

STRALEY, JOE
START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

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JOE STRALEY
FEBRUARY 21, 2001

JOE STRALEY: You want to go back to the beginning, I was born in Paulding, Ohio, near Toledo, Ohio, October 6, 1914, and I was there until I graduated from high school. I suppose in those formative years I may have developed a background for social causes. But I don't remember being much involved emotionally, and I like to think I never have been emotionally involved, in the sense that I let emotions carry the day as against some sort of recourse to logic and reason and what the facts are and so on. But I do recall events--we were on the farm--and two miles down the road there was a farmer who was black. And this man--by the way, in Ohio, in that part of Ohio, I suspect like two percent of people were black, and the rest were Caucasian, so a black stood out. I remember in school, a certain amount of taunting of blacks. And it was, as far as I was concerned, a way of life, acceptable behavior, I don't remember being upset by it. I don't remember really participating in it. But I think there was--children can be very cruel, you know. Cruel to each other, black or white. And have lack of sympathy, you probably know this: if one child is hurt, and bawling his head off, the other children just sort of look at it--[as if to say] curious situation over there--they don't join in any kind of vicarious sorrow in general. And I suppose could say that I looked upon this taunting of blacks in the way that children do. I do remember an occasion, an event, in which I was riding on a farm wagon with my father and this black neighbor. And my father was remarking about some remarks that he heard from children, whether it was from me or my brother, I don't know. But it was in a sense, to say that, in a kind of unthinking way, he said something to the effect that, "white children don't like niggers," something like that, and he thought it was kind of funny. He laughed, of course, and so did the neighbor, you know how blacks are, I

don't think this is specific to blacks, at least it's very common for blacks to come forth with a great belly laugh, whether it's funny or not. They can come up with a laugh. So he came up with a laugh about this, and you would have thought that it was accepted as a joke. A week later we learned he jerked the kids out of school. And my dad went to him and said, how come you did this? And he said, "well, you told me the kids didn't like niggers, and I don't want my kids to be where they aren't wanted!" My dad was absolutely crushed. He couldn't believe that he had touched that raw a nerve. And I was just observer to this whole thing. And the memory of the obvious hurt that was involved sort of carried over? Sort of colored my relationships with black people from that day on.

DAVID POTORTI: And this was high school?

JS: I couldn't have been more than fourteen. Maybe even younger than that.

DP: So it made quite an impression on you.

JS: It made quite an impression on me. That there was that much a feeling, and that much hurt. I don't think I articulated it at the time as I'm articulating it to you--hurt, I don't know if I ever thought those words, but one way or another--[vacuum cleaner begins and door is closed] I remember when I became a graduate student, you might say in my undergraduate years at Bowling Green State University, I don't remember having an encounter with a black person at all. I don't know if there were any black people at Bowling Green University. It's just amazing that I could have been there that long, and I have absolutely no memory of seeing a black person at Bowling Green. Or worrying about it. So you see, while I may have been sensitized by this earlier experience, I wasn't sensitized to something that wasn't there, [that hadn't been] in my face. But when I got to graduate work, there were two black graduate students, and I was--(A) first of all, very

impressed, I couldn't believe from anything I knew about blacks that they were ever qualified to become graduate students. This is essentially to say that I, in the back of my mind, had to think of blacks as being inferior, that they couldn't succeed on the same set of rules as white people. And here was Walter MacAfee and Leroy Posey, doing great as graduate students, at what I had accepted and believe still, is one of the finer graduate schools in the country.

DP: And this was Bowling Green?

JS: No, by this time I was at Ohio State, where I was doing my graduate work. And I had a lot of conversations with them. In fact I suppose, thinking back about that, I could probably say that it was a kind of a reverse discrimination going on. I paid more attention in a sense to MacAfee and Posey than I did to anybody else. "You guys know what you're doing, don't you? How about helping me with this problem?" [laughs]

DP: Well, I guess that's natural.

JS: Maybe, except I didn't see other people flocking around Posey and MacAfee [laughs].

DP: Now, can we go back and tell me about your parents? You said they were on the farm, so was your dad a farmer?

JS: My dad was a farmer. They both came from rural settings. My mother had spent one year, no, two years, at Hiram College, it's a little church related school in northern Ohio, connected to the kind of fundamentalist faith called Church of Christ, there are a lot of things come close to that, but Church of Christ have a lot of followers of, all I know is followers of somebody Gambol...they're Gambolites. I don't know what that means, except that it was fundamentalist to the extent that every religious service

involved breaking the bread and drinking the wine, and declaring that this was the body and the blood of Jesus. Nobody believed that, of course, but it was symbolic of, and well, constituted a, well, I guess a useful way to express their faith in what the Bible is going to tell us here in a few minutes.

DP: Was this a mixed congregation or was it all white, pretty much?

JS: As I say, there were very few blacks, and no blacks went to a white church. Where they went to church, if they went to church, I have no idea. But they did not...blacks, always at that period in Ohio, always seemed to be doing their best to become invisible. You know, they didn't want to be rocking any boats, or getting in anybody's way. It wasn't probably as flagrant as it was reported to be in the South maybe at about that same time, a black was expected to step off the sidewalk if it wasn't wide enough for people to pass without that. But I would say that blacks were just doing their best to get through the day, and not make waves.

DP: So your mom was religious. Was your father also?

JS: In a way, they were both--well, it's hard to give a full report in a few minutes. But, the combination of some kind of internal psychology that afflicted our family, that when my mother and father were married, they immediately found themselves under the tyranny of my mother's mother, my grandmother, and this grandmother of mine had such set notions about the Church of Christ, the one which I always attended, that she could see no way but that Stella, my mother, would adhere and relate to that church and to no other church. My father had early on a certain kind of animosity to grandmother. It was awfully subtle, but he wasn't about to be pushed around by grandma. And one of the things, since he had always been a Methodist, he was just not going to pack up and leave

the Methodist Church because grandma said so. So for all the years that I was a youth, we drove in from the farm, all of us together in one little car, stopped at the Church of Christ, let out my mother, let me out, and dad drove on to the Methodist Church. There were three of us, in true male chauvinistic style, my father claimed the loyalty of my older brother. So brother Huston had to be a Methodist, I, second child, just out of fairness had to go to the Church of Christ, my sister, who came along third, became obviously a Methodist. It's going to go this way. That's where the story ends, you see, my father carried off two, and my mother carried off one: me. So there was confusion in this whole thing. A person could understand, I suppose, in a family where the mother was Catholic and the father was Protestant or something like that, they might split and decide, this is not the church for me. But most people could never see the difference between two Protestant churches as being sufficiently great to cause you to decide you can't attend either one of them. But not in my family.

DP: Now, what were the names? You said your mother was--

JS: Stella.

DP: And your dad was--

JS: Ozro. You'll find that he begat somewhere among the begatters in the early parts of the Old Testament.

DP: Ozro, that's a great name. And you had two--was it a brother and a sister?

JS: Two siblings, one older, my brother, his name was Huston. This being my mother's maiden name, Huston. And I had a sister, have a sister, Miriam. You notice that my father and mother, whoever decided on names picked very Biblical sort of names-- how [much more] Biblical can you get than Ozro, Joseph and Miriam.

DP: Do you remember anything being said in church as you were growing up, about racial equality or anything like that? Or was that something that was never discussed?

JS: No, no, it was never an issue. These things don't get to be an issue unless it's under your nose. No black was challenging the status quo; there weren't any blacks being lynched around. It was somewhere else, you know. Now, I've been told that in my wife's church, which was in a more urban proximity to a more urban community, this kind of thing did surface from time to time. But not in Paulding, Ohio. Paulding was a town of 2,000 people only, you know. And church on Sunday was populated about 50-50 between people who lived in the community and people who drove in from the countryside.

DP: Okay, so you talked about graduate school and going through all of that. And when did you come to Chapel Hill, and how did you happen to come here?

JS: First I spent, after I graduated in 1941, I spent three years at the University of Toledo. This was during the war, and we had military related programs going. Young men who were in the process of becoming aviators came to Chapel Hill, partly to learn some physics, partly to be somewhere while they got ready for them in some flying field off somewhere which we never had anything to do with, didn't know where it was, in fact it was a lot of places, and the people who came there were picked out of class and sent off here, and sent off there, and arrived overnight, and left overnight. It was a quite turbulent time to be teaching physics. But that was the purpose I was serving throughout the three years. Early in my career I was the head of a department, you see, and I must have had a dozen different people teaching physics more or less under my supervision. I say more or

less because these people were pretty independent characters, and almost none of them were physicists, you see. They were English professors, and they were engineering professors, and they were sociology and musicians and you name it, and they were studying physics one page ahead of the class in some cases. But we got by, we did our job, we send them on, they did whatever they had to do from that point on. So as the war wound down, I began to think about, this program dried up, so I was looking for another place, and it just happened an opening showed up here. I came here on a one year grant in 1947, and shortly after moved into this house--this house! [laughs]

DP: No kidding. This was probably out in the country when you bought it.

JS: Absolutely. Although that house for example was already there--[my] next door neighbor--that house being the house you read about if you read William Meade Prince's book called A Southern Part of Heaven--he refers to hiking out to the old Stroud farm, to look at the cows, and to feel in general, well, we've gotten out to the boonies, and isn't it nice out here.

DP: Wow. That's hard to believe.

JS: Well, when I moved here, this wasn't even part of Chapel Hill. I bought this place and--I'm kind of a sloppy thinker in so many ways--when the administrator of the university was trying to encourage me to come here, he used as a bait the description of the retirement system that we have in North Carolina. I almost dozed off, I was so bored and disinterested in it. [laughs] And at this point in my long life, boy oh boy that was a wonderful thing he was talking about. So when I signed the deed for this house I didn't ask, how about fire insurance for this house? Turned out shortly after I arranged to buy it, I was talking to my neighbor over the fence and said, hey, I didn't hear anything said

about fire protection. And he said something, and I said, of course, there's a fire department here, I hear the horn blow every once in a while. And he said, well, if you have a fire, they'll come and watch. They were absolutely forbidden to go outside of town and rescue anybody, because it was unlimited, you know. This may have been real close to the town line, but who's going to decide how close is close? So, there was no close--here you get fire protection, here you don't.

DP: Probably the same with police protection, too.

JS: Well, there was some kind of county emergency fire protection, but it came from way off somewhere. As I remember what would happen would be that if your house got on fire, somebody would see if they could summon some volunteer firemen to come down here and see what they could do about it.

DP: Buckets?

JS: Well, they may have even had a fire plug here, but you know the guys that know how to do that, and have the hose and know how to do it, don't get here for half an hour. And you can kind of imagine if you have a volunteer fire department, and one guy is momentarily out of the store, and the other guy is out in the field, bringing in the hay, you're not going to get very fast service.

DP: They didn't have cell phones back then.

JS: They had telephones. But you don't telephone a man on a tractor. Even now, it would be 50-50, wouldn't it? How many people have a cell phone?

DP: So Chapel Hill was segregated when you came here, wasn't it--the University was.

JS: Oh, totally. Thoroughly segregated. I remember walking across the campus

with a man by the name of George Henry. This memory is very vivid to me. I didn't spend that much time at that point in my life worrying about this. But I knew when I came down here that I was moving into an area where race relations were going to be really different from anything I'd ever known before. So I was walking across the campus and George Henry, who was professor of music, was extolling the wonders of this University. Because people like Frank Graham, who was then the president, this was a very liberal environment around here. But I said, if it's a liberal environment, I should think that we'd have some black students. I remember George Henry being bowled over by my naivete. Because he [said], "oh, come on. We'll never have black students here. We've never had black students here, and there's no move afoot to bring black students here. Why don't you get with it, Joe Straley?" [laughs] In other words, it was total at that particular point.

DP: And when did you become aware that something was changing? Was there any event that sort of caught your attention?

JS: I was starting to say there was a kind of democracy afoot. There was a man whose name I'm not going to be able to think of, I think the name may have been Lawson or something like that, but he took care of various kinds of services to people who needed service. He could have had an office somewhere, and people would come in and say, I want a load of dirt, I want somebody to cut and mow my grass, I want this, I want that. His office was a tree, down in front of--is it still called Jeff's? It's about where there's a five and ten variety store, if you start from the intersection where the University Baptist Church is--start from Spanky's--move about a third of a block, there's a great tree. That great tree used to be this man's office. He had a bunch of men, all black, with trucks and

cars and the like, and they would go out on assignment to do this or do that, and he would be there, and if you wanted service, Mr. Berman,, who ran the store, would call him to a phone, and he would carry on a conversation, and the next time a truck came by, he'd send this guy out to get a load of topsoil and deliver it to so and so address. And this man was quite admired, actually, he ran a good business, he provided a great public service, he was sort of a pleasant guy to be around, you know?

DP: And this was a black man?

JS: This was a black man.

DP: And when would this have been?

JS: Oh, 1947. Well, he'd been there for a long time, but that's when I first became aware of him.

DP: And what was his name, do you remember?

JS: I--think it was Lawson.

DP: So you're saying that people were happy to employ black people for service.

JS: What I'm saying is nobody was [saying] "What's that black man doing around here? What right does he have to lean against this tree all day?" He was accepted as part of the community.

DP: It almost sounds like the way Mexican-Americans are accepted; that we're perfectly happy to have them mow our lawns, or whatever.

JS: Maybe, but I put this into a little different context; he was running a business. And openly, and being accepted. So I say that segregation may have been pretty complete in so many ways, at least here was some little entering wedge in the door. A man running a business from a tree, right in the heart of the white community.

DP: When you think of your fellow teachers, and the university atmosphere in general, were people openly hostile to the races, or was it like the gentleman you just mentioned?

JS: Uninvolved.

DP: Uninvolved, where he would just say, oh it's silly to even imagine.

JS: This guy that I was talking to was not anti anybody; he was just telling me the facts of life. He had no anticipation in our lifetimes that we would see the situation change. And it did change, fast, relevant to--change is always gradual, one little step at a time.

DP: And there was the Brown vs. Board of Ed ruling, which was in 1954.

JS: That occurred somewhere off-- it didn't immediately produce many waves as far as I know, but it did begin to produce some waves, I'm going to have a little trouble fixing a date, I would say probably in the early 50s, the community formed an organization called the Fellowship for the Integration of the Schools. This must have been almost immediately after Brown vs. Board of Education. And this resulted in dozens, I could say hundreds, but that would be exaggerating, dozens of meetings. I think we met every two weeks, maybe every month, it just seemed like forever--another meeting of this group called Fellowship for the Integration of the Schools. And it was as interracial as you could ask. We always met in one of the black, I was going to call black churches. But the white community responded quite well to this, because this was an ideal notion that segregation had to go. [It] became I think somewhere between a passion and I think a straightforward goal, almost immediately after Brown vs. Board of Education: if it's going to happen, let's do it right in Chapel Hill, was essentially what I'd have to say about it.

And people who you'd not normally expect to come forward, came forward and paid yeoman duty. One of the first chairpersons, who constituted the presiding officer who kept the Fellowship for the Integration of the Schools moving, was the owner of a dry cleaning establishment. In other words, you didn't pull out of a community of people that you would normally expect to be active on something like this. His name was Smith, but I'm not going to be able to come up with his first name.

DP: I'm assuming that this was a white man.

JS: A white man, um-hmm. Now, why they elected a white man, I don't know, and how he managed to--how it was decided, because in a sense I may have tuned in late, I just don't recall. I think I attended early meetings.

DP: How did you hear about it, or how did you get involved?

JS: Well, you see, we had an activist minister here by the name of Charles Jones, and Charles Jones may very well have been the instrument by which this was set up. There's certainly some material around--have you read anything on the establishment of the fellowship? A person who probably knows it pretty well, is the Reverend J.R. Manley. He's been minister of that church all this time--he was the minister when I came here, and he's still the minister of what's called the First Baptist Church...

DP: Yes, he's definitely being interviewed.

JS: He's a key person to talk to if you want to come up with more about the fellowship. [Vacuum cleaner unexpectedly jumps into action; tape is stopped.]

DP: Looks like the vacuum cleaner has been retired. So where were we? We were talking about the organization, the Fellowship for the Integration of the Schools, and how you heard about that, and you mentioned through the church.

JS: I think my role in it may have gone beyond just hearing about it. I think from an early date on, that both Lucy and I, my wife and I, were quite involved at least in seeing to it that it happened, that every one of these things involved food, we always took food. Every one of them involved our discussion--I was quite inclined towards providing the benefit of my two bits worth on most occasions.

DP: And did this cause any sort of tension between your role as a professor, and your involvement in this? Was there any downside to that?

JS: I had tension because of my activist inclinations, but not brought about by that. I was alleged to be a communist. And in a very limited sense of the word, I probably was. I don't know whether I'm a communist or not. I never signed any documents that said I'm a communist, I never joined any organization that said we are a communist organization. I did belong to several, what were regarded as radical organizations, that were dissatisfied with the policies of the United States, particularly in protest to the continuation of what was called the cold war. I had some naive understanding, read some of the wrong books, to get the whole story about Stalin. But my entrance level on it was in the violent period of the war with Germany, the heroic diaphanous of Stalingrad, for example, was a nightmare you'd have a hard time forgetting. When people told me that Stalin was a tyrant, the same instincts and tyranny motivations as Adolph Hitler, I sort of didn't believe it. I could have believed it, because after all Hitler managed to achieve a certain amount of solidarity with the German people, so why not--and I knew that was a tyranny--so why was I so slow to accept the notion that Stalin was also a tyrant? One of the things that kept me ignorant was a sort of unwillingness to believe. I had at one time or another read a little bit of Marxism and the like, and I had the feeling that it was

founded on an ideology that was totally acceptable: "workers of the world, unite, you have nothing to lose but your chains." I found that as a background for what communism was all about, as being an acceptable background. I didn't know, perhaps I should have known, the extent to which this had strayed from any kind of liberation of the masses. It did a big talk about liberation of the masses, but I guess it turned out to be mostly talk. But I was shielded from being accepting of this, because a right wing element in the United States was prepared to make it hard to believe anything, because they told so many lies themselves. They said things about Communists that in my own experience just didn't work. Junius Scale for example was a close friend of mine and a leader of the communist party in North and South Carolina, was as gentle soul [as] you ever met one. And the right wing characterization of people like Junius Scale just didn't fit the guy. And so if you're not going to believe everything, now it turns out to be at what point do you find, okay I've got to believe this much, but I'm not going to believe beyond that point, or I'm going to believe something else beyond that point.

DP: So did you actually get hauled before a committee?

JS: Yeah, I was. Chancellor Robert B. House, who was chancellor while Frank Porter Graham was president of the consolidated university, got very nervous, because people out in the state decided that Chapel Hill was a hotbed of communism, and developed all sorts of paranoia about people that were working here and were activists that were finding Chapel Hill a comfortable place to be. I guess I'm going to give Chancellor House the benefit of the doubt, he felt he just had to know, he couldn't just sit back and ponder Joe Straley and his activism, while he was getting letters from all these editors around the state about this hotbed of communists that were led by Joe Straley. So

he called me into the office one day, and he sat me down, and he cleared his throat, and said, you know I hear such great things about you, your ability as a physicist has prepared you to be one of our most important individuals on our faculty. But I hear all these stories about your work with radical organizations, and I've just got to ask you: are you a communist or not? And I opened my mouth to say something, and he [stopped me] and said, before you answer this question, I want you to know one thing: I can't fire you for being a communist, but I can fire you for lying [laughs]. Well, it was probably facts of life that if some person on the faculty wanted to be a communist, they would have a hard time firing them, you know we've got the AAUP, which works like, well at that time it was very very busy defending the academic freedom of individuals...

DP: And what was that?

JS: The American Association of University Professors, and we had a very active chapter. Very interested in this aspect of university life. AAUP comes out with a monthly magazine about what's going on in academic freedom all over the country. And other issues that relate to academic life. I think there were eleven different categories of activism in the national AAUP. Protection of a person's right to free speech was only one of them, but I swear that the time spent in a typical meeting of the AAUP here at the university, on this one issue, towered over everything else. I think throughout all that period, from when I arrived, 1947 to we'll say twenty years later, this was the topic. This was the topic. One way or another, we were into it. We had students that were left wing. And they were there absolutely demanding this and that, about getting the gum shoes off of our, out of our hair. Who's this guy Terry Sanford, that's walking around here from the State Bureau of Investigation, asking who's communist and who isn't? This

is one aspect of Terry Sanford, you know he became a senator and governor and everything else, but one thing I never saw in his bio is that he was with the SBI, the state bureau of Investigation--in any case, the American Association of University Professors was the organization that probably protected people like me from threats. I would think that probably, knowing Chancellor House, if he were not threatened by the kind of response he would have gotten from the AAUP, he was not that liberal, he would not probably have quavered-- "Let's get the commies out of here so I can get back to work."

DP: So, you're part of this group: Fellowship for the Integration of Schools, you go to a lot of meetings, and you said this started happening after Brown vs. Board of Ed.

JS: The AAUP part of my life came about because long before 1956, when Brown vs. Board of Education, this happened late 40s, early 50s, about that time, people began to challenge the continued segregation of black people. A student group known as the SPU, the Student Peace Union, got founded, under, I think, Pat Cusick, John Dunne--I'm talking about a university organization, and did not at that particular point at the outset, did not involve I don't think any blacks, it was only a little bit later that it became an organization committed, and maybe changed their name, too, several times, but the Student Peace Union also involved with a couple of professors, Bill Wynn, a professor of psychology, and Al Amons, a professor of psychology. Al Amons remained on the fringe of activism all through this period and died very suddenly one night--I didn't know that he had this chronic case of asthma, I guess it was, he had a little breather. He died because it fell on the floor and he couldn't find it in the dark, apparently. I didn't know people had that kind of asthma. But in any case, these few people that I'm talking about managed to get together meetings of faculty and students, but mostly students. I remember being at

several of these meetings, and there couldn't have been more than 15 people present at the meeting, not a big thing, but it's interesting how a small thing if pumped out of shape a little bit, can become a big thing. This Student Peace Union and these activities of the radical sector of campus was part of the thing that was going on that was worrying the people way off in Rocky Mount somewhere, you talk about making waves.

DP: Were you welcomed as a professor? Were you viewed with any kind of suspicion by students who were involved in these groups, or did they welcome you?

JS: I remember very little expression of hostility, very little.

DP: So there was not a problem with you being from the older generation versus the younger generation.

JS: Well, at that time I was the younger generation.

DP: Right, but you were probably still older than the typical college student.

JS: I was young enough that I don't believe that age was regarded as a big deal, the difference of our ages.

DP: So I guess '54 was Brown vs. Board of Ed, and then things sort of happened. And I think the first thing that happened in Chapel Hill was that sit down protest at the Colonial Drug Store in 1960. Do you recall this?

JS: There had been something before that just down the street at the place which is now the Pyewacket. It was a milk/ soda bar, ice cream. That must have been just a little bit before the Colonial Drug Store.

DP: And that was a sit-in kind of activity?

JS: Yeah, we organized a sit-in there. I did not participate in the sit-in, but I was an observer, just standing around nearby on some of these occasions. So if something

untoward should happen, there'd be somebody to say what it was that they saw happening. But they went in and sat down and demanded milk shakes, and were refused service. And then they thought up the great idea: let's take out the stools. Now nobody's going to sit in there. No sacrifice too great, we're prepared to pay to stop progress [laughs].

DP: So you were an observer, rather than a--

JS: Pretty much so. I remember several time driving my car down there, and sitting in the car acting inconspicuous I suppose, when something was going on.

DP: Would it have been too much for you to actually participate?

JS: I decided it was a line I didn't want to cross. Yeah. I did picket, visibly picket, many hours. And I did attract some kind of hostility when I was picketing, from people who didn't approve what we were doing. I remember I was picketing and here came this, what was then for me an older person, although he probably wasn't all that much older, demanded to know by what route did I become an expert on race relations? Kind of a hostile question. And I wasn't really prepared for the question, but I came up with the appropriate answer: I said, well, I've managed to become acquainted with quite a few blacks who have become my friends, and I can't find any particular reason that I ought to treat them any different from anybody else. And I would suggest that you ought to try the same remedy. He stalked off, he didn't want to deal with that kind of dumbness [laughs].

DP: So you picketed, you observed. Was there any sort of academic journal on campus that you might have written an article about it?

JS: No, but there were a lot of meetings, and I appeared before a number of these,

and gave speeches, and was quoted. At one point, much later, I wrote to the appropriate authorities under the freedom of information act to find out what they had collected about Joe Straley.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

JS: It was probably never illustrated more dramatically than when Henry Wallace showed up in the area. Henry Wallace had decided--as you know, he was running for president in 1948, so we're talking about things going on in 1947--I was very much involved with the Progressive Party, and this was part of the reason for this suspicion of me and my motivations, because in this particular instance I was part of the North Carolina Committee for the progressive party. And we decided that we would cooperate with a plan that Henry Wallace had to make a southern sweep. He laid out--by the way, those three books over there describe Henry Wallace, "Gideon's Sword." Those three books, I didn't know there was that much to say about Henry Wallace. But just to continue on this story, Henry Wallace was going to make a southern sweep. I think his first stop out of Washington, D.C. was in Durham. We rented a space in downtown Durham, for a banquet and for his talk, it was a place called Harvey's Restaurant. It was just like this Gates thing. By the time Wallace got here, they said, absolutely not, get out of here, we didn't know what kind of guys you are, you can just not come near this place. So we held it in a place called somebody's tennis club--Roxboro Tennis Club?--it was in the black community, it was in a little, well I would call the space about like Squid's Restaurant, in that (A) it wasn't all that big, and (B) it wasn't all that unified. You could get in the door, but you couldn't necessarily see the speaker. It was the rainiest night, I mean it was raining cats and dogs by the time we got there. And this was the kind of reception we got. That was the first big insult we got, Henry Wallace came, had a restaurant all set up, going to be a nice evening, couldn't be there, went off to this tennis club, in a room that was totally inadequate, rain was coming down, they weren't really

prepared for us foodwise, everything was wrong. It was the pits. So after we had eaten, we adjourned to what was called, and still is, the Durham Armory, down there relatively close to the Carolina Theater. When we got there that evening, a contingent of individuals, I would call them Klansmen except that they were not in garb, and were not necessarily Klansmen, white citizens council was the word that went with that type of person at that particular point. They were marching around carrying signs, picketing that place, we got inside, and all hell broke loose. I mean, firecrackers, a great chain of firecrackers would go off, one went off right under our chair. I think the woman that was sitting next to me wet her pants over it [laughs].

DP: It must have been pretty scary.

JS: Oh, it was scary. Fights broke out, one of the Wallaceites, one of the people who were close to Wallace was supposed to be guarding the door, got too close to the door, they pulled him out and slashed him with a razor down his back. It was something like fifty stitches to sew him back up again. The chant from the opposition was so insistent, and so loud, in a room that didn't have good acoustics, that Henry Wallace never got a chance to give his speech. He said some things, but only people nearby heard what he had to say, and what he had to say wasn't much, because mostly it was statements of defiance, like-- "You can call me red, you can call me black, you can call me white, but you can't call me yellow!" [laughs]

DP: So it's against this backdrop that all this integration stuff is happening.

JS: What was wrong with this meeting? First of all, Wallace served notice that he was not going to speak to segregated audiences. So he was off to a rocky start, from arriving down here with presumed communist connections, to integrate the south against

their better judgment, and so on. It was not something that was really calculated to produce a stable, quiet evening! [laughs]. The next morning he came through Chapel Hill, gave a speech in front of the downtown post office, [that was] moderately well received. But it was downhill all the way--eggs were thrown when he got to Greensboro, he didn't have a chance to say much, he went to Winston-Salem, then he toured, and and the book, I was told at the time, what else happened...I remember so well, the person who answered that question, what else happened, said, well, Wallace decided this was not his dish of tea, and he drove around the route but never stopped--the book doesn't say that at all. It says he stuck to his program, he stopped where he was supposed to stop, he gave the speech where he was supposed to stop, and he let them throw eggs at him all the way, and he did what he planned to do. Isn't that funny, all these years I went on the basis of this one person's description of what he heard went on?

DP: It's that revisionist history, I guess. One of them's right and one of them's wrong.

JS: Right. There you are.

DP: That's interesting--it just shows how it was much harder to achieve integration, because against this backdrop you already have this built-in negativity, right? Against communists... they were all lumped together.

JS: Unfortunately, there was a tremendous amount of tendency for liberals to run from controversy. And this was one of my pet disappointments, or pet peeves, even. And that was when Wallace first declared, and told what he was about, the instant claim around Chapel Hill was such that you'd think he was going to win the election hands down [laughs]. People chickened out like mad--the red-baiting that started in the

newspapers was just so awful that it took courage to admit that you had even heard of Henry Wallace. I was one who's just stubborn, I just refused to let these things keep me from going about my business as I hoped I would have done in any case. But it didn't serve any great purpose, because by the time the red-baiters got through, they had achieved their goal, and that was that only a few naive liberals like Joe Straley and hard core communists were left. I think you, I don't know whether this is a correct statement or not, but if you call an organization Communist, then the majority of the people in the organization are communists. If you start with a wide organization and all the people drop out that are not communists, then you end up with a communist organization, right?

DP: Yeah, I guess.

JS: [laughs] Isn't that sad? They said it was communist, and sure enough, it turned out to be [laughs].

DP: At one point, were you an SDS student advisor?

JS: I was going to tell you, as a result of this John Gates thing, the university decided they had to have some control, and so it became...you said SDS, but I was SPU, Student Peace Union, too--SDS was more middle of the roadish, but never mind...I lost the thread here--the Gates event produced a kind of internal chaos, because look, this guy had reserved this space, what right have the chancellors to cancel the space, okay? Well, we've got to have some control around here--for example, one of the spooks was that, after all the Klan might come here to get public space. We claimed look, this doesn't belong to the chancellor, it belongs to the people of North Carolina, the people of North Carolina ought to be welcome here. "Well, we've got to have some process by which people use the space, that's democratic." So they decided that they would accept without

question applications to use the space and they could have it if available if the organization was a campus recognized organization, and had a campus faculty advisor. I served as faculty advisor to the Student Peace Union, and maybe for SDS at one time or another. At one hoary campus meeting, a man by the name of Kevin Godfrey, who was pretty pissed off at Joe Straley, demanded to know, "Straley? You were an advisor. What kind of advice were you giving?" And [I answered], I gave advice when advice was asked. "Were you at the meetings?" No. (laughs, big laugh). Well, no. So how can I give advice if I'm not around? I didn't see any reason why I had to go to their meetings. They go on and on you know.

DP: So they'd just come to you and ask you?

JS: So I was listed as a person responsible for this organization, and in some of these stormy faculty meetings that ensued, fingers were pointed at people like Joe Straley, because they were advising but they weren't advising. They were supposed to be in a position to control, and they weren't controlling, and so on. I was closer to these organizations than they gave me credit for. I knew what they were doing. They just didn't approve of what they were doing, it was as simple as that.

DP: So you really kind of defeated the purpose of being there as a controlling person.

JS: I played the role. I don't think I frustrated the intent of this, because if I had been at all the meetings, and they had asked me for advice, which I didn't think they ought to have to ask, after all, young people ought to have freedom without having grandpa around to shake his finger at them. I don't think things would have been any different if I had attended all the meetings. I'm a permissive sort of guy who believes in

open democracy, and believes in students having some kind of sense of responsibility, and furthermore, I think the university would be the poorer if somehow you didn't have a few whistle blowers standing around saying that the world's going to hell, I'd like somebody to know it before it actually happens. And who's going to tell if you stamp out the Student Peace Union.

DP: I was going to ask you, since you taught physics, this was probably not a topic that came up in the classroom. But did this make its way into your actual academic curriculum? Did you ever discuss it in your classroom?

JS: Not much. I was teaching a course in physics--in fact, when the bomb was dropped, August the second, 1946, I was traumatized you know by what this one bomb had done--just unbelievable, one bomb wiped out everything as far as the eye could reach? And I went to the department chairman, and said we ought to offer an elementary course in physics, non- mathematical, that deals with what the physics as now being revealed is all about--explain how an atomic bomb works. And nothing in the syllabus, somewhere I have a copy of the book I wrote for the course--nothing in the syllabus spoke of getting out of the framework of just straightforward, hard core physics, hardcore in the sense that it dealt with physics and not with the social implications of what physics does. On the other hand, I have to admit that I was sufficiently motivated to raise the question with the class-- I didn't spend a lot of time on this, maybe fifteen minutes at the end of a lecture, and in one or two cases I almost started getting carried away by my fervor of the danger this is, because at that particular point, whereas we had dropped a bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the Russians had not yet developed a bomb, and I questioned whether or not the United States was prepared to find out if they had. And questioned whether or

not we had really thought through the implications of having an enemy who was prepared to do to us what we had done to Japan. And whether or not our justification, which seemed adequate to us, would seem adequate justification when it was in someone else's hands, people who regarded us as the enemy. For example, right now, I think we're still in that dilemma, if we're going to bomb Iraq, as we have now for ten years, with peaks and spikes and periodic reprisals...what is our judgmental faculties going to be if they develop a bomb and drop it on New York City? Do we have a moral reason to say, hey, those guys violated the rules. That was what was in my mind then, and I think it's still a good question.

DP: Was that the case with the integration stuff, as well? Did you discuss that in class?

JS: No, I don't remember ever mentioning integration in class. It didn't seem to be relevant. But there was a relevancy if you're in the chapter on how the atomic bomb works, you can't not mention it.

DP: I think let's call it a day, and thanks. If I come up with more I'll certainly call you.

JS: I'll be happy to. It stirs a lot of memories, some memories that need to be stirred again.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B