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N.8 Undergraduate Internship Program: Spring 2016

Interview N-0048

James Womack

2 March 2016

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ABSTRACT – JAMES WOMACK

Interviewee: James S. Womack

Interviewer: Charlotte Eure

Interview Date: March 2, 2016

Location: James' Womack's home, Selma, N.C.

Length 1:24:24

James Womack was born in 1945 in Pine Level, North Carolina. He moved to Selma, N.C. in the tenth grade and was valedictorian of his senior class. At the urging of his parents, he attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, despite his desire to go to Howard University. He describes his first two years at UNC, during which he was in the Marching Band, as lonely and isolated. In his third year, he was selected to be the first black cheerleader, and although he was initially unwelcome, he felt accepted by his fourth year. A brief discussion of dorm life and the roles he played as a residence hall officer. He discusses in more detail the cheerleading try-outs and the role the student body president played in his acceptance as well as how he was received by the students and other cheerleaders. Describes helping athletic coaches recruit African-American players, focusing specifically on a story about working with Dean Smith to recruit Charlie Scott. Tells a story about an away-game while in the Marching Band during which he had to stay at a separate hotel from the rest of the band in Jacksonville, FL. He explains how the admissions process was unwelcoming and meant to deter him from attending, which pushed him to go to Carolina more. He also explains how Carolina kept him separated from the other black students. Womack tells multiple stories of professors who treated him unfairly and wouldn't give him the grade he had earned; he becomes very emotional telling these stories. When a young woman was murdered on campus, he was questioned by police despite not looking like the suspect. He talks briefly about his job on campus during summer school and tells a bit more about the projects he worked on in Everett Hall. His only close friend, Buddy Edwards, during his first year at Carolina planned to room with him during his second year, but UNC sent a letter to Buddy's parents, and it didn't happen. Eventually, he and Buddy reconnected and remained friends until Womack joined the military. Womack describes how he was aware of the student movements on campus for Civil Rights but was uninvolved and describes his feelings as to why that was, focusing mostly on his desire to be accepted. He gives more details about how he felt as a cheerleader, and then gets into stories about his time serving in the military, from Fort Bragg to his international travels. After a brief explanation of his work after the military, Womack describes how UNC impacted his life after school, describes how he felt his college experience differed from that of his friends from his hometown who attended black colleges and universities. He concludes by reflecting on his overall feelings when he thinks about his time at UNC, which are positive in some ways but always tinged with sadness.

This interview is part of the Southern Oral History Program's project to collect oral histories from the first black students to attend UNC.

FIELD NOTES – JAMES WOMACK

(compiled March 2, 2016)

Interviewee: James S. Womack

Interviewer: Charlotte Eure

Interview Date: March 2, 2016

Location: The home of James Womack in Selma, N.C.

THE INTERVIEWEE. James Womack was born in 1945 in Pine Level, N.C., the only son of his parents' six children. He moved to Selma, NC in tenth grade and was valedictorian of his high school. He attended UNC-Chapel Hill for four years, where he was in the Marching Band, a cheerleader, and co-president of his dorm, Everett Hall. He was drafted after graduating and served as a teacher and writer. Later, he moved to Texas and spent nearly forty years in Austin – most of that time working for a telephone company – before health problems brought him back to Selma to live closer to his sister.

THE INTERVIEWER. Charlotte Eure is an undergrad student at UNC-Chapel Hill. She has a double major in Women's and Gender Studies and Communication Studies with a concentration in Media Production and Theory. She is an intern with the Southern Oral History Program, working on the Communications Beat and contributing to the ongoing oral history project on the first African-American students to attend UNC.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW. The interview took place in Selma, NC at the home of James Womack. We sat comfortably at his kitchen table for the duration of the interview, which lasted for about two hours, of which one hour and twenty-four minutes was recorded. Womack was very generous and spoke at length without much prompting. He started to cry at multiple points, and noise can be heard on two occasions of him pulling a napkin out of a plastic bag to wipe his eyes and nose. The refrigerator and an A/C unit would turn on intermittently to produce background noise, but our location in the kitchen was far enough away that it barely interfered. Womack had his cell phone in front of him and would sometimes tap it with his nails. He also had a cane leaning against the table that he moved on occasion. We continued to talk after I officially ended the interview, and he told me more about the positive relationship he had with his college advisor, his siblings, his years living in Austin, Texas, and his best friend. As I packed up my things, he asked a couple questions about me and we talked about a mutual love of UNC basketball. Before the interview started, I told Womack about the SOHP project he was participating in, and he seemed to keep it mind as he shared stories with me during our interview. He was very candid.

NOTE ON RECORDING. I used a Zoom H4N Handy Portable Digital Recorder from Swain Media Lab in the COMM department and recorded a backup on my phone. I moved the recorder a little closer to Womack about halfway through the interview when he sat back in his chair after having been leaning on the table.

TRANSCRIPT—JAMES WOMACK

Interviewee: JAMES WOMACK
Interviewer: Charlotte Eure
Interview Date: March 2, 2016
Location: Selma, NC
Length: 1 hour, 24 minutes and 24 seconds

START OF RECORDING

CE: Okay, so my name is Charlotte Eure, and it is March 2, 2016. And I'm interviewing James Womack in his home in Selma, North Carolina. So I was thinking that we could start with you maybe telling me a little bit about where you grew up.

JW: Okay. I grew up in two eastern Carolina towns. The first one was Pine Level, which is a small town east of here. Just about two miles. I lived there from first grade to tenth, and then we moved to Selma. And I finished the rest of my growing up years in Selma. And it was from Selma that I entered the University of North Carolina. Carolina was not my first choice. I was selected to attend a small men's college, Morehouse, in my junior year of high school, which meant I would have skipped my senior year and attended there. However, after I got there, I realized how immature I was. And I only spent three days there, and came back home and finished high school. I was valedictorian in my high school, and then at my parents' insistence, and high school principal, they wanted me to apply to Carolina. No one from my high school had ever gone to Carolina. And reluctantly, I applied, and was accepted into Carolina in-- come on, mind--in September of [19]03. It was a difficult time. We definitely were not welcome

at all. That's true from faculty, as well as student body. My first year, however, I joined the marching band, and marched the band for two years. And then, someone bet me that I could not make it as a cheerleader. And I didn't take so easy, but I took the bet. And so I tried out, and was accepted as a cheerleader. Which was rough the first year. I'm sad to say, there were some students who were so annoyed by that. I was the first African-American cheerleader. Initially, things would be thrown from the stands at me. But, as time went on, there was a level of acceptance. And I was too stubborn, hardheaded to be discouraged by that. I served as a cheerleader for two years, my junior and senior year of college. I don't know if I'm going the right way for what you want.

CE: Oh yes, no, it's great.

JW: Okay. Initially, as I said, times were hard. And for example, there was a bar downtown in Chapel Hill, because they were aware of black students coming onboard, and because they wanted to distinguish who was a student and who was a townie, well it was really funny, but when you'd go to the bar to order a beer, they would give you the beer in a brown paper bag. Which was a signal to the bar. And that happened to me once or twice, and I was never really bitter, I was lonely the first couple of years. I had only one friend, and we were pretty close. And I was isolated from most of the other students. I didn't drink at the time, I had never socialized. I did not relate to the town people. I was very isolated, and like I said, extremely lonely the first year. My dad--. I would come home and say, "I can't take it, I'm going to quit." And he would always say, "Just make it to the end of the semester." Being a wise man, he knew that eventually I would adjust, but at that time, no. By my junior year, by the time I became a cheerleader, there was a much greater level of acceptance, because I was known on campus. And people wanted to be my friend. And so, it was much easier. I was also, I did not

join a fraternity. That was not available for me. But, I was really very popular in my dorm. First I was elected social secretary, and then president of the dorm. The dorm was called ROGA House. And pardon my French, but it was known as the Royal Order of the Gaping Assholes. That's what ROGA stands for. And it was on the coat of arms, it was during the time that President Kennedy had been assassinated. And they were soliciting funds for the JFK Library. And lo and behold, we sent in a donation under the name ROGA House. So, somewhere in Massachusetts is an obscene appellation on a past president. Let's see, what else?

CE: Well, I'm interested to hear a little bit more about how you became a cheerleader? You said there was a bet?

JW: It was a bet. Because cheerleaders were, especially the males, were frustrated jocks. They were fraternity boys, and the women were sorority girls. There was no, they never had that (). And so, I felt that my chances were really slim. As a matter of fact, tryouts were held in Kenan Stadium. And when I came in, the students got up and walked, and sat on the other side of the stadium. I wasn't deterred. And I was even more determined to make the grade. It was funny. The first year, due to the student body president, he thought it was very unfair that this incestuous relationship came out, was determined to, as to who was a cheerleader. People voted the next year's cheerleaders, so consequently, they voted their sorority sisters and fraternity brothers. But that year, the student body president had made some changes. And had employed a group of students who were not cheerleaders to pick the next year.

They were campus bigwigs, athletes, there were about seven or eight people who had been chosen. And they were told that there would be a grading system where you--, they would select on a sliding scale, seven being the highest grade that each cheerleader--, each of the panel members would assign. And then it would go all the way down to seven. I'm sorry, from seven

to zero. And it's funny, everybody wanted to not be accused of unfairness, so consequently, when they gathered all of my scores, I had a perfect score. And they said, "No, we can't have this. We've got to do this, the grading system over." And the president of the student body admonished them by saying, "You didn't do that to any other cheerleader." He said, "You can't do that to him." And the day of the selection, I had to leave early because I had a final exam. So I told the student body president that I couldn't be around for the selection, I had to go for my exam. And he said to me, "Come walk with me." And we walked up further in the stadium. And I asked him, () uncomfortable at the time, he said, "You made it." And it was considered so whatever, but to the point that there was an article the next day in the *Daily Tar Heel* about the first black cheerleader in the history of Carolina. And for our first away game, it was Clemson. And Clemson was not a nice place at that time, to be a cheerleader.

But nevertheless, I persevered, and it got to the point where there was desire to bring onboard African-American athletes, football and basketball. And because I was a cheerleader--I don't know what other reason--coaches solicited my help in bringing onboard prospective athletes. The football coach, I don't even remember his name at the time, asked if I would help recruit. And I was glad to do that, I was all rah-rah. And then, one evening, somebody yelled down the dorm that I had a phone call. I asked, "Who is it?" and they said, "Coach Smith." And [I thought], "Right, Coach Smith is going to be calling me at my dorm." But it really was. And he asked if I'd come meet him, and he was going that evening to see a prospective basketball player. He was going to see Charlie Scott. Who was a student at Laurinburg Institute, and that they were playing an away game that night in Rocky Mount. And Coach Smith--, I knew what he was doing. He said "I'm going to see this player, and I'd like your opinion." "Right. Yes, Coach Smith, you'd like my opinion about a basketball player. You being one of the greatest basketball

coaches.” But I was glad to do it, and we went to Rocky Mount, and watched this phenomenal basketball player exhibit his talents. At the time, Charlie had signed a letter of intent to go to Davidson, and to play for Coach Lefty Driesell. And Coach Smith said to him, “We’d like this guy to come play for us, and see what you can do.” So I invited Charlie to come spend the weekend with me at Carolina, so he could walk around, go to classes, and see what campus life was like. Especially as a black student. But like I said, he was a phenomenal player, and he came, he had free reign to go and really get a chance to see what campus life was like. And it impressed him, or Coach Smith had impressed him, so then Charlie changed his mind, and decided to become the first black basketball player.

CE: Did y’all stay friends?

JW: Not really.

CE: Why do you think so?

JW: Well, for one thing, he was an athlete and they were segregated in an athletic dorm. Because they were team members. And so, most of what he did was as a player, and of course, this was my senior year, so I had my things that I was doing, and he had his. And of course, his () so I did not--, did not become a friend of his.

CE: So, you said your first year as a cheerleader was rough, and that students were annoyed. Was that more students attending the games, or did you feel support from the fellow cheerleaders? How did they treat you?

JW: No support from the fellow cheerleaders, and no support from the students.

CE: Did that change by the next year?

JW: It did, it did. At that time, I became one of the senior cheerleaders. And was put in charge of selecting the next year’s cheerleaders running the practices, and the ways in which the

new crop of cheerleaders would come up. I should tell you too, during those--. It was my first year in the band at Carolina, had been chosen to go the Gator Bowl at that time. I don't think they call it that anymore. Anyway, and so the band was going to go to play. And we were to meet, because it was over the Christmas and New Year holiday. We had come back to school on the () day, in order to be transported to the Gator Bowl. And I was all excited, I had never been to Florida. And I came to the school to get ready, and the band director called me outside, and he said, "You can't stay in the same hotel as the band, they won't accept a black person." So he said, "You can go if you want to, but you have to know, you'll be staying someplace else." And it didn't bother me. I said, "Okay."

So I went, and after we got off the bus in Florida, they gave me a voucher to a motel in the black section of Jacksonville. And it was back around midnight or so when we got there, and I kept trying to hail a cab, because I didn't feel comfortable in the streets by myself. And no cab would stop. And finally, I saw a cab driver in a coffee shop, and he was getting a cup of coffee. But his cab was running. So I said, "I'll go get in his cab, and he'll have to take me where I want to go." And he did, he was rather polite, and he asked me if I was new in town. And I was skeptical about answering, because this guy might take me for a ride, and I had limited funds and stuff. So I said, "No, I've been away. I'm coming back for a visit." And he said, "I figured you were from out of town," because in Jacksonville, at that time, blacks could only ride cabs painted white. Any other color was a white cab. Which was okay, except the black designated cabs had jump seats, so that you rode like you were in a bus. And they took you as if you were the only passenger, but they would stop along the route and pick up passengers, and I didn't particularly like that.

But in any case, the motel that they had me stay in was, and this is one of the times that segregation really worked to my advantage. It was a super modern motel that was probably a high-priced hotel for blacks, this place had a swimming pool, color TV. And back that time, color TV was never-- I had all the advantages. And the other band members, who were in that hotel, it was an old time, old hotel, it had none of the amenities. So I got the number one instance in which segregation really worked to my advantage.

Carolina was not exactly friendly to me in the application process. Now I could understand that no one from my high school had ever been a student at Carolina. So the admissions people really had no track record as far as the level of education for people coming out of my high school and stuff. So they insisted that I come to Carolina for an interview as part of the acceptance process. And I went, toured the campus, and met with an admissions officer, who said to me, "This school is very challenging. And I want to know if you applied to any predominantly black colleges." And I said, "Yes, I have." And he said, "Well, I think you should go to those schools, because I don't know you could withstand the academic rigor of this school." It was at that point that I stiffened my back, because I went to the interview to () parents how it goes, I'll fail it. And I'll get to go to the college that I want to go to, which was named Howard University in Washington. I admit, lots of guys in fraternities, I was going to join a fraternity, I was going to have a good time, and my parents said, "No, this is a state school, and the tuition is cheaper, and so you're going to go there." So therefore, I felt like if I failed the interview, they would have no choice. But it was at that time that I said, this man is really doing a good recruiting job for the school, because he doesn't want me to come in. And it was at that point that I decided, my grades are fine, and I said, (). And there was no reason for the

admission not to be accepted. So it was at that time that I decided, "Okay, I'm going to Carolina."

CE: How did the rest of that interview go?

JW: I don't remember much about the rest of the interview. It was never welcoming or pleasant. It was, "You can come here, but it's not very promising for you." It was never, "We'd like to work with you (). And I hope you have a successful time at Carolina."

CE: In your first year, I know you said you felt really lonely. Did you meet other black students at that time?

JW: No, they did as much as they could to keep us separated. There were, I think, sixteen of us. And there were two fellows in my dorm, they were twins. And they did what twins do, they palled around with themselves. It was also problematic with the instructors. Many would--, they wouldn't fail you, they'd give you a D, so it adversely affected your grade point average. And there were some professors who were quite open, saying, "You'll never get a good grade in my class." There was one instructor, his name was Blackjack McCloud, and he had a Confederate flag displayed in his classroom. And so, you got that idea, oh, yeah. And what they would do, they would give you (), didn't matter if you were there, and were a sterling student or not. In later years--, Well my parents used to always tell us, "Don't be so quick to accuse somebody of being prejudiced. Look to yourself first. And make sure that you're ()."

At one point, as an English major, we were only required to take a course in Shakespeare. And then all the others were electives. But you were expected to sign up for and pass this course in Shakespeare. And I'll never forget the instructor. I tend to be a scatterbrain. And so, I would try my best to sit on the front row, because that never keep me from getting lost in yadda, yadda

of conversation. So I would raise my hand to respond to a teacher's request that, "Doesn't anybody know what this is?" And he would continually say, "Doesn't anybody, now?" And wouldn't call me. So, a couple of my white classmates would come up to me and say, "Do you feel that Dr. McQueen is being unfair to you?" "Yeah, maybe. Maybe I need to try harder." And then, I wouldn't raise my hand, and then he would call upon me. And his questions usually were, "What's your opinion of this or that passage from Shakespeare that you'd read" And when he would call upon me, he would go, () the outlined response and say, "Well that's stupid." And he would go onto--. One day, he came in, and he said, "Oh by the way," it was a Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday class. And he said, "By the way, you are to turn in a paper," let's say on Tuesday, by Thursday. It's going to count for fifty percent of your grade. And that's all he said. [Laughter] Wait, I need more information here. Do you want research? Do you want an opinion? Or what--. He looked at me, in front of the rest of the class, and said, "I told you all I intend to tell you." So I said to myself, "Well, okay. I don't want him to feel like I'm confronting him. So I'll wait and go to him during his office hours. Then maybe, because maybe he had a bad day." And I went to his office after class, and thinking one on one would be better. And the response was the same, even harsher: "I told you in class that what I had instructed you was all the information you're going to get." And so he was rough.

Then my particular field of concentration was medieval literature, and there was only fellow who taught medieval literature. So I, of course, signed up for his class, and worked real hard. He gave me, I think it was an A midterm, and the other grade was your final, I'm sorry, a paper, which he gave me a B on. And then final exam, a B. And when he posted the grade outside his office, he had given me a C. So, my parents wanted me to contest it. And I said, no. I've got to have this guy next semester. And I don't want to alienate him in case. So, I worked

harder, got an A on the midterm, an A-plus on my paper, because I had found an Icelandic saga that he didn't know anything about, () do this in my next year's (). So, and then I made an A on the final. (). And he came up and he said, "I guess you're a little surprised. You worked hard. You knew the material. But I can't give you anything but a C." () oh, slights that you had, you either had the choice of walking around angry all the time at the unfairness, or you could put it away and go on.

About the time, there also was a time when a young lady had been killed in the arboretum. She was attending summer school, and I don't know who it was. They never did find out who the culprit was. But it was at that time that the Ku Klux Klan threatened to come on campus and hang every black male student. They didn't do so. But the police, the description of the young man that supposedly killed the girl was six foot something, had a blue shirt, had an olive complexion, and had wavy hair. None of which is my description, and what college aged male didn't have a pale blue shirt somewhere in their closet? But supposedly the young lady had scratched the culprit. And I was in summer school, and fortunately I had come home for that weekend. And I found out about this murder while sitting in the barber's chair. Otherwise I would have had no alibi, because I used to-- I also worked on campus that summer. I would go to my room and sleep there, rather than eat lunch. So, I would have had no alibi. And, but would have been subjected to some bad cop stuff. And so after I had finished my weekend at home, I went back to campus, and had just awakened from my nap, and was on my way back to my little part-time job on campus. And so, I was-- I had () or something. And I couldn't find what--

CE: The Band-Aid?

JW: Band-Aid. And I had a large Band-Aid, and it covered up my thing. And I had a pale blue shirt that (). And I was walking along, and a car with two men kept following me. And then, after a certain--. One of them got out of the car and said, "Would you get in the car?" And, "No. I don't know you. And I don't get into strange cars." At that point, he flashed his badge. So I got in the car, and he was questioning me, and I got the impression it was about that murder. And he finally said, "What's that on your face?" And I said, "It's a ()," but that isn't the word I used. And I said, "The only thing I had was this bandage." And so he insisted I take it off, and he verified that. So after he clearly saw I was not, and if so I wouldn't be walking around at noon on campus, anyway. And they apologized, and insisted on taking me back to my job. And I kept saying, "No, I'm okay, I can walk." You went to lunch, and you come back with the police, but they insisted that they do it. What were some of the other things?

CE: You said you worked on campus that summer?

JW: Yes.

CE: What was your job like?

JW: It was a great job. What department? It was the department that trained counselors. One of the projects that I worked on was a study of the probable success rate of students, vis-à-vis their SAT. That was very interesting. Then I also served as a guinea pig for counselors. They would give me a script, and I would be in a room with the high school student, and they would be observing from a glass. So those were the kinds of things I did that summer. So it was a very interesting job.

CE: Well I'd like to go back a little bit to your dorm, and being president. Could you tell me a little bit about that process, and how you became--?

JW: Well it was an elected thing, and my first foray was as an entertainment, that was fun and from there, and having more senior status, and trust me, (). And there wasn't much to do, because most of what we were interested in was keg parties and things like that. So, it wasn't any grand thing. And then we also did have projects that--. One of our projects was, we were trying to become--. They were running a number of red projects and the student who got the most Marlboro packs got a free color TV set from the dorm. And we ran that ().

CE: How did you feel about being selected president?

JW: By that time, I was more immune. I had adjusted more. And didn't feel any rejection from the student body at all. It was a small dorm, Everett Dorm was where I lived the entire four years of my college career.

CE: So by that time, did you feel like you had friends?

JW: Oh yes, yes. I had friends, or if not friends, certainly associates. However, my first year in the dorm, was hurtful. I had befriended this guy, and he didn't like his roommate. And I don't know, my roommates had moved out, off campus. And so, he and I became roommates. And it was, you could select your next year's roommate. And I suppose the powers that be would accept or make arrangements for dorm living. And unbeknownst, this had happened to all the black kids on campus who had chosen white guys as roommates, the university had sent letters to their parents, the parents of the white fellows, asking them, "Did you know your son has chosen to room with a non-white student?" So, nobody sent a letter to my parents. And the way I found out, this guy, his name was Buddy Hendrix, from Havelock. We had selected to room together, and I got to campus first, and put my stuff away, and was rushing out to sign up for classes and stuff when he and his dad arrived. And so I said, "Hey, see you later, I'm going to go do these things." And I came back, and he was not moved in. And no

explanation, but he wasn't in the room. And he kept avoiding me after that, that day. Because I kept wanting an explanation, no big deal, I wanted to know why, since we were such close friends. And there was (). And finally, a guy that became his roommate told me his father had told him, "You're not going to room with a black guy. And I don't want to hear anything to the contrary. It's my money that's sending you to school." And so, poor Buddy was caught between what his dad said and our friendship. We eventually got past that, and became really good friends. And our junior year, he got married, and moved off campus, and I became friendly with his wife, and I'd go over for dinner and stuff, they were very nice. And we maintained our friendship until I went into the military, and he had left Carolina and moved to Washington, DC, and we didn't continue our friendship.

CE: Were you aware of the student movements on campus? The protesting that had started around that time?

JW: I was aware, but not involved. I, of course, knew Karen Parker, Shirley Thompson, I knew several people who were involved in it, but I was not at all involved. And did not participate at all.

CE: Why do you think that was?

JW: I think I was more intent on being accepted, and--, as opposed to being concerned about campus events, and civil rights events.

CE: Do you feel like you were accepted eventually?

JW: Accepted by who?

CE: Well, by the students.

JW: Students who were involved in the civil rights movement?

CE: Sure.

JW: There was no acceptance and no rejection. It was just those students participated in the civil rights arena, and I existed in an arena that was not involved in civil rights. So, it was benign neglect, yeah. There was no acceptance or rejection.

CE: You were in the marching band your entire time at Carolina? Or--.

JW: No, the first two years.

CE: And then ().

JW: And then the next two.

CE: And you said at games, you experienced a lot of harassment. Did that stop eventually?

JW: It stopped. It was very short-lived. I guess because I ignored it. They got no adverse reaction from me, and it didn't last that long, maybe a half a semester, and by then, they were accustomed to me being a cheerleader. And it faded away.

CE: Did you get recognized on campus often?

JW: Yes.

CE: How was that?

JW: It was rewarding. Lots of people then wanted to be my friend. Which was odd, it's not like I'm the president of the student body, or Heaven forbid, some athlete or anything. I was just a person who was a cheerleader. But, enjoyed an amount of positive acceptance by virtue of being in that position. Because at that time, I don't know how it is now. In the pecking order, there was athletes, secondary, which (). It was almost as if these were people who couldn't be athletic, but were close to the athletes by being on the cheering squad.

CE: So I'm curious about your time in the military after UNC.

JW: I was at Fort Bragg, and toward the end of my basic training, we were to stand guard on a particular--. That was part of our training. And we were told you need to shine your boots, shine your brass, medals, and whatever. And you just, all this, because you've got to be a ship-sharp Army person in order to stand guard. Well we were out--I didn't do any of those things--I went to the PX and bought a can of spray stuff, and I lacquered all my belongings and then went to bed. The other guys were going to be up all night shining stuff. But for some reason, the only thing that I cleaned was my ammunition pack. And like I said, then I went to sleep. So the next morning, we were called out for muster, and they inspected you. And the inspector said, the guy who had the most --I'm trying to think of the civilian word--the shiniest stuff, they're going to be chosen as the general's orderly. I knew it wasn't me, and I didn't care. But, as it would happen, this lieutenant who was in charge conducted a mental exercise after looking over the military stuff. And it got down to two people: another guy, and me. And we were equal. Everything this guy could do, I could do too. So in exasperation, the officer said, "Take out your magazine clips," and he inspected them. And that was the thing I cleaned, and he hadn't. So I was chosen to be a general's orderly. I had no idea what it meant.

Anyway, I got to be that position. And what it was, I rode around with this general on base, inspecting parades and doing, and he would talk to me about stuff. And he said to me, "I'm not going to tell you why I'm asking you these questions." He would pose situations, "How would you handle that?" And since I didn't know what it was about, I answered freely and completely. Unbeknownst to me, he had selected me based on that thing to participate in an experimental program that was the pet project of Secretary of Defense McNamara. There were young men who wanted very much to be in the military, but weren't able to pass the basic intelligence test. So he had chosen eleven second lieutenants, four enlisted people, and about

twelve civilian teachers, to teach school in the military. And we were given great teaching materials. And we were to bring them up to par in six weeks. Well, this is after basic training. I knew nothing about this. I was working in personnel, because I could type fast. And so, this officer had assigned me to his office. And one day, he said to me, "Take these papers over there." Well, I didn't know. I'm just the messenger. And this sergeant major, who was one of the highest ranking enlisted men, they outranked many of the junior officers, they had a lot of say. And I was going over, and I was giving this guy the paper. He looked at my name and he said, "Womack, you've been AWOL." And I was going, "No, I've been here every day, how could you say?"

And what had happened, this personnel officer got the view on new recruits--, that's not what I want to say. All of the people who were assigned after basic, he got to determine where they went. And he had countermanded this general's order, and had kept me over at his place, and when I was supposed to have been assigned to this teaching position. So the sergeant major called the--, he was a warrant officer, and he said, "You will personally pack this man's bag and personally deliver him to this new assignment, because what you did was illegal." And so, they did. And I'm sitting there, and nobody's even paying attention to me, they're packing my stuff. [Laughter] And I didn't even know about the new assignment. They came, picked me up bodily - not bodily-- but picked me up and took me to this new assignment. And it was only when I got to the new assignment that I understood what had transpired. So, I worked, and really enjoyed--, we wore civilian clothes. Like I said, we had excellent teaching materials. The new recruits were responsible for making sure our rooms were clean and beds made. We didn't have to do anything but teach. And like I said, it was an enjoyable thing to try to help people realize their own dreams. And so I worked there for a year. Then, got orders to go to Vietnam. And was again

assigned a personnel officer. It's on my records, and sent me to a really plum assignment as a writer. I wrote citations for awards of valor. From the Medal of Honor, Bronze Star, silver medal, Silver Star, and things like that. And would assemble a board of officers to read the citation, determine whether the citation was meritorious, and if so, the person would get their award. If not, then--.

So I worked there for six months, and then went to the--, it was an administrative position, where I would conduct surveys on assignments of death benefits. And keeping track of wounded and killed soldiers. So that was what I worked on the last six months of my service. And when I came back, I had less than six months. And so, at that time, if you had less than six months coming home, they wouldn't let you go. And while in the Army I got to see and go to some fantastic places. My first place was visiting Japan. I had a relative who was a military officer stationed in Japan. And his wife was a nightclub singer down in the Ginza district. So once, she showed us where. And he showed us around, too. That was a fantastic trip. () kind of thing in Japan. And was so impressed by--, it reminded me of New York City with the (). And people who had a slight cold would wear masks, just not because somebody told them to, but that was such a polite society. I was very impressed.

My next tour was to Hong Kong. And I fell in love with Hong Kong. Got to travel to--. Hong Kong was divided into two parts. And right now, I'm having trouble. But anyway, I got to see both. Victoria was one side, and by ferry, you would go to another side. And it was a fantastic place. And so much so that those of us who had gone to Hong Kong decided that when we got out of the service, we were going to go to work for any airline, hauling baggage, we didn't care. But to be able to live in Hong Kong. The temperature never got hotter than eighty.

No colder than, what was it? It was not even cold at all. And seriously, such a fantastic place. But of course, then I came home, and became a civilian, and enjoyed that.

CE: What did you end up doing after?

JW: The first job that I had, I did political public relations. And would set up conferences, and write articles, and did things like that. And then I went to work for the telephone company as a manager. It was a quasi-managerial position, where we would go around to businesses who had Ma Bell equipment, and we would conduct surveys to see if they were optimizing the use of this equipment. And if not, we would make an arrangement with the managers to set up programs to teach their employees how best to use their equipment.

CE: So, how do you feel your experience at UNC was different from once you were out in the world? Especially your experience with race?

JW: Yeah. I found it to be very beneficial. I found that it opened avenues of learning to you, such that there wasn't a day that went by or an experience that I came through that didn't relate back to Carolina, and feeling that some of the things that I experienced at Carolina helped me go through what I was encountering. So, it felt like a positive learning experience from Carolina. And earlier, I said, and I truly mean this, this only applied to my last two years of college. The first two years were a blank, dissatisfied, lonely, friendless, it was as if I were in a sad, sad situation. We were totally isolated. And isolation, and ignoring can be a hard thing to encounter. I would come home from Carolina, and would encounter classmates from high school who had gone to college, who were attending college, predominantly black colleges. And our experience was so different. They were having fun, like teenagers should. And college kids should. And my experience was just, "This is certainly not something I'm enjoying. I'm miserable, alone, absolutely no network." Alone, an island, by yourself, and all you did was go to

class and come back to your dorm. There was absolutely nothing fun to do. But, it changed after I became a cheerleader.

CE: Do you think that that's part of why it changed? Or what else do you think shifted?

JW: Yes, both of them. My extending myself, and things being positively set in my direction.

CE: So I guess this'll be my last question for you, but I'm curious how you feel when you think back on your time at UNC?

JW: Initially, on the surface, it's positive. Because I'm still a basketball, football there, stuff like--. But when I get the chance to sit down and talk to people about it, there's still a pain. Almost a sense that things happened that I could never change. And there'll always be a modicum of sadness. So.

CE: Well, I want to thank you so much for speaking with me, and is there anything that I didn't ask that you would like to share?

JW: No, I think we pretty much covered everything.

CE: Okay, great. Well thank you so much, it's been a real pleasure hearing your story.

JW: I sincerely attempted to be as truthful as possible. And to call upon memories, good and bad, in order to truly relate to the project.

CE: I appreciate that, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW

Edited by Lauren Bellard

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