

Interview
with
ROBERT WINSTON

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By Goldie F. Wells

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INTERVIEW WITH MR. ROBERT WINSTON

Goldie F. Wells

Goldie: Today's date is January 26, 1991. I am in the home of Mr. Robert Winston in Raleigh, North Carolina. Mr. Winston is the principal of Wake Forest/Rolesville High School in Wake Forest, North Carolina. Mr. Winston, I would like for you to introduce yourself and say that you know that this is being recorded.

Mr. Winston: I am Robert Winston and I am aware that this is being recorded.

Goldie: Mr. Winston, I really appreciate you answering my questionnaire. I am doing some research. I am trying to compare the role perceptions of black high school principals and I am interviewing principals who were principals in 1964, and principals in 1989. In 1964, there were over 200 black high school principals and when I called the State Department last year to ask for a listing of minority principals, they sent me 41 and I found that some of the principals are not principals of what we call traditional high schools. Some of them are principals of alternative high schools. I just want you to share with me. I am going to ask you some questions and I would like for you to give me information if you would.

Goldie: How did you become a high school principal?

Mr. Winston: I became a high school principal after being a middle school principal for three years in what I think was a very difficult situation. I became a middle school principal at a school basically that many principals did not want and I think that was probably a test to test my administrative skills. I was a principal for three years and after that I was promoted to a high school principal. Also I became a high school principal because at that time the Wake County School System which has 12 high schools had no black high school principals except one and this person had already announced that he would be retiring within two years. So I think that I became a high school principal somewhat because of the need to have that one token principal, I feel.

Goldie: You told me that you had been a band director before. Did you start as a band director or were you a classroom teacher?

Mr. Winston: I was a band director for 15 years in this system and while I was a band director for about 10 years I took an interim position as an assistant principal at a high school and decided that I didn't want to continue in administration until I got my proper credentials. So I went back to being a band director and went over to the University

of North Carolina and picked up my administration certification. Then I felt that I was truly qualified to be in administration and there wouldn't be any question of whether I had the proper credentials. After about the fifteenth year as band director I became a high school assistant principal again and that was at Wake Forest-Rolesville where I am now principal. I worked three years as an assistant principal there and then when the opportunity became available to become a middle school principal I took that job and stayed there three years and then returned to Wake Forest-Rolesville.

Goldie: Now I want you to tell me something about the school, Wake Forest-Rolesville and the composition, the racial composition, the staff, the community?

Mr. Winston: Wake Forest-Rolesville was a small high school three years ago when I came here as a principal. We had 700 students and the makeup was roughly 25% minority, 75% majority and that is changing each year. We went through a massive student reassignment program here in Wake County wherein a lot of North Raleigh area students were transferred to Wake Forest. Incidentally, I live in North Raleigh and students North of that road just down the street from here attend my school. North Raleigh is supposed to be the ritzy part of Wake County and Raleigh and it is supposed to have the best schools. So there ~~was~~ quite a resistance from those people to transfer, but we managed. We now have over 1000 students and next year ~~we have projected~~ we will have 1150 and eventually we will reach our capacity which is 1500 students. With the transfer of North Raleigh students to the school, our minority population continues to decrease. We are right at 20% or just under 20% minority as far as students are concerned. As far as staff is concerned we are a little worse off. We ~~are~~ ^{have} the 18% minority. ^{Staff} I have three teachers who are minority teachers, blacks and all female, here in the academic areas. I have two black males in the vocational area and of course my being principal. With that minority figure we have a minority teacher teaching a reading program and we have two in physical education and that is ~~basically~~ it.

Goldie: How many staff members do you have?

Mr. Winston: We have, if you count counselors and all support staff, we have 65 faculty members.

Goldie: What about the community. Is your school a new school?

Mr. Winston: No, it isn't. It has been in existence since the fifties, ~~and we have~~ ^{had} a massive building program and we expanded. The campus is ~~probably~~ three times the size that it was originally. It is located right in the city limits of

Wake Forest. It used to be the white high school and then it was integrated with the black school ~~there~~ which was ~~Duboyd~~ *Dubois* High School. From there in the early seventies Rolesville High School, which had been a predominantly white high school, was merged with Wake Forest therefore we became Wake Forest-Rolesville High School. Most of the minority people in Wake Forest were pretty much at the poverty level when all this merger took place. Now we are seeing some emergence of a black middle class but they are very small in number, ~~for a~~ ~~tenure school.~~

Goldie: Now I am going to ask you something about the responsibilities you have and how you deal with them at your school. Would you talk about supervision of personnel and how you select your teachers?

Mr. Winston: Let's talk about teacher selection first. Wake County has a screening system wherein all applicants are screened before principals actually look at applicants and recommend applicants. I personally think the system is biased and one reason for my thinking that is persons conducting the interview of anyone applying to Wake County are not necessarily the same people all the time. None of these people have had much training on screening applicants. The system pretty much sends out notices to administrators and say we need help in screening these applicants. If there is a principal around who wants to help or an assistant principal, come down and help us and we will give you a bunch of dates and you can choose. I would imagine that even though most administrators try to be very objective there is a lot of subjectivity that comes into play there. We recommend teachers from that list. Of course we interview them and recommend them from that list that Wake County has established. The problem that I see is that we don't find many minorities on that list and if we find them on that list their ranking may be lower than a lot of the other applicants which creates a problem for a principal because when we recommend that a person be hired to the Board of Education they really frown upon recommending people with a lower rating when you have all these people with a high rating out there. I have managed in two cases when I was at the middle school and at the high school last year to get an application through to hire a minority who was rated real low. In both of those cases they have proven to be excellent teachers. I think the system creates a problem in the way that they screen the applicants. As far as supervising personnel I have two assistant principals, one pretty much in a traditional role of buses and discipline and this type of thing and then I have a curriculum and instruction assistant principal and that person does a lot of the classroom observations and actually completing the TPAI's for teachers. I do about 25% of that and the teachers that I target ~~basically~~ *every new teacher* are the new teachers. I want to be sure that every ~~new teacher~~ I get a chance to look at them. I also want to

be involved with the marginal teacher. Those who may have been around forever but need a little supervision. We are moving toward involving departmental chairs a lot more. We are a Senate Bill 2 school. We are experimenting with site-based management and we get department chairs more involved and hopefully that is going to work out.

Goldie: Curriculum and instruction. You have kind of eluded to that with your assistant helping you there but how much are you involved?

Mr. Winston: I am quite involved as far as program implementation, ^{is concerned} ~~as far as~~ actually leading the staff and a lot of this leadership is provided again through departmental chairpersons. I try to make sure that ^{I am involved in} anything that we are doing in the area of curriculum and instruction, that I am on top of it and ~~that~~ I am aware of it. There is somewhat of a problem when you have a curriculum and instruction assistant principal who is doing just that. If you aren't careful, that person can emerge as the instructional leader in a school especially when that person happens not to be a minority. So I have to work especially hard to make sure that I am perceived as the instructional leader. We have done some exciting things I think. Since I have been there we have implemented the ^{Paidge} ~~Perdana~~ Program which ~~is~~ integrating English and social studies. We are experimenting with something this year we refer to as connections wherein we are integrating not only English and social studies but also math and science and we are piloting this program with freshman. We use a lot of technology to assist in instruction in ~~that~~ ^{the} area. ~~We try to stay right in there.~~
connections Program

Goldie: Discipline.

Mr. Winston: Discipline is still a major function of mine. I don't handle the day to day routine things but the major things involving board policies I am involved with that. No student can be suspended from my school without my approval and signature. The assistant principal can recommend but if it is an offense that is so serious that a suspension is necessary then the assistant principal must consult with me and bring me up to date with what is happening with that student and then we will make the decision as to what to do with that student.

Goldie: Transportation.

Mr. Winston: Very little involvement. We have transportation supervisors for each of the twelve high schools in this district and they supervise not only the high school transportation but the area elementary and middle schools that feed into that high school. So full time persons are responsible for recruiting and employing bus drivers responsible for all aspects of bus transportation

with the exception of establishing the bus route. That is still the principal's responsibility by law. So that responsibility is delegated to my assistant principal and I am only involved when there are cases of parent's appealing routes or bus stops or that type of thing. For the most part I am not that involved in transportation.

Goldie: Utilization of funds.

Mr. Winston: Well I am the school's budget manager so I manage all funds available to us at the school. Quite frankly central office has so much control over funds, ~~so~~ there is not a whole lot of flexibility there and when you consider the control at the central level plus inflexibility in the past in dealing with funds. This year has been interesting. As a Senate Bill 2 school we ~~have~~ moved funds around, ~~and all of~~ *The process IS* ~~that so that is becoming an interesting area~~

Goldie: Cafeteria management.

Mr. Winston: I maintain a very good relationship with my cafeteria manager. I find that the cafeteria manager and the cafeteria workers is a network of people who can do a lot to help the school. You can learn a lot about what the perception of the school is from just people in the community from cafeteria people. So I visit the cafeteria every day that I am on campus whether I am going to eat or not. I try to stop by there in the morning when students are having breakfast. Just pretty much my routine every morning is to start walking and walk until the bell sounds to begin school and the cafeteria is one of the places I go just to let the kids know that I am around. Then I come back at lunch. We have some teachers who have been assigned to cafeteria duty. Also, one of the assistant principals is assigned to be there every day. Not the whole time but to be visible.

Goldie: The cafeteria manager though there is a central person.

Mr. Winston: There is a central person. I do not have to do anything as far as the operation of the cafeteria. They have their separate bank account and everything and they are their own division--Child Nutrition Services. In talking to the cafeteria manager they are trying to make profits now.

Goldie: Yes, they are, but it is difficult.

Mr. Winston: Buildings and grounds.

Mr. Winston: We manage the custodial staff. Most of our buildings and grounds maintenance is handled at the central level and the trend now at the central level is instead of employing workers who would maintain the schools, they are contracting out a lot of the services. We have 84 schools in

this system and with that number of schools and they are spread out--Wake Forest is to the extreme north and Fuquay to the extreme south and the distance ^{apart} between those two schools probably is close to 60 miles so when you start dispatching people all over the place to take care of maintenance problems a lot of it is contracted out. Our lawn services are contracted out, a lot of the electrical work, and other things are handled by private companies.

Goldie: Community relations.

Mr. Winston: That is quite a task. We are involved in a lot of things. We are trying to establish some partnerships with some local businesses. They haven't been successful yet. I meet with the Chamber of Commerce. I try to meet with them at least once each month. The Chamber has established what they call "Business After Hours", receptions that start ~~around~~ ^{at} five o'clock where area business people come in and socialize ~~and then go out front to attend some of those.~~ Also there is a community council which our school joined just to keep the community aware of what is going on. I have a good relationship with the local school newspaper. They don't zero in on the negatives. They will publish the negatives but they don't dwell on it. That is completely the opposite of the newspaper in Raleigh which can be quite negative.

Goldie: With the students coming from North Raleigh and Rolesville and Wake Forest, do you think that the school community has jelled?

Mr. Winston: Yes and no. I think it has jelled a lot better than I ever expected. The majority of our student body is going right along--business as usual and they get along beautifully and no problems. My greatest problem right now is some feuding between black students. That is a real problem. It seems that those students from the North Raleigh area who are, I guess you would consider "the haves", seem to be harassed quite a bit by some of the students who live in the town of Wake Forest who are, I guess "the have nots". Those who live in the projects area and that type of thing and we have really been wrestling with that. In fact I have been in a few homes to talk with some parents about the situation. But overall the communities have jelled.

Goldie: That kind of disturbs me a bit. Do you think it is jealousy or do you think that the "haves" are trying to assimilate or become a part of the dominant culture?

Mr. Winston: I think that may be part of it. In talking with the other high school principals in Wake County the situation is not just at my school. So there is something happening and we are not sure what.

Goldie: How much administrative power and control do you

think that you have over your school site and your responsibilities?

Mr. Winston: I think I have quite a bit of responsibility and I am not sure how much control, if that makes any sense. I think I do set a direction for the school. There are so many policies, board policies that we have to adhere to until certainly I can't do everything that I would like to do. For example, we have an attendance policy where if a student misses more than 10 days during the semester, the student automatically fails regardless of what has been accomplished in class. We have a rigid athletic eligibility policy. These types of things limit the control the principal has because what I am doing is implementing policy. Probably the area that I have the least amount of control right now is in the area of personnel because of teacher tenure. There has been a lot of talk about eliminating principal's tenure as you know and my response to that is yes, go ahead and hold the principal accountable but at the same time eliminate teacher tenure so that the principal has complete control over the situation. I have one or two teachers who really need to go and the choice that I have is whether I spend all of my time documenting ^{and} trying to get rid of them ~~and~~ ^{and} whether I want to tackle the political fallout that is going to occur if I go after ~~that~~ ^{them}. So the choice is either to deal with that or ignore it and go on.

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

Mr. Winston: Well, I was a teacher at the time that desegregation occurred. From my observation as a teacher, I think that desegregation really took a lot of the power ^{and} control away from principals. I remember when I taught in some segregated situations ^{where I} at least I perceived the principal to have tremendous power. I don't think that that is the case anymore especially for a black principal. That is not the case.

Goldie: Do you enjoy your job?

Mr. Winston: Yes, I enjoy it but not as much as I enjoyed teaching. When I taught I dealt with--everything seemed so positive and upbeat when I taught and in administration there are those negative things that you have to deal with and those decisions that you have to make and you are standing out there alone.

Goldie: Have you found that there is any difference in supervision of black teachers?

Mr. Winston: On my part, no. I find that the few black teachers who are fortunate enough to work in Wake County after going through all that screening process, I find that

they are the cream of the crop. On my staff I cannot think of a black teacher who is slack. They are a joy to supervise.

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

Mr. Winston: The major problem right now is parent perception of how much control that they have over the schools. We have a superintendent who ~~has been here~~ ^{he is} in his second full year and is big on partnerships and big on the involvement of parents. I think that his philosophy is very good but given the population that we have in this area I think a lot of parents have misinterpreted what he perceives as parent involvement. I have a lot of parents and I am talking basically about middle class on up who very much believe that they should make the final decisions about schools--not through their elected school board members but by their getting on the phone and calling central office and principals at least in this area. All the high school principals have expressed ^{the} concern and indicated that their moral is ~~sort of~~ low because of intervention from the superintendent's office in some decisions which we feel have been sound decisions. Just because enough parents made a lot of noise they got ~~changed~~ ^{Principals' decisions reversed}

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

Mr. Winston: Seeing something good happen to a student. I really get excited about that. I started something when I was at the middle school but it is hard to keep doing ~~it~~ now but I try to. I have ~~some~~ little note cards that I send to students, not just to honor students or ~~your~~ top athletes, but ^{when they do something good} ~~anything that happens to a kid~~ ^{To any one}. I just drop them a note and tell them how proud we are of them and I enjoy calling a student into the office to hand deliver that note to him and teasing that student because a lot of times they come in and they are just dumbfounded. "What have I done?" It is just great to say, "Well calm down, you haven't done anything and I want to tell you something good." I enjoy that. I really enjoy students. I enjoy seeing teachers have successful students and teachers share ~~with me something that is great~~ that has happened. I really enjoy that.

Goldie; Well, I told you that there were less than 40 black high school principals in the state. If you knew of a young black male or female that aspired to be a high school principal in North Carolina, what advice would you give that person?

Mr. Winston: First of all be sure that he gets sound training. Pay close attention to any course, any insight to bureaucracy and politics in general. I think that that

person needs to be very much aware of the many hidden obstacles that are out there. ~~That~~ All of them aren't visual and you are not going to be able to recognize all of them. The person must become very much in tune to people. That is the key and if the person cannot develop any good people skills, they may as well forget it.

Goldie: Do you have any words of wisdom that you want to give us?

Mr. Winston: Yes, try not to forget from whence you cometh. That is very important and at the same time as you reflect back on your own personal experiences and your background whatever it might be, remember that when you go on the job ~~that~~ you have to put your personal feelings, your personal attitudes, even your personal agenda, ~~you have to put that in~~ in a proper perspective. For example, I am very much committed to increasing the number of minorities on my staff. That is a personal agenda of mine. I will do whatever I have to do. At the same time I won't lose sight of the fact that I just can't do it for numbers sake. That I have got to be very methodical in my approach. I have got to be sure that the person that I bring on board is going to prove to be the highest quality he can be. The thing that I learned ~~that my~~ teachers drummed into my head years ago, the old saying, that you have to be twice as good. That is still true. Very much true and I think since integration some times we tend to forget that ~~because~~ we are trusting people. We tend to trust people and while we think everything is going fine there are all sorts of little things happening that will knock us off our feet.

Goldie: What is your main reason for wanting more minority teachers?

Mr. Winston: To be role models for our kids. Our kids need to see more minority teachers. Also I think eventually ~~that~~ the educational profession is going to regain its prestige and respect and people are finally going to be compensated for what they do. So I think for economic reasons I would want to get more minorities involved.

Goldie: Well, I enjoyed the interview and I can tell every one of the principals that I have interviewed, the '64s and the '89s, have been real educators and I have come to believe that an administrator is an administrator is an administrator. It doesn't matter about the years, but the way you answer the questions and I think that everyone that I have interviewed really loves children. I asked the question, what is the most important thing in your career and it is seeing something happen with the children. I think that is something that we have lost by not having as many black administrators because the role model, setting the stage or charting the course for the students through your selection

of personnel is very important and when that is out of your hands it is hard to do that. But I have hope and I have a dream that one day we will regain our place in education with the changing demographics. We are having more and more minorities. That has happened in our Statesville City School System. We are almost 50% with the minority students but we do not have minority teachers. I'm thinking that some of our problem can be eliminated if we had teachers who understood the situation. I really appreciate you taking your time on your Saturday, your day of leisure, to interview with me.

Mr. Winston: You are quite welcome and I enjoyed it. Good luck to you ~~and your pursuit of whatever~~. *On your study.*