

Thurman Couch  
Interviewed by Bob Gilgor  
2/12/01

RG: This is February the 12<sup>th</sup> in the year 2001, and this is Bob Gilgor interviewing Thurman Couch at the Chapel Hill Library. Good evening, Thurman.

TC: Hi Bob, how are you doing?

RG: Doing well, and yourself?

TC: Good.

RG: I want to thank you for coming here, I appreciate the time that you're giving to do the interview. Now I'll begin with a very broad question, and that is, what was it like growing up in Chapel Hill, and when did you grow up in Chapel Hill?

TC: Well, I grew up in Chapel Hill from grade 1 to grade 12, from Northside to Lincoln High School to Chapel Hill High School, which was I think 1956 to 1967. Well, for me, Chapel Hill was a great town. It was Northside School, that was Mr. James Peace who ran Northside, and there was a great number of great teachers there, from Mrs. Gombs to Mrs. King, to Ms. Peace, it was just a wonderful time of learning and getting to know the people in your town. It was a great time. Northside, what I remember most is that we would always play kickball in the morning just before the bell would ring, and once we got inside it was down to business. So it sort of went quick, grades one through six. We all swam in Clearwater Lake and skinny-dipped in different places, we had little swim holes. We didn't have a swimming pool until they built Clark, so we swam in swim holes in the summertime. It was a great time. I loved Chapel Hill as a kid. It had everything I could ever dream of. I've been all around the country, different places, I haven't seen anything like Chapel Hill. It's changed over the years.

RG: What were your parents like?

TC: My father was a chef, and he worked as a custodian at the hospital. My mother was a chef, and she worked for a restaurant here in town, a great restaurant, The Pines Restaurant. I had great parents, they worked hard, they wanted me to have an education. I was the first in my family to go to college and get an education, so I had great parents.

RG: Do you have brothers and sisters?

TC: I have one brother, one sister. Sister graduated from UNC-G, and my brother lives in Manhattan, so yes, small family.

RG: Where was your dad a chef at?

TC: The Pines Restaurant.

RG: So both of them worked at The Pines.

TC: Yes, and so did I. Mr. Murray is a very, talking about The Pines Restaurant, a very influential man in my life, Leroy Murray who ran The Pines at that time. He was the first guy that taught me about chateaubriand and things of that nature. He was a connoisseur of great foods, and he had horses. I used to tend his horses, he had thoroughbreds out in Dogwood Acres. He taught me a lot. When it came time to choose a college, I had already ate filet mignon, so I wasn't...he said always bring them to The Pines, let me look 'em in the eye, Thurman, see if they're real recruits. So, I had good structure, you know, I went to school, played ball, and I went to work after practice. So we had a pretty good life.

RG: Who was the boss of your family?

TC: Well, mostly I think my mother was always the boss. My dad always said, do whatever your mother says. He'd wink. So...

RG: Did she do the disciplining?

TC: Well I think my father disciplined me early, so I knew the difference between a woman's discipline and a man's discipline, so that was understood. My father caught my attention, I guess it was around 11, 12, and he let me know what time it was.

RG: And how did he do that?

TC: Well, you know, by, I think I was out in the backyard um, wrestling and saying some things I shouldn't be saying with some other kids, and he heard me, and he addressed me about it and I sort of got fat-mouthed, but he taught me right then and there that you don't do that, so, respect was always there.

RG: What, what kind of a house did you live in?

TC: Well, we lived on Grant Street. We had a house, one, two, three bedrooms. It wasn't a huge house, but it had everything. It had a tub, we always enjoyed, where I come from a tub was a big thing. Um, I had a room, my brother and I had a room together and my sister had a room by herself, and we had a kitchen and a dining room and a living room. In the back yard we had a basketball goal, and we had neighbors next door, you know, and we could always play in their yard. It was a wonderful time.

RG: Did you have relatives in the neighborhood on Grant Street?

TC: No, no relatives, but everybody, we had a few people on the street that was like sisters and brothers, you know, that we all grew up together with. There was the Edwardses down the street, the Foushees across the street, um, people next door

like that, and everybody, we were all very, very tight at that point in time in life. It was not like it is today, everybody watched after each other.

RG: How did they watch out after each other? Give me some examples.

TC: Well you know, when you walk down the street from school every day, people say hey, how you doing, son, how's your mama, that type of thing. You're walking down the street and talking too loud, and somebody may say, hey boy, be quiet. So you know, it was good things, and come on in, you want a sandwich? Eat with us. And I think all of us, all the different classmates you had and friends, you could go to their house in the afternoon and having a bologna sandwich and cheese, you know, it was camaraderie with them. It was never a power move. The only problems coming in life was afterwards. All through your neighborhood it was a wonderful time, you experienced everything, you saw everything, the flavor of the neighborhood was wonderful, all the time. You know, there was police, things were still the same, police still rolled through the black neighborhoods, and back then everybody knew to get out of the way when the police came. So it was difficult. I want to say one thing, though, one thing that really intrigued us was on Tuesdays, I think it was Tuesdays or Wednesdays, we would go down to the courthouse in Chapel Hill and listen at the cases come before the judges, you know, they would let you come in. That intrigued my life, that made a big change in my life, what went on in the courtroom down there from day to day.

RG: How did that change your life?

TC: Well, the way that the whites treated the blacks, you know, the worries, the way they spoke to them, from the judge to the lawyer to everybody in there, how they always put them down, and always had derogatory statements to say about them. And if you were a black man, I remember most of all, if you didn't have a white man who spoke for you, you went to jail that day.

RG: How old were you when you went to courtroom to see this?

TC: I was probably in 9<sup>th</sup> grade, 9<sup>th</sup> grade. I had heard about it, you know, word travels through the neighborhood. That there's no justice. You go downtown, you in trouble.

RG: Is that what you saw, no justice?

TC: Oh, definitely, definitely. Well, I don't know if I saw it as much as I learned about it. We knew who we were in the black school, we knew that it wasn't equal. I mean, we at Lincoln, we at Northside, we knew that we weren't as equal as Chapel Hill High School or the rest of the schools that were going on in town. We knew that we had to work harder, study harder, be harder. We knew that our books were not of the same caliber, the same standard. We knew that we had a mission ahead of us. It was instilled in us, I think, by Mrs. King over at Northside, and then on to Lincoln. There were some things that were very noted

by Mr. McDougle, who was our principal at Lincoln High School. He had a quote every morning about something great, but every day he reminded you when you were out of character, how important it was for us to stick together as a race, and how important it was for us to get an education so that we could make some changes, so we could make some changes. Very important. One other thing about Chapel Hill, I remember that when they came to do the sit-ins, I was a ninth grader, and we heard about it through the grapevine, and we went to this secret meeting place where they, um, they was having these rallies to get together, and I remember seeing, I won't call their names, but some of the great leaders stand up and tell us that we had to make a change, and that there had come a time. And I knew that my mother and my father couldn't go, because they would lose their jobs. And they made it clear that parents couldn't even participate in making the change in Chapel Hill. Plus, I lived off of Merritt Mill Road, so right up the street at the ice house, there was a big sign that said black and white. You couldn't even drink water from the water fountain, you know, it stood out there, it was big. To walk from Northside, 'cause Northside to Lincoln High School, I lived close to Lincoln as a child, but to walk from Northside home, 'cause you had to walk then, there was no buses for us, you know. We had to walk to school. But there was always those signs saying, we, Big John, who was known as the most racist drugstore guy, you know, you couldn't, he didn't allow blacks to come in there and do anything in his store. He had made it known that he was a racist, so when you walked down his street you had to look for him, when you walked past the drugstore you had to look in there to make sure he wouldn't run out and say something to you. You couldn't buy a milkshake. But thank God for the milk dairy. I forget the name of those guys, in fact one of the guys still, just retired from Durham. His brother, we could go in there on Sunday and get a milkshake and do whatever we wanted. And a cheeseburger. Just a simple thing.

RG: The Dairy Bar?

TC: The Dairy Bar, yeah. The Dairy Bar. Famous.

RG: You know, that's really interesting about Big John and Colonial Drugstore. He kept his store open late at night, didn't he?

TC: Yeah, well he was, you couldn't, at one point in time I don't think you could get your medicine from him, you had to go in there and get your parents' medicine. He'd let you come in there for that, but you couldn't step around to the counter and order a soda.

RG: You couldn't sit down there.

TC: Oh, you definitely couldn't sit down. You couldn't sit down.

RG: Were you, I guess that's away from the interview, but,

TC: Go ahead, go ahead. Cut it off. (tape stops)

- RG: Okay, so let's go back to your childhood.
- TC: I don't wanna get, you gotta watch me. I'm very high strung here a little bit, so you...
- RG: So am I.
- TC: So you gotta cut me off every now and then, you stop me, okay?
- RG: All right. Um, can you hold that a little closer for me?
- TC: Sure.
- RG: Um, tell me about how other parents treated the kids playing out in the streets.
- TC: Oh, Miss Rebecca Clark, she'll call you over and maul your head, you know, and give you a lecture on life, when you cut through her yard or you screamed or you're walking down the street. Miss Rebecca Clark will pull us all over and give us a lecture on how we should act and what we should do. And might spank you and send you on home. And may ride over and tell your mama. So that's the kind of neighborhood we had. Or Mr. Williams might say something as you're coming by his house. Or Mr. Foushee would say, hey Thurman, what are you doing? Where's your mama today? You know, so that's the kind of neighborhood we had, it was a great neighborhood. I can remember it just like it was yesterday.
- RG: So what you had in the neighborhood, it sounds like a lot of people were looking out and making sure that you did the right thing?
- TC: Exactly. And the older guys. I mean, it was no different between the parents and all the guys in the neighborhood. In the afternoon it would be joke time, say on Friday night. The older guys would all come up to the steps, and we'd sit on the steps, and they'd tell jokes about life, or they'd tell you what to do and what you can't do. It was, um, it was a wonderful time. It was a wonderful time.
- RG: What were your teachers like at Northside?
- TC: An extension of your home. It was like leaving home and going to a second home. They cared about you and loved you. They loved you. I mean, they took the time to tell you what you needed to do. It wasn't always ABC's, it was life and what you needed to do. Today you needed to talk about hygiene. Or you need to talk about the guy who sits back there who doesn't say a word, how you have to help him. You know, it was always something good. As well as the paddle. You know, there was discipline. You knew better than to act up in Miss Hargraves, you knew not to act up in the cafeteria if Miss Hargraves saw you, she'd put that ruler across your head, no matter whose class you was in. So there was respect. We, it was a happy time. Everybody walked down the line, everybody kept a straight line. We all grouped around, we all was serious about

our studies. Everybody wanted to excel. And those that didn't, who might have been slow, we all helped along.

RG: Did the teachers help them?

TC: Oh sure.

RG: Teachers and students.

TC: Oh, all the time. It was a family affair, getting you ready for the next stage. It was always getting you ready for what's out there in the world, and in order to be prepared, you must have knowledge. Every day.

RG: Did your parents stress education to you?

TC: Well there's one thing you better do, you better not come home with no bad grades. You could talk and say a few bad words, but grades was very important in my house, and it is important in my house today, I tell my children the same thing. I send you to school to learn. Not to talk, or not to cross the teacher, but to get the information that's being given out. And if someone's getting the information sitting next to you, my mother wanted to know why I wasn't getting it. Pretty good student, never had a problem with academics.

RG: Did they expect you to go to college?

TC: Well, um, they never talked about college to me. I learned about college from my guidance counselor, Mrs. Edmunds, who still lives and runs the newspaper over here in Durham. Thank God for Mrs. Edmunds, and I'm sure there are a lot of other guys out there who are thanking God for her too. She's the one that talked to me about college, getting me ready and putting me on a college prep level of education and what we had to have. So we, at Lincoln High School, after being at Northside and getting to Lincoln, there was some great advising going on there for some of us guys, who wanted to make a difference. Mrs. Edmunds was probably the prime player, the prime player in my classmates and those below me's lives, I can tell you that. She talked to us about college and SAT's, and we had never known about those things, and how we had to prepare.

RG: Did she teach, or was she simply an advisor?

TC: She was the guidance counselor.

RG: Guidance counselor.

TC: She has the paper here in Durham and I still hug her and kiss her when I see her. Without her I don't go to college, I wouldn't have known what to take. She's the one that set up my curriculum. She sets your curriculum for you, she'd bring you in there and talk to you and fix it up so that you could go to college, if you wanted to. If you wanted to. And Mr. McDougle, he, hey, the pride that you heard, every

morning when he came over there, a cliché about life and what you should do, when you heard that you wanted to be something. He made you feel like you wanted to be somebody. Every morning. Every morning I walked into Lincoln High School I walked in there proud. I looked forward to hearing what Mr. McDougle had. If you was late, he would say, you are too late for today and too early for tomorrow. Get on out of here. You know, that type of thing. Or, come on in here Couch, let me talk to you, and you're a good boy, that type of thing. And he'd give you a lecture on what you needed to do.

RG: So he was stern.

TC: Very.

RG: But did you feel love from him?

TC: The real ( ). For sure. We felt love from everybody. Peerman stands in the hallway as you're coming in in the morning, make sure there's no problems. Beautiful stature of a man standing there, the epitome of what life is supposed to be. Hey, there was so much pride. And on Fridays you dressed up in your school colors, or your team colors, when you got a chance to wear that blue and that gray. What's more important than that? Or you when you made that football team, with the winningest football team in the whole state of North Carolina. Pride. Tiger Power.

RG: What was it like when you were younger, with regard to sports? Did you see these football players when you were young?

TC: Every day the most beautiful thing I ever saw was, when they came by my house before football practice, they came by there everybody, ?, Toro, all of them. Everybody. Fred Ball, everybody, all of them. Everybody come by, everybody walked past my house as a kid. And I'd be sitting there on my steps and they'd have their books, big Toro, they'd be walking through there. But they'd walk with so much pride. And I would tip down to the field when I was a young boy and look at them and watch them. And I said one day, I'm going to be like that. But then you got to know what it's like to be on a winning team or be around a winning attitude with a guy like Peerman. And when the school adapts the whole, when the school is into athletics and everybody's in, and it's unity, it's in the cafeteria, it's in the classroom, it's everywhere.

RG: Pride.

TC: Pride, man. Pride. It's the biggest thing of all. And when I think about it now I get charged up. I use it on my children now. Same thing. Let's go. My daughter Jessica is, she's in 7<sup>th</sup> grade. She's playing basketball now. I got one now. That's my oldest daughter, Courtney, out there, she's the academic. But you know, Lincoln? Pride, man. But I want to talk a little bit about um, I just want to say this to you. Mrs. Edmunds and the things that we did, we were a unique group. We are the group. We are the ones. Because what they wanted to do at first, after all

this stuff is going on, they wanted to say, we gonna go to this new school out here, Chapel Hill High School, and you guys can join us next year, since this is the first year. This was their proposal, okay. We're not going to integrate totally this year, it's gonna be too much. And that we are going to integrate it the next year, you give us a year out there to get things straight, and then we'll put you black kids in the next. We voted that down.

RG: How did you vote that down?

TC: Mrs. Edmunds, our guidance counselor brought that to us. Told us that we had, I'm not sure what the procedure was or how we went about it, but I know for sure we voted that down. We said, we are going now.

RG: Did you vote, or did your parents vote?

TC: I can't remember the process.

RG: But somebody voted, and you voted against—

TC: Waiting another year.

RG: Waiting another year. Why?

TC: Because we were going to make it our school, as well as theirs. It wasn't going to be just their school any more. It was going to be our school. And we were the first ones in there. We brought winning pride to Chapel Hill High School. I'm the eighth outstanding senior. I was the president of my junior class. And the eighth outstanding senior chosen at Chapel Hill High School. I captained the basketball and football team.

RG: At Chapel Hill High?

TC: At Chapel Hill High School, yes.

RG: Your senior year?

TC: Yes, and captain of the Lincoln team in my junior year. Led the basketball team in scoring and the football team in tackles. That's right. And, I want to say to you now, it made me a militant.

RG: Tell me more about that.

TC: Probably it made the greatest change in my life. 'Cause, I'm telling you, as a kid I worked for The Pines down there, where they didn't let no blacks come in there and eat, and my mommy and my daddy worked back there in the back. By the time I was a senior in high school, you had broken the rule where they could, blacks could come there and eat. Mr. Finley, you know who Mr. Finley is, good God! Mr. Finley! Well anyway, in my heart I wanted to make a difference, so I

was going to become a sociologist, you know. So by the time I got to Iowa State and began to read for real, about Malcolm and James Baldwin and, I met other black people who were involved for change. I was reading Mao Tse-Tung and I was on my way to become a new human being. That interfered with my being a number one draft choice versus a number six draft choice. But you learn later in life, so, hey, I fought the fight. Still fighting the fight. Still fighting the fight.

RG: What influence did your leaders—you were there during integration. What influence did people like Harold Foster and what was his name, Marion, or—

TC: I want to tell you about Harold. I don't know if anybody has. Harold would come over to the Hargraves Center, which at that time used to be called Roberson Street Center. He'd speak to us all. We'd all be inside, inside there playing ping-pong, playing pool or something, he'd pull us all together and he would quote and rap and tell us about what was really going on in the world. For me, Harold is my Stokely Carmichael, and I mean, I got a chance to meet Stokely come right here. But for me, Harold is the catalyst. Because he wasn't afraid. Most blacks in Chapel Hill were afraid. It's known as an Uncle Tom town, I want you to know where we're from. So we, I don't ever want to confuse that so it won't ever be misconstrued. As I got older I realized where I had lived and who the people were that I lived with. Yes. That's right.

RG: But you didn't have everybody in that category. I mean, you had Harold Foster, you would never have been able to go out and do civil disobedience without a whole group of young people like him.

TC: Oh, oh no, absolutely not. There was hundreds of people that came along. Billy Hargraves, I can't think of all their names. Hilliard Caldwell. I can't think of all those, all those people. But you gotta understand, that's the way it was. Despite us all who were speaking out. Where we lived, you either had to stay in line, or, that's the way it was, it was a color barrier as well, you know. You were dark-skinned and black, then there was certain jobs you had. You were light-skinned and black, then there were certain places you could work.

RG: Let's go back to that light- and dark-skinned black. Did you see prejudice within the black community, depending on the shade of your skin?

TC: I didn't learn about that until I was out. I never knew the importance of that until I was out and I became more educated on how divided structure was set up within the black community. So, as a child growing up I didn't have that feeling, you know. I love Chapel Hill, I bragged on it, you know. It was my town. But when I became educated and I realized where and who I'm from, I had to label it that way.

RG: Tell me more about the teachers in classes at Lincoln High School.

TC: Man, there was nothing like it. I'm talking about somebody who's gonna stop you. See it wasn't always about one plus two or three plus four, it was so much

deeper than that. I mean, you know, the teacher had to be a psychologist, she had to take time to give us a lecture on what it's going to be like in order for us to be able to sit and listen, you understand? Today she's gotta talk about one of the individuals who hasn't taken a bath, or she's gotta talk about one guy who hasn't learned a thing or who hasn't been in school, does anybody know where he is. You know. And he's gotta talk to us about the quality of education that we are getting so that we can be able to compete in the world. If you think you're going to be able to skate right here in this room, when you get out there I'm telling you right now, you ain't going to be able to make it. Now sit down. You got a problem at home, let's talk about it. You don't have any lunch money today, here, here's 35 cents. You understand. So you was cursing on the playground, I'm not going to kick you out of school today because you was cursing on the playground, come over here and let me talk to you. You know you can't do that. I'm going to call your mother and we need to have a talk about that. Or, they're going to tell you, well Thurman, you need to talk to your friend Willie over here, because Willie is out of control, and you guys see what you can do with him. Or it might be a problem in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade where we got some guy who we know is bad and he's acting up, Coach might tell us, you got a problem over there with Johnny, you need to go talk to Johnny. We gonna go tell Johnny, Johnny, you can't do that no more, you understand? Don't wrestle the girls down there on the playground no more, if you do that again you're going to get a butt-whipping. So, so you see it all coincided, we're not cutting up, we're not showing no signs of disrespect or, when you say something to me, or you're not looking out the corner of your eye, or you make me feel like I can't come to you. I felt like I could go to any teacher that was there. And they had the time. But forget about that, it's what you felt when you sat down in their classroom. I mean, Ross ?, the best math, the best algebra, the best geometry teacher in the whole wide world. Made us all A students, so we could switch. Made geometry and algebra fun. Raise your hand high! You're high and wrong. That's all right, let's go to the next one. You understand?

RG: (Laughs) You're high and wrong.

TC: You're high and wrong. That's exactly right.

RG: That's great.

TC: And if you did something, and you were a good person, and you know you're going to make mistakes as you grow up. Mr. McDougle wouldn't send you home, he'd let you go downstairs and work with the janitor and haul out some of the ashes out of the boiler maker. Ain't going to send you home. What am I going to go home for, to get a whipping from my parents who ain't going to be able to understand why? He's going to give you a second chance. There are kids who come to school, Harvey, he's out of school, he can't get back in.

RG: What were the hallways like between classes? Were they noisy?

TC: Well it was, it was a small school, you know. Peerman, when the bell rang, you knew to move quickly to your class. We were like regimented soldiers. We were good soldiers in our school. We had pride in our school. There was nothing more important than getting to class on time. That was never a problem. There was no problem in the hallways. Somebody might be coming down the hallway, hollering out or screaming or something, who didn't know how to act, or walking past the outside sidewalk, but somebody, one of the teachers would go to the door and be there to tell them, Johnny, shut up. So you know, we didn't have that. We had pride, man, we loved our school. We loved our school like we loved our home. Just don't forget that. We weren't there because we, nobody forced us to go there. I never missed a day. I can remember 9<sup>th</sup> grade, perfect attendance, 10<sup>th</sup> grade, perfect attendance. I still got them perfect attendance things there. Wanted to go to school every day. I, I loved school. I wanted to go to school every day. R.D. Smith, get you a job, you're a good student, a good athlete, you can drive a school bus. Make yourself some money, help your family out. What's better than that? Lincoln, man. And Chapel Hill High School? I don't want to go there. But we can if you want to.

RG: Let's leave that for a few minutes, and I do want to go into that, but I want to hear more about the school, and let's talk about the band. What—

TC: The band? Whew. Man, you know what it's like to be in the band, to march for, I mean, 'cause everybody couldn't be in the band, you got Mr. Edgerson who's over there and got the number one band. Pride, man. Pride. The band was the pride, the heart and soul of the school. The heart and soul of the school, you understand? Do you know what the band did on Christmas, to see your own people march down Franklin Street with the best band in the whole county? To be able to run rings around the kids down the street who got all the new equipment and everything? That was exciting. But I think the strong point of Lincoln was our athletics. We were all, we were all the troops, man. We were soldiers. In order to, you paid a price to build a football team run by Peerman, or to play on the basketball team or be on the track team. Not only did you have to be a good student, you had to be a good person.

RG: What did he do that made you say that? That you had to be a good person?

TC: Because you know, he made you be a man. I'm telling you, he made you be a man. He worked you 'till you, he worked you beyond the point that you thought you could ever go. And when you saw the reward for it, man, there was nothing like it. When he practices you for two and a half hours and tells you you got to run down Merritt Mill Road and then go down to Smith Level Road and go up and down that hill, that's serious. It made men out of us. And he talked to us. I mean, listen, in, that was the greatest camaraderie that anybody could have. To, I was on the undefeated team. Unscored upon. I'd sit on the bench, when he'd look down at me I'd turn my head. I went to college and them guys ahead of me who I know would've been in the NFL, twice as good as I am, never got a chance. So I believe in God, too, these things there, and he believed it too. That's one thing I remember, we were very spiritual. Let's don't forget our spiritual

component here. I don't want to keep talking and not talk about the spiritual component. That's very important. You know, we all put God first, and I don't think there was an athlete at the school, or a student that didn't believe that God was the reason that we could do what we wanted to, because we were the chosen people, we felt like. We were the chosen people.

RG: Did they teach religion in school?

TC: Teach religion? We were all religious. They didn't have to teach us no religion. No, they didn't have to teach us no religion.

RG: Was there prayer in school?

TC: Yes.

RG: What role did the church play in your life, growing up?

TC: Oh God, Reverend Duhart. I'm an A.M.E.

RG: St. Paul?

TC: St. Paul. I go to St. Joseph over here in Durham now, just because it's my home. Oh God, Reverend Duhart, well first of all I grew up in a very spiritual home. My grandmother was a very spiritual lady. As a young boy, I don't think we talked about this before, we sharecropped on a farm out here in Chatham County. So she was very spiritual, and she believed in God, and I had never known anything about God until I listened to my grandmother pray. I think I was about six when I first realized what a real prayer was. Maybe seven. And I heard her talk about God. And I spent my first summer with her, and every night she prayed, every night she talked about God, and every morning she prayed and she talked about God, and every Sunday we walked those two and a half miles to church, no matter what. So, yeah. God is, we were very religious. Religion is, is the bread of all, most of us. Again, growing up being a young man, you know, you get angry. Because a lot of people are hypocrites, when you are really living a righteous life, the fact that you realize that people are hypocrites, that makes a difference. 'Cause you do believe in God and you do believe that a man should be a righteous man, and God made us all, and we should be equal. So that right there puts a, I think that makes a serious difference in my life, I know it made a serious difference in my life, because I believe, I found that most people are hypocrites. I didn't believe nothing nobody said. Cause, I mean, they talked out of both sides of their mouth.

RG: But, but you went to church—

TC: Every Sunday.

RG: With your parents? Went to church with you?

TC: No, my mother went. My father seldom ever went, because he worked every Sunday. My mother I think worked every other Sunday, or something like that, but um, I was going every Sunday, was no ifs, ands or buts about it, was going to church. Reverend Duhart changed my life. One day he, one Sunday I thought he was talking to me, I thought he had been to school with me all day. I really became a believer, because he talked about everything I had done wrong that whole week, he talked about it that Sunday. I thought he was, I thought he had been, I swear to this day, I tell my mama, I thought he had been—

RG: Following you around.

TC: Sure. He was reading it from a script. Here was bad boy Thurman. I was a bad boy. Very religious now, I'm probably more happy about my spiritual life today than I am about anything else.

RG: Do you think that that keeps some of the anger down?

TC: Well you know, I was angry for a very long time. I said I would never come back to North Carolina and live as a, um. I moved to New York and L.A. and different places, I never wanted to be called boy again under no circumstances. I wasn't going to be talked to as if I was an animal while I worked. You know, 'cause when you, I had to get a better job because I wanted to play football, so I had to go do like ?, 'cause they paid about twice as much money as working washing dishes in a restaurant. You know, they treat you like, hurry baby, run, come on there, looky here, hey, hey. That type of thing. Or come on boy, what are you doing. So, so um, yeah. It, it had some wear and tear on me, and I was very...then when I got to college I realized that, you know, you were just a piece of meat again. So I got angry again, you know, and again I got angry in the pros, they going to play the blacks less. You always gotta be less, no matter how good you are, you always (tape runs out)

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RG: Thurman, tell me more about the football team.

TC: Well, with the football team, you had to get ready in advance, it was, it was a situation where you practice all summer, you lift weights, you run, you get in condition, then you go out and you play against a guy and the best man wins. You know, and you're happy about that. You got some camaraderie with your friends, you got something for your school, you've done something for your school today. You know, that orange and black, you carried it to the top one more time, we won tonight. We could beat Chapel Hill High School if we wanted to. Bring them on. We, we felt we could beat Carolina. Let's scrimmage them. They didn't have a winning football team at that time. But then, you know, you go on. For me, football became um, a way of life. You had all, I wrapped my dreams around it, 'cause somebody told me, said hey, you gonna be great.

RG: What position did you play?

TC: I played linebacker. Played middle linebacker at Chapel Hill High School, middle linebacker for Lincoln, played offensive guard and offensive tight end. Football, it became a business at the high school. I mean, you liked it, I liked it, you know, it was another gallery. It was ongoing from the Hargraves Center, or from, we had played together at the Hargraves Center, then that same group of us got together and we played together for Lincoln, we made them a winner, then we went on into Chapel Hill High School and we put them on the map and made them a winner, then a few choice of us who were lucky, all over the country, get chosen to go off to college somewhere. And when you get there, it's big business. You're not the little boy from Chapel Hill High School anymore who's All-State, captain, had all the accolades. You're one of the 52 guys there trying to make it again. I was blessed. It was no difference there, I mean I'd catch from you in the morning, it was nothing for me to run the people down. I'd already been a sharecropper, so my body was already in good shape, I didn't eat no chemicals. I ate fresh collards during collard season, only ate meat when it was meat season, and that carried on into my house inside the hall. We only ate whatever was fresh, so my body was ready to develop.

RG: The summer conditioning program, was that done on your own?

TC: Always on your own. You had to um, nobody had to wake me up in the morning at 5:30 to go run. I'd run the railroad tracks from down on Merritt Mill Road all the way through Carrboro, just run on the inside parts. So it'd made your legs stronger. Put the weights around your ankles, get stronger. I'd run from, from um, to The Pines, you know where The Pines Restaurant is?

RG: Uh-huh.

TC: All the way to Lincoln High School, 'cause we'd, every morning, every morning, on Saturdays. Every morning, Mr. Murray said run to work, change into your sweats, you know. It's a dedication thing, you know, you got to work.

RG: And where did you lift weights?

TC: Anyplace that we could. Mr., I won't say anyplace that we could, 'cause we got Mr. Mason let me in the field house. Mr. Mason treated me like I was Mr. Mason's boy, you understand? You know who Mr. Mason is?

RG: Yeah, I knew Morris Mason, he's a legend.

TC: Good God, Mr. Morris Mason, I'm me, I mean there were Donald Carter, me, Ken ?, we all, I mean I ain't got no problems goin', I got Carolina football shoes on, Mr. Mason loves me. I'm a Chapel Hill High School star, Lincoln High School star, he looks after me. I'm in the weight room down at the University of North Carolina. I sold drinks in the stadium. Ice cold drinks! But we really sold ice. 'Cause that's all they wanted, is ice. Few drinks and a whole bucket full of ice, yeah. That's, my life, let me tell you. The anger, you talk about anger, mad as

hell all my life. But thankful for guys like Leroy Murray, you understand. The only white guy I knew that I could trust. I ain't trust nobody else. I trusted Joe Madden who recruited me out of college at Wake Forest and went on to Iowa State. Trusted him because he was always a man of his word. I didn't trust Johnny Majors or any of those other guys. Jackie ? over there, I didn't trust him.

RG: What was it about Mr. Murray that made you trust him?

TC: He was truthful. He taught me how to make money. You know what he taught me? I run restaurants over there, he taught me that if you're a good person and you do right, everything's all right. That's what he taught me.

RG: What was his role down there?

TC: He was the boss. He was the man. It was his. First, GT500, I love fast cars to this day, he had a 1966 GT500 specially made, ordered for him, he let me drive it, said take this, go ahead.

RG: How did you respond to the fact that they didn't allow blacks in there, and that they were against, or when the sit-ins occurred down there, they fought the sit-ins, they wouldn't change?

TC: Well at first, like I say I didn't know too much about it. Then I didn't know where my mother worked and my father worked, what was really going on there. By the time I got to work for him, he's made the change and he's let blacks in.

RG: Oh, I see.

TC: But I did work there when there wasn't, he would tell me, Thurman, I'm going to have to make this change. Said I don't like it. Said I love your daddy and your mommy just like they're my own, he said, but this is the way it's been, and when the time comes I'll make the change. And he finally made the change, finally made the change.

RG: Let's go back to the football team, and—

TC: Go, Tigers, go.

RG: I understand that you drove an orange bus with a tiger on the side.

TC: Good God almighty. Mr. R.D. Smith, thank God he's a mechanic. I don't know where we got this bus from, but they painted this bus orange and put the tiger on the side of it. Beautiful bus, long. I mean back in them days, it was, nobody had a real bus. We had us a real bus. And all the trips, you know, the first trip we took on that thing we was going to Mount Olive or somewhere, the smoke came up through the bottom and we almost died. We all had to, look, we had to empty the bus, R.D. had to put on his fatigues, but he worked on it for about an hour and a half, we got back on the bus and took off. So it was, man.

- RG: Did, did Principal McDougle go on the bus with you?
- TC: No. No, no. I never recall Mr. McDougle being on a bus trip with us. No.
- RG: Did the band ever go with you?
- TC: No, the band didn't travel on the same bus we did. I think we had some kind of band bus. I don't think, that I remember, I don't think the band traveled with us. Only when it was a home game did the band perform.
- RG: I see, so they didn't go to the away games.
- TC: No, they didn't go when we went away.
- RG: I understand that at some point there's a ritual where the team ran around the field before the games, and they went to midfield and sang a song about Tennessee Mountaintop?
- TC: (singing) Born on the mountaintop in Tennessee, greatest man in the land of the free—it was an exercise that we had. That was, that was our theme, you know. Davy Crockett.
- RG: So you did that.
- TC: Oh, of course.
- RG: And then did you do any hand-clapping, or put on a show?
- TC: Sure, we, we had hand jive, man. We felt good. We had hand jive. Just like you see the guys running and high-fivin' and doing the wiggle-wobblin'. That's always been. That's a black thing.
- RG: So you did that at midfield before the game.
- TC: That's right, well, it'd be on your side of the half, you know, you got half the field, and we always did that. We'd run out beautifully, you know. It was a ritual. Then we'd come out in our shoulder pads and we'd do our song. Then we'd beat everybody by 100 to nothin'. Sorta, not everybody. Just one time I think.
- RG: You beat someone 106 to nothing.
- TC: That's correct, Mount Olive.
- RG: Now were you a 2A school?
- TC: Yeah, I think we were. 3A. We were a 3A school.

RG: And were you playing 3A and 4A schools?

TC: Only 3A. 3A schools. Only one thing I want to say is that Mrs. Gwen Lindoff is the woman that I was speaking of. And me, Hank Anderson, Toro, Nate Davis, in that order, um, but before she came along we would go down to—me, Henry Campbell and other guys would go down and set up little goals, me and Hank in the different communities, so that the kids in the projects in our own Chapel Hill, great town, could have a place to play. There was no playgrounds or anything available for us, you know. And we thank God for Roberson Street and we thank God for Mrs. Gwen Lindoff and Hank Anderson, who has moved on as well. But what we started over there at the Hargraves Center, 'cause that's where Harold could come and speak, and over there was a meeting place where brothers could learn from other brothers, and that was very strong. And I wanted to live and carry on that tradition. Every summer I worked over there, helping Monk, helping all kinds of people, you know. We helped each other. Somebody didn't have something, we tried to make sure they had something. We spent our summers being strong from one part of the community to the other. Always.

RG: Did you feel obliged to give something back to your community?

TC: Absolutely. If it weren't for no, I would have worked for no pay.

RG: Who gave you that?

TC: When you say, who gave me that—

RG: I mean, where did you get it?

TC: We, from school. We got it from everywhere. It's all around you. It's all around you. Starts first at home. You see your mom, starts with my grandmother. Starts with my grandmother, who, no matter how hard she works, she's gonna take something over to her neighbor's house who we gotta walk for another half, quarter mile a way or something, she doesn't cook and carry because she's sick. Or we gonna split a piece of ham, or we gonna kill hogs and share with our other people who we know don't have enough. From the beginning. Hog-killing time for the blacks, only time you got some meat was when they killed the hogs. You understand. I ain't talking about when the Colonial store came, and we was able to go buy two pounds of hamburger. And we eatin' chicken necks. And rice. Come on now. So you learn to help. This whole thing's been about helping. And today as I speak to you, we're talking right now about taking 15 boys, right here in the Durham schools, 15 of them, 10 boys and three girls, and let's do something for them, let's take them for a year. Let's go into the worst situation, let's get the worst situation over here at the school and let's try and help. 'Cause nobody's doing nothing, man. We took care of each other. And when they put the schools on us and split us up, they cut our, it was another form of slavery as far as I'm concerned. And they ain't stopped yet.

RG: How did you feel, you spent your last year at Chapel Hill High School.

TC: Very angry when I got there. I had to, I came to make a statement.

RG: What were you angry at?

TC: The fact that they, well with the school down the street, and they had football shoes with no holes in the bottom, and what have we got, we got the hand-down material from whatever somebody gave us at our school. Or that we got the books, we wanted to let them know that hey, we don't care who y'all are or what y'all, you know, we are as smart and as intelligent as you guys are. But you know what? Claude Piano Docey, Lou Peerman, Scroggs, so many other people who were waiting on the other side to make the transition. So it was, it was unbelievable. We were able to go in there, and the football team met first. It was a day like nothing I'd ever seen before.

RG: So the blacks and the whites got along on the football team.

TC: Fine. School, everywhere. We had a great year.

RG: What about the rest of the blacks and the whites in the school the first year? Did you see dissention, did you see walls being built?

TC: Well we made a pact, you know. We made it publicly known that we weren't having no mess.

RG: The team?

TC: All the black guys from Lincoln High School. Wanted to let 'em know they don't bother any of these young kids, we don't have no racist calling, no name-calling, none of that stuff. If you do, we'll wait for you after school, and we'll turn this baby out.

RG: So you had the leadership ability to stop, what I hear you saying, to stop the name-calling and any fights—

TC: We went there correct. So I just want to say it's about when you do things that are correct, and I think when you put forth your best foot. I think when you put forth your best foot, and that's what we did, 'cause we wanted to go correctly. We wanted to go intelligently, 'cause that's what we stressed at our school, at Lincoln. We was going intelligently, we was going righteously, we was going religiously straight. And we got there with them, we wanted to, we weren't accepting anything less than that. And we'd already learned that everybody put their pants on one leg at a time, that was our motto. Put your leg, put the pants, now if they got three legs, then we got a problem with that. But I'm telling you we got there, I mean there's so many guys, white guys, I can't recall, um, Mike Geary, so many different guys that I, that can feel like I'm sure you can feel me now, that can feel the fact that we are righteous when we come.

- RG: It's really fascinating to hear your story of your first year, the first year at Chapel Hill High School, and to me it sounds as though what you're saying is your leadership, the black students and, was it the white students on the football team too, or did you perceive it just as the black students, who said that we're going to get along, there won't be any name-calling, there won't be any fights?
- TC: Well we, we, well first of all, good point. We were the first ones to gather together, the football players. So we, we got together in August, school started in September. And we had already made a vow, plus we had a coach named Peerman, and another coach named Bob Culton, and my hat goes off to Bob Culton who's very sick right now, and may the good Lord bless him, who was another, who treated me respectfully. Anyway, we had a coach named Peerman, he knew what time it was. He knew what we was about to overtake. And he had been our head coach, and he was there with us so we could bounce off him. But we made the difference in practice. We had a few name-calls, but he was smart enough to say, we heard so-and-so, we'd say, Coach, we heard so-and-so use the "N" word. So that day on special drills, we'd whup him into the ground, whoever he was. Make him a better guy.
- RG: Now let me go back to this issue again. Do you feel as though you changed the nature of the school?
- TC: Without a doubt. We had Cat McKay, I don't know if you can remember, her daddy was a great sandwich maker here for the University of North Carolina, her and some other people, I can't name them all right now, but yeah. It was a very radical time, and there were some very radical young white people at Chapel Hill High School at that very time, too, so that made a difference. We went there cocked. I left out of there, hey, tipping my hat and on off to the greatest year of my life. I had the greatest year of my life. I got a college scholarship, and you know, named All-State and all-everything at an all-white school. So it was okay, we made the transition. It was the beginning of the fight. And all those guys, I see all my classmates, there was the beginning of the fight, because ? never went to college. And the fight was just beginning.
- RG: Did you have any information about what happened after you left?
- TC: Sure.
- RG: Because it seems to me—
- TC: It deteriorated the next year. They fired Peerman, they demoted Peerman from head coach, they had two head coaches, him and Colton, they demoted him over to the junior high school. It was a setup the first year.
- RG: I thought that he was assistant coach, that Mr. Colton was the head coach. Is that not—

TC: We, it was a dual, we saw it as a dual head coaching situation there.

RG: Okay, so—

TC: We never saw, only thing I saw Colton as head coach of was the basketball team, 'cause when basketball season came, Peerman was not the basketball coach. But the next following year, the school went haywire. They threw Mr. McDougale out, they got rid of everybody, split it up, sent everybody everywhere, and they went on to being white as usual. Which is the normal function, you know that. If there's a crisis up North in New York, you know how they handle it. They water it down, and you know, damage control right here and there, and then, we'll get back to it. Yeah, it happened. My sister was there, still left there, you know.

RG: So Mr. Peerman got fired and went to the junior high school the next year?

TC: Demoted, I think.

RG: Demoted.

TC: He had a picture of me on the back of his clipboard every day, you know. He got demoted his first, the next year, and I think by the time, before I left college they had moved him out completely. Because I came back and coached high school when I was in college.

RG: What were your thoughts about Mr. McDougale being assistant principal?

TC: Well we knew, well we knew that he wasn't going to be the principal. I mean this is North Carolina, you know. We had just left an all-black situation and the way things work in North Carolina, they don't let black people run their things, they don't let black people run their children, never have. So we weren't fooled by that. We knew that it was going to be limited, limited there. We weren't fooled at all, we had all discussed that way, way ahead of time.

RG: How did you feel you were treated by the white teachers?

TC: Oh God. The worst thing this, the teachers. They had never seen us, first of all. They had never seen more than three blacks in a class. They maybe had seen one every now and then, and now here they are, sitting up with all blacks. Some of them were racist, you know. They couldn't not be racist, it was born and bred in their heart. They don't understand our lingo. They don't even understand the way we dress or the way we look. And then having to look at us every day made a lot of people angry, I'm sure.

RG: Did they, if you raised your hand in class, did you feel as though you had the same right to be, that you were just as likely to be called on as a white person?

TC: Well, you gotta remember this. Us, we knew we were smart. When we went there, we went with our group, we weren't worried about having to compete with

them. That was, we had a guidance counselor, we had already took care of our own schools. We knew what grades we had. We had come to integrate the schools for real, and let them know that this was not going to be a white school. We weren't worried about them academically. We weren't. We were academically well enough to handle ourselves at Chapel Hill High School. We didn't have to fight a war with the teachers. We knew there were white teachers and we took it easy, we knew how to act.

RG: That's interesting, but that wasn't the issue I was getting at. The issue I was getting at is, did they look you in the eye, did they call on you the same as they called on the white students?

TC: Of course not. Of course not. I ain't gotta tell you, of course not. Of course not. Never. You never saw any camaraderie. That's the first place we learned that we knew that we were different. You know that, over at Lincoln teachers would say, hold on a minute Thurman, I want to talk to you about that last quiz you took. Come here for a second, you know, you went down a little bit in your grades in your algebra class. Let's just talk about that, son, what's going on? You think they said anything to you? Think they said anything to you in the hall? You think they said anything to you at any other time, in the cafeteria? Come on. Never. It was, it was over and dead then, the war was on. We were surviving. We had ourselves though, we were all camaraderie. We checked on each other. We know who the worst racists was. It was a big move. Lincoln High School was a dream. It was inadequate, but we did the best we could with what we had. Did the best that we could with what we had. The love had always been, you know, it ain't me that's the guys that got shafted, it ain't my group that's been shafted. It's the ones afterwards. It's getting worse as it goes now. They don't even let the blacks in Chapel Hill do nothing now, the education system in Chapel Hill for the black students from the ghetto and the places in there, is gone. And guys like us, we ain't never going back. My wife wants to live in my hometown, and I tell her, I couldn't take it. You understand, I could not handle it. I couldn't take it. I have, you know, we come to Durham. I really see, my son's in law school now, my oldest son. I'd rather for him to walk through the walls at Hillside where there's something still real that hasn't been diluted.

RG: Is Hillside mostly black?

TC: Yeah, it was an all-black school.

RG: Well I knew it was all-black, is it still mostly?

TC: Mostly yeah, uh-huh.

RG: They didn't close Hillside.

TC: Hillside got a brand-new school. They closed the old school, we're trying to do something now, trying to open up the gym so we can do something there with

these kids, do some more things. Listen, I can't even tell you. Some of us saw things differently. Keith wanted me to talk to you.

RG: I appreciate it.

TC: Yeah, because I'm a fighter for real.

RG: I can see that.

TC: I'll talk to you, my wife and I, we are in the struggle now for real.

RG: So you're still committed

TC: 'Til the day I leave here. I want my, look, blacks have got to own things in this country. It's ridiculous. You can't even own a home. You walk in to get a home, you can't even talk to a loan officer. It depends on how they're feeling that day, if they gonna, they may got their quota of all they're going to let own a home in Durham, or in Chapel Hill. Or the people that's been over there in the Northside area for years, and let somebody come in and buy up all the property. Nothing's going to remain black in Chapel Hill, they're going to destroy the black community. The black community is on its way out. It's unbelievable. Just unbelievable.

RG: How many in your graduating class who were black went on to college?

TC: It was a big group. It was a big group. Good God, I mean...it was a big group of us.

RG: Did you see that at Lincoln also, that a significant percentage went on to get a college education?

TC: Sure, we, oh God, A&T, and, you know, we had people who were going everywhere.

RG: Did they have any record in the school, a bulletin board or something, where you could see who had gone to college?

TC: Well you gotta understand, in the '60s, early '60s and late '60s, hey, the universities were highly more racist than the high school level. So going to the universities was, is a no-no. So where you going, you gonna go to North Carolina Central College, or you gonna go to A&T? You're not going to go to the University of North Carolina, 'cause they're hand-picking everybody they take. I mean, they got a big basket to choose from. I mean, you got a goody-goody student over there, then send 'em on to us. You understand. I got a scholarship to the University of North Carolina. Me, Rick Lanier, gonna make us the first group of black football players in 1967. I wasn't interested in that. I knew how they were going to treat them. I walked through there every day, I knew how they

treated you at the University of North Carolina. So, gotta go somewhere where some blacks have already made a pay.

RG: What, I understand that there was some association between the football players from the University of North Carolina and Lincoln High School. Did they help in the coaching, did they come to see you play, did they give you some equipment?

TC: They came to see us play.

RG: Uh-huh.

TC: Because nobody could believe about this high school team. But other than that they didn't do nothing. They never coached us. Not one single day, never been a white man out on the field.

RG: Did they arrange for scrimmages between Lincoln High and Chapel Hill High down at the University?

TC: No.

RG: Not when you were there.

TC: Not while I was there. I don't know what went on before me, you know. I'll tell you, we could've beat Carolina

RG: I'll tell you, looking at you right now I don't doubt it.

TC: Could've beat Carolina. They didn't have nothing, they didn't have a thing.

RG: What was your team record, 60... '66, or the, the spring of '66, so that would be the fall of '65 was your last football team.

TC: At Chapel Hill High School. Or, at Lincoln High School.

RG: Yeah.

TC: Oh. I think we were 11 and 1, 10 and 1, something like that. I think we, 10-0-1, I think we tied Merritt Moore that year for the first time. Yeah.

RG: Was Merritt Moore a 4A school?

TC: It was a 3A then. It was 3A. We played over in Durham County Stadium. Yeah. We, we were the horses.

RG: Did you win the state championship that year?

TC: We didn't win that year. The year before and the year before that had been state championship years. We lost out in the state championship in 1966.

- RG: So you had won two state championships in a row.
- TC: Had probably been about four in a row up to that point. Maybe five. I'm telling you. It was like that. They destroyed all our trophies. Took the trophies over there, then threw them away. I mean, that was cold-blooded. That wasn't, I mean here's the school system, took the trophies from Lincoln, threw them away. We can't even go look and see a trophy of—threw them away. It's unreal.
- RG: I hear they recovered some in the trash.
- TC: Did they?
- RG: And I know that Diane Pledger, Diane Peerman Pledger has some of them.
- TC: Oh good. Diane's like a sister to me, I see her all the time. Yeah.
- RG: A week from Saturday her sister's coming down from New Jersey.
- TC: Good, good. Talk about, I'm, they'll tell you who their brother was. Peerman, he's my man. He treated me, my man.
- RG: Like a father.
- TC: That's right. My man. I'm his boy.
- RG: Tears in your eyes.
- TC: That's right. He's my man.
- RG: What was it about him that made him so close to you?
- TC: Changed my life. My ninth grade year, he changed my life. I was a tough boy, 'cause I grew up tough. Very tough. I wasn't, outside of my home I was tough. Inside my home I knew the rules. So when I was on the school property I was tough, I was a tough boy. So I guess I, the teachers, I was kicking some boy's ass. Peerman come up to me and told me hey, shook me around a little bit and told me hey, you need to come out for football. This ain't, this ain't the way. And for some reason he and I sort of bonded that day. And he designed everything for me from then on. Captain of the team, I'm the leader. I remember what he gave me. It was just—
- RG: Did you consider yourself a leader before Coach Peerman got a hold of you?
- TC: Yeah, sure, in my neighborhood. I was the man. I'm the front guy, you know, we're playing JV ball and sandlot ball, I'm the go-to guy. So you know. I'm not going to let the big guys talk to my partners. You know, I'm probably the biggest guy in my group or next to the biggest guy in my group. So I had to make the,

I'm a stand-up guy. Stand-up guy. At home, you know all the parties were at my house, we had everything at my house. That type of, a lot of friends, now. I tell you, Keith, she knows who I am. Yeah, Keith know who I am. She know I'm taking names. I'm not going to let them walk away with it. No way. I ain't letting the bad boys in, no matter who they are, you're not good, you can't come in. You don't have an X on your hand, stay outside. That's the way it works. I got children now. The most important thing to me are my kids. I'm raising them to be leaders. To be economically sound in this country. To be able to create jobs for their brothers and their sisters.

RG: Speaking of economics, when you were growing up, did you see many black businessmen in the community?

TC: Oh, there was nobody else. I mean, I got my hair cut at a black barbershop. You know, the barber and the mortician were the biggest, that's the only thing they'll let you have in the black community is the barbershop and the morticians. So, but yeah, that was, Preston Weaver had a shoe, I mean, Franklin Street was about black at one time. Let's not forget that.

RG: Yeah. In what, the '30s?

TC: I'm not sure when they changed it over, but you know. Just don't forget that. Hey, like I said. Black man making money in America, you know that's out. Come on now. That's out. That's—

RG: Don't you feel as though they've made some progress?

TC: You want the truth?

RG: Yeah.

TC: No. It's, man, they can't do enough. It's the worst. It's the worst. I mean, everybody, black man in this country, I mean you know, you can't even go in the bank and get nothing. Don't you understand?

RG: You had trouble getting a loan even today

TC: Sure, I mean, you know. I thank God for Centura, at Centura another black man gave me a loan and we're on, you know. Been successful ever since, so I do all my business with them. But you understand, come on man. This country, black guy, they give a black—look. First of all, did the black woman go to college and did the black guy go to prison. Let's get this thing straight. The white man will get the black woman a job, she can work for him as long as he's there. He ain't giving the black man no job. We all, look, we all went out and got college educations and then they said there weren't no jobs. Come on now.

RG: So you lost a generation and a half, maybe two generations of college-educated blacks from this community, is the way I see it. Talking to people.

TC: Oh, listen. I could tell you, most people in Chapel Hill, mealy mouths, it's the worst place I ever been as far as backbone. For real, now. I don't know about what any of the, I don't know about who, Harold Foster is the only stand-up guy that I speak on of all the names that you've named off on there. I wouldn't slate another person on there, another anything. 'Cause I don't think there's another person that got another backbone to do anything. That's my opinion. My opinion. And the real fight has never got mentioned. Again, you know. It's okay in the community, I mean, you know, they let the white, the white man always give a few blacks a little something to keep them, keep the salt in the pepper. But you know, some of us guys know that it's all B.S. Pure B.S. You know. It's going on right now. My son, he told me he's going to become a chemical engineer, I told him you must be kidding. How many chemical engineers you know black. Uh-uh, you going to law school. Continue the law business we got started. That's where you going. You're going to create some jobs. You don't know how to take care of yourself. Got a bigger fight to fight, man. It's a big fight. You know, Florida can change the vote. Come on now. I've been out there. I've worked in Washington. I know that the Lord has blessed me, I know I'm blessed. I've worked in New York, I've worked all over.

RG: What are you doing now?

TC: Dedicated family father to my children. Dedicated. (Aside: I'll be there in a minute, honey. Okay, I'll be there in a little bit.)

RG: I could ask you some more questions, but you've given me so much already. I really appreciate it. Thank you very, very much.