

Interview

with

COLEMAN BARBOUR

February 16, 1991

By Goldie F. Wells

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## INTERVIEW WITH MR. COLEMAN BARBOUR

Goldie: I am in the home of Mr. Coleman Barbour in Whiteville, North Carolina. Mr. Barbour is the principal of Whiteville High School and was a 1989 principal. Today's date is February 16, 1991. Mr. Barbour, I would like for you to introduce yourself and say that you know that this is being recorded.

Mr. Barbour: This is Coleman Barbour in Whiteville, North Carolina and I am the principal of Whiteville High School and Ms. Goldie Wells is recording this interview at this time.

Goldie: Mr. Barbour, I am doing a research project and it is part of my doctoral requirements at Chapel Hill and I am comparing the role perceptions of black high school principals. In 1964, there were over 200 black high school principals in the state of North Carolina. In 1989, when I wrote to the state department and asked for a listing they sent me names of 41 principals and I found out that some of those principals are principals of alternative schools and not traditional high schools. So there were less than 41 in the state of North Carolina in 1989. You are one of those principals for 1989. What I am doing is I am interviewing principals from '64 and principals from '89 and then I'm going to see if you look at the role of the principalship in the same way. I am going to ask you some questions and I just want you to relax and just tell me how it is and how you administer. First I want you to tell me something about yourself and how you became a high school principal.

Mr. Barbour: In 1977, I came to Whiteville as assistance principal from Vance County Schools where for three years I had been a history teacher and English teacher in Vance County School System. When I arrived in Whiteville in 1977, I was assistant principal and stayed assistant principal for six years. After that six year period then I went over to Central Middle School to be a principal for four years. In 1987, I came back to the high school. That assistant principalship at Whiteville High School where I am now principal. One of the things that I think helped me get the job was the situation at the Middle School. Since 1987, I have been the principal of Whiteville High School. That is pretty much how I got that because I changed the curriculum at Central Middle School during the four years there. I think that was quite impressive because it had not be changed for years and years. Eventually when the vacancy came at the high school I went back there but this time as principal in 1987.

Goldie: Do you have any educators in your family?

Mr. Barbour: In my immediate family, no I don't. In my personal family there are about five but they are not under

the names of Barbour. They are under the names of Sanders and whatever their married names are.

Goldie: Now I want you to tell me something about Whiteville High School, something about the racial makeup, something about the history of the school and anything that you want to brag about your school.

Mr. Barbour: Well, it is difficult to brag about Whiteville High School because we do so many things well and we have done things well for years and years. There are about 800 students, 66% of those are white and the other 34% is black. 75% of our students go on to a secondary school. We do very well on our SAT scores; we do very well in our academic subjects; they go on to college and do very well according to the printouts given back to us by the University of North Carolina System. The teachers that we have, most of them have Master's degrees. They are all certified. There is no one hired that is not certified. The athletics, which comes second to our academics--we do very well in that. We got State Championships in baseball, football, golf and we ranked pretty much runner-up in the State in basketball, tennis and again in golf. In most sports we do very, very well. So we are both an academic school and an athletic school and I think when we put those two things together that is what makes Whiteville High School such a great school. The other thing is where it sits. It is in the middle of town and the community supports it very well. I don't think that there are too many things that we could want that we are not able to get if we were to ask for them. Teachers do a good job in the classroom but we have regular problems like everybody else. We have an extended day program that starts at 3:30 and we have about 28-29 students in there. These are students who are in what some places call an alternative school but it is a place where kids can go to school who have children and who just can't fit in the regular program but it is not a big school and it is all part of Whiteville High School.

Goldie: Now I am going to ask you something about the responsibilities you have and I will give you areas I'd like for you to address. First, I would like for you to talk about your supervision of personnel and how you select your teachers.

Mr. Barbour: Well, I am the only one that supervises personnel and I don't give that to the assistant principal. I am the only one that supervises curriculum. As far as discipline is concerned and keeping up with facilities, that is delegated out to my two assistants. They do have some discipline but when it becomes a major problem, I always handle that. That is to control school better. The first question was, how we choose teachers? The first thing is they have to be certified. We try to get the best ones that

we can get but you can't tell from an interview who is the best. You have to talk to them for some period of time and have an observed class in all the subject disciplines. I have been somewhat able to pick up an idea about what we expect in a teacher and how it fits over at Whiteville High School. Academics come first. We look for the very best teachers we can possibly get. Then after I evaluate them you have got to get rid of one if he/she is bad during the three year period so through evaluations we get rid of bad teachers and then that keeps our academic program going the way that it should. It is a difficult task to choose good teachers. I chose a football coach this past summer. The way that I told him is that I got him off of somebody else and we had an All-State Championship football team but I found out from his principal in talking to him after that game in 1987, you remember this is '90 that we had him. I asked him, what about him as a teacher. That principal told me that he was a super teacher and I remember that when my coach left so that is the way that I got the new football coach. He is a teacher first and he is a football coach second but we have the football tradition and he went 9-3 this year plus he has done a better job in the classroom than the previous coach so that is somewhat the way we choose. When I choose my science teacher I would do the same type thing.

Goldie: Do you have a pool at the central office of available applicants you use to make your selections. Do you go downtown and get them and look at them or do you try to do some scouting out there? I remember you said what kind of teacher you wanted. Are you always kind of scouting yourself too?

Mr. Barbour: Yes, I am always looking for good teachers and you can tell, you know you go to conferences and talk with people and you talk with other principals. They will tell you who their good teachers are and when the time comes you try to see if you can't get them. If they don't want to come, you leave them alone but you get the ones that would best suit you. Yes, we do have in the central office applications. But all applications are similar. Any time you go down and look at one you find out that they are very much similar and if you browse through them and decide on what people you would like to truly interview, then you interview those. Then you see how they will fit in with what you do and how well you do it.

Goldie: Suppose that you know someone and their name is not in that pool downtown, how is that received by the personnel director?

Mr. Barbour: Oh, we get along very well. I just tell the superintendent that is not what I want. I want somebody else. But that is the relationship that we have. Some cases the superintendent would send you three names and you pick



one of three but this is a small system and it only has 2800 students. Everybody knows everybody so it is easy to go down and say, look, I want this and that. Sometimes he knows somebody better than I do and he will say, call this person and see what you think. Somebody has told me that he is good so we all do about the same thing. The superintendent, Dr. Jerry Pasqal, goes in his circle and then I go in mine. You know his circle is superintendents and mine is principals and then we decide.

Goldie: How many schools are in this system?

Mr. Barbour: There are only four schools in this system. One is primary which is a K-2, Edgewood Elementary which is a 3-5, Central Middle School which is a 6, 7, 8, in which I was a principal and high school 9-12.

Goldie: Curriculum and instruction. How do you deal with it?

Mr. Barbour: Well, that is the key to school--curriculum and instruction. How do I deal with it is perhaps the key thing. I had department chairmen which all schools have and I have department leaders and when I get ready to make a change like this year I'm planning on making changes in science and math, I'll meet with the department chairmen and say what it is that we need to put in. Now I also have two counselors and an assistant principal. Maybe some of the teachers who would like to take part. That is probably two or three but we sit down and I just say, I want to make some changes in math. What is your advice to me on how to do it? What they will say is, I would like to see--one teacher said, applied math, one teacher said a complete calculus course and then I asked them to give me a description of it. How would a student get into that class, what would be the prerequisites to it, what would the student look for as he signs up for that class and where are we going with them? Where are we going to start, where are going to go with them in that class. They have to tell me that. They have to tell me how it will suit our academic situation. How well it will prepare our students for college, where our kids are right now, and where will that class put them later. I do that same thing in biology. It is the advice that they give. Sometimes their advice is not the only thing and you have to go somewhere else and get some advice by sending your department chairman to another school. You have to go to the State Department and see what they have. Then we make a decision as to whether this class is good for us. Then you have to follow up on that class by checking it maybe for a year or two just to make sure it is doing what it is doing. You have to look at the number of students that signed up for it the next time because once the word gets around the students they talk to each other. Do not sign up for that class. Then you have to understand whether it is the teacher that is causing them not to sign up and the way the instructions are or whether it is the course itself.

You have to make a decision on that because curriculum and instruction are so important. That is school, that is what makes school go.

Goldie: So you see yourself as the instructional leader.

Mr. Barbour: Well, I don't know if I am an instructional leader or an instructional facilitator because I am the one that initiates it and they give me the input. If I were the leader I would say this is what we are going to do right here, this is what we are going to do right here, and I want you all to do it. So I think facilitating is better than being a leader.

Goldie: How do you deal with the discipline?

Mr. Barbour: That is a tough question in 1991, because there are a variety of things that a student does. What we normally do if it is a tough situation, we normally put the kid out of school for a period of time. You know that by law that principals can only suspend a kid for ten days and then he has to make a recommendation to the superintendent. Then he makes this recommendation usually--but that is not the important thing. It is how can you help that kid earn a diploma and at the same time discipline him? That is the key thing. It is 10 days and will 10 days do it and you know by law if the kid is suspended for 10 days he has a right to make up any work that he misses and it is put on his six weeks grade and semester grade or any grading period so you have to make that up with the kid. You have to counsel with them before you let them go. Don't just send him out. Let him know what he has done wrong, why you put him out of school and what you want him to do when he returns. Make him understand that the diploma is worth two things. It is worth his going on to a university or college or it is worth his going into the marketplace. You have got to get him to understand that if he is continually suspended from school or misbehaving then he cuts those two things taken away from him which is what a diploma is for. The other thing is you have to make him understand the rules and regulations. They are important in that life goes on through rules and regulations and that is what makes you a good citizen. And you have got to make them understand that he needs to be a good citizen. School is a miniature society and you have to treat it that way so when you discipline problems which is after school which is troublesome for kids but not for us because they have to go to work. Making money is the key thing, not earning a diploma is the key thing now days. That is one of the variety of things they have to go back and tell their bosses that they are going to be late but that is a key factor. Then sometimes you just need to relieve the kid from one subject from that class and that teacher. So we have period suspensions where they can go on to the rest but not go on to that one and go to in-school suspension for that.

There are so many different obstacles to a kid's discipline problem that you have to be real, real careful as to how you handle them. I think that we have pretty good discipline but it is not what it should be. I don't think any school principal would say that his discipline is the way that it should be. That means that every kid is in class doing what he is supposed to be doing and that is not going to happen.

Goldie: But you did mention earlier that you had delegated that to one of your assistants and you handle the tough problems.

Mr. Barbour: Yes, the initial time that they see a person in administration is probably one of the assistants. Either the assistant principal or the associate principal.

Goldie: How many assistants do you have?

Mr. Barbour: Two and they are right next door to me. It is not that I'm not accessible. They will come and say, Mr. Barbour, you need to see about this and sometimes I get them initially, the big problems. I don't stay away from discipline. We talk in the afternoon, whenever we suspended that day they come to me and say, hey, look, I put him out. I may get a phone call at home and not know anything about it and so they come by and let me know. What they really do the way I have it set up, they usually tell me as they are doing it and they will say, "What do you think?" That is the way that we handle it. The key thing is that we put out the rules at the very first of the year. On the first day of school at Whiteville High School, you don't go to classes the first day. The first day you meet in the auditorium. I talk to kids about--we welcome them back and tell them all the good things about school and what we want them to look for--a diploma. How we want them to get it--by working hard and being a part of their instructional classes. I tell them what the discipline procedures are right then and then that way they can't say that they don't know. Then they go to the homeroom and when they go to their homeroom they get a handbook. They would go through the handbook and each student signs a contract. All they have to say is that they have read it. Then when we have a discipline problem it is difficult for you to say "I've never heard of of it." But you know that some kids come in later and some kids come in new. This is when the counselors sit down and talk with them about the discipline procedures. But the key thing about that is that they have never heard me at the very first of the year. Sometime that kid may get a break the first time but all kids know what to expect.

Goldie: So the first day when they come to Whiteville High School they understand.

Mr. Barbour: The first hour. It takes me about an hour.



Goldie: That has been profitable for you.

Mr. Barbour: Oh yes, very. If I have a difficult problem I can say, look, I talked to you kids about it the first day of school and here is the handbook and here is where you signed it and this is what the rule is. You usually don't have a lot of problems.

Goldie; Do you ever have assemblies throughout the year-- this type of assembly--just talking to the students.

Mr. Barbour: No, we don't. No we don't have that many assemblies because of our new 5 1/2 hour day. We have at this point right here, we have had three. Monday will be our fourth. That is the National Honor Society induction. You see we don't just meet, just meet, just meet. Our main purpose is to give kids instructions. We had Monte Williams here to talk to them about staying away from drugs and how to respect themselves. That was a very good one. The kids still talk about that one now. Then we had someone from Wake Forest to come down and talk to them. He was a basketball player. We had a light presentation from the Chamber of Commerce that we let the kids go to and then we have this one coming up Monday. No, we don't have a lot of assemblies. We try to stick to curriculum and getting those kids what they need to get. The discipline is something that is hard to handle. It is the key to the school because without good discipline you can't have good academics. But most of our kids have direction and that is why 75% to 85% or more of them go on to universities because they have that direction. This community has some direction but we have those 5%-10% that don't and we have to handle that.

Goldie: Transportation.

Mr. Barbour: Transportation, we have 8 buses that belong to us and then the buses are disbursed between the schools and we have 28 in all in the whole school system. Whiteville High School kids very seldom ride the bus. They have cars. That is this communities way. Central Middle School students and high school students ride buses together. I have 9 and Mr. Frink, that is the principal at Central Middle School, has about 8 and the buses run their route and whatever high school and middle school students are out they pick them up leaving the primary and elementary students for the special bus that comes there. So we have 2 buses that go one route but the kids can only ride one. If my daughter and son rode the bus, 2 buses would come down here. She can only get on one of them. The associate principal handles that. I handled that for 6 straight years so I know where all of our buses go because I rode them every year, twice maybe so I know exactly where they go and they still go to the same places.



Goldie: Do you do the routing or does he?

Mr. Barbour: He does the routing and all I have to do is check it. Because I know where they all go. I have been here so long.

Goldie: Utilization of funds.

Mr. Barbour: In high school you can make a lot of money on your own. That is one thing. Athletics make money. This is just a small school and athletics will make about \$60,000 to \$70,000 by itself. That is how we operate athletics. You get \$22 per student from the state for textbooks. The instructional supply money comes from the state. We charge kids fees and that is in instructional supply and we use that money to buy back what they need. We get a fee for books, a fee for different things. It is all printed out in handbooks and approved by the Board of Education before hand. In certain classes you need certain things. In chemistry you need certain things. If a kid doesn't pay, there is nothing that we can do about it by law but most of them pay. The parents want to see the school do well. We spend all of our money back on the kids.

Goldie: What does the teacher have as far as capital outlay?

Mr. Barbour: As far as capital outlay is concerned we get with them on what do you think we need--the department heads. Before I send out the memo they will go check with their people and then we will meet and decide. Then whatever they tell me when I have the full faculty meeting if somebody didn't get a chance they get a chance then. After that the teachers have an input to answer your question. They have an input on all of it. We buy what they want. We get the books that they want and what is on state contract.

Goldie: Cafeteria management.

Mr. Barbour: In response to how we handle the cafeteria, our kids go off campus at lunch.

Goldie: Most of them go off campus?

Mr. Barbour: Yes, and our cafeteria is always in the hole. If it wasn't for the other three schools, it would be in the hole for the system but nobody else can go off campus. Just the high school. That is going to end this year when we build a new cafeteria. In 1977, that was the first month that I was down here there was a fire at the high school and then they started letting the students go off campus because we were separated and we had to use a church, armory and part of the school that wasn't burned. So we had to use that and then kids were allowed to go off campus for lunch. We had the facilities but since that time they have continually gone

off. Now we are going to widen the cafeteria and that sort of thing and they are going to come back on and that is difficult because kids are used to going off. That is the big thing. Over in the middle school they say, "I'll be glad when I get to high school so then I can go off campus." But as far as the funds in the cafeteria we are in the red in that but it doesn't matter because the school board approved it and they know what is going on.

Goldie: Buildings and grounds.

Mr. Barbour: I don't know where you are going to next but when you look over at our campus, you see that building, the new science wing and media center. Well, we are putting everything right over there together and that will make our place more attractive for kids and for teachers. It will give them a better atmosphere to work in. I think that our facilities since we are in that small space in town is very adequate because we have--the only thing is our football field is 1 1/4 miles away from the school. It is right out in the country. If you walk right across here, that is where our football field is. Our track field is out too. There used to be a track on the campus but the parents and community used that for walking and we don't use that because it is too small. Our facilities are somewhat scattered but that is good. That means that I don't have to monitor the whole system when we have an event. When we have a football game all we have to monitor is the football field but if it was up here on campus we would have to check on the buildings and all.

Goldie: You have several buildings right there together.

Mr. Barbour: The band room is on the back and the auditorium which is probably the most important building out there is the most beautiful building and they kept that 1923 look on the outside but when you are on the inside it would astonish you as to how it looks on the inside. That is the key thing in there. Nice, soft seats, the sounds are nice, you get the same sound regardless of where you are because of the sound system and the North Carolina Symphony comes down here every year, Southeastern Community College uses it every year and any big event in the county goes on at Whiteville High School. Something for you to say is, Whiteville High School is a political school. Someone was coming, Martin was coming to speak, I mentioned a while ago about the National Honor Society, you know we always have a key speaker. This year I am going to eat lunch with him at 12:00 today and it is going to be Dr. Avant. He graduated from Whiteville High School and he is a neurosurgeon in Texas. He gives us a \$3500 scholarship to the best senior. Right now he is going to meet with me to talk about what it is that we need. He wants to donate something.

Goldie: So you can get something for that new science wing.

Mr. Barbour: I think we have that covered. But the speakers are usually pretty good. The other thing we use in this auditorium, we use Whiteville High School graduates. This year for example, at the athletic banquet we used a golfer who is a pro and graduated from Whiteville High School. The National Honor Society is going to meet Monday and he is a Whiteville High School graduate. The commencement speaker, who is a lawyer and she was here when I was an assistant principal, she is going to speak. Brenda Smith, who was at Whiteville High School, she just had all the talents and we knew that she would do well. She is a black girl and lives in Virginia. Pretty black girl and good at everything she did.

Goldie: Where did she go to school?

Mr. Barbour: First she went to North Carolina Central and then I want to say that she went over to UNC. The auditorium and our facilities are good facilities and when we get everything over there together it is going to be much better except for the athletics and we don't have the space for that.

Goldie: Well, I was going to ask you about community relations and it sounds like Whiteville High School is an integral part of this community and everybody uses it.

Mr. Barbour: Everybody uses it. It is open until 10:00 at night. Southeastern Community College has classes over there until 10:00, plus they have their own facilities out here but the people around the area walk in and want to use it. They can use our facilities from 7-10. Last night the academic boosters had a spaghetti supper; the Air Force jazz band was in the auditorium. We have to have a separate person to schedule the events for Whiteville High School. That is how much the community uses it. But they reward you when they use it.

Goldie: Who is your Community Schools Coordinator?

Mr. Barbour: Frank White. He does that.

Goldie: How much administrative power and control do you think you have over your school site and your responsibilities?

Mr. Barbour: I don't care that much about power. We make all of the determinations about the site. We, and when I say we, I usually pull my principal in on such things and say what do you think about this? It gets down to my saying this and this but at least they can say, and they always do say, "Hey, we get a chance to say what we think," and they have changed my mind on some things after I brought it out. "Do

you think this will work?" "Yes, I think this will work." If it does, then that is good. You see my associate principal went with me to the middle school and came back with me. So he has been with me plus he was there as a teacher when I came in 1977. So we have been together for a long time. He can almost tell, like yesterday--I was in Raleigh at the Forum sponsored by Jim Hunt and it started to snow down here. I said to the group, the superintendent and two board members. Hey, don't worry about it. Mr. Hamilton is not going to let school out unless it gets bad. In Whiteville High School what we do--that is the spotlight. If we say lets go that is it because we only have one high school. Now if you are in a large area where you have many high schools, it would be different but Whiteville High School is the highlight. It is the big show. All eyes are on Whiteville High School. Everybody in the county look at us and ask how we are doing in scores and then put theirs against ours. Even New Hanover checks our scores and say, and they are much bigger, if Whiteville can do it, Scotland does it, Hoke County does it, people in this region are competitive of us.

Goldie: How did you do on your report card?

Mr. Barbour: We didn't do well. I thought we did poorly. I thought that we were above par in some areas and we were par at some areas. I didn't think that we did that well. I think the community thought we did good if you look at what they measure. With our advantage we should have done much better but power I don't know. We don't have that much power. We try to make sure things are in control. We operate our school right there on site.

Goldie: Well, it sounds like even though you say that you don't have a lot of power, you do. You don't will power but you do have it at your command. You share power but if you wanted to you could call the shots if you wanted to.

Mr. Barbour: Only if we wanted to. But we don't want to do that. I want to say, look you are in charge of that and you are in charge of that. If you get a problem then you come back and I'll help you out of it.

Goldie: How did the desegregation of schools affect your role as a principal?

Mr. Barbour: You'll have to remember that I didn't teach in both of them. I have never taught in both situations and I have always been in a desegregated part. I went to school in the segregated part.

Goldie: Do you think that the desegregation had any bearing on where you are now?



Mr. Barbour: Yes, those men did a lot of things that made sure--I can give you an example of that. Mr. Kennedy, my principal in high school, I was a good student but I was going to take typing. Now typing is very important but at that time it probably wasn't. I was in there and I knew I could make it and Mr. Kennedy came and got me out of there and put me in geometry.

Goldie: Where was this?

Mr. Barbour: Clayton, it was Cooper High School then. Clayton is right outside of Raleigh and he got me out of there and I was mad at him but at that time you didn't talk back to principals. He went to church with us and he knew Mama very well. He knew that Mama was a hard working person and she had those seven boys and how she kept us straight and he knew that anything that he said to her or any other family that was the end. It wasn't any question about it. We called him names behind his back like everybody else does but he was the one who said, "Hey, you are going to go here." When I became a senior, not only me now, remember he does for everybody, you go here and he separated me and my best friend, sent one to one university and me to another, and he knew what he was doing because all of this; Dale is a chemist, he knew what he was doing, I guess. But he was determined what we did. He used to walk up and down the halls, stay in the hall and watch kids and I find myself staying in the hall watching kids as they come in and making sure he would talk with his teachers and as I go by in the mornings I talk with everybody. Not realizing that he had an influence but then realizing--he is 91 now and still living. His wife taught me in the 7th grade so these men left their footprints on most of us other educators. The thing that I would have liked to have done is taught in all black schools and then taught in a desegregated school. I can't make that comparison. All of mine has been in desegregated situations. But I am sure that you are talking with John up in Fayetteville. He probably can make that distinction. Moses Lewis can probably make that distinction down at South Brunswick. These men had a very important part to play in us being the types of principals that we are, I would say and not knowingly so.

Goldie: But your mentor even though you didn't realize it.

Mr. Barbour: Yes, you don't realize that at the time but then you found out that they were doing something good. Just like a parent telling a child to do something and he says no. Then when they get older they realize.

Goldie: I think the principals when we were in segregated schools had real power. Power in that building, power in the community and they could tell you and whatever they told you that was it.

Mr. Barbour: And real power at that time was real power. Power now is a political and economical power. You have to have those two and you have to have social power too, being in different clubs. Like I am in the Rotary and I am probably the first black that has ever been in it but then there are others, Thomas Jones, a fellow at CP & L, and you have to have some social power and you have to have that social power to get the economical power and the political power. But you have to earn all of that stuff. It takes a long time and I'm the first black principal that has ever been at Whiteville High School and there was a man here by the name of Graham Powell and he never got that opportunity. I'm sure there are some other places that were better. He was black but schools were segregated then and from what my understanding is from my history--I wrote the history of the Central Middle School while I was there and it seems to me like he was a very, very effective principal. He did things that my principal back in Clayton did. They were somewhat similar. But then you talk to anybody and you find out that all of those principals were just alike and the thing about being a principal in these days and times is that we are afraid to really get into those three issues--social, economical and political situations because they are tough situations. They pull on you all the time. You do things when you don't want to do things but you have to do things. You have to do those things.

Goldie: So you are saying that is a requirement now?

Mr. Barbour: Yes, that is a requirement now. You have to be there. I've had to and I'm sure all these other people that you have interviewed have three or four meetings at one time. You pop up here and stand a while and then you go there and then you go on.

Goldie; Do you visit the churches too?

Mr. Barbour: I don't visit all the churches. No, I belong to one. I've been here long enough now you know after a certain period of time and people understand your philosophy. If I were coming in here new, in 1977, I went to all of them. That was part of getting into the social thing. You get in a social situation with blacks you have to go to church and then you have to do some other things in the other social situations. I didn't have a family then. I came down here single but now I have a family and they have to come up somewhere in one stable place--stability. That is what is important to them. It has to be important for a principal and his stability and his base. You have to have that base to do the things that you want to do.

Goldie: Do you notice any difference in supervising blacks and whites?

Mr. Barbour: The majority of teachers regardless of race, black or white, I am going to ask them to do it and in a fair manner. A very small percentage would do exactly what you want him to do if you do it in a fair manner but the only difference is, they question more and that is good. You need those questions because they are going to bring up some things that you probably haven't thought of. You have got to listen. The thing is being fair with everybody and that way everybody begins with two groups regardless which comes first. Sometimes the students come first and sometimes the teachers come first. Once you have established that, then you aren't going to have problems. Now directly, no, I don't have any problems with any of my teachers. I have problems with teachers against teachers and not race.

Goldie: Just people problems.

Mr. Barbour: That's about what it is. Because I think they understand that they have to work together and we are all trying to get those kids graduated. That could be another thing that could be altogether different. In Charlotte or somewhere it could be altogether different. But now teachers don't want to do anything I ask them to do. You know that. My son doesn't want to do anything I ask him to do. You know that and that is what you have to deal with but you have to know how to handle it and convincing you to do it or not do it. If you need to give options. You need to give options. If this is direct then you need say, I want you to do this and say it. I don't think that you can say one thing and do another.

Goldie: Do you enjoy your job and why?

Mr. Barbour: Oh, yes, I thoroughly enjoy being a principal, especially on the high school level. There are so many activities, there are so many people to watch grow up but the most important thing is being able to facilitate a school and see kids progress from what you have either added or subtracted or either whatever is already there. Seeing progress through it. The worse thing is seeing some not being able to progress through it because you can look at that and see where like I said a while ago. It is a miniature society. If you can't survive that when you get out there in the real complexities of the bigger society you are going to have a difficult time. That bothers me more when I can't see the progress through it. I guess I work hard at getting those who can't progress through it. That is what makes it difficult for me to suspend a kid or expel a kid from school. I can suspend them but not expel them from school. I give them lots of alternatives. That is what I am supposed to do. I am supposed to be able to come up with other alternatives. What can I do besides put this child out for the rest of the year? Most of the time I have come up with something. This year only two kids. I knew this one kid



had been taking driver's education and didn't have his license and he wanted to quit and I had to talk to him and let him get away with some things I shouldn't have let him get away with trying to keep him there. If I did suspend him, I would take him home and talk with his parents and I sat there and I told them, I said, the next time he is going. But then I finally went back and sat down and said, I want to come up with an alternative for him to stay in school. What I want him to do, I want him to go to extended day and provided he passes a certain number of classes he can come back to regular school next year but he can not take driver's education. You go in there and you bring me back a chart on that. Which is easier, I could have gotten the chart but I have counselors so she brought it back to me and I went back to his house. I said, this right here is what he can do. The parents said, "Okay Mr. Barbour." But I had the kid in middle school. This class that graduated last year. I had been their principal for 7 years and so I probably had 6 years with Darrell. Not ever with his parents. He had been trouble all along.

Goldie: So you knew each other real well.

Mr. Barbour: Yes, so he came in and said, "I want to take driver's ed." I said, "Son, you are not going to take driver's ed. If you don't do what I tell you, you aren't coming back here period." So he tried to go out to Southeastern Community College to get a GED and I told Dr. Scott, no, don't let him. I know Dr. Scott. We had worked on committees together. So he came back and then he's doing what I asked him to do. You see now that society can be difficult at times but he makes it difficult. As long as you do what you are supposed to it is easy. As long as you follow the laws.

Goldie: When are you going to allow him to take driver's ed?

Mr. Barbour: Depends on what he does at the end of this year.

Goldie: If he follows the rules, so you are using that as a control.

Mr. Barbour: Yes, but I would rather work with those kids. My top kids, the only guidance they need from me is to make sure that they have what they need in curriculum and make sure that I just congratulate them when they do something good. You know one of our students is going into the finals in the Morehead Scholarship. The Morehead Scholar is March 2-5. We had someone go last year. I give them roses and things--the girls. This guy is smart as he can be. So I give them a pat on the back. That's all they need from me. They are motivated and their parents are that way.



Goldie: What do you consider your major problem of your principalship?

Mr. Barbour: I think the major problem is not being able to get black kids to understand what school is all about. Black kids have a tendency to not be directed. I understand why. Most black families in this area are directed the way they should be. My responsibility is to direct them and that can cause some problems because the hidden factor is racism. You think it is and it has nothing to do with it. What it has something to do with is being motivated in the right direction and it is difficult for me to motivate them in the right direction. I have a student right now that is good in math and comes from a good family. He wants to drop advanced math so he can work 8 hours. I want him to stay with his math because he is going on to a university and I want him to be successful. He has everything else and he doesn't have to have advanced math but I think he ought to have that. The president said in his speech to the nation that he is going to step up math and science. If he can look at the war, and I said all of this to him, those fellows that are dropping the bombs they know something about computers, math and science and if you don't, you can't be one of those people. And in the world that he is going to go in, he is going to have to do those things and he is going to have to compute quicker in his head and mash quicker and I was trying to get him to understand. Now he saw very few black pilots and this is a major war. I want him to look around and see executives cause he could be a CEO. But right now he's making money he has never made before and he is saving it. But he doesn't need to drop that course. That is my opinion but he may go on and pick up something else with just my talking to him. Just like I didn't see what Mr. Kennedy was doing a long time ago with me. That may be the thing and he might remember it. But my point is, his self direction could start earlier and my problem is directing a lot of kids earlier.

Goldie: You mentioned that it is considered racial. If you went to some of your black children who you know have potential and said to them, you need to be in such and such course or you stay on them a little bit because you see them goofing off then they say, you are treating me different from the way you are treating the white folks.

Mr. Barbour: The same thing but you can tell a white kid that and you don't have to tell them that but one time--the majority. Some black kids you don't have to tell but one time. Okay Mr. Barbour, I will do it. I talking about maybe five or ten kids. Most of them will do it. Ninety-nine percentile of our kids are going to do exactly what you want because the school is directed that way. But what I say to you is, the problem is getting all of them but you have to work at it.

Goldie: Do you ever say that if you had them by yourself, you could do more with them?

Mr. Barbour: All blacks in one school?

Goldie: Yes, have you ever imagined would it be different working with those children if they were in one school?

Mr. Barbour: It is hard for me to imagine that for me now. You take John. He can imagine that because I never taught all. You see I never had a situation where I just taught all black kids. I teach a Sunday School class but I never had that situation. I don't know whether I could take all those--as good an administrator as people say that I am, I don't know if I could do it but I could work at it. I would be willing to work at it for kids because you can't get all those black kids together to do that. We don't think of education as being important. That's what the problem is. What avenues it can open.

Goldie: It seems that the old administrators that I have talked to took that responsibility. They were able to motivate the whole community to understand what education was about. They changed the lifestyle of the community with their message of what education was about and some of the articles that I have read seem to think that if blacks were working with blacks that there is maybe some ethnic understanding that they have that would assist in helping and when...

Mr. Barbour: I am a history major. I'm not sure about that. In any situation all whites were working with whites. I don't think you have--in South Africa you have blacks and blacks and they stay with blacks. In this community you could have all blacks and it still would be difficult. I'm not sure about that. What I am sure about is, I'm sure that there is no direction. I am sure of that. Direction that should come from the home, direction from school. After that direction you get directions from the teachers then you have direction coming from all points and if a kid is able to get that, then they are able to do well. But our kids, the black kids haven't been able to get all that direction and that is what has made it quite difficult for black kids. But somewhere along the line I think being a role model for them--that is what they need--lots and lots of it. They will be able to change some direction and I hope they understand me as being a role model for them but also a role model for the community and people in general. If they use it, then they can use it negatively or positively but it is there for them to use. But if we give them the direction that they need then they can pick it up and use it positively.

Goldie: Do you think our societal change has caused the lack of direction with the lack of parental support, the

desegregation of the schools. You are a historian, do you think the historical backdrop--when I started this research I felt that because of desegregation there were lots of changes in the way administrators look at their roles but I am finding that society has made changes and I am wondering if this has had an effect on the lack of direction of our children.

Mr. Barbour: Societal changes has been rapid during this decade right here. They have been so fast that kids have not understood them but they are trying to join them. I'll give you an example. A kid now days thinks that everything is instant, everything is quick but that is the societal change. If I want something I want to get it fast. If I go to the restaurant, I want it fast and that is the reason I go to the restaurant because we don't have to mess around and cook it at home but we want it quick. We go to Hardee's and McDonalds' and Burger King and all of those fast food places. We want it fast. Kids have gotten use to that. Since they have gotten use to that they want education fast and it is not going to come fast. It is going to take a period of time for it to come and that period of time doesn't have to be years. What it has to be is being able to concentrate on focusing on and learning whatever it is in a short length of time. Once you are able to do that, then you are picking up a quick education but all education isn't supposed to be quick. It is supposed to have some longevity and maturity to it. It is supposed to have some development to it, something that you can build on later, later, later. But kids think that if I learn it right now, I don't have to use it anymore--that's it for this thirty minutes I have it. It doesn't work that fast. It is not like fast foods. It is not like going to a restaurant. It's like staying home and cooking it and it taking a length of time. For them, the length of time is a lifetime. That is what education is for--a lifetime. Some parts of it you can get fast. You can get 12 years of education fast. You can get four or five more fast but what you are going to learn from a lifetime is long and you can't get that real quick and therefore, kids try to be mature fast and that causes them to go in all directions and they don't know what their direction is. If we could break down that fastness of this decade, then we could help kids understand that direction and focus and development is important because eventually you get to maturity but you only get to maturity after you are dead. You never reach it. Another societal change is the fact of single parent families but that is no excuse. You can pick out somebody else but you have to pick out a good role model. If I didn't have a mother, I'd pick out a woman that I like and I would look at what she does and then I'd find another one and pick out a characteristic and add on to it, if I want to go in a positive direction. A kid without a father you would pick out another person and so the same things as you would the mother and get all the good things and so on. Since we somewhat



want things fast as kids, we try not to pick out anybody. Nobody is good enough and the quick thing is go and do what you want which is a hindrance and keeps them from really focusing on the direction so some kids with single parents can do just as well as anybody else. Kids that live alone, they do well. We have some kids in our school who live alone. They are in the top area of class, work every day and still come back and focus in on what they are doing. So that has not been an excuse but it could if you took a negative direction. That is why I'm focusing and concentrating on why direction is so important. Single parent families, latch key kids, it depends on your focus. I think another thing that is really important is that we have become so individualistic that some times they don't need the help of anybody else to find out where they are going so they can do good. We need to help them with that. Eventually I think what they will do is get around to it. If they don't then we are going to have a lot of bad situations. The societal changes have caused some of the problems that our students have but not all the problems and it depends if you hook up into the positive society against society changes or either the positive within the society changes that will make you successful.

Goldie: As you philosophize, I guess you think about new ideas. Have you come upon ideas that you think would help schools to help children to focus?

Mr. Barbour: I'm hoping that we do that everyday. To truly answer your question. If you are in a math problem, it is not so important that you get the answer. What is important is that you understand the process. If you understand the process, that is going to give you the answer. What process tells you is that these are the steps that you have to go through to get to where you want to go. Just like you pulling out a road map for you to come to Whiteville. How am I going to get there? I am going to go down 74 and I am going to take Exit 14 off of 95 and that will put me on 74 and that will bring me into Whiteville. That is the process of getting where you want to go to get you to Whiteville. What will really make kids focus is that they learn everyday that there is a process in getting where they want to go and they know how to follow that process, even though there are going to be some obstacles because you are going to get lost if you don't know the way to Whiteville and you have never been there before. You're going to stop and ask. That is where teachers come in and say look when you get to a point where they need some help we will be there to help you and then they continue the process. If they understand that, that will be the thing that will get them to truly focus. That ought to be in every class. If you are in history and it just so happens we are in the Middle East, there is a process to that. Chaney and Colin Powell can't make a decision--they can come up to it then they have to go out and ask the field people and then they have to check with the



troops and come back and the president can make a decision and then he can go on with the process. We ought to be teaching process everyday and that process ought to be teaching kids to focus and make determinations instead of making them develop maturity. I don't know. It is difficult though because there are so many side shows and sometimes we go off on a side show and we never get back on focus. Sometimes we go there and we stay there a long time and then we get back on focus. The side shows are important. Sometimes side shows become more important than where you are trying to get to. You stay out there a long time--I don't know. Getting kids to really focus in is truly a difficult task if you are talking about all of them, and we are talking about all of them.

Goldie: What do you consider the most rewarding about your principalship?

Mr. Barbour: Being a principal. That is about it. It is rewarding. It gives me a lot of opportunities to meet a lot of parents, a lot of kids, it gives me an opportunity to see the difference in ability in kids, the difference in how they react socially, the difference in their economic situations, and at times it even tells me the difference in their religious thoughts. A while ago we were talking off the record what the church did. But the rewarding thing is seeing what they can do and you get to see which direction they are focused in. Then you get the opportunity to see that they stay on that focus. I mentioned a while ago about Brenda Baldwin and some others--Margaret Will. She was the only girl who played on the Boys' Golf Team because we didn't have a Girls' Golf Team. She was focused back then. Brenda Baldwin, she was Miss Whiteville High School. She would argue about a discipline problem and she would say, well, that is not right and then I would go through my procedures explaining how it is right. Then she will say something else. Now she is a lawyer and she is coming back and talk to us. You see, those kids were focused. The thing about us is that as educators and I like to say that as principals--that it is rewarding but you see people hate for you to question them. You don't like for a kid to question you. I don't want to do that. That is not right. You are mistreating me. You have to get them to understand, I'm not talking about them I'm talking about you. Your focus is different. They have a different focus than you had. Eventually you have to go back somewhere along the line when you see those kids where they have been real successful and some not successful and you still have to go up to them and this is rewarding, "Hey, I remember you. Hey, Mr. Barbour, I remember you. You used to try to make me go to class and I wouldn't go." We both would laugh. What are you doing now? "Well, I wish I had done what you told me." Then the real successful ones like Brenda, "Mr. Barbour, remember when we were talking over the phone and I remember when you were

assistant principal and you and I talked" and I said, "Well, I never thought that you were going to be a lawyer but you fussed a lot." That is the rewarding part. Then I get the opportunity to take her out to dinner because that is what we do for our speakers and talk with her some more. Then the kids who have gotten into trouble and they want you to come and say something on their behalf. So you become part of the community even to those that you think didn't ever pay you any attention because they are just as important as the one that went on to be lawyers or pro golfers or all that. Just to be with them and talk with them and see what they are doing and how well they are doing and what they say after they have done something and whether it is good or bad, it is rewarding. Because what comes out of the bad situation is what eventually comes out is, "Hey, you tried to do that so it is not your fault," is what they are saying but not saying. Those are rewarding things because now he understands so if he does get out he does understand that I tried. Teachers who retire write me a letter. Mrs. Harper retired and I didn't want her to retire because she was a good reading teacher. She could teach a kid who came from a very low economic situation and she could take them and I knew that and I would stick them in there with her and I would just walk away. She would look at me and I wouldn't even look back. I knew that she would be looking. I would say, you can handle that and go on down the hall. She would take them and she would work with them and then she would come back in there and fuss at me. She had a right to though. She knew I would listen. She would say, "Mr. Barbour, I can't do that." I would sit and listen and then when she would get ready to go I would give her a hug and she was white woman, a fine person and she would go off and maybe a month later, she would say, "Look what I have him doing." We talked about that when she came back two weeks ago. She was just coming through town. She said, I couldn't pass through town without coming to see you and we sat down and talked about an hour. That is rewarding so you get it from both ends--with the students and with the teachers--if you are successful with them. They know that you are focused. But Mrs. Harper would argue with me forever. "Mr. Barbour, I can't do that," and I would say, "Yes, you can. I've seen you do that. I've been in your class enough to know and I have seen it." She would say, "But I can't do it, I'm getting too old to do that." I said, "That is when you work harder," and we would fuss--you know what I mean when I say we fussed. Those are the rewarding experiences from being a principal. The compensation is more rewarding--you have to have that to survive. Those are things that are much better.

Goldie: Do you think that you need a so-called sponsor of the other race to...

Mr. Barbour: I think that you need to motivate kids and my main thing has been focused to keep on top of it.

Goldie: I mean to get to your position--did you have a white person even though you knew that you could do the job, was there a white person that said to the school board or to the superintendent that you would be good?

Mr. Barbour: Oh yes.

Goldie: Is that a part of the politics now?

Mr. Barbour: Yes, I think it is. The superintendent has got to say it. He would say this to you, I'm going to say it in a long way. When I was going to college I had to work at Jesse Jones in Garner because I lived in Clayton and I wanted to go to college and I was determined to become a good worker because I knew I was going to work and do what I wanted to do. There was a man there by the name of Wayne Ludder. He watched me work first and I really worked and then he let me work both shifts. Then I would go off to school and we would have a week off for Thanksgiving and he would let me come in and work. We'd get out for Christmas and he would let me come in and work. I did that for years until I graduated. You had to have that person and I had that person in Mr. Press Sowers, the assistant superintendent, I worked for him for two years as an assistant principal. My superintendent now, I worked for him for two years as assistant and then after they left I worked for George Dennison for two years who was the superintendent up in Bertie County. I didn't get the principalship after that. Each time somebody else came in and whether that had any effect on me or not, it probably did. They knew it. They would tell me, hey, you're good but that didn't do it. I didn't get the job and I stayed and then I started to go around and put out applications and go from place to place. This is when I really understood politics. I understood politics because I studied history and I've had politics in education and in graduate school and I had gone through the PEP Program. It wasn't that I didn't know that so I was supposed to do the job at Red Springs and I had to learn everything about that school. The superintendent had told me everything about that school and told me you've got it. That night there was a guy that had lived in that town and he was a black guy and the politics worked. I knew the books and I had done everything and I didn't get that job. That didn't bother me. It told me, you don't know politics, you know it bookwise but you don't know it. So I said, okay Coleman, you have to learn what politics is. Each one of these principals knew I did the scheduling, everybody knew. The whole school knew all that stuff. They were saying, that is not right. I said wait a minute here. They would come in and tell me both sides, black and white, that is not right. You can say that. I'd say, you have got to realize that there has never been a black principal at this school. You have to understand the community. Because I had learned some things. Then the principal at the middle



school resigned. You know black guys can be principals of middle schools. That is no problem right there because those years, especially when you know more than your parents like my little daughter right now. She is as nice as she can be. She does her work but you know what can happen at that age. She said the other night that they were taking a social studies test and the teacher told them to stay in ten minutes and finish the test and she said, "She didn't have any right to make us stay in." She did have a right and so I went over to the middle school and the school board put me over there and the first year went perfect. Then I started changing the curriculum. I had their permission. So I gave them something that they had never had before in that school system. The next year is when the principal left. The community said, "Hey, wait, we want him back over here." But then there were a group of parents who said no, we want him to stay here because my child is here so let him go next year. Okay, we are talking about a power struggle. So they come by and said, Mr. Barbour, we want you to go to the high school but we want you to stay here because you have something going that has never been and we want you to finish it. In other words, I had some unfinished business. All I did was set the 6th grade one way and the 7th and 8th grade another way and the teachers had never had planning periods before. They were in classes for 2 1/2 hours. The last class was something like 30-40 minutes. I couldn't understand it when I first went over there. I couldn't understand why would you put a setup like this. The teachers wanted a change. So when they saw me putting this in then the school board was looking too and figuring and then we are getting pressure here then. We were pressured on one side to move it and pressure on the other side to let them stay. Now where were the most significant people. The school board talked to me about it. They said, Mr. Barbour, we don't know what to do. What do you want to do? Then they could say, he wanted to do it. That gets them out of the trap. So what happened was, I said, well, you know it doesn't matter a whole lot to me--it is whatever I can do for these kids because we're okay. One of the board members said, what we will do is we have a guy with 28 years and that would give me time to finish what I was doing. They got a guy with 28 years to be principal and so he came in and stayed and then I eventually went to the high school with the class. But the middle school was set up then. So since then the principal there now is black and all he had to do was add some more things to what I did and it is even better now.

Goldie: Did you say that you had worked with him before, the one at the middle school now?

Mr. Barbour: No, we could never work together because both of us are black. See we had to keep switching places. When I went to be principal he came over as assistant principal. When I went back to be a principal then he came back over



here to be principal too so we have two black principals in the four schools. The superintendent and assistant superintendent, I work with them and at that time the board members and they were saying, hey, wait a minute here. They are happier at this school and they love to go to school and all of a sudden at a middle school age and all you do is sympathy and we had church at the Central Middle School, you know little things. Just little biddy things that they never had before and then we started changing classes. Every teacher that teaches had a planning period. They never had a planning period before. I stopped all the pull out. When I first went I couldn't tell there were so many bells ringing within an hour I didn't know what was going on. What I mean by that is, when I set up a schedule I can tell you what classes are supposed to be moving in my head. Now this 9th grade ought to be going here, here, and here. When I first went there I couldn't tell. I didn't have any organization in my head when I heard the bell. Every time that bell rings now I can tell you who is doing what. She is free this period, she is free this period. If I can't tell you exactly, I'll be close. And if I can't do that then I don't feel organized. I think that is the thing that helped me to be principal at the high school is the way it was organized. It is in the politics. You have got to be a politician to do it. If you are not a politician, you're going to want to be.

Goldie: If you knew of a black male or female who wanted to be a principal of a high school in North Carolina, what advice would you give them?

Mr. Barbour: Be a good organizer, be articulate, be certified, and anybody that you choose make sure that they are certified and good. Have a philosophy and make sure that everybody understands that philosophy. You can go anywhere you want to go and when you come back you've got to have a philosophy and everybody has got to understand it--students and teachers. Be well educated. Those things right there. If you are not a politician, know it when you see it. Know what is going on. Know who the significant players are. Know the players around the table and know the ones who are not around the table. Know the ones in the distant background and understand that you have power but you don't have to flaunt it.