

INTERVIEW

with

HERMAN CARRAWAY

Principal
North Lenoir High School

January 17, 1991

by Goldie F. Wells

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Goldie: Today's date is January 17, 1991, and I am in the office of Mr. Herman Carraway at North Lenoir High School. This is Sunday and he has agreed to interview with me. I am in Lenoir, North Carolina. I would like for you to introduce yourself and say that you know that this is being taped.

Mr. Carraway: I am Herman Carraway, principal of North Lenoir High School, and I am aware that this conversation is being taped.

Goldie: Mr. Carraway, I told you a little something--I've written to you and told you that I was doing research on Black high school principals. I am doing a comparative study to compare the role perceptions of Black high school principals who were principals in 1964, and principals in 1989. You are one of the 1989, principals. In 1964, there were over 200 Black principals. When I asked the State Department last year to send me a listing, they sent me a listing of 41 that were presently serving. I have found out since then that some of that 41 are principals of alternative schools and not what we call traditional high schools. So I would like for you to just to share some things with me about your principalship and about North Lenoir High School.

Goldie: First, I would like for you to tell me a little about yourself and how you became a high school principal.

Mr. Carraway: Well, I began teaching in 1962-63, as a science teacher at Savannah High School. Actually it was a union school at the time because it went from 1-12. I worked in the high school. I was there for about 8 years and they integrated in 1970-71, and I came to North Lenoir as a science teacher. I taught here for two years, biology, and my third year I was promoted to assistant principal. I was assistant principal for approximately 9 1/2 years and my principal decided to stop and go into business and from there I was promoted to principal. I did serve as acting principal during the time that I was assistant principal for a year when he took a leave of absence so I guess I was at the right place at the right time.

Goldie: Do you have any educators in your family?

Mr. Carraway: You mean my father or mother? No I have a sister who is a college graduate. She taught for several years and then stopped and went to work at Walter Reed Hospital. Other than that, as far as my immediate family, I don't.

Goldie: Now I want you to tell me about this school. It is a beautiful school. I was just amazed when I drove up because it looked like such a new facility. Tell me something about this school.

Mr. Carraway: Well, Goldie, it hasn't always been like this. We were in a 1920's building up until about three years ago. At that time we got a bond referendum passed in the county and the superintendent was a go-getter and somehow or another we were able to move out into trailers and all the staff cooperated wonderfully. We had a few headaches but we did it. We moved out and we were there for maybe a year and a half and at Christmas, the beginning of the third year we were able to move back in so that is how it came about. We had trailers from one end of the school to the other.

Goldie: So they sacrificed to have this nice building. It is the state of the art. Now I want you to tell me how many students you have here and faculty members, assistants, etc.

Mr. Carraway: Well, we have around 1250 enrolled. ADM will average about 1150. We have 85 professional staff members and 6 custodians, 8 lunchroom staff personnel give or take one or two because it fluctuates based on the participation.

Goldie: How many assistants do you have?

Mr. Carraway: Two assistant principals.

Goldie: What is the racial composition of the school?

Mr. Carraway: Now, it is roughly around 60% White and 40% Black.

Goldie: Is your staff the same way?

Mr. Carraway: No, unfortunately we have tried to keep it as near the 1/3 Black as we possibly can but due to whatever reason there is we just have not been able to find that many Blacks who are interested in coming to work at North Lenoir. It's not a matter that they are not interested in coming to work at North Lenoir they are just not out there Goldie. We do the recruiting and well, we haven't been lucky enough to find many Blacks. We do have one assistant Black principal. We have one Black guidance counselor. We have three counselors and any time we have been able to get a Black employee in a position we have gone after that person but unfortunately as I said before the numbers are just not there.

Goldie: Now I want you to tell me something about your responsibilities and I will give you different areas to address. First tell me about the supervision of personnel and teacher selection.

Mr. Carraway: The teacher selection process is done by the Associate Superintendent and me. It is a process where we go in and he has a file of applicants and of course we look at the applicants and decide on the ones that we will notify or contact to come in for an interview. After we have interviewed the person we will get together and if we both agree and I do have veto powers because of that and if it is someone we don't feel will work out at this school and then we don't have to pick them and so far I have been very fortunate in not having to do that.

Goldie: Now, your supervision of your personnel. Once you get them how do you supervise them?

Mr. Carraway: I'm the principal and I've have respect. I think the staff members do recognize the fact that I am the principal but the supervisor road is split up between the assistants and myself and what I have done--we have taken certain departments and each assistant principal has several departments to supervise and I have several departments to supervise and that is how we handle the supervision of the staff here.

Goldie: Do you try to do all your ICP's or do they have that responsibility?

Mr. Carraway: No, I have an assistant principal who does all the ICP's. I do evaluations but there was no way that I could cover the bases that we have to cover here.

Goldie: Curriculum and instruction.

Mr. Carraway: We all take a role in that. Our guidance counselors try to work very closely with them. We are fully aware of the curriculum and instruction. I don't have as much time to put into it as I would like but we do get a chance to visit the classrooms and we do all the suggestions in fact this year we are really contemplating and I met with the superintendent on going to semester scheduling. Many of our kids are, for whatever reason, socioeconomic backgrounds or just disinterested in school and have not progressed as well as we think they could or as well as I know they should. And as a result we have, from research, say that you do your best work at the beginning and at the end you make your biggest progress anyway and we feel like if we change more from one setting to another that maybe this will turn them on and get them on the right track so we are looking at that very closely.

Goldie: Do you see yourself as the instructional leader?

Mr. Carraway: As a part of it, yes. I wish that I could say I'm an instructional leader but when you take into discipline and the other areas that you really have to cover and

maintenance of the plant there isn't a lot of time left to be the instructional leader even though you are when you can be. For example, when I look at the marked analysis of what each teacher has and I go over that with them and some have high regular failures and we have to look at it and revamp our teaching methods. But we don't have the time to do as much of that as we should. I think the public views us as having that time to go in and sit down with the teacher when we find something that the teacher is doing that probably she needs to be reminded that we can do it a different way and get better results; but many times you have to go to the filter bed, you know what the filter bed is? It has to do with the sewage system. If it goes haywire or something goes wrong down there you have to be down there to try to get that squared away--

Goldie: Because your water has to be---what is it like? A big septic tank?

Mr. Carraway: That's right. Well actually it's a field that sandy and what it is where--the sewage runs out on the sand bed and filters through. When it hits the sand it is supposed to be clear and clean and it usually is but if it is not then---but that is like is the life of a school principal.

Goldie: That's right. You have to answer but by being rural that is a different problem. The water just doesn't come through the pipes like in the city.

Mr. Carraway: And we also have athletics, which takes up a tremendous amount of time. At least two games a week and believe me if you have an athletic program you can bet your bottom dollar you are going to have some friction. Those things that the public doesn't see the high school principal as being and it takes a lot of his time away from being an instructional leader that we read about that we ought to be.

Goldie: The next area is discipline.

Mr. Carraway: Okay, discipline we have in-school suspension, we have an assertive discipline program wherein the students have exhausted the teacher's methods of trying to deal with discipline in the classrooms. She can assign them to detention for 30 minutes in the afternoon after school is out. For more severe punishment we have in-school suspension of course if a student is fighting we automatically suspend him at home. We split that up too. I like to get all the assistant principals and I feel like they should be ready to step in if I'm not here and I think they are. We alphabetize the discipline assignments. For instance, one assistant would have from A-G and H-S for another and I would take the T-Z. This is working pretty well. We record everything that we do with the student in a file that we keep here--for my own

personal purposes we have discipline tracking on the computer for all suspensions but just for me for a quick referral and I made this chart and I put the student's name and I will put if it is home suspension and I will put an SO if it is in school, and if he is Black--and most of them are Black unfortunately.

Goldie: And look, Black males.

Mr. Carraway: Of course, you probably knew that.

Goldie: Yes, that is what most of the research shows that it is the Black male.

Mr. Carraway: So this is just a quick referral as to what--

Goldie: This is for the whole month?

Mr. Carraway: No, we started in September 1990, and they go for the whole year, page after page but that takes a tremendous amount of time too. But if you notice here you see the Black male fighting, fighting and I have met with them and we have met with the parents and we have worked with them. I feel like we have made some progress but it takes a lot more time than people feel like it does to get them on the right track or turned around and interested in school and not knocking somebody in the head. We also have these discipline referral slips. I guess most schools have those and for a student who has exhausted his assertive discipline procedures in a classroom and the teacher refers them here we have to calm them down and hear their side of it. That is another area that really takes up a lot of time and we can either deal with it or we are going to have chaos. That is where being an instructional leader creates a problem. You can't do both at the same time.

Goldie: Transportation.

Mr. Carraway: Okay, when I had three assistant principals I had one of those assigned to transportation. Now I have the athletic director. I have given him two periods in the afternoon to work with buses and also with athletics. I've been able to swing that by somewhat--I don't want to say revamping but compromising here and there. It has worked pretty well. We have enough bus drivers. It certainly is not working as well as it did when we had students because they were here if we had to let out school early we didn't have to go telephone and try to run them down and have the buses wait until they got here to take the kids home. But we are managing. How long we will be able to manage like that I don't know. It has certainly created some problems.

Goldie: Utilization of funds.

Mr. Carraway: We have been given some flexibility and more so this year I think than we have in the past but in the past we have met and we have met this year, the principals and assistant principals, those who want to attend, each year at the Christmas break to propose a budget for the next year and this is an overall budget that we want the central office to actually recognize. On an individual basis we also make out an individual budget request, capital outlays request and also current expense request. It's a wish list mostly but the major things that we really have to have, we prioritize it and within limits our assistant has been responsive and now I'm trying my best to get a computer for the guidance counselor because once that computer is tied up to SIMS they can't do anything with it so I think we are going to get it. I hope so anyway.

Goldie: Cafeteria management.

Mr. Carraway: We have a Food Services Director at the central office level. Here we have a cafeteria manager who looks after the cafeteria period. I am informed and I sign the time sheets as to what goes on. I'm over there everyday at lunch time and that is where the students are so that's where I try to be and our assistants are over there too mostly if they are not tied up with a conference or whatever. But the fundamentals of the operation of the lunchroom are done by the central office Food Service Director. We have quite a few free lunches--well partial free lunches and free lunches and that is coordinated before our food service director and I have a secretary who works with that and turns the information in to her.

Goldie: Buildings and grounds.

Mr. Carraway: I have six custodians--I need fifteen but we manage and as you can see around we really have a lot to do but we specify assignments to assigned areas for all of them. We have one who really looks out for the grounds and when it is inclement weather when we need him inside he comes in and gives us a hand with the inside work. If you look at the campus we have buildings--this building here is assigned to one custodian and then we have another building that is assigned to a custodian, the lunchroom, math building is assigned to a custodian, the vocational wing is assigned to a custodian so we do it that way. Now with the filter bed, all the men will report there on Monday morning to make sure that it is operating properly and rake the filter bed and get it in shape and the head custodian would check by there everyday to make sure there is nothing going on wrong. That is the way we operate as far as custodians.

Goldie: Well, the buildings and grounds look real nice.

Goldie: Community relations.

Mr. Carraway: We have a newspaper that keeps the public pretty well informed as to what we do. We do have a teacher here on staff who coordinates the news or releases to the paper and we have a Chalk Talk area in the newspaper and believe me sometimes you almost get too much I think but she makes sure that everything that is done at this school is carried to the paper so that the public knows about it. We communicate with the parents about report cards through communication sent out to them. We have a student handbook, we have a teacher handbook and we have orientation for freshmen students. All the parents come out at that time and they are given the handbooks that the students get so they are made aware fully of what goes on at the school.

Goldie: How do you think the community feels about North Lenoir?

Mr. Carraway: Goldie, I feel that the community loves North Lenoir. Especially those who have students here who are progressing and doing well. Those who have students here who are not doing so well and may be in trouble may not have that same view of North Lenoir but overall I think they feel pretty good about the school.

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

Mr. Carraway: I don't have total control but as far as someone coming in to say you do it this way or that way, I do. It will fall back in my lap no matter what goes on if there is a question and someone has a concern, eventually it will reach here so the decision I make is being supported. In that respect I feel that I have control but when it comes to control over what goes on relative to student behavior, student progress, I don't have the control over it because many students don't come here with the intentions of getting an education to begin with. So therefore I don't have control over what they do at that point but as far as authority-wise I have no problem with that.

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

Mr. Carraway: I've had no problem in that respect that I know of. We came here as I told you before in 1970-71. That was the first year that they totally integrated in Lenoir County and I had very few problems at that time even though at that time the schools were 60% Black and 40% White and now it has been reversed. You have a flare-up here and there but as far as any major difficulties with integration or desegregation I haven't had any.

Goldie: Do you enjoy your job and why?

Mr. Carraway: I do. That is all I've ever known I guess. Believe it or not, I loved to go to school when I was a boy. I had to work out on a farm and plow a mule but when I had an opportunity to go to school I enjoyed it and I guess I like being around people, I like to see the kids make progress, especially when one comes back and shakes my hand and tells me he has gone on to school and become a lawyer or whatever. And we have an academic awards banquet and so far we have been fortunate enough each year to have a graduate to come back to speak, who is successful, to come back and speak to the academics banquet students and that has really been a blessing because each year we have alternated a Black and a White and we have been able to do that. So that really makes me have goose bumps when you sit beside one of those who left four or five years ago and is coming back to do his thing. We even had a West Point graduate, a Black student. That makes you feel good.

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

Mr. Carraway: My major problem is discipline. It really is. I feel like if we could get a handle on discipline that the students that are causing the discipline problems would get their assignments and attend class on time and I believe that we could make a lot more progress. In fact I know we could. It's not the fact that it is that bad but it is so time consuming. It takes you away from doing those things that you know you ought to be doing to get the school going like it ought to go because you have to meet the parents and you have to--it doesn't matter whether it is a discipline problem or not he is an individual student so you are concerned about him/her. There is a lot of time put into it. We have Kennedy Home. It is a student home that students come into transition programs when they have had problems at home or had something going on within their lives that they can't handle and those students come here and we set up all kinds of special programs to try to address their special needs. Invariably it takes a lot of time and when they come in and sometimes they get on the bus and keep going. They are children so we have to try to track them down and deal with them and that certainly doesn't allow a lot of time to do all those other things that we need to be doing.

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

Mr. Carraway: Seeing a student come in who hates school to begin with and he decides to stay around for a couple of months and by the end of the year, he is loving it and you can't keep him out of the office telling about some of the things he has done and some of the achievements he has made. That is rewarding. The other thing that I would have to say is I have a student who is a finalist in the Merit

Scholarship Award and we have one this year. A Morehead scholar--those type things. It really makes you feel good. You get Governor School students and those who just go to school and do well. You pick up the paper and see their pictures in the paper and that is rewarding.

Goldie: If you knew of a young Black male or female that aspired to be a high school principal in North Carolina, what advise would you give them?

Mr. Carraway: I would tell them to learn as much as they possibly could. Be observant, patient, tolerant and just love people. I think that is the way that you are going to have to go. Seemingly somehow if you are phony or if you don't mean what you say when you are talking about being tolerant and patience with people and loving people and loving to see progress, it will come out. And if you really truly believe that then I feel that you are on the right track and in the meantime you need to learn as much as you possibly can. You have to do that. And there are politics involved, you know that so you need to learn as much as you can.

Goldie: We have come to the end of the interview guide. Do you have any words of wisdom you would like to share?

Mr. Carraway: I don't know if they are words of wisdom or not. Being a high school principal is not the flower bed that a lot of people think it is. Sometimes you look at a position as being one that you come in the office and tell everybody else what to do. It doesn't happen that way. I think you get other people to do things you ask them to do because they feel like what they are doing for you is not necessarily a favor but they are doing you--in other words I'm trying to put it in my words but I feel that they do the things you ask them to do not because necessarily they want to do them but because they have faith in you and the way they get that faith in you is because of the examples that you set. I feel like that you are going to have to instill in others that if there is something that needs to be done, that you will do it yourself. If you don't feel up to doing it, then I don't believe that you are going to get anyone else to say "Yes, I'll do it." And I would say be a good example.

Goldie: Thank you so much for sharing with me. This has been really interesting and I like the school and I'm sure that the students enjoy coming to this school. I have gone all over the state--I showed you my map and so you see-- and I really appreciate you doing this this afternoon so that it makes my trip complete and I can get this data. You will be hearing from me.

Mr. Carraway: I'm glad to do it and--you better slow down.