

This interview is part of the **Southern Oral History Program** collection at the **University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill**. Other interviews from this collection are available online through www.sohp.org and in the **Southern Historical Collection** at **Wilson Library**.

P.1. Southern Journalism: Media and the Movement

Interview P-0001
Obataiye Akinwale
05-12-2010

Abstract – p. 2
Transcript – p. 4

ABSTRACT – OBATAIYE AKINWOLE

Interviewee: Obataiye Akinwole
Interviewer: Joshua Davis
Interview Date: November 18, 2010
Location: Phone interview
Length: Approximately 2 hours and 58 minutes

Obataiye Akinwole was a disc jockey and programmer on WAFR (Wave Africa) in Durham, North Carolina. Akinwole was instrumental to the station's founding in and remained active on-air and behind the scenes at WAFR until its closure. Raised in Raleigh, Akinwole moved to Durham after graduating from J.W. Ligon High School in 1964 to attend North Carolina Central University (then North Carolina College) on a track scholarship. At NCCU, Akinwole earned a B.A. in Music in 1969 and an M.A. in Music in 1976 (Akinwole notes that he finished the requirements for his Master's degree in 1971 but refused the degree for five years in protest, in part due to differences with white faculty members at the university). In the interview, Akinwole discusses his relationship to music, beginning with listening and performance practices in his youth through his formal training at NCCU and work at WAFR and beyond. Topics in the interview include: Akinwole's family life growing up in Raleigh including the divorce of his parents at age six and an influential uncle who exposed him to jazz at an early age; radio stations and programs he grew up listening to like the big band jazz show "Our Best to You" on WTPF (Raleigh) and gospel shows on WLLE (Raleigh); buying a Modern Jazz Quartet LP in 1956 as a precocious ten year old at Jimmy Theim's Raleigh record store; political activity at NCCU, notably a successful protest to improve food service at the institution; meeting Ralph Williams, co-founder of WAFR, because Williams wanted Akinwole to write music for the NCCU Law School Anthem; Celia Davidson, piano teacher and mentor at NCCU; Akinwole's iconoclastic approach to his education at NCCU like including contemporary American and black composition into his course projects; attending the Black Expo in Chicago in 1969 organized by Quincy Jones, featuring Roberta Flack, Donny Hathaway, and Les McCann; Community Radio Workshop; producing *The Road to Freedom*, for the Your Own Thing Theatre in 1976 as part of NCCU Bicentennial celebration; programmatic work at WAFR like "The Children's Radio Workshop" and "Expressions"; allegations of an FBI investigation into WAFR activities; community investment in WAFR from North Carolina Mutual, NCCU, and Durham Business College; Osafo McDonald, leader of Baptist preachers group in Durham, who hosted a religious show on WAFR; Robert Spruill, co-founder of WAFR, playing two hours of Fela Kuti for a listener who requested party music; playing The Last

Poets uncensored on the air at WAFR; Paul Vandergrift's 1976 M.A. thesis at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill on WAFR and WRAL (Raleigh); Akinwale's 1976 Leadership Development Program fellowship through the Southern Leadership Development Council in Atlanta, Georgia, which afforded him internships at radio stations in Chattanooga, Tennessee, Jacksonville, Florida, and New York City, New York; WAFR and the importance of having a "black communication vehicle" in Durham; other names of interest to WAFR history which appear in the interview include Robert Chapman, Eugene Rogers, Karen Rucks, Daniel Samson, Mary Duke Seimens, Jasey Scarborough, Maceo Sloan, Naomi Rogers, L.H. Robinson, Jack Price, Quame McDonald, Howard Lee, Emma Jane King, Winston Kennedy, and Jaclyn J. Jackson.

TRANSCRIPT: Obataiye Akinwole

Interviewee: Obataiye Akinwole
Interviewer: Joshua Davis
Interview Date: November 18th, 2010
Location: Phone interview
Length: approximately 178 minutes and 16 seconds.

START OF INTERVIEW

Josh Davis: Well we can go ahead and start. I am Josh Davis; I am speaking with Obataiye Akinwole. Did I say your name right?

Obataiye Akinwole: You did, that is very good.

JD: Alright. November—what is today's date?—November 18th, 2010, and we are going to be talking about WAFR and I thought an easy place to start would be maybe if you would just like to tell a few things about yourself. Where you came from? Your youth? How you came up? Some personal background.

OA: Okay, I'll give you just a tidbit. I came from a very musical family. I also came from parents who were pretty much, I would call them modern day freedom fighters, who pretty much blazed a trail for me; they took no crap off anybody. They were all about justice and equality for everybody and they insisted that we be raised in a manner that we felt that we were as good as anybody else at doing anything. So that's the background for what I developed to be in this life I guess. I was very active in sports. I was very active in music of course, as I mentioned a couple of days ago.

And from that, going to college, I got connected with a group of students who were all about the same thing that I was all about and that was making sure that things were done right. I do recall that my college at North Carolina Central University, or North Carolina College at Durham in those days, we actually shut the campus down because of a protest about the quality of the food on campus. So we organized a protest and demanded that because of the money we were paying to the institution, we deserved better than beans and flanks. And through our efforts a new cafeteria was eventually built.

This group of students and I—of course we spent four years together, four great years together—and after that I was approached by Ralph Williams, and Ralph and I had worked together. Ralph was a law student at Central when I met him, and we worked together to write an anthem for the law school at North Carolina Central University, so I actually wrote the music, words and the music for the anthem for the law school at Central. Ralph Williams and Robert Spruill got together and came up with this idea for a communications vehicle because we got tired to listening to WSRC. We were pretty much fed up with the belittling kinds of things that we thought were aired on WSRC, at least Spruill and Ralph Williams were, so they came up with this idea to apply for a HEW grant to build a radio station.

JD: That's "Health Education and Welfare" right?

OA: Yes, Health Education and Welfare. They joined forces with Robert Chapman who was a student at Duke and was well versed in writing proposals and so the three of them actually were the movers and shakers for WAFR-FM. They came to me and as I mentioned, we pretty much did the work in terms of knocking out holes in the walls

to build a radio station. Of course we had confident contractors to help, but the physical labor we did a great majority of that ourselves. Ralph and Spruill actually came to me because they wanted to set up a good programming structure at the station and we talked about the focus of this station and the approach that we would make to the music and to the commentary and to who they would exactly be on the radio station. Of course you know we were all volunteer pretty much.

JD: Yeah, this is good. Can I rewind just a moment? I was going to ask a few more questions about your background. Do you mind sharing where you were born?

OW: I probably will not share a whole lot of personal information, I don't mind sharing when I was born, but on a tape I probably wouldn't do that. I am actually 64 years old so I was born in 1946.

JD: Okay. When did you graduate from high school?

OA: I graduated from high school in 1964, from North Carolina Central University in 1969 with a B.A. in Music Theory and Composition, got a Masters from Central in 1976 and the reason for the difference in the years there is that I actually finished all the coursework for my Masters in 1971 but I refused to take the degree because of the protest I had with the music department at North Carolina Central. So I was pretty much a rabble-rouser.

JD: Protest?

OW: Absolutely. I believe very strongly about voicing an opinion about anything.

JD: You said you completed your coursework but you refused your degree because of what?

OA: Because of a protest that I had with the music department. I thought I was treated differently. I don't like to use the term "racism" all the time, but there was definitely some differences of opinions about me versus some of the other students. And I did not appreciate that.

JD: Where they're a lot of white faculty in the music department?

OA: Pretty much, yeah, yeah. A lot of white faculty. One particular story I can tell, I won't mention any names, but we had one particular professor who was very good at what she did. She was from Austria, and she was actually at North Carolina Central University because in those days, the university school system would not allow couples or spouses to work on the same campus, so it was a pretty archaic kind of a rule, but that was the rule then. So the husband worked at UNC in Chapel Hill and of course this lady was pretty much forced to come over to North Carolina Central University and have those "other people." [Laughter.] So she was not really happy about being there, and it showed in her approach to us. In our opinion it did. Some other people have shared that opinion, but of course none of them would speak out, they would sit around and tolerate it, and I wouldn't.

Now, let me give you one specific example: There was a report that I wrote, actually a paper that I wrote. It was a stylistic comparison of three composers; C.P.E. Bach, Domenico Scarlatti, and Francois Couperin. And I thought I researched the paper well. I actually asked the Chairman of the Department to read the paper for me, and he just raved about it: "It was excellent. It could have been developed into a thesis at some point, blah, blah, blah, you have already completed the groundwork for your Masters thesis," and the instructor said it was passable. So just little things like that. I don't want

to dwell on that, but I wanted to give you a little background as to why my attitude is the way it is.

JD: That's interesting.

OA: It seems like these things just keep constantly popping up over time and that was one of the things up there to us saying, well, we need to have a vehicle that we can express ourselves through our own music, through our own commentary, with our own people. That was the basis for the station.

JD: Now, you grew up in Raleigh, right?

OA: I did.

JD: Which high school did you attend?

OA: J.W. Ligon [pronounced "Liggin"].

JD: J. W. Ligon, OK.

OA: The premier—and I always like to use this term—the premier *colored* high school in North Carolina.

JD: J.W. Ligon, that's interesting. I have read interviews of the children of J.D. Lewis and I think some of the Lewis's went to Ligon.

OA: They did. They did, they did.

JD: Did you listen to radio growing up? That's one thing I am kind of curious about is your musical background. You said you came from a musical family.

OA: Oh yeah, I listened to everything. I listened to everything. As a matter of fact there was a radio station in Raleigh on WPTF I think it was, which was the big white station in town. And they had this show called *Our Best to You* every evening, and they

played this big band music and I was just fascinated by the sound of big band, that kind of thing. Then of course Basie and Ellington used to come through town and I never missed an opportunity to go see them play also, and of course I grew up in the church playing piano and organ, so it was just something that we were always into. My sister and I actually pretty much locked up the high school talent contest because she sang and I played and we would win it.

JD: That's cool.

OA: So it was a lot of fun. Even though we were so called impoverished, growing up was just great, it was great.

JD: How many siblings?

OA: Two. I have an older brother and an older sister and of course I mentioned to you that my father had a second family so there are seven others of us. 10 in all and we are all very close.

JD: What did your parents do?

OA: Well, I won't get too much into that except to say that my mother was a domestic worker and I will tell you this: the people she worked for were, how do I say this diplomatically, they were very good to the smart little boy so they always bought me books and the encyclopedia(s), all kinds of things. And I appreciate that, I don't want you to think that I am not appreciating that they did that, but I was never sure of their motivation for those kinds of things.

JD: Right, I can understand that. Now did you go up to listening to WLLE, "Willie"?

OA: Oh yeah, I knew WLLE well. As a matter of fact, they had a couple of gospel shows on there and I used to actually listen to those so that I could copy the music for my choir.

JD: Yeah, they had a guy named Brother James Thomas?

OA: Absolutely. Yep.

JD: I don't know if you heard his shows or not, but I think he had a show—

OA: I did, I knew him well.

JD: I *think* he's still alive.

OA: You think, seriously?

JD: Well I interviewed him about three years ago, but I can't guarantee it. I think and hope he is still alive. He had this group called Capital City Five, I think even like two years ago they were still doing shows. Anyways.

OA: Was [13:06.9] in that group?

JD: You know, I don't know anything else about the group really, I was talking to him about his record store that he had. It was called Soul Shack.

OA: Soul Shack, yeah I remember Soul Shack also, yep I do.

JD: We didn't get too deep into the gospel but yeah, no he was very nice, and he had a lot of memories.

OA: Yeah, he's a really good people. I used to listen to those shows religiously, as I said to get songs for my choir because [coughs] it would help in terms of not having to pay for albums and that kind of thing.

JD: You would listen to the radio instead of having to buy the music.

OA: Mm-hm. Yep.

JD: Were you recording shows back then?

OA: Oh no, this was all in the head. Any musician will tell you that there are basic patterns of music that if you take any popular song, by popular I mean jazz, R&B, gospel, there are basic patterns to those songs. One of the advantages we had was that when a song was very popular in those days, they would play the hell out of it. They would play it, I mean just—*irritating*. That was one of the other things that we wanted to definitely not do, was have a station so you could sort of set your clock by when we were going to play music because there was a lot of music out there to be played. The first time along, the song would play and I would just write down the basic structure, you know ABA, ABAC, and set the bars and the measures and that kind of thing and even some basic chorus structure and then the next time around I would just complete the song. Saved a lot of money.

JD: Yeah, that came up on research I've done on these record stores and maybe I could have another conversation with you another time about radio and records.

OA: Absolutely, yeah anytime.

JD: But yeah, I've heard a lot of people say that, that was a way to have to bypass buying 45s.

OA: Right. Now the negative side of that was that we were taking away some of the livelihood of some of those musicians, because they were not getting revenue from us buying albums, right?

JD: Some of those [14:48] too, maybe.

OA: Yeah, but part of that whole thing was that we really didn't have a whole lot of money growing up at all. When my mother and father divorced, it was like everybody had to get out there and work. All of us had jobs and it was very tough, very tough.

JD: I can imagine. How old were you when that happened?

OA: I was actually six years old.

JD: Okay, wow. So it sounds like you listen to a lot of different music; jazz, R&B, gospel. Was one of those your favorite? Or were you really equal opportunity when it came to different genres?

OA: Oh no, jazz was at the top of the list. There was no question about that. I remember when I was ten years old—maybe it was eleven—I went into Jimmy Thiem's record store in Raleigh, and this was the big white record store. I bought an album. I must have been ten because it was 1956 I think. It was the Modern Jazz Quartet and had music with Jimmy Jufree so the guy Thiem asked me: "Boy, what would you want with this album? Why would you want to listen to this kind of music?" Are you familiar with the Modern Jazz Quartet by the way?

JD: I know the name; I guess I am more acquainted with the soul and R&B of the era than jazz. I know the name; I don't know their music though.

OA: Okay, well these guys were classics. This was like classic jazz. This is classic jazz.

JD: From the '30s, or was it contemporary?

OA: No, John Lewis and Milt Jackson. John Lewis played piano and Milt Jackson played vibes. They were pretty popular during the late forties through the mid-eighties.

John Lewis just died about five years ago and Milt Jackson I am going to say about 1999, 2000, something like that. Modern Jazz Quartet was really popular from the period from the mid-fifties I would say to up to and including 1980. Anyways, this album was so heavy that most people could not listen to it and enjoy it because the harmonies and the rhythms and that kind of thing. But I actually heard that album at someone else's house and just loved it and went down there and spent, I think it was like seventy-five cents, which was huge in those days, for this album. Like a month's worth of work, almost. The guy questioned me about buying that album and I said, "Hey, that's what I want to listen to." I was always pretty much a jazz fanatic, but now there is another side that a lot of people, well people who know me understand, I am also a Chopin fanatic. On my senior recital, I actually played two or three pieces that were Chopin pieces.

JD: In high school or in college?

OA: In college.

JD: Now that guy in the record store, tell me the name of the store again—

OA: Jimmy Thiem's record store. And I think it was T-H-I-E-M. I'll have to check that; I don't remember. It was in Raleigh, it was on [sighs] I want to say on Salisbury Street.

JD: Yeah that's new to me. Most of the research I've done has been on black-owned record stores and that's a new name to me.

OA: Right. No, this was probably the most popular record store in town, but as I said I bought that album in '66 and when I left in '64, I pretty much did not go back during college and whatnot but the record store was gone by the time I graduated from college.

JD: And that guy was questioning you because you were a young black kid? Or what was it—why was he questioning your purchase?

OA: That's what I felt. I felt people he was questioning me because I was a young black boy and he just probably, and you know in his defense he was thinking, you know, why would I be interested in this kind of music because most young people in my age group were listening to [20:45] Lewis and that teenage folly crap.

JD: So R&B, the pop stuff, the teenage stuff.

OA: Exactly. It was all James Brown, it was all James Brown, and only James Brown, and all of these soul groups of the day. Some of us were also listening to Ray Charles also but Ray Charles was always deceptive because he was a fantastic jazz musician, he could pretty much play anything well.

JD: Yeah, he did all kinds of things. I mean he did the country thing. He came from a jazz background but he kind of opened up the door for R&B.

OA: Crossover. I call him the first crossover artist.

JD: Huh. Yeah, I think I've heard that before. How is it that you were so into jazz? I mean, that's pretty precocious, I mean you're a ten year-old, now that's the Modern Jazz Quartet, that's kind of hard bop stuff right?

OA: Oh man, yeah. That's hard, hard bop, yeah.

JD: How as a ten year-old in Raleigh, North Carolina were you developing an ear for that? Who was letting you into this kind of music?

OA: My uncle was. My father's half brother was letting me into that music. He was actually headwaiter at the Sir Walter Hotel so he was a very sophisticated man. He was instrumental in, he always had me dressing properly, you know, being clean, and

spin-and-span and he loved to listen to jazz so I would sit there and listen with him. And initially, I didn't understand what the hell was going on, but he would explain things about the music and it would make sense. Let me just put this on the table: I think for me, it was more intellectually pleasing than listening—you know that stereotype about those little black churches and all you would hear was stomping and screaming and no substance—and Uncle Howard just sort of brought a different kind of dynamic to me by introducing me to jazz. Don't get me wrong; I appreciate very lively gospel music, so I don't want to make you think that I don't.

JD: No I'm not thinking that, I was just thinking there had to be someone who introduced you to this music because you just don't discover that on your own as a ten year-old, usually. That is very interesting.

OA: Yeah, he was so cool. That was my hero. He was a very cool guy.

JD: A cool uncle, that's a certain kind of uncle that shows their nephew, kind of things that a man should know.

OA: Oh yeah, he was good at that. He would also thump me every now and then [Laughter]. I felt like I was getting too big. I remember this one story: When I was in the eighth grade, I was at a softball game with my girlfriend and there was this guy who thought I had embarrassed him in class by answering a question. You know how high school was—and especially if you made good grades, there were issues with the guys that didn't. So this guy pretty much beat the heck out of me at the game, embarrassed me at the game, and I told him I was going to get him back at some point, but that's another story. I ended up going outside to heal up because he beat me pretty bad. I went to the Y,

the YMCA, and got in a weight lifting program and pretty much turned from an Urkel.

Do you remember Urkel?

JD: Oh yeah.

OA: Well if I were to show you pictures of me when I was a young man you would say “That’s Urkel right there!” [Laughter]. After getting on these weights and things, I sort of started spreading and started playing all sports and [25:15] real well blah blah blah and those kinds of things. But Uncle Howard one day, I must have had maybe two muscles on my body and thought he said something to me that I really didn’t like and of course I jump back in his face and that was a big mistake [Laughter]. That was a *very large mistake*. He just sort of gave me a physics lesson real quick.

JD: You were in high school at the time?

OA: Exactly. Actually, I was not in high school—yes I was. It was ninth grade because I had done a year of weight training and thought I was big stuff. Yeah, that must have been ninth grade. I’m thinking of stuff that I haven’t talked about in years, right?

JD: Well hey, let it all out, right? So if I recall, in ’64 you graduated and then you went directly to Central?

OA: Yes I did.

JD: And you were music major as an undergrad too?

OA: Correct. Music major and psychology minor.

JD: Okay, and it sounds like you enjoyed going to school there.

OA: I did, I really did. I had scholarships to a number of schools; track scholarships to a number of schools. I went through all of them but there were about 20 schools and I actually visited Michigan State and that was my favorite school of all the

schools except North Carolina Central. And it was actually Coach George Quiet who was the coach of the football team at North Carolina Central. He actually won a couple of CLW championships with his football teams. But I don't know if you know about Central, but our track coach Leroy Walker was at one point Chairman of the U.S. Olympic Committee. We've had several Olympians on our track team. We had All-Americans, and World Champions. We had a *very good* track program at North Carolina Central in those days. So Coach Quiet actually talked me out of going to Michigan State to go to North Carolina Central—or North Carolina College at that time—because he said, “You're going to run with champions” and my ego, was what made me go to North Carolina Central as opposed to my first choice, Michigan State.

JD: Interesting. Were you running track all four years?

OA: Yep. I think in '64 I had one of the best times in the 200—'65—meters in the country. I ran 20.4 [seconds] in the 200 meters. Let me just share this with you so you understand—track was never, for me, anything other than for a means of getting an education. I cared nothing about popularity or the groupiness, all that kind of stuff. I almost got kicked off the team because of lack of effort because I was told to go practice and I wanted to practice piano.

JD: That's an unusual [crosstalk] combination; an athlete and a musician, I know there are others, but that's not --

OA: It was very strange at Central, that's for sure. Yeah, I was very much out of place there to be honest with you, very much out of place.

JD: How so?

OA: Well let me give you another example: I was in this class called Performance Practices and this instructor, probably just happened to be the same instructor I mentioned earlier to you, this was undergrad though. So we were studying Baroque music. We were asked to bring examples of [basal passacaglia] which was basically this repetitive base, and so all these students were bringing these into there and playing them and when she got to me I played James Brown because all of James Brown's music is built on repetitive base movement. Any James Brown you know, think about the base line, it's always that repetitive baseline. So she was offended by the fact that I would play James Brown so I asked her, "Well, why are you offended?" You know I said, "The assignment was to bring what you could bring, just an example of basal passacaglia." And I said, "Is this not an accurate example of that music form?" She said, "Well yes it is." Then that's the end of the question for me 'cause that's what you asked me to do, right? She didn't think of it that way. So I was sort of an outsider because I wanted to emphasize on Chopin and all kinds of things that you just don't do in this world.

JD: Were you getting along with your classmates?

OA: Oh yeah, we had great times, we had great times. One of my classmates was Leon Pendarvis who was for years the Music Director for Saturday Night Live Orchestra. [spells name] If you go back to all the old Saturday Night shows and you see the small black guy with a black beret on, that's Leon on an organ. That's Leon Pendarvis.

JD: I think I know who you're talking about actually.

OA: Yeah, he's a cool guy ... and can play his ass off.

JD: Were you getting political already? Were you involved with politics in college?

OA: Oh yeah, yeah, as I said, one of the first things we did my freshman year was close the campus down. And this was actually an organized movement. We got the students together and we told them that there would be no violence, no destruction of property, we would just make sure that nobody got in and out of the cafeteria and you know, if a person pushed us out of the way, we would fall out of the way. We had some very specific types of instructions for people who were involved in the protests. Before long, pretty much the entire campus had joined us in the protest. Of course we had leaders who were very political, and that was always part of me. We grew up in a housing authority and our mom was one of the first people to jump out front and say, "Hey, right is right, and wrong is wrong." It was just part of our nature to say if something's wrong, you've got to speak up to it. So the answer to your question is yes.

JD: What year was that protest?

OA: '64, my freshman year. I'm not trying to tell you that I started this protest, but I was actually an integral part of it because there were other people like there were [33:37] I'm trying to think there was [Ben Ruffin] and Howard Fuller and those guys were actually the leaders of this protest, but I just jumped right on board because I thought it was right.

JD: On campus?

OA: On campus, yes.

JD: Howard Fuller he wasn't a student was he?

OA: No, not at the time.

JD: He was a little bit older, right?

OA: Right, yeah. Howard actually became I think was it Milwaukee? I think he actually became Superintendent of Schools in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Ben Ruffin actually died a few years back.

JD: Yeah, his name has been coming up a fair amount in these interviews.

OA: Yeah, well it was interesting because there were people who always thought that Ben and I resembled each other and there were people who would walk past me and call me Ben Ruffin and I would say no, I am not. I never thought I looked like the guy at all, never. Not even close.

JD: Interesting. You graduated in '69 you said?

OA: '69, yes.

JD: And you decided to stick around in Durham? What were you doing?

OA: I went to grad school.

JD: Oh, you went directly into grad school?

OA: Yes.

JD: Okay, and you had met Ralph Williams because he asked you to write this anthem for the law school?

OA: Correct.

JD: How did he know about you?

OA: Through the music. There were people who always talked about this crazy guy in the music department--that would be me. But let me tell you this first. The Chairman of the Department, because of my track, I actually talked him into allowing me to have a key into the music building because you know in those days they would close the buildings at like 9 o'clock at night, 10 o'clock at night and you would have to study in

your room so if you were a music major, you had no way to practice late. So because of track thing, like I said--we had a very good track team and workouts were intense--so there was no way I could actually go to class, work out, come to the training table to eat, and then go to directly to study. So they would allow me to come later on at night, unlock the building, and practice.

JD: Wow, so you were trusted.

OA: Exactly. You have to earn trust, you have to make sure the people know that you're a man of your word and were going back to Uncle Howard now because one of his favorite tenets was, you are your word, period. If you say your going to do it--that's why you're not going to get anything out of me unless I'm pretty much assured I can get it done. I'm not going to make a commitment for something that I'm not really sure about. Because those kinds of things carry over with you throughout your life. They make you who you are.

JD: Your musical education at Central-that sounds like it was mostly classical.

OA: Yes, it was pretty much classical, yes.

JD: Was there any other influences in there?

OA: You mean in the music?

JD: Well I guess there's the coursework you had to do and then there was the stuff that you were creating, but what kind of music were you making at the time?

OA: If I don't do anything else in front of you and when we say music at North Carolina Central I would be remiss not mentioning Celia Davidson. Celia Davidson was my piano teacher and she was like *my second mother*. I loved that woman, and I am truly indebted to her for keeping me sane through college. Because like I said, I was really out

there in terms of my activities and she sort of kept me grounded and she wouldn't take any junk from me either. That was the thing I liked about her, she would stand right up in my face and would shut me down.

Let me give you a good example: My girlfriend was a voice major at Central and for her senior recital, I actually arranged a piece that was called, it was actually Trilogy and it was just three Negro spirituals. Let's see ... if I can remember: "Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen," "I've Been 'Buked and I've Been Scorned" and "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child." I sort of interwove those pieces into, I would guess for want of a better work an aria. And I actually played for her voice recital and I'm trying to think of some of the other things. I was writing a lot of light jazz-type pieces, one piece was called "Baby's Cold," and it was a blues piece. They were locking me into this classical thing, but I was going out in a different kind of direction with what I was doing for my music personally.

Plans for the summer were that I was going back for my senior recital. It was typical at my school to play Bach, all the major composers: Beethoven, Haydn, Schubert and sometimes Chopin. My recital consisted of Chopin, Respighi, [Grier 40:03], and Berksman [40:05], some American composers. Mark Fax actually—I had a half piano and half organ recital, classical organ recital, and Leo Sowerby, an American composer, and Mark Fax, who was a black composer from Howard University and I did play one Bach and one Henry Purcell piece. [spells name] Mark Fax is dead now but he was a long time instructor at Howard University and I heard some of his music and really liked it, so I played a piece that he wrote called "Three Organ Pieces." So I was always trying to—you know, if you tell me to go right, I am gonna go left.

JD: Yeah, you're building this picture of yourself, you had a rebellious streak.

OA: That's an understatement. [Laughter] Ask my mother. That's really an understatement, man. Or ask my wife. [Laughter]

JD: That'll have to be the next interview. [interjection about spelling names]
What kind of music were you listening to in your spare time?

OA: Pretty much all jazz.

JD: You were really a jazz guy.

OA: Yeah, I still am, I mean I really love the complexity of jazz. I love the intellect of jazz. For me, you can take any of the great classical composers and any of the great jazz composers. You can take Ellington and put him next to Bach as far as I am concerned, because his output is just as great.

JD: Huh. Did you have other friends at Central who were listening to jazz as much as you?

OA: Oh all of us were. Well no. Let me just say no. Later on I did ... what was this guy's name? There were a couple of guys that were-- Well first of all, I have to be careful about it because I don't use the word "friend" too loosely. I don't have a lot of friends but the friends I have are like [Dino 43:48], and Bill Lawson, those guys I've known for like 37, almost 40 years. So I have very special friends, I have very good friends, too, but I don't have a lot of them. So at Central, I can't really say that I had a friend in the music department. Even Leon Pendarvis and I were not very close in terms in the whole friendship thing. I knew of him, he knew of me, but friends, no. There were two guys that I know who were very interested in jazz and I am so sorry I cannot

remember their names now. We actually went to, in 1969 the school selected us to go to this Black Expo in Chicago with Quincy Jones and some other artists.

JD: Jesse Jackson organized that, didn't he?

OA: Yeah, it was Jesse Jackson. They were bringing in young musicians and composers from all over the country and it was really--like I said Eddie Harris was there, some of the great musicians were there, Roberta Flack. Donny Hathaway and Les McCann. It was a great experience but I cannot think of those two guy's names. There were three of us who went and they were very much into jazz also. Arnold George was one, I'll tell you this Arnold actually worked with the big band at North Carolina Central so he was one. Oh, I will tell you this, Donald [Baker] has always been a jazz fanatic, too, so we did a lot of listening together. He was one of those guys, but he was not a music major so I guess where I'm going with this is: my friends were not music majors. I didn't have any friends in the department.

JD: What was the most popular music at Central at the time?

OA: Well, you have to qualify that because the most popular music in my group was jazz, and we didn't really know what the heck--oh, let me back up, I can tell you. Ramsey Lewis, "In Crowd," Marvin Gaye, oh boy, let's see.

JD: You're saying this was popular with the in crowd?

OA: Yeah, Marvin Gaye, Tammi Terrell. Any Motown was popular in that day. I'll just have to put it in the category of music businesses and I would say Motown, the Philly Sound, you know [45:48], Stax guys with what's-his-name Issac Hayes and that group. Those were the three most popular.

JD: Jazz was not the dominant taste at Central?

OA: Oh, absolutely not, nowhere even close to being on top. There was a little friends group of me and my friends who were the so called jazz nuts.

JD: Where you listening to the radio at this time still?

OA: Oh yeah.

JD: What radio were you listening to in college?

OA: When I listened to radio it was, whatever that Durham station was I listened to them some.

JD: SRC?

OA: SRC. There was a station ... what was the name of that station? There was a station that was pretty much like WPTF in Raleigh, and I can't remember the call numbers. It was a very popular station in Durham and they had a late night show just like PTF did but they played more show tunes like Frank Sinatra as a singer, and Johnny Mercer-type tunes, and I always liked those guys because they were great writers. You know, Rogers and Hammerstein, they were great writers. They knew their craft well. My group actually had albums and that's what we listened to. So when we'd get our beer and hang out, we would be listening to that Modern Jazz Quartet piece and Donald actually liked a lot of salsa, what's his name, Tito Puente, that music, yeah Donald was into kind of stuff.

JD: I think a lot of that was the New York influence. That East Harlem influence he was talking about.

OA: That's it. We loved that stuff.

JD: This is interesting, a lot of why I have been asking these questions is I have been trying to kind of develop musical biographies for the people who were involved with AFR and VSP and they're interesting and they're different.

OA: Right. That was the joy of the station. We had so many contrasting tastes at the station and that's what made it great, as far as I'm concerned.

JD: We'll be diving into that, those contrasting tastes. Before I forget, you mentioned WSRC a couple of times. What was it like listening to it? I am just kind of wondering what your memories of the station were.

OA: They were painful because I thought there was a lot of buffoonery in the announcers and I listened to it as I mentioned before I listened to it solely to get, pretty much to get songs and see what was popular in the day. So I could turn it on for an hour, hear what they're top ten records were, and then turn it off because I knew they'd be playing those same top ten for the next fifty days in the same order, that kind of thing. It was very irritating, very annoying.

JD: Their announcing style, too?

OA: Their announcing style was very annoying, yes.

JD: Had you outgrown that style of radio? You said earlier you were listening to WLLE growing up.

OA: No, but I said I listened to WLLE only to write down songs. WLLE was the same as SRC for as far as I was concerned.

JD: Yeah, that's what I was thinking.

OA: Yeah, they were on the same page. When I listened to them, I had a specific purpose in mind and once I fulfilled that purpose, I was done with them. The so-called "Disc Jockeys." [Laughter]

JD: Could you find jazz anywhere on the radio?

OA: No. Well, no, not here. When I went to Philly I could find music. I could find jazz. There was a big station in Philadelphia at the time; I don't know if it's still there or not, called KYW. They played, man they played serious jazz late at night.

JD: Yeah, the big cities, that's kind of something I've had a sense for a while, and I saw that in a lot of trade publications for the radio and understood that most of the jazz radio stations were big cities and they were mostly up north. Not exclusively--

OA: Well I've found that they were either North, East, or West Coast.

JD: Yeah. Or later on at HBCUs.

OA: Exactly. Now going to New York was kind heaven because you could find any kind of music you wanted but I'll go back to this program on PFW called "Our Best to You" where they played those show tunes and big band stuff. That was very pleasing also.

JD: Those are mostly white artists, right?

OA: They are mostly white artists, correct.

JD: So you really did have a taste for that kind of '30s big band, the swing music basically, it sounds like.

OA: No, I did not have a taste for '30s big bands, but '40s and '50s big band, yes. And there are distinct differences between '30s big band and '40s and '50s big band. Because some of the instrumentation changed from the '30s and I'm more of a late '40s

early '50s. Let me just give you this. Oh, man. I just lost it. I'm embarrassed. Duke Ellington was not my favorite band. He was my favorite writer because of the styles that he used. He wrote everything. But Basie was actually my second favorite band and the name of my...oh it just left me I am totally embarrassed but it'll come to me I'll throw it in when it comes back.

JD: Yeah, no worries. So at some point, you got involved with WAFR if I'm not fast-forwarding too fast. You were referencing that a little while ago, you--

OA: Oh! Jimmy Lunsford, Jimmy Lunsford, that was my favorite big band.

JD: Interesting. I've got to work on my jazz knowledge.

OA: [Laughter]. Well, I'll tell you what. Here's what you do, if you get a chance. Go to iTunes and pick up a piece by Jimmy Lunsford, by Basie, by Ellington, by Tommy Dorsey and those guys and just play them and see which one you like. For big band sound, there was nobody like Jimmy Lunsford. Even though I am amazed at Ellington [50:40], I love both of them but Jimmy Lunsford, he had a band, man. God he had a band. And sorry to cut in you on like that, but --

JD: Oh, no, I was kind of almost asking for advice, so totally not a problem. So Ralph Williams, he knew you because you composed this law school anthem?

OA: Well, Ralph actually knew me because both of us were pretty much rabble rousers on campus. We were both into the quote-unquote civil rights movement at the time and so was Spruill by the way. Very active in the community, all of us crossed paths all the time because we were at the same meetings, protesting the same kinds of issues. Ralph knew that I was a music major and he came to me to write that anthem and I think from my work on that and the conversation we had about music and jazz and blah blah

blah that was actually a time when Ralph and I had a talk about how bad the state of radio is in the black community. We actually had a conversation about that as I recall. So when they came up with a concept, they came to me, Ralph and Spruill came to me and said let's have a meeting to talk about programming for a radio station. So of course I had a lot of opinions about that.

JD: This is what year?

OA: This is 1970.

JD: Okay, and they were thinking about starting a station and they knew you were a big music guy, they wanted to talk to you about programming, you'd had this conversation about the state of affairs of black radio in Durham.

OA: Um-hm. Well not only Durham because as I was saying the concept was based on of the Community Radio Workshop, the parent organization, where we would actually train students to and I'm using that term loosely, could be adults, could be children. The first level was to just get them to get FCC qualified to be on the radio, so it was more like a helping you pass the FCC test, and then the next step was to we actually started a school with Durham Business College, we started a communications program at Durham Business College. We had instructors take [56:26] people at Durham Business College could sign up for a course in radio. So not just about WAFR and the radio station, for us, it was about building a communications program.

JD: Right, the Community Radio Workshop. Now were you involved with that from day one or had they already started that when they approached you?

OA: I was involved with that stuff since day one.

JD: Okay, before I forget, you mentioned you were very active in activism. You mentioned the freshman year protest. By the late 60s were they're certain protests, certain organizations, or certain people that you were working with in Durham?

OA: Yeah. I mentioned Howard Fuller and Ben Ruffin. And I am at a loss to remember the name of the organization but it will come to me also. There was a group on Petigree Street also called Your Own Thing Theatre that was doing a lot of things in theater and culture in the area.

JD: With Ms. Rucks, R-U-C-K-S?

OA: Yes, Karen Rucks. Yeah, there was a lot we thought a lot of injustice in Durham, because Durham had positioned itself as being a quote-unquote black mecca and you had all these so-called affluent African Americans in Durham. But the flip side of that was that you had, there was just unbelievable poverty in Durham. You could leave North Carolina Central University and go down a hill on Lawson Street to McDougal Terrance and you'd think you were in a third world country.

JD: McDougal Terrance, the housing project?

OA: Right. So, so this whole notion of we have arrived and that stuff, we never bought into it and we made sure the people to know that there was always things to be done.

JD: The class dynamic keeps coming up again and again.

OA: And it will. It does good aid. I can leave my house and go two miles into abject poverty.

JD: You're in Northern Virginia?

OA: Yes, in Alexandria. So that class thing, it's going to be there until we change the way this country does things. It is just preposterous to me that you have athletes making \$100,000 a day and you've got people who can't eat right there on the street; there is something wrong with that. I don't mean to go off on all that, but that is where my head is.

JD: No, no, no that's fine. It seems like especially in Durham in this area that class relationships within the African American community did have an effect on different things.

OA: No question, absolutely.

JD: Your Own Thing Theatre, that keeps on coming up. I've just been learning about it recently. Tell me a little bit about what you did with that. They were right next to AFR right?

OA: Correct. Well they were actually there before we were right next door. They were there first, and we just happened to get the building right next door to them. One of the things that I did, one of the other sides of my creative process is that I started writing plays. So I wrote over the course of some years in Durham, fourteen plays. As a matter of fact, my master thesis was a play called *The Road to Freedom* and what I had to do in this play, first of all I had to convince my graduate committee that I could portray in a stage play, all of the processing and forms and what not that I have studied in music over the last two years. I actually convinced them to allow me to submit that as a play and it was the first time anyone had done anything other than a research thesis at North Carolina Central University. So I was pretty proud of that.

That play was produced at North Carolina Central in 1976 for the part of the bicentennial program. It's called *The Road to Freedom*. It's a multi-faceted musical about the struggle of black people from the shores of Africa to now, today, or to then, 1976. That was my involvement with them; I have always been a fanatic about theatre also, because let me just tell you about this: Writing a script, getting people together, putting them on a stage, and having them make you believe that you're seeing something real, it's fascinating to me.

JD: So you were doing music, you were doing plays—

OA: I was doing too much. [Laughter]

JD: What was the idea behind Your Own Thing Theatre? Just a little background on it, why did Karen Rucks set that up?

OA: Well, here again, just think about the contemporary theatre at that period of time, what were they doing? They were doing all the quote-unquote white plays. There were no plays for black artists to have their plays produced. By the way, there were no plays for young black kids to go to learn what theatre was all about because it was a class thing again. If you were a poor black person at that time to walk into a theatre where there were the some of the so-called rich or well to do black people, you would probably be looked down on. And it would be insulting, so the premise for Your Own Thing Theatre was pretty much the exactly the same as the premise for WAFR: to have a place where we could go to produce things about us.

JD: So she [Karen Rucks] passed away, right?

OA: She did pass away, but she did a fantastic job of teaching kids in Durham about theatre and not to slight the white playwrights, there were some great ones out there, I mean Tennessee Williams, those guys could right their butts off, man, but don't we deserve to have our stuff seen also?

JD: Yeah, no, I understand what you're saying, those plays could be good, but they might not be accessible. They might not draw people in of a different generation and a different class background and a different racial background.

OA: Exactly, and even as late as 1996. I am thinking it was 1996, I actually moved here in '96, and before that, one of my friends at Central who was chairman of the theatre department right after Linda [Norfolk 1:04:31] with Johnny Auston and he had this play called, *The Gospel Truth* but the play was written as a stage work with no music so he asked me if I would write music for the play because how can you have a gospel play without gospel music? So I ended up writing about fourteen songs for that play and it was produced at North Carolina Central in I'm thinking 1995 or 1996, I can't really remember, and as a result of that play, Doris Snider who produced a children's program at Central every year, asked me to write music for this play that she had. She just heard music in this play that was called, *The City Without Love* and it was a Russian children's play. So I wrote about ten songs for that play. Since then, I've not done anything in theatre, but it's just, well, once again, the point I am trying to get to is that it is always good to have somebody to appreciate your work and that's what Your Own Thing Theatre and the Community Radio Workshop were all about: giving people an opportunity where opportunities did not exist before.

JD: The guy's name was Austin, A-U-S-T-I-N?

OA: T-O-N. Johnny Auston.

JD: It seems like your theater, and Your Own Thing Theatre, and some of your experiences in activism and just your general musical education, these things were developing in the '60s, and then we get to 1970 and the Community Radio Workshop is getting started and Williams and Spruill come to you. Were you already friends with Robert Spruill?

OA: Actually like I said, we were not friends but we had worked together and both of us were at the same meetings and in the same protests for the same issues.

JD: Both Spruill and Williams?

OA: Yes. So I knew him well. Robert has always been out there in front, as a matter of fact I think he may have been president of the Student Government Association one year ... I'm pretty sure he was president of the SGA one year, one or two years, while we were in college.

JD: Was he still an undergrad? Was he younger or older?

OA: No, we're the same age. Spruill and I were in the same class. He came to Central in 1964. Now Ralph was a little older.

JD: Yeah, he told me that. So you and Spruill were recent grads? So they -- ya'll started --

OA: And Donald also, I think he may have been a year or two behind us, but he was pretty close to us also.

JD: Yeah, I think he may even still have been in school but I'll have to check the interview. So they came to you, you had these conversations especially with Ralph about

black radio, and you were a music guy and so they came to you especially to ask about your ideas for music?

OA: Well no, I mentioned the plays, I mentioned the writing, I mentioned the protests, and I had developed pretty much a reputation for coming up with novel ideas for things. As I mentioned in some of the examples which I gave you I always trying to be different than what the norm was. If you said do this, I wanted to-- okay that's fine but let's try this over here also. So one of the things we talked about was, and I mentioned also that I was pretty disgusted about programming on black radio, so I had ideas about other things like one program we did was called, "The Children's Radio Workshop" and it was sort of like a *Sesame Street* for radio.

I had a program called, "Expressions" and basically it was to allow people who had done writings, and papers, and books and whatnot to come and share their work with our radio audience. I had a program called, "From Black." John Hudgins did that program, and I actually developed all these programs for specific kinds of audiences so that we wouldn't have to listen to those selling cars and toothpaste and all kinds of silliness and kind of get some credit for free, unlike all the rhetoric on traditional radio, so that's why Ralph came to me because he knew that I had a reputation for thinking through those kinds of things. And of course the Malcolm X, we played Martin Luther King Jr. tapes, we played The Last Poets, we played obscure artists like The Wings Over Jordan Choir. You would never get a gospel hour on WLLE, or WSRC, with The Wings Over Jordan Choir or the Mississippi Mass Choir, you would never get that on those stations, but these are quality artists that need to be heard, so we did.

JD: Tell me more about the music, especially why you chose this kind of music.

OA: Well the music was varied. We had Rahsaan Roland Kirk on there, but we also played The Stylistics.

JD: OK, so jazz and soul?

OA: Yeah, yeah, yeah—well, no, no. I don't want you to think that we—see, if we had locked into jazz we would have been just as bad as those other guys, locking into one subset of the black culture, I can't deny that there those [1:11:03] who like gospel music because there are, I can't deny that there are people who like James Brown because there are. If you were to come into this house right now and speak to my wife and ask her what he favorite music is, she would say Charles Johnson and blues. B.B. King and blues. I am not a blues lover. I can listen to it for a little while but I just can't deal with it for a long time. My wife could come in and put Charles Johnson on, every tape that Charles Johnson ever made. Do you know who Charles Johnson is, by the way?

JD: You know I don't think I do, that's a blues guy?

OA: Blues. [1:11:39] I won't go into it, but you're talking about the crème de la crème of blues: Charles Johnson, guitar player. Awesome musician. But Barbra would come in here and put Charles Johnson on and he could play for ten days and it wouldn't bother her, but I couldn't, I couldn't. But I could come in and put the Modern Jazz Quartet or Bud Powell or Bird, I could put any of those on and listen to them forever. So, even within this house there are differences in what is appreciated and our culture is just like that so what we said was that we can't just lock in on one thing so we played The Stylistics, we played Motown, we played Stylistics, we played B.B. King, we had William Hawk had the blues hour at the station, this guy loved blues as much as my wife did and he played a nice variety. We played everybody, and the jazz.

JD: Did jazz take up the majority of the programming?

OA: I would say probably 30% and the reason I say that is because I did mention all of these other programs that we had developed so it was not always music all the time.

JD: So you mean actually 30% of the total programming?

OA: Exactly.

JD: Okay, so tell me a little bit more. Why jazz, and blues, and R&B? Why those things? Why something different?

OA: Well because that's what people wanted to hear. One of the comments we got about programming at WAFR was that we liked not having to hear the same thing over and over and over. So the question you asked—let me see if I can answer the question, because the last thing my wife told me about the interview the other day, she said, "Be sure to answer the questions." OK, so why those kinds of music? Well we called ourselves the Community Radio Workshop an educational vehicle, so the way to educate is to make sure that people know things that they don't know about already, so that's why we had these diverse audio that we played because we knew that some people would say yeah I like it and some would say no I don't but at least they will become aware of it.

JD: And Last Poets, you were playing them unedited right?

OA: Unedited, correct. Matter of fact, Ajamu Dillahunt, who's from New York also, he tells this story and it's fascinating to me. He was driving down I-85 going to Atlanta and he was slipping because in those days as a black person driving down I-85, you were just lost. You better have a 8-track player or whatever was popular at that time in your car because you would pretty much be lost with the radio, so he flipped through

FM and he said he heard us playing, he heard the Last Poets, and he pulled the car over because he couldn't believe what he was hearing. And he ended up stopping in Durham and never left.

JD: He actually stopped that day on the spot?

OA: Yes, he stopped that day because he had to find out who was playing The Last Poets.

JD: Yeah, I've heard his name around; he's a local activist in Durham, right?

OA: Yeah, well he actually lives in Raleigh now. Yeah. But he is very active in food for the hungry and he is very active in workers' rights also.

JD: Yeah I think that's where I've seen his name around.

OA: Yeah, you can catch him on Facebook, too. Justice for ... man, what is the name of that group? Just put his name in. [spells name]

JD: He wasn't involved with the station directly though, was he?

OA: No. These stories keep popping up from people who hear us and what they heard at the time actually changed their lives in the sense that, well, "Maybe these guys have the courage to step out and do these kinds of things" and it took a lot of courage because what we did was very dangerous very dangerous.

JD: Tell me about that.

OA: Extremely dangerous. We had threats from Klan groups, or people who said they were Klan groups, and threats from people who just didn't like—and I don't like to use the "n" word but "those people." So it was pretty serious, it was pretty scary and we knew we were monitored by every agency out there, also, we knew that.

JD: Which agencies?

OA: FBI, all those guys were. We know that they were around.

JD: Really? Did you have run-ins? How did you figure that out?

OA: Well, we figured out by people telling us. People who were in positions who we thought—and I want to make sure I say this correctly—people we thought were in the position to know that they were around because we were always being told to be very careful to make sure that our paperwork was always in order. And let me tell you about one little thing: One of the things I remember was, you had to have an engineer to monitor the antenna and the power source. We always had difficulty because there were not a lot of black engineers around. Matter of fact, there were a couple of white guys who were engineers for us for a long time. But there was a point in time where we missed a report that was suppose to be filed about the transmitter and whatnot, and I just thought that the notice that we got about missing was just a little too quick, so somebody had to be monitoring what we were doing. It was like a power spike or something, and please forgive me because I don't understand the technical side of the whole thing, but it's almost like if you were suppose to be on a phone call for two hours and you go for two hours and one minute, and then 30 seconds later someone calls you and says, "You went over", that's a little quick, right? So little things like that.

JD: Technicalities.

OA: Yeah, little technicalities.

JD: Bob Chapman, was that the white engineer?

OA: Bob Chapman was actually one of the guys who were instrumental in writing the HEW grant for the radio station. Bob Chapman, just to give him his props, he was very strong, very much a part of the creation process of this station; as a matter of fact,

I'm not sure if the station would be their if it had not been for some of his input. Now, there are those who would question that, but in my opinion, they won't be being realistic about it.

JD: So what role did he play? This has been one thing that has been a little confusing because everyone remembers it a little differently; there's this whole story of how Williams and Spruill were thinking about the station and then SRC-FM was being sold?

OA: At that time, yes.

JD: And you just got me where I'm wrong; I'm just trying to do this for simplicity's sake. Tell me the story of how Williams and Spruill got connected with the Duke guys like Chapman.

OA: Like Chapman. I'm not sure about that. All I'm sure about that is that when they came to me, Bob was already apart of the project.

JD: Why did he care? How did he get linked into this project?

OA: He was one of those activists. This is only my opinion because I've never talked to him about, you know, why did you actually do this. He was one of those kinds of guys who thought that that was important also.

JD: Thought that what was important?

OA: Having a station that played, that catered to our culture.

JD: African American culture.

OA: Yeah, exactly. And that's another thing I want to be careful about because we were not programming just to African Americans; we were programming to everybody but we felt like that we had something to offer to everybody. It's like I don't

know you, but if we spent time together talking, we would loosen up a little up more about things and I would get to know you, but you can't do that if we don't talk to each other or have some form of constant communication. So it's like, I was [tries to recall name of hotel] at the Carlisle listening to some jazz. Now the Carlisle was a very exclusive hotel, and I heard this guy talking about the people he was using for very disparaging kinds of remarks and I finally figured out he was talking about some black people that he had run into, and then he said something about all of them being like that and I just got up and went to his table and said, "You know, I don't know any people like that, and as a matter of fact, if they were near me I would have something to say to them, too."

JD: When was that?

OA: I'm going to say about four years ago.

JD: Oh, so really recently.

OA: Oh, yeah, it was like yesterday, almost. And I remember we were at the Carlyle because we were listening to this young musician who used to be here in D.C. but he is now playing at the Carlisle on a regular basis. Lawson Harris [1:23:00] is his name, and we went up to hear him, and I heard this conversation and my wife said, "That's not your conversation; you should not get involved," but I said, "It is my conversation because I can hear it," so I told the guy, I think you did the right thing, I was not rude or anything, I said, I think you did the right thing. If I had somebody living next to me like that, I would say something to him also, but all of my friends are not like that so I can't see where everybody's is like that.

JD: How did he respond?

OA: Oh, he was like, you could have sold him for \$0.10. The other question I asked him was: are all white people racist? And it was so funny man, I love doing stuff like that, but my wife was of course petrified. She said, “Would you please stop doing that kind of thing?” and I just turned around and went back to the table and I never heard another sound come from that table.

JD: I bet you didn’t. I see what you are saying. Well it’s an interesting group of people, like you’re pointing out, Chapman was white, he was involved with the station from the beginning. He never had a show, but he was involved with setting it up. Williams, Spruill, and you, it sounds like you four were kind of the originals?

OA: Yeah, that’s exactly right. But, you know, I’m very careful of that because there are people who get sort of upset about the way history is portrayed. If I were going to do it historically, I would say that Robert Spruill and Ralph Williams would be the founders of WAFR and the Community Radio Workshop, historically. They came up with the concept. Robert Chapman was instrumental in helping them write the grant to work through the legal side or the technical side of things, because if I’m not mistaken that’s the type of stuff he did. He was a project manager and a proposal writer, and that kind of stuff so he was very organized. As a matter of fact, there were some philosophical differences about the direction of the station almost immediately after it was started and Robert Chapman left.

JD: What were the differences?

OA: I don’t recall. I was not involved in that. That was between Ralph and Spruill because shortly after that Ralph left also, Ralph Williams left.

JD: He left? When did he leave?

OA: He was gone within the first year of the station.

JD: I didn't know that, I'm learning a little bit from everyone. Why did he leave so early?

OA: Well like I said, there were several philosophical differences about the direction of the station.

[Break in conversation and discussion related to it.]

JD: These inner dynamics of the station are very interesting to me. They have been kind of hard to tap into because people won't talk or people can't talk, Mr. Spruill for example since he passed recently, and also it sounds like you have a really good memory, I'll just leave it at that. And some people's memories, they've even said it, they have trouble remembering some of the details. I think Donald Baker told me about three or four times: "You gotta to ask Oba about that." So were there a lot of personality differences? I'm wondering, are there any guesses as to what kind of differences there were within the station?

OA: Okay. There were differences as there would be in any group of human beings.

JD: Personality differences.

OA: Personality differences. We were all very strong-willed people. All of us could have been leaders in anything else that we did. All of us were very out front, all of us were very outspoken, all of us were very opinionated, there was the whole intellectual side, all of us thought we were smarter than the other person. [Laughter] So it made for an interesting dynamic. Now I think that's where, I'm not going to say problems arose. I want to say that in terms of ... I never figured out what agenda Robert Chapman had

because there were some things that I will not get into the specifics, but there were things that were said about the direction of the station that I just didn't agree with and pretty much I would side with Spruill and Ralph about that because it was like a white guy coming in telling us how to run black culture. And that was just never going to work. So I think at some point—that make sense?

JD: Yeah, I think so, especially at this radio station.

OA: Yeah, exactly. So at some point early in the development of the station and I'm thinking it was the first year, I'm pretty sure it was in the first year, Robert Chapman was gone. Now in his defense, he had not planned to be a long-term participant in the operations of the radio station. His help as far as I remember was to help get the station developed and move onto some other project. I'm not sure if there was any personality issues involved with Robert Chapman leaving the station. Now with Ralph, there was definitely a personality issue there, because Robert and Ralph had different ideas about what should be the image that the station should project and how we should do things.

JD: Robert Spruill.

OA: Robert Spruill, yes. And I pretty much sided with Robert because although we are intelligent, and radical, and out front, and blah blah blah, you still have to appeal to the will of the people. If no body turned your radio station on, what the hell is the need to have a radio station. That's foolish, that's foolish. Ralph was a little more, "Let's just throw everything out there and wherever falls, it will fall, and Robert was more, "Let's organize this as a business, and get a board of directors." We were trying to draw the community in, so if you go out there and get these same people we were talking about earlier from the different parts of black culture in Durham, put them on a board and let

them make the decisions about the direction of the station, you're going to have much better success than not doing it that way. There were serious personality differences. Because I would say that anyone of us could have made the outfit.

JD: Yeah, it sounds like between you, Spruill, and Williams, like you said. I mean I'm taking this from you and also what I've read and I've heard: three strong personalities, three leaders, three people who are motivated, very basically, what was it that you were trying to do with the station?

OA: I would say open up the media to black people, and that would be my simple statement, and that would be through the training and programs and just saying to black kids: You can do this. You can be a cameraperson, you can be a director, you can be an online announcer, any of these possibilities, you can be that, right. You can be a filmmaker. My daughter right now is at the Savanna College of Art Design studying film. When she was a child we were watching movies and she was looking at camera angles and stuff that I knew nothing about, so I said, "Well, is that what you want to do?" And she would say, "Yes, that is what I want to do, dad." "So, go do it!" So, to have a vehicle that people could go to to learn how to do things and also a vehicle that you could turn on and listen to and hear things about you, hear something that was created about you. Hear music, hear commentary, hear issues about the black community, those kinds of things. That was my major purpose for being there.

JD: What were the big issues ya'll were talking about? The issues that you brought up the most.

OA: The primary issue was money. Our station was supported basically by grants and contributions from our listeners so we had fundraising drives every year and just to

talk about Spruill's genius, one of the things that he was adamant about was that we had to get a Board of Governors, we had to start pulling these people in because we had to have the buy-in of a community if we were going to be successful. The grants were not covering operating costs and of course the kinds of things that we were trying to expand to do, like the Community Radio Workshop thing, the only way to do that is to have the buy-in of the public and we don't have to kowtow to the public, but we definitely have to have them on our side, and how do you do that? You let people think that they are actually a part of the decision making process. So I had to give him that, that was actually the right way to do it. So his role was that he was president of the Community Radio Workshop and I was vice president.

JD: How often would the CRW meet, like how often would ya'll have meetings where people actually came into the station?

OA: Oh, that was weekly. Oh yeah. We said Community Radio Workshop. It was not about us, it was about people and the community so people like Karen Rucks were part of the process. We had the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company folks involved, we had North Carolina Mutual involved, we had North Carolina Central University involved, Durham Business College involved, we had fraternities and sororities, church groups. We had Osafo McDonald [1:35:57] who was, I forgot what the title was but he was sort of like the leader of the Baptist preachers' group in Durham. He actually ended up doing a radio program for us. [spells Osafo] We actually had these kinds of people coming in to talk to us about the things that were going on in the community and from those conversations programs developed; that's how Osafo's program developed. There's a need for a spiritual program that's influential. Osafo gave

some of the most fantastic commentaries about the Bible that I ever heard, I wish I could find the tapes of those things.

JD: Do you have any tapes?

OA: Oh yeah, I have some boxes downstairs but they are reel-to-reel tapes. Donald and I were talking about trying to get those things digitized but I'm not even sure what kind of condition they are in now to be honest with you.

JD: Well, we should talk about that later, after the interview.

OA: OK, great, great. But the point I am trying to make is that these people coming into our organization as a part of the Community Radio Workshop, they were what actually made the organization what it was because what is a Community Radio Workshop without having community involvement? We went to every corner of black culture in the city and had them involved.

JD: So a workshop wasn't necessarily people from the station speaking to guests, the guests were also speaking and leading workshops.

OA: Absolutely. You got it.

JD: I can see now how you could do that as often as once a week because you could bring in people.

OA: Absolutely, there was so many people there that we had to just put people on the back burner because there was so much involvement and of course the school that we had, the kids that were about of the Community Workshop process got to hear these lectures and these are kids who were impoverished and they got to see another side of life also, something beyond the misery that they were living in, so it was good for everybody.

JD: How did they get involved?

OA: They were actually students. We had people come in, like Osafo would come in and do lectures for them. We actually had professionals like [recalling name] ... we actually had people come in and talk about things to be done in radio and TV, we actually had them come in and talk about history, especially history in black Durham. Just little things like, the Biltmore Hotel [1:39:13] that was right next to us. The place where the radio station was housed was a very historic part of Durham, North Carolina. It was the mecca for black entertainment. When Basie, and Ellington, and all those guys came to— Billy Strayhorn is who I was trying to get to for Ellington because a lot of the stuff that that Ellington got credit for, Billy Strayhorn actually did. Those guys used to come in and say at the Biltmore Hotel so that hidden [1:39:43] strip where the station was is very historic so what's there now—a car dealership.

JD: Yeah, the Chevrolet. Was Ervin Hester the guy you were thinking of?

OA: That's exactly, thank you very much.

JD: The radio announcer, the TV guy.

OA: I'm embarrassed that I didn't remember because he was a really good guy, too.

JD: Yeah, well there are so many different names we've been running through, it's understandable. It was also forty years ago, so ... [crosstalk] Well, gosh, I just had some other questions. Where was I? Oh, yeah: political issues. Ya'll were talking a lot of politics on the air, right?

OA: Yeah.

JD: What were the big community or political issues? What were the topics? You mentioned fundraising, but what else?

OA: Well, that was an issue internally but the topics in the community that we were talking because that was the primary thing had to do with our survival, but in terms of community issues, we talked about housing. There was a really big problem with slum lords in Durham during that time, I mean *slum lords*,: the places that they had people living were horrible. There was a problem with jobs because Durham used to be a really big tobacco mecca also, they had some of the largest tobacco processors in town, and as a matter of fact right next to the radio station was a tobacco factory that closed down. So unemployment was an issue also That's one of the reasons Durham Technical College became so successful at the time because they were doing things like trades, they were training people in trades so they could go out and get jobs as brick masons and mechanics and that kind of thing.

The other thing was, and this was the biggest as far as I was concerned, having black representatives on the city council with the large black population you have having representation. I don't know if you know this but Durham is like a city-county government, sort of combined, and this is my opinion but I'm pretty sure this is what happened: if you take the city population by itself, then you have a majority black population but if you add the county population in, then you don't. So I always thought that that was why they actually combined the governments like that.

JD: Yeah that sounds totally plausible; I've heard that happening in other places like in Charleston that's what they do.

OA: Absolutely, yeah. So those kinds of things were at the forefront of our conversations and as you know you're talking '71 and '72, as it is today, racism was still very much alive and there were always people reporting incidents and things that were

happening to them and I know that even Robert Spruill and some of us we could probably tell you stories that we're lucky to be alive because of the stances we took on things.

People were just insulted by the fact that we would have the audacity to speak up to them.

JD: So people would call in and share experiences or stories they'd had? So-and-so, this landlord do so-and-so to me?

OA: Um-hm. That is correct.

JD: Names would be mentioned on the air?

OA: Well you had to be careful about that, about mentioning names on the air. That's where people like Howard Fuller and Ben and those guys like that, and I have some other names I'd rather not mention because I'd rather let them call you if they want to talk rather than mentioning their names. There were other people who involved in politics in Durham at the time who could actually go out and investigate and see if things were true, and see what and how issues could be resolved, and that kind of thing. It was an exciting time. There was a lot going on and I would tell the average white guy that if you had a chance to live like that, we could take everybody and have them live like some of those people lived, like I lived as a child, then I think things would improve drastically overnight.

JD: Yeah, no, I can image. People could experience it firsthand. What was the connection between the political and community programming, and the music?

OA: As you can understand, a lot of the music was ... a [1:45:33] of a musical protest. One perfect example that comes to mind is Max Roach. He wrote an album, what's the name of that album? [JD: *Freedom Sweet*.] *Freedom Sweet*! Thank you, thank you very much. Well, you've got your stuff down. There were a number of pieces like

that were guys were actually expressing themselves through the music. They were expressing their dissatisfaction with the racial flavor in the country at the time; they were expressing their dissatisfaction with how they were being treated, even as musicians sometimes because a place like New York, New York would hand out cabaret cards in those days and if you didn't have a Cabaret card, you could not play at night or on weekends.

JD: What's a cabaret card?

OA: That's a card that the New York City would actually give to a musician who wanted to work in a club that served alcohol in New York City, and if you did not have a cabaret card, you could not play in a club or anywhere else at night or on weekends, so that pretty much shut you down, didn't it? So, issues like ... those musicians were writing those kinds of pieces as a protest to what the system was doing, you had guys who would make recordings and never got a cent from them. Muddy Waters, all of his early stuff was just taken from him because he didn't know enough to sign a contract or couldn't read it if he did.

JD: Yeah, that's happened to so many musicians.

OA: Yeah, so that was a connection between the music and the politics in Durham. We played those kinds of things. I keep going back to the Last Poets because that's the most radical example. That's not the only example now, the Max Roach piece, some Coltrane, Alice Coltrane wrote a lot of protest stuff also, but those kinds of things actually tied into what we were doing at the station.

JD: So politically conscious music?

OA: Exactly. In a word, yes.

JD: [Discussion of time remaining] We're covering a lot; your memory is great; you're making it really easy to interview you.

OA: This stuff is like a part of me; this is like my heart. To me, it's the most important thing that I've done in my life other than my marriage and my kids.

JD: Yeah, well this is an amazing story.

OA: Yeah, that's where it rates in terms of my life it was most significant.

JD: What was the listener response like? You mentioned people who felt threatened by the station, but what was the community response? What were ya'll hearing from the community, from the street, people who called in, whoever?

OA: The listeners loved it. I hope Donald told you this story but there were a lot of stories like this, but this to me actually captures the essence of WAFR in the day. Donald was on air one night and this guy called in and said, "We are having a party man, can you play some party music?" 'Cause I think Donald was playing some of that Tito and Poncho and, you know, the salsa stuff. So Donald said "Yeah, I got something for you, man" so he played about two hours of Fela Kuti that night, and Fela has always been called the African James Brown. The guy calls back and says, "Man, that is the best music I have ever heard." So we actually stopped programming to play for a party. [Laughter] I'm surprised he didn't tell you that story.

JD: No he did, he did actually. But that's a great story; I wanted to hear it again. So he was just playing for that party, that guy.

OA: Yeah and as a matter of fact, my wife and I are going to New York I think the second week in December and there is a play about -- [brief interruption] There's a

play about Fela on Broadway in New York and we are going to go see it in a couple of weeks.

JD: I've been hearing it's good.

OA: Yeah, I've heard some various comments but I always consider whose telling me whether they like it or not when I listen to comments. When I hear it myself I know I am going to enjoy it.

JD: So other people in the community I guess one question is, who were the listeners? I know there's not a single listener, but did you have a sense of patters of who was listening?

OA: We actually had demographics done through what is that ... Nielson. Was it Nielson at the time? [JD: Arbitron?] Aribtron, thank you, thank you. Aribtron ratings, and we had a very wide listenership; we were ranked up with the top stations and in terms of black community we were killing, like, SRC because people were listening and I'll tell you, let me just go back again, we didn't have just one flavor, there was a time you could turn to the radio daily, and you could hear an hour of the best gospel on radio. Now, you would hear the same stuff you heard on SRC, but you would also hear Wings Over Jordan and the Mississippi Mass and some of these obscure kinds of things. Odessa. You would hear these other artists who had never been heard before and people actually liked that. You could turn to the, we'll call it the pop hour for want of a better word because I don't remember the name of the show and you could hear The Stylistics and James Brown and all his people but you could also hear some artists that you'd never heard before. That was one of the things that we had in my introduction to Expressions: people you've heard, people you haven't heard on Expressions. That's what the station was all

about. There are other people, like, I have a friend who is a Washington, D.C. native and a pianist, a jazz pianist but he played classical, he played gospel, he played everything. He was on a cruise, the Capital Jazz Cruise a few weeks ago and he was playing and George Duke came up to him and asked him who he was 'cause he said he had never heard playing like that.

JD: George Duke was just on the boat?

OA: No, he was actually there to play, but Vince was playing another gig before George Duke. He is so oblivious to everything, he had no clue that George Duke was even in the audience or didn't even care, really, to be honest with you. So I think he was playing with Patty Austin and when they finished, George Duke came up to him and like I say wanted to know who he was because he was just amazed by his playing. So, what I am trying to say is that there is always somebody as good or better, so Stevie Wonder is a fantastic musician, but there are other fantastic musicians also out there and they need to be heard, too. And that was the basic premise of the station was to play people you've heard and people you haven't heard and give everybody a shot at being heard.

JD: That's interesting. Were people, were deejays, were ya'll mixing within the shows? Like would you have different kind of music within the hour or was it mostly block programming.

OA: It was mostly block programming within a genre. So you may have a variety of things within bebop, you have a block of things within the Motown sound, but they were pretty much blocked in. Except we had a couple of shows like my show called Expressions and Johnny Boykin's show which was the midnight show where we just pulled an album and played everything so I might play Max Roach for the first fifteen

minutes of the program and it could followed by somebody as diverse as Randy Louis [1:55:22].

JD: I may have misunderstood you. Expressions wasn't a literary show?

OA: Oh it was, but I was playing music also.

JD: Oh, so did you have live guests or was it like you would read stuff out loud?

OA: I would read stuff out loud, but I had, I would do things like, let me give you an example of what Expressions brought. Earl Thorp was a Ph.D. professor in history at North Carolina Central University. In terms of historians in the country he was supposedly one of the top of the black historians in the country. He agreed to ... I had this idea for this history thing. He agreed to come down and read hours upon hours of shows on history and they would be like in fifteen, twenty-minute snippets and we worked with him on presentation, on keeping the energy level up and that kind of thing so he wouldn't bore people to death but those tapes became one of the most popular on my show.

JD: So he recorded the tapes for the show and you would play them over and over again?

OA: Not over and over. I would play him as a series, I had a guy to come in and talk about health care and whatnot, and so once the series was finished, no I didn't play it again because we didn't want to be like the other stations, did we? So he would record twenty episodes, or twenty different tapings of Expressions and I would play one show and week for like twenty weeks and then we would go to something else. It wasn't 20 weeks because that's too long; it would probably be about a month, four or five shows, that kind of thing

JD: They were like mini lectures or what where they?

OA: That's a very good example of what they were -- mini lectures.

JD: Now he's deceased right?

OA: Yes he is, unfortunately, he was good people, too.

JD: What were the most popular shows? It sounds like Expressions had a following.

OA: Yeah, I think we had a pretty good following but I think the most popular shows were probably the, believe it or not, the late night show -- [JD: Johnny Boykin.] Johnny Boykin, yes, and Osafo had a really popular show with the [tries to recall name].

JD: Osafo McDonald was not related to Quame McDonald?

OA: No, no not at all. I just talked to Quame a couple of weeks ago as a matter of fact. He called me to tell me that Mary had passed: his wife who was creator of the Children's Radio Workshop.

JD: I heard that. I'd like to speak to him at some point.

OA: Okay, do you have his information?

JD: I think I found it online, but if you have it maybe you can email it to me. He is in Minneapolis right?

OA: Correct. He would be good to talk to because obviously all of us are getting older and this stuff will be gone soon.

JD: Yeah well I think I just have a few more questions if you have time.

OA: Certainly.

JD: You have given me a lot of good stuff. So Johnny Boykin, his show was popular and Osafo McDonald's show was very popular. You described that show as an intellectual take on religious programming?

OA: Yeah, he would actually do mini lectures also.

JD: Interesting. And he was a minister?

OA: Yes he was.

JD: And is he living still?

OA: I've been trying to find him for sometime now. I'm not sure what's going on but he's moved from a couple of churches, I actually found him at a church in Oakland and I left several messages to get back with me and I haven't gotten any response but just talking to you, this stimulated something else. I think I am going to have my friend in Oakland just go over to the church and see if she can run him down. [spells Osafo again] I would love to talk to him myself because one of the things I was trying to get was I cannot remember the name of his show but it was very popular because the one thing he did that was cool was, you know how there's this religious connection between black people and slavery? He always approached his lectures from that point of view that you have to throw some honey out there to get people to the door to get them to listen to you and he had a church in Durham over on Berkeley Street and I actually was a musician for his church for some time also.

But he had a unique way of getting people involved in the process and he was always well listened to because of that unique ability to get people to listen. I would love to talk to him. [JD: He sounds like an interesting guy.] Oh, and I'm sorry, we had a drive

time show that was pretty popular also, matter of fact the ratings for that show were really good.

JD: Have you seen the thesis by Paul Vandergrift?

OA: No, Paul Vandergrift wrote a-- ? I know Paul Vandergrift!

JD: He has a son also, there's a Paul Vandergrift III and IV so I don't know which one you know but...

OA: Well I know the father, but the father passed some years ago

JD: There's a thesis, I'm holding in in my hand right now. UNC Master of Communications thesis, "A Comparison of Two Approaches to Public Non-Commercial Radio in Raleigh, Durham, and Chapel Hill, North Carolina." Half of it is about WSHA, half of it is about WAFR.

OA: Oh my goodness. Could you e-mail me the name of that?

JD: Yeah, and I could email you the name of it and I'll try to get my act together, I could probably email you a copy of the whole thing.

OA: Oh, that would be great.

JD: I need to scan it anyway cause I got to return it to the library it's from '76.

OA: Oh wait a minute; you said it's from 1976?

JD: Yeah.

OA: So that is probably a Paul that I know because he used to have a radio program on WAFR, I think. Not WAFR. WRAL, I think, in Raleigh. One of those stations. Hmm, interesting.

JD: It's got to be the same Paul Vandergrift; I don't think there's a lot of them in Raleigh.

OA: What's really getting to me is that I know didn't know that. That's blowing my mind. Oh, geez. Because his brother was actually my piano tuner for a long time.

JD: It's probably the most thorough account, actually, I mentioned those books in the emails but actually this thesis is probably the longest account of AFR that's out there.

OA: Well, he spent so much time with us and he actually spent time at the station.

JD: Well he must have, yeah, and you know what? Actually, according to the bibliography you did an interview for this thesis.

OA: Oh my god. Man, I don't remember that. [Laughter] Oh my god.

JD: Yeah, so he interviewed Spruill and he interviewed Akinwale, according to the thesis.

OA: Well I'm sure he did because I've very close to Paul, I know him well -- knew him well.

JD: Yeah, I tried to get a hold of him but it got confusing because there were like multiple Paul Vandergrifts in the phone book, like the III and the IV, and so --

OA: Right. The Paul Vandergrift that wrote that thesis is dead. I know that for a fact, he is dead. Now was that a Master's or a Ph.D. thesis?

JD: It's a Master's thesis. It's about 100 pages.

OA: Cause you know he got his Ph.D. also.

JD: I didn't know that.

OA: Yeah, at UNC so I would be interested in seeing what he actually wrote as a dissertation for his Ph.D.

JD: Well I can look that up as well; it should be in the UNC catalog.

OA: Yeah, I'm positive that's the same Paul Vandergrift. I knew the entire family well. Matter of fact, I'm going to call his brother and ask him which Paul is it the III or IV or whatever.

JD: Yeah, if you have a chance ask them if they have the interview tapes because those would be--. I fear that they don't have them, just 'cause that just sounds like the kind of thing that someone would throw out when someone passes unfortunately, but you never know.

OA: You never know; they could be a packrat like me. I will definitely ask him if they have those tapes, 'cause my wife actually knows the family well also.

JD: Yeah, it references these tapes in the bibliography that are used as sources throughout the thesis. For some reason, that kind of makes me wonder about ... you know, it sounds like he was already a bit older.

OA: Yes, Paul was a few years older than we are, yes.

JD: There were these older people that had relationships to the station, especially through the Board of Trustees, and you mentioned the Board of Trustees, and I've got a list of the Board of Trustees here in the thesis, but I kind of wondered what role they played, like what did they do?

OA: Well one of the things they did was to help with fundraising and actually outreach to some of the people on their level. Mention some of their names to me that you have.

JD: Well I'll go ahead and just read all of them to you, if you want. Ms. Ann Atwater, she was an activist, right?

OA: She certainly was.

JD: She's famous; she's got a whole book about her. Ms. Goldie Berry, Mr. John Krosland.

OA: Goldie was our secretary for a while, but she was also on the Board of Directors.

JD: And also Secretary of Durham Youth Organizations for Community Action, which I think Ralph Williams worked for.

OA: That's correct.

JD: Okay, and then there is Operation Breakthrough people like Leonard Davis.

OA: Yep, and Breakthrough was a very significant program also in Durham.

JD: Yeah, those books I sent you they mentioned that a lot.

OA: Yeah it was big in Durham.

JD: [2:07:48] Bob Chapman, Ralph Williams, Spruill, Eugene Rogers, Karen Rucks, Daniel Samson, Mary Duke Seimens, Jasey Scarborough, Maceo Sloan, Naomi Rogers, L.H. Robinson, Jack Price, Quame McDonald, Howard Lee, Emma Jane King, Winston Kennedy, Jaclyn J. Jackson. I think I read them all out. It's interesting mix of a few professors, a few of those so-called black elite.

OA: That's what I was mentioning it for, that's why I thought Spruill was genius in coming up with the idea to paint a broad stroke [2:08:35] because you want to try and get the buy-in from everybody. You want everybody to feel like they belong and that they are part of the organization and that's why you have that mix of people, as I said with Atwater; I mean, how could you not have her involved?

JD: Well did they participate and contribute or what did they do?

OA: They were like any other Board. There were people who just had their names on the Board and we knew that, like let's see, not Maceo Sloan but you mentioned the Spauldings and those kinds of people, some of them just had their names on the Board and we wanted that because when other people saw the list of names it was, "Oh my god he's on the Board" kind of thing. We knew we wouldn't get anything out of them except their notoriety. And then there were people who were very happy on the Board like Winston Kennedy was very active on the Board and Karen Rucks, very active in trying to help us do what we were trying to do.

JD: Winston Kennedy it's says UNC Grad Student. What was his background, what was he studying?

OA: Well I'm not sure what he was studying but I know that he had a really interesting background in terms of history and he was always talking about it. It was Winston and David Brown used to get into discussions about the history that were very much intriguing because both of them were real red and they were the kind of people who could also quote a chapter and verse from any book that was written about black history, so it was funny.

JD: David Brown? Who was that?

OA: David Brown was just one of the guys who ... we had a lot of hanger-on-ers right, and they were people who came by and spent time at the station. They didn't do a

lot except they did support us and sometimes they did gopher work and David Brown was one of those guys. He was a student at Central, as I've said a hell of a historian. And Bruce Bridgens was another one of those types. Bruce actually came to the station to learn about black history and he ended up with a book store in Durham down on Fayetteville Street called the No Book Store.

JD: Oh that guy?

OA: That's Bruce; he was actually one of our students.

JD: The No Book Store was open until this year, last year.

OA: That is correct, and Bruce was one of our students.

JD: Oh, so did he ever have a show?

OA: He was on shows, but he never had a show of his own.

JD: He sounds like someone I could speak to get the fan perspective, or the listener perspective.

OA: He would be excellent. He is very articulate and he's very knowledgeable.

JD: Interesting. Are there any other fans' name or listeners that you think would be good to talk to?

OA: Not offhand, I can't think of anybody. It's been a long time. I was trying to think what was that lady's name? There was a lady in Pittsboro, North Carolina that I haven't talked to in ages but her name was Willie May Leach. She actually came up and had a show at the station about health and wellness, and he would be a good person to talk to but I have no idea whether she is married, if she's still alive, but I know that she lived in Pittsboro. Oh, man, I see faces, I see a thousand faces but I can't think of a name right now. [spells name]

JD: And Karen Rucks? I keep seeing different spellings of her last name.

OA: Yeah, I cannot help you with that. I can tell you this: I did locate the box that I have the WAFR stuff in, I have to pull it out, and I'm pretty sure that there is a spelling in there.

JD: Do you have pictures in that box?

OA: I have pictures, yes.

JD: Wow, and articles too?

OA: Yep.

JD: Well I'll try to send you later on a list of what I have.

OA: Well what I am going to do is as I pull that stuff out I am going to scan it. Please do me the favor of ... put a physical address in your next message and what I'll do is I'll just burn a DVD of these pictures and articles and things and send it to you.

JD: That would be awesome, actually. That would be wonderful. That would be great. Your stuff's hard to get at. I think I'm getting close to the end if you have a few more minutes.

OA: Yeah. I would love to get those tapes digitized because it's going to be gone. I do have some sound bytes that I could send you also that came from the interview with National Public Radio.

JD: Yeah, I have the documentary, but do you have additional sound bytes, like ones that weren't in the actual show?

OA: Yes, yes. Yeah I have a lot of stuff that wasn't ever used on the show so I'll burn a copy of that, too, and send it to you.

JD: Yeah, that would be hugely helpful, honestly. That would be a big deal to be because that is the hardest stuff to find and I think, to me, if I can listen to it, the more I can hear, the better I can write about it. It's not easy writing about an experience and sound.

OA: Oh absolutely, as a musician I can tell you I understand exactly what you mean. [Laughter]

JD: Yeah, so I want to do it justice and the more I can hear, the more I can get a feel for it, but even the little stuff I heard on the episode kind of I think gave me a taste at least.

OA: Right, well there's more, like I said, they did actually two CDs of outtakes that they didn't use so I'll send you all of that stuff.

JD: Cool, that would be great, I'll send you an address. That reminds me, the on-air announcing style of WAFR, how did it compare to the announcing style that one would find on SRC or WLLE?

OA: There was no comparison at all except maybe a couple of guys. We had a couple of guys who came up in traditional radio and we tried to soften them a bit without taking away their personalities.

JD: Who were those guys?

OA: Spencer Brown and I cannot remember the other guy's name. I can see his face right now. He did work at SRC for a time and I'm embarrassed –no, I'm not embarrassed – it's just been so long I can't remember his name, but it'll come to me. I know Spencer Brown was one of those guys who came out of the tradition and brought that to AFR. Also ... man, I am going to say, Jerry McCauley, he was an older guy who used to do a gospel show at SRC and it was one of those old stomp down ol' soulster gospel shows. He actually had a very big following on WAFR, too, people liked that stuff. [JD: You said McCauley was the name? And how was that spelled?] I have no clue. But when I filled out these notes, I know we have some of these names, but he was an older guy, I don't wish this on anybody, but he has to be dead now, because if he's not he's 102. OK. And I'm not going to laugh because my favorite aunt just passed this last year at 102. She still had every tooth she was born with and she was still trying to drive. [Laughter] So anything's possible right? [JD: And watch out on the roads.] I went to her house and took her keys cause I saw her trying to park one day and my wife said "Honey, she is going to kill somebody" so I just took the keys [Laughter].

JD: Smart, okay. Spencer Brown, had he worked at another radio station?

OA: Oh yeah, he came out of radio and TV and he had done some work at other places. He actually came to the station when Bill Lawson came there. And he and Bill for

some time were really the only salaried employees that we had. They did most of the spots that we had and that kind of thing.

JD: You mean the recorded spots that advertise the show.

OA: Yes absolutely.

JD: So Bill Lawson, Donald mentioned him also, I probably could talk to him.

OA: Yeah, I would suggest strongly that you talk to him because you're going to -
- Bill was a Ph.D., a distinguished professor of philosophy at the University of Memphis, you're going to get a whole different flavor from Dr. Bill as we call him.

JD: Yeah I should definitely talk to him.

OA: Please do. He's actually one of my dearest friends also. [Discussion of getting contact information.]

JD: Baba Femi. [unintelligible] What was his real name, do you know?

OA: I have no clue.

JD: Is he deceased also?

OA: Yes.

JD: Okay. He was the guy who said something like, “Good morning, be careful, for we live in America”?

OA: Exactly. That was his favorite line, man. Who told you that?

JD: That may be in the *Ebony* article or somebody else mentioned it, it’s a powerful thing to say on the radio.

OA: At that time it was very powerful. That was one of things that I was alluding to about the fear factor because we said some things that really were different. Now understand that Adewole was actually a member of The Last Poets. [JD: Really?] Yeah. He was one of the founding members, along with Godwin Adewole ... what was his name? Not Godwin. [tries to recall] Baba Femi was one of the original founding members of The Last Poets.

JD: [Adewole] wasn’t not still in The Last Poets when he was doing AFR was he?

OA: That is correct.

JD: Did he have a New York connection?

OA: He is from New York.

JD: He didn’t cut an album with them or anything did he?

OA: I think he told me that he cut an early album with them but when I talked to ... I can't remember his name, now. Who's the leader of the group now? [tries to recall]
Let me just do a search right quick, I don't want to hold you up.

JD: No worries, I'm actually doing it as speak, also, looking up some stuff online for these Last Poets' names. ... Obataiye Akinwale was your on-air name correct?

OA: Um-hm.

JD: That is not the name you were born with.

OA: That is correct.

JD: Okay and I don't know if this is too personal of a question, you don't have to answer it if it is.

OA: I won't answer it because that's not who I am. That person is dead. Oh, Abiodun Oyuowe, that's what I was trying to think of. I'm sorry. No, I don't because that person is dead, I never, never, ever deal with that. So if you look at -- I'm sorry -- I just talked to -- Abiodun Oyuowe is his name, the leader of the group, the current leader. I sent him a message a couple of weeks ago because Kwame wanted to get in touch with him and he never responded to me but I know that Baba Femi did raps with the group and Aby Adone actually confirmed that.

JD: I would have liked to see that, they were in Greensboro last fall and I missed it, I've never seen them before.

OA: Oh man, well you know what I like about them? They were actually very serious about what they were doing and they were true to the words that they spoke and they strongly believed that they could make a change in this country also so I have to

respect them for that if for nothing else, the fact that they spoke truth. Like Gil Scott, without the drugs hopefully.

JD: Yeah he's had some issues, but I saw him in Durham in February and it was great.

OA: Oh yeah, he still has it, that's for sure. Matter of fact a friend of mine, this lady who writes lyrics for one of my songs, she just wrote a hip hop piece, poem, and I'm doing sort of a hip hop background to it that's pretty close to something that Gil Scott did back in the day. I can't wait because it's my first hip hop-type piece.

JD: Yeah no that sounds cool. I'd be interested to hear some of your music.

OA: Oh absolutely, we can do that. We are going to the studio in a matter of fact in two weeks to do a spiritual-type thing that I'm doing, but I would be glad to send you some stuff sometime. Not a problem.

JD: How did things change over time? I get a sense from reading about the station that it got harder to stay on the air and that one time I saw a reference that the music may have changed some. By years '74 and '75?

OA: The music changed drastically, and that was because of the influx of -- as I said, one of the most difficult things to do in this business is to stay on the air especially when you're not associated with a college, a school, or an institution that can help fund you, so that's why we played these games, this intricate game of cat and mouse with the Board of Directors and that kind of thing. But as time went on, people came through and decided this was not the life they wanted to leave. Ralph said, "I've got a family to deal with" so he went out, and Ralph was always an entrepreneur, they had a school in Durham and so he went to work. So he couldn't give as much time, and at some point in

time he couldn't give any time to the radio station. There were other people just like that who came through that stayed a while, we didn't have any money to offer them, so they went onto other things, and that started changing, younger people started coming in with different tastes in music so there was a compromise between, "OK, do we get to have somebody on the air or do we stand and say we are going to do this and not allow that kind of music and not have anybody there?" Because we couldn't be there twenty-four hours a day. So it got very difficult overtime to keep consistency in the music and as a matter of fact, in '75-'76, Spruill and I applied for fellowships with the leadership development program. I won a fellowship; he didn't. I went away for a year to study and when I came back, we were essentially ready to close.

JD: What was the Leadership Development Program?

OA: It was a program for training black leaders. It was part of Southern Leadership Development Council out of Atlanta, Georgia and this program was funded by the government, I'm not sure which agency, and K.Z. Chavis was the director and every year they brought in about thirty young black people and you actually told them what you wanted to study and you had to write a proposal that spoke to your development and I chose of course radio and actually interned with several radio stations around the country. As a matter of fact, one in Chattanooga, TN; Jacksonville, FL; and New York; and it was a real fun thing, man.

JD: Where these all black-oriented stations?

OA: No, these were all white stations. 'cause we were trying to learn the business. I was trying to learn the business.

JD: So were you programming in these stations or what were you doing?

OA: No, I was actually pretty much following, bird dogging then management, seeing how things were run. And a lot of these were non-profits, so how you do your fundraising and the like. One of the thing I learned was that you really need to get professional fundraisers to come in to do stuff that for you because it was obvious that we didn't know what the hell we were doing. So, we learned a lot about that, but like I said when I came back – as a matter of fact, I was able to sneak in the entire summer of 1976 at Berkley College of Music in Boston. I don't know how I finagled that, but I did. [Laughter] The only time I came back to the station during that time was during the summer when I think I mentioned earlier that my play *The Road to Freedom* performed as a part of the Bicentennial celebration at North Carolina Central University so I came back to see that. And [the station was] pretty much on the way downhill then.

JD: From what I understand it was getting hard just to keep the station on air.

OA: Oh there were days when we were not on the air. I understand that we were not the air at all.

JD: Was that technical issues or did you just not have the manpower?

OA: There were never problems with manpower, never. Let me do that again. There was never a problem with having somebody around to have on the air, it may not have been the optimal person to have on the air, but there was always someone there to do something. The problem was having money to keep the lights on. There was one time when I know the phones were actually turned off, and transmitters for radio stations take a lot of power, so this basic bill getting paid became very difficult over time and the grants started dwindling over time. There was less and less money.

JD: So did it basically boil down to money or were there different reason why the station had to close?

OA: Well, it boiled down to money, but not necessarily from a financial standpoint, [but] from a philosophical standpoint. We never, ever, in my opinion had the buy in of the people who were trying to get money from. And there were various reasons for that. It was almost like, “Oh, you need to stop doing that [giving money to the station] because you’ll make it bad for the rest of us” kind of attitude.

JD: What do you mean? Like stop bringing the tension? You’re going to make it bad for the black community?

OA: Exactly, exactly, exactly. Because you’re raising issues that we’re not really wanting to deal with right now. Now, that’s just my opinion. I’m sure if you asked one of those guys on the other side of the fence they would say, “Well, you guys didn’t listen to us.” Well, wait. What you were telling us was not what we were about, that’s not why the station was started. They were telling us things that you could go say on WSRC, so why not just have another SRC?

JD: Who were those people?

OA: Those leaders I was telling you about. Some of the Sampsons, and the Spauldings, and the black bourgeoisie in Durham, that was where it was mostly coming from. I think that the masses really loved the station, but see, understand this also. In those days, nobody understood the concept of a radio station that didn’t have commercials and asked you to give them money to help them pay their bills.

JD: Yeah, I can see how that concept was unknown to people.

OA: Yeah, it was unknown. So when you get out on the street and ask for money, in a sense, sometimes you'll get people who have a negative point of view of who you are. "What's the matter with them, they can't pay for themselves?" Well no we can't because we are a non-profit: "What does that mean?" So it just started wearing thin after a while.

JD: Which reminds me. How did you even get the idea to have a non-commercial station? Had you even heard of non-commercial radio before? It was a pretty new thing.

OA: Well not really, UNC had one of the largest non-commercial stations around.

JD: Well I guess I'm thinking non-commercial, non institutional.

OA: Yeah, OK, that was pretty radical. I think idea for doing that was there was nobody that had really done it and that we could probably do it better. We could probably make this successful.

JD: So had you listened to UNC's public station?

OA: Of course, yes.

JD: Were they playing jazz?

OA: I never heard any jazz on UNC. There was a lot of classical. And classical to me was not a bad music, I actually like some classical. They have some composers that I am very fond of and I can listen to all day, so I listened to a lot of classical on UNC.

JD: And did you listen to WSHA at all, in Raleigh?

OA: I did, yes, but at that time, I think they had gone off the air for some reason. In 1970 I think they went off the air for a while for some reason. But there again, SHA in Raleigh, their sole purpose was to imitate, and all of the kids they were training there, were trying to imitate commercial radio with the up-tempo chatter.

JD: Who did that come from? Betty Check? The woman who was leading that project?

OA: I'm not sure about that, I really don't know because I really didn't have all that much contact with them, although while building the station, we did spend a lot of time with them. As a matter of fact, you know it's funny, as a matter of fact my wife used to have a show on WSHA back in '92, '93 where she read from popular books and she did that for I think about two years, I thought that was kind of ironic.

JD: Yeah, full circle. One of the things that's interesting to me is this lineage. What's very interesting is that VSP started right about when AFR ended.

OA: Yes, they came to us and they learned everything they could about AFR and especially what not to do in terms of fundraising.

JD: Who came to ya'll to talk to you?

OA: Valeria and Jim. Mostly Valeria.

JD: OK, and what was she doing, what was she asking about?

OA: Valeria is very thorough; she is an extremely astute person, I mean very smart, very intuitive also. She had obviously listened very closely to what we were doing on the radio station and at the point in time that she started coming there were obvious gaps in what we were trying to do philosophically and what we were actually doing. She asked a lot of questions about that. This is the questions you're asking like, "How did this happen"? And "Why did this come to be?" That kind of thing. So she got a lot of information about what not to do.

JD: And what were you telling her not to do?

OA: The most important thing was you can't do this without money so you're going to have to find a funding source that will be pretty ongoing and the most important thing, I think, was that in terms of your philosophical style you're going to have to pick a niche and pretty much stay there and try not to piss people off who disagree with you. That's a biggie.

JD: Do you think that hurt AFR? Well, you said you never got the buy-in from the community, for example people who thought you were making it bad for the rest of the black community.

OA: That was one side of it. Like I said, we had very good ratings, Arbitron ratings, so we knew that people were listening to us and enjoying what we were doing but when I said buy-in from the community, I mean very specifically financial buy-in from the community, financial support, that's what I'm talking about. I'm not saying that the station was not supported; it was. But when it came to whether I need to give you \$1000 to keep you on the air or whatever, I really don't care if you stay on the air or not. That's the way I read it. So it wasn't a priority. Oh, I think I got it. I don't think the public saw the importance of having a black communication vehicle clearly as we did.

JD: What was the importance of that vehicle?

OA: The importance was—well okay, what's your favorite food? If you had to go to a restaurant right now, which would be the one you would go to?

JD: Maybe an Italian restaurant.

OA: Okay, so suppose that the city you're in, that all the Italian restaurants closed down and you couldn't get any Italian food ever again, you would not be very happy would you?

JD: No.

OA: I mean, there would be other food to eat, but you would not be happy because you like Italian food. So that is the analogy I like to use about WAFR. We like what you're doing, we like the music, we like the difference, we like the whatever, but I can go eat a hamburger if I needed to. I don't think it was as important to the public to have a vehicle that spoke to your own issues as it was to us.

JD: Yes, I hear that. Was SRC on the air the whole time that ya'll were on the air?

OA: Yes.

JD: Okay, it's just that the FM station went off and the AM station stayed on.

OA: Correct.

JD: What could AFR, as a non-commercial station, achieve, that a commercial station could not achieve?

OA: Well as a non-commercial station, we had a little more freedom in terms of programming. Typically a commercial station has to find a specific niche and they have to stay there. They have to program to that group and if they don't, that's what their survival is based on. The idea that we could actually program to the masses with ideas and concepts that were different than what they were accustomed to, for us, that meant that we could have pretty much a free hand. Could you imagine SRC playing *The Last Poet*? How long do you think they would stay on the air?

JD: No they couldn't. I mean I'm even surprised that ya'll got away with playing *The Last Poet* on air, it's just amazing. In some ways it's kind of—

OA: It was illegal because of the profanity. I'm not sure we got away with it, I just came up with this concept that perhaps some of the things we did early on may have hurt us in terms of our public perception. I'm not saying that it did, I'm just saying perhaps.

JD: Did ya'll ever get turned down by grants?

OA: No, never did get turned down, well in a sense yes because what started happening was the amount started being reduced and we were going back to some of the

main sources. I'm trying to remember some names now because I remember there was one specific instance when we were told: "Have you tried other sources?" and of course we said yeah. Now understand that in a place where a certain group has control, what better way to keep you in your place than to say no I'm not giving you any money and if you don't have other resources that was what I was telling VSP about, you must have other sources other than grants because people will tell you "no" and then you are dependent on what they tell you.

JD: Ya'll got some federal money in the beginning right?

OA: That's correct.

JD: Corporation for Public Broadcasting money

OA: Yes

JD: But just at the beginning, right?

OA: No, we did get some additional money from them but it was very minimal and they were basically one of the ones who told us: "Okay, we got you started and now you have to go find other sources". I think I still have a copy of the proposal that we used to get our initial money.

JD: Wow that would be great to see that, honestly. I'm just about to wrap it up; you have been extremely patient and willing to listen to all of my questions.

OA: I appreciate you for taking the time this is very important to me also.

JD: I can tell. It's just impressive all around. The story is impressive, the history is impressive, your memory is impressive, and your recall is the best recall I've come across yet about interviewing about these stations.

OA: Well I'm a composer and if there's one thing musicians have to do, we have to remember. Its like forgetting cord changes to a song. You can't play it if you don't remember the cord changes.

JD: Speaking of music than, I was wondering how ya'll divided the programming? Was it like every man or women for them self decided the show or was there kind of a central committee that decided the program and what went where?

OA: Yeah we had basically at the beginning, it was like everybody just go for you. We had some overall guidelines about what we thought was lewd and indecent but obviously that was a bit of a stretch because we played *The Last Poet* [Laughter]. We had some general rules but I think maybe after the first six months or so Spruill and some of the other guys we actually sat down and put together a program and we had a schedule that we pretty much tried to ahead to for our programming. Now within those programs,

Osafo came to us with this concept he said: “I want to do this from a religious perspective” so we set aside a time for him to do that and he had to present to us a plan for the program so we could actually know pretty much what he was going to do. He was so thorough, he had this tight message plan similar to what he was trying to do and we did every program pretty much like that. Some of them were pretty elaborate like Osafo and some of them were just a paragraph saying this is what I am going to do but we had a general plan as to what we were trying to portray on the radio station but within that plan was the fact that we wanted to give everybody a shot at hearing things that were different.

JD: Okay, interesting. One other thing I’ve been wondering about and I think I’ve gotten somewhat conflicting impressions, but the role of the white community they kind of pop up in unexpected places. There’s Bob Chapman but then something that surprised me is that Ralph Williams talking about someone like John Herby Weaver who was the banker and associated with Central actually gave a lot of advice in the planning stage behind the scenes. Maybe he didn’t want to be associated publically with the station too strongly but one of the main people who Weaver introduced Williams to was Mary Duke Seamons.

OA: Yeah I was going to mention her name; she was like at the top of the list in terms of her help and money.

JD: Oh so she gave money too?

OA: She did, yes.

JD: What was her stake in it? Why would she care?

OA: They're human beings. See there were a lot of people who were white black green or purple who saw the importance of having this kind of vehicle and I think that's where she was coming from. She saw the importance of having that. If you want to free a people, you don't give the sandwich, you teach them how to fish. That was the concept here was that: hey this is going to help these guys learn how to fish, so you still have to go back to Community Radio Workshop because that was the real organization so what Ms. Seamons saw was cause we went to her not about WAFR but about the Community Radio Workshop, training young black kids in broadcasting, training them in life in general because we had people coming in talking about health, we had people coming in talking about how to clean up your credit card account, how to apply for a loan, all kinds of things like that so it was not just music all the time, it was information about how to live. Okay, if you're having a problem with your landlord think of things you can do, think like that. That's what we went to her and that's why we got a buy-end because she saw something beyond just DJs playing music.

JD: So in some ways it's like CRW and AFR they were kind of like twin organization but they didn't exactly mirror each other.

OA: No, actually our concept was that the CRW was actually the parent organization for AFR and all these other little things we were trying to do.

JD: What were the other little things? You mean the programs you just explained?

OA: Yeah the programs I just explained, the relationship with Durham Business College and the Communications School. Those kinds of things.

JD: I also saw a reference somewhere that there were two versions of the story. The first one being: a brother from Burlington Mills donated a bunch of carpet to AFR, then there was the other version that said: Burlington Industries the company donated a bunch of carpet. Do you have any idea? That just surprised me. It's come up a few times, this Burlington connection.

OA: Yeah let me tell you how that worked. I think both can get equal credit. What happened was he was instrumental in getting Burlington Industries to give us the carpet.

JD: And he was an employee of Burlington Industries?

OA: I think he was but I do not know I cannot tell you. I just know that he was instrumental. I don't think he had carpet himself, but I think he was instrumental in

having them donate the carpet to us so without him they would not have known about us to give the carpet, but without them, he wouldn't have been able to get the carpet.

JD: Its unexpected that here is this giant textile company in Burlington and an employee was able to convince them to donate the carpeting for the station.

OA: But that happened at a lot of stations there were things like equipment that we were able to get from places that helped. We were able to get actual telephones from the local phone companies so there were all kinds of things that helped us. It was not just white people or black people, there were all kinds of people who saw the solidity of Community Radio Workshop or WAFR and help us. You never hear about them, all you hear about is the noise we made and what not but like Ms. Seamons, who would have ever expected that she would have stepped up to the plate.

JD: Yeah I would like to include that somewhere in the story because it makes it more complicated and it makes it interesting in an unexpected way.

OA: Well all of this is my opinion but she saw the logic in having an organization like ours. That was my point. She said "Hey they can do some good, they are not out there with guns trying to hurt people or something, they are right out there in the open trying to do good." That's my opinion about her involvement.

JD: Do you think people like her or Burlington listened after they made the donation?

OA: I'm sure they did, just to see what's going on. Understand, the first five or six months, we were just wide open, anything could go. I remember one night a lady came in and I didn't even know her and I said something like, "Hey I just picked out this article today out of the paper, do you want to read it into the microphone?" And she picked up the article and read it. So it was just crazy at that time, but then we saw the need to sit down and really do programming and be more specific about things so The Last Poets and all of that sort of radical stuff we were doing, if we played it, it had to be between 6pm and Midnight.

JD: Is it true that the very first thing AFR played was The Last Poets' albums back to back?

OA: Yeah I'm telling you, that's the first thing that came on air. I still have those albums downstairs.

JD: Like when you went on the air that was the very first thing that ever came out?

OA: That was the very first thing that ever came out cause we had no welcome address or call in or whatnot.

JD: Oh you didn't even announce the station; you just put the album on the air.

OA: Yeah I think we said something like: "We're new in town and we are going to turn this thing around and we are going to have some different things" and like that, bam. [Laughter].

JD: Wow, was that midnight or what time was that?

OA: That was like 10am.

JD: Well, I guess one quick thing: It sounds like some of that stuff like *Last Poets*. Did you start phasing that out later on?

OA: Oh yeah, absolutely. Not phasing it out, but like I said, if we played it, it would have to be very late night and it would have to be preference by some commentary on what we were trying to do while playing this album. Like Malcolm X tapes, we played a lot of his tapes but there was always commentary about what Malcolm X was all about and how he was really on the same page as Martin Luther King Jr. and we would always invite people to call in with their opinions on what we were doing. Like I said, the programming changed in phases over time.

JD: Well I guess a final question: What do you think WAFR achieved?

OA: Visibility for us, for the various kinds of things that our culture fought about. I think even for us, there were people in the black community who didn't know certain aspects of the black community like Dr. Throp and his historical priorities I'll call it. He was not really known that well locally, but nationally he was like a powerhouse in terms of his historical knowledge. Osafo McDonald went on to become like a bishop in his church, a real powerful figure, so I think what we did was that we opened the door to find the black culture that people had not seen but the most important thing that we did was those kids that came out of Community Radio Workshop and got jobs in the communications industry and the one thing I wish I had done if nothing else is be able to follow them. I actually saw the name one night on the credits for this movie and I said: I know that guy! He came through our school, so to me that's the most important thing.

JD: Do you remember any of those names?

OA: I don't, but I have them.

JD: That'd be interesting. I have heard these references. I think Donald mentioned a name or two. Well wow, thank you so much, it looks like we just topped three hours.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Katie Russell

Edited by Seth Kotch