school?

DR: That was a public school, yeah. That's a public school. If we don't get some kind of control of the discipline within our public schools we In my experience out in Bullitt County, I wrote a mother asked her to help a child in a math problem. And she wrote back and said that's what you were trained for. That's not my job. I said well, you come sometime and sit in one of our classes and see what

we're doing and whether we're qualified or not in this. To me there's a whole lot wrong in the public school system more than integration. Quality education and meeting, no, I'm not going to tell you. I know one person in my opinion. He's outstanding, well noted in Louisville, Kentucky, but he graduated. No, he didn't. They passed him on and gave him a diploma. That's all they did. They just passed him on and gave him a diploma. And we've got to face it. Some kids can't learn as fast as others. I personally like them integrated, you know, the smart students with the average students and the poor students. There for a while we had the advanced program. In fact, I was asked to speak at the national school board convention in Miami a few years ago on the programs that we were having, the advanced program. But you can't take all of the advanced students and put them over here and then put all the poor students down here and expect them, you know, to amount. These poor students when they get out in life they've got to live with these students over here and they've got to live with each other. Somehow mixing them together and helping them learn one from another with another I think would be a great big help.

DC: I'll just turn the machine off. Thank you very much.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

TRANSCRIBED APRIL 2005 BY CATHY MANN