

Interviewee: Carman Weathers

Interviewer: David P. Cline

Interview date: August 3, 2005

Location: Louisville, Kentucky

Length: 4 discs; approximately 3 hours and 1 minute

### **START OF DISC 1, TRACK 1**

DC: Okay, great. This is David Cline and I'm in Louisville, Kentucky on August the third with Mr. Carman Weathers. If you want to just introduce yourself and then maybe launch right into this family background.

CW: My name is Carman Weathers. I'm a native Louisvillian and I was telling Mr. Cline the uniqueness of my position is that my family has been in Jefferson County, in Louisville since as far as we can go back, to 1845.

DC: Do you mind if I pull a chair up here?

CW: No.

DC: I want to make sure it gets me too.

CW: Not at all.

DC: Maybe sit a little closer together.

CW: So I have been kind of first-hand with this situation for a long time. Secondly, I was in the Louisville public school system before it was Jefferson County and I've kind of had a unique perspective of seeing things unfold over the years. So that kind of gives me some insight. You know—

DC: What year were you born?

CW: I was born in 1936. I have a birthday coming up pretty soon.

DC: Two years after my dad.

CW: One of the things that's unique is that I have seen the thing unfold from strict segregation to voluntary integration, or desegregation, to the current plan that we have. Through it all I have seen, in my estimation, progress or lack of progress of black children and that's ultimately where my concerns were over the last fifteen to twenty years.

DC: So were you born here?

CW: Born right here. Of course, I've been other places also, but my family as I said initially, have been here since 1845. So we kind of have a stake in what goes on here. I mean we're not immigrants, we didn't come in; we've just been here.

DC: And where did you go to school?

CW: I went to Central High School.

DC: Which elementary schools?

CW: I went to S.T. Taylor Elementary School. I went to Madison Junior High School and Central High School. Needless to say, I'm always reminded and people tell me that this is not the same Central that exists now, that existed when you were there and I understand that. This is not the same world that exists now. (laughter) So for you to think that I think that things are exactly the same is—I won't comment on that. Ridiculous. But what I do know, that the same problems that existed then, exist now and the same cultural and social impediments that get in the way of black development that existed then, exist now.

DC: What problems specifically?

CW: Well what I'm saying is that this is just Carman Weathers's theory.

DC: Lay it on me.

CW: 1865, when the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteen Amendment were [created], all those amendments did was tell us or point us in a direction. Six to eight million people were let go and did not have a plan. We were told now you're suddenly free and you can compete, which everybody knew was fallacious at best. How could you compete and you had been on this soil in slavery for three hundred years? And as a result of that non-competitive stance that we came out of slavery with, we still have not ever been able to compete. Because in my view, the biggest impediment to our advancement on these shores is our victimhood then and now. See the victimhood of black people did not stop; a lot of people assume that. Legally there was no reason for you to feel like you were a victim, but the culture and the social fabric of this nation had already built a place for you, a niche for you and your victimhood. My contention is that that exists today. I mean how else can you explain the position that we're in when you measure us by every other ethnic group in this country? We're either innately stupid or something else is impacting on us.

You don't want to deal with what's impacting on us because that involves cost. See to say we could ride on the bus involved no cost at all. To say that we could vote, to say that we could do all the things that you allowed us to do as a result of the civil rights legislation, involved no cost. But every time cost or that you have to give up something—when I say “you,” I mean America, the people that make decisions—every time we have insisted that you pay some cost, you have reneged and we find ourselves in 2005, you refusing to pay the cost and me having to pay the cost of you not paying the cost with my underdevelopment as a people. Of course, you didn't come for these speeches.

DC: No, well I'm interested in the theory of Carman Weathers. Did it develop over time or...? Where did you come to your commitments?

CW: Well yeah, that's a good question. See I was a civil righter, I believed that. I believed in the goodness of people, that all you needed to do what to see that we had the same aspirations and we shared the same birthright, all you had to do was find it out and then you would voluntarily take all of these impediments from me and consequently, as a result of my drive and my initiative, that I would be able to overcome. Obviously, I was wrong because that hasn't happened. As we go on, you see more rigid impediments being put into place and people that used to be quote "on the line in the civil rights war" are no longer soldiers. In fact, they stopped being soldiers and then they started being spectators and now they are soldiers again but not in defense of America. So you see, I've seen this transformation and we call it a lot of things. We call it conservatism, we call it democrats, but it's all goes down to one thing: finding their place and everybody else's place in this country. That's what has happened to us.

DC: So what do you do to keep on fighting?

CW: What do I do? I do everything that I can do. I volunteer. Well let me show you, let me tell you about Carman's war record. (laughter) Yeah, my war record. About fifteen-twenty years ago, I was in the public school system and my colleagues used to say—

DC: As a teacher?

CW: Yeah. Of course, that's about the best I could do at the time because I was at war constantly with the system. I used to write an article about once every two or three months in the paper and people would say, how can you maintain your job when you're attacking the school system? Well I didn't see that I had to be apologetic to the school system as a way of maintaining my job. In fact, I have always felt like if I were qualified for a job in the Jefferson County public school system, my political views had *nothing to*

do with my fitness for the job. So I didn't see myself as being threatened by my politics. Other people saw me as being threatened by my politics, but I never have. Otherwise I wouldn't have written all the articles and things that I did criticizing the superintendent and the administration and their policies.

So a long time ago, I became an advocate for what I thought was the right path, the right set of policies to do some things for my people. Now and I don't want to sound colloquial by saying "my people," white people do not need Carman Weathers to look out for them. They have always been in a position to look out for themselves. It's me and my group that have never had people in a position to look out for them. So that's what I choose to do. I choose to talk about black issues because black issues did not have the people to look out for black issues that black issues needed. A long time ago, I understood that I would never go far in Jefferson County public schools in terms of going up the ladder, in terms of the administration and da da da da da, because I made those decisions early on that I was going to speak the truth to power and that that would be a price that I would have to pay and I willingly paid that price. So I'm not going to talk about all the people who entered the system at the same time I did and came out principals and superintendents and everything and are in some instances, less qualified. I have two masters degrees, so on paper, I'm qualified to do a lot of things that I was never allowed to do. But there's one thing I was allowed to do through me being who I am and that was speak out on behalf of my people. A lot of people didn't do that.

DC: Yeah, and that kept you from being promoted up the ladder?

CW: Oh course it did. In other words, it got me in a backhanded sort of way, one of the reasons you're here talking to me now is because of that. The superintendent who I had been so critical of decided that he was going to shut me up, so he put me on a monitoring

committee to look at the current student assignment plan. That's how Carman Weathers got on the monitoring committee.

DC: Which superintendent was that?

CW: Ingwerson.

DC: Can we back up just a second? I want to just get the chronology right to how you came to teaching. So Central grad and then went to JSU to play football and got your B.A. there in what year?

CW: '58.

DC: '58. Okay and then what did you do?

CW: I coached one year in Gulfport, Mississippi. I was a basketball coach. I was a basketball player in high school too so it didn't matter. I was assistant football coach but my basketball team was in the run-off in the state of Mississippi. I decided that I needed to get a masters degrees so I went to Detroit where I have family and I got a masters at Wayne State University. Then I was still convinced that I was going to be the greatest coach that ever was and I tried it for about the next ten or twelve years.

DC: What was the masters in?

CW: Physical education.

DC: So you'd been coaching?

CW: Yeah, but there was no coaching for me in the state of Kentucky. We only had one head football coach in the whole state and I think we have two now. I want to say that again. We had one then and we have two now.

DC: Black head coaches?

CW: Right. We had one then and fifty or forty of the—we have two, the second one being we have two here in Louisville, Kentucky.

DC: What do you think about that?

CW: Well I don't need to think about it. (laughter) What do you think about it?

DC: It doesn't show a hell of a lot of change, does it?

CW: We had one then and we've got two now. Of course, there's no denying our representation on the football teams but-- So anyway, I went back to my alma mater to coach for four or five years. Then I became--

DC: At Central?

CW: No, I went back to Jackson State.

DC: Oh, to Jackson State.

CW: That was during Bear Bryant's [time], you know I'm just telling how I arrived at certain points in my life.

DC: That's good. That's what I want to know.

CW: While I was at Jackson State, we had seventeen young men to be drafted in one year. It's never been done before -- signed and drafted as free agents, we had seventeen. SC-Southern Cal, at that point in time, was the national champion and they had eight. So it gives you an idea. We had twenty-four percent of the NFL draft came from eight historically black colleges in the Southwest Conference. That's Tennessee State, Gramling, Jackson State, Valley State, Alcorn, Texas Southern, Arkansas, and Prairie View; from those schools, twenty-four percent of the entire NFL draft. Okay and at that point, people began to make some decisions about this and one of the people that helped to make decisions was Bear Bryant, who was the current coach at the University of Alabama. At that point in time, Alabama played Southern Cal in Tuscaloosa. Southern Cal had a running back named Sam Bam Cunningham, who scored six touchdowns on Alabama. This is rumor, that Bear made the statement of "where is my ni \_\_\_\_? If this one can beat

me, don't we have any in Alabama?" And somebody says, "You have a lot of them in Alabama." And from that point on, historically black colleges were doomed. Because we'd had seven kids out of Mobile, and we never got the top one out of Mobile again after that, after he had made that decision. Of course, it was a snowball [effect]. After he made the decision in Alabama, every school in the Southeastern Conference made a similar decision. Up until that time, we had those kids. So after about a couple more years, I said this is going to take me not where I really want to go. With the energy that you have to expend and the dedication you have to have, is this really what I want to do? So I decided to come home and I came to Louisville and I've been here involved in this struggle, one way or another, since that point in time.

DC: About what year was that, do you remember, when you came back?

CW: I came home in '72.

DC: And started teaching in the—

CW: Yeah, at Russell Junior High School. It was Russell. When I attended, it was Madison.

DC: Oh okay. It had changed--

CW: Same junior high school. The first problem we had is they decided it was old and they wanted to close it and they had a very good reason for wanting to close it. If they closed it, then all the black kids that were there could help integrate all the white schools that were not going to be closed.

DC: They were going to have to go somewhere else, right.

CW: So we haven't had a white school closed for that reason.

DC: How many black schools did close, do you remember?

CW: Well—

DC: I know there were quite a few, right.

CW: Let me put it in another way to you. In the whole west end of Louisville where ninety percent of all your black people live, there is not but two middle schools. So what that means is if you're a middle school student, you've got to get on the bus. Right there at that corner right there, eight buses pick up kids, eight buses. So that means that the kids who live in this neighborhood go to eight different ones. I'm not opposed to that if getting on that bus would mean that you're going to close the gap intellectually, the achievement gap. But to put my kids on that bus, send them on an hour-and-a-half or two-hour ride and they come back just as ignorant, even more so because they get on the bus and they arrive and they are not in a classroom with the other kids, with the white kids who live in that neighborhood. So they're only integrated in the restrooms and the lunchrooms, and so I fought against that. It doesn't make sense to me. It seems like it's wasted effort. So I became an opponent of the student assignment plan.

DC: Have you seen changes over time in that?

CW: It's not any better now than it was. It's more of the same. Here's what you have to ask yourself. Has black kids getting on a bus going to suburbia helped them intellectually? If it has, then put them on the bus. If it hasn't, then you need to find a new approach, and it hasn't. Of course, this school system understands that, but they want to be user-friendly to white parents. They do not want to threaten white parents, okay. Black people don't have any place to run. They can't take their kids out of public schools and put them in private schools, but the suburbs can. So this system decided that it was going to not scare white parents. It was not going to do anything to make white parents take their kids out of the school system. That meant sacrificing black kids. They went to court and said it's a compelling interest for us to diversify. The compelling interest is for you to

educate those children that you have been mandated to educate. Damn it. You ain't mandated to be a social worker. You're mandated to educate my children. You went to court and the courts agreed with them, all except Central. We won our suit, but the compelling interest is that diversity and it looks good. On paper, we're integrated. Yeah, in the lunchroom and in the restroom. You're not integrated in the classroom. This is what they have done.

DC: This is one thing that I am interested in, the terms "desegregation" and "integration," they're not the same thing.

CW: No, and here's what you have to understand here, though. Here it's ridiculous. In other words, Jefferson County, what they did is this: they created attendance zones. Now there's no attendance zone for the west end. The attendance zone exists in only neighborhoods where whites are in the majority. So what that means is that if you're a white student and you decide that you want to attend your home school, it's open for you because the fifteen-to-forty integration can go fifteen-to-forty. What that means is according to housing patterns and the number of people moving in and out of the neighborhood, that the number of blacks in each of these attendance zones can be adjusted to the number of whites that want to go to the home school. The more whites who decide to go to the home school, the fewer blacks that are bused. So we are a commodity. We are fuel that drives this integration. I'll take a few more of the unfortunates this time, fifteen-to-forty, in other words. But never—see we keep three high schools open. Integration keeps three high schools that normally would be closed because people in those neighborhoods are not having babies and they don't warrant having a high school, but if they can reach down into the west end and get more of us, we can keep that high school open.

DC: You see that as part of their motivation?

CW: Of course it is.

DC: Which high schools are those?

CW: Atherton, Wagner, probably J-Town.

DC: These are suburban high schools?

CW: Yes. They went after the....

### **END OF DISC 1, TRACK 1**

### **START OF DISC 2, TRACK 1**

CW: High schools where they don't have the—that people are moving into and they don't have the kids there to warrant keeping the high school open, but they're open. As long as they can come down there and get twenty-five, thirty percent, they're open.

DC: So you came back in '72; did Russell close? Is that one of the ones that closed?

CW: Yeah. We fought it. We managed to keep it open for three years and the reason they said that it should close was because it was old. I'm wondering would that same logic apply to Harvard?

DC: Yes, sir, yeah.

CW: If it's old, close it. But they closed it and closed two other middle schools in the west end since then. Parkland's closed; it was old too. And now if you're a middle school student and you live in the west end, you don't have but one that you can go to, that's over here at Western, and the rest of them you have to be bused to.

DC: So '75, it closed the same year that—

CW: No, it closed in '75, the same year that the new busing plan that we're under right now came into existence. The reason it closed then, see they went through the back door, is because the city system was no longer in charge.

DC: Right, because of the merger.

CW: Right, merger came. So we had stopped the city system from closing it for three years.

DC: Oh and then, I get it.

CW: So during that summer when we were in limbo, we didn't know who was going to be in charge of the system, da da da, they closed it.

DC: Were you given any warning?

CW: No. You just read in the paper one day that Russell would no longer be a school. In the middle of the summer, we couldn't rally parents or kids like we had done. Then let me tell you what else. I left to go to—they sent me to Thomas Jefferson High School. It seems like it always follows me. Thomas Jefferson was, without busing, the most integrated high school of the twenty-three high schools in Jefferson County. Here's why it was integrated. They built Thomas Jefferson High School right on the boundary of a white neighborhood and a black neighborhood, natural integration. Nobody had to be bused. And it worked. It was the best high school, really. I saw some good things there. It had some good leadership. I believe in when I see good leadership saying it was good leadership. It was led by a principal named Whitaker. Good leadership.

DC: Was it an integrated faculty too?

CW: Everything, everything. Let me tell you what happened. As long as Thomas Jefferson was doing alright and integrated—it was right in the Newburg area. I don't know whether you—

DC: I'm learning.

CW: Okay, the Newburg area is a black enclave that really didn't belong there. It's just like it's there, right in the middle of this sea of whiteness. It's a holdover from slavery, that slaves were given little parcels of land and da da da da da, and encouraged to stay there so they serve their used-to-be masters. We have three or four communities around Louisville like that: Barrytown, Griffithtown, and Newburg. Barrytown and Griffithtown served the Anchorage area where the most affluent live, in Anchorage. Back to Thomas Jefferson, so they said we could use Newburg's black folk in any number of ways. So the first thing they did is they took like maybe twenty percent of them and they put them to an adjacent high school, which was Durrett. Durrett is now closed and they put Male there.

DC: Right, okay.

CW: Where Male is now, that used to be Durrett.

DC: They moved into that building.

CW: Right. So what happened was that they come up with this plan.

DC: And that was a traditionally black high school before?

CW: What?

DC: Traditionally black?

CW: Traditionally white.

DC: Traditionally white, okay.

CW: Right. No black people were in Durrett. So what happened was they looked at four high schools and they said, we don't have enough blacks, but if we close one high school and take the blacks that are there, split them up four ways, we exempt four high schools instead of one. So the high school in the county that was the most integrated, that had most integrated the longest, that had the greatest history, they decided that that high

school could no longer exist because they needed us black people. So they closed it, just closed it. So when they closed it, they took the black people and made four other suburban high schools, who did not have enough blacks, exempt. And they're exempt today.

DC: So that was Thomas Jefferson and they closed—

CW: Made it a middle school.

DC: I was going to say I thought, yeah I knew the name was still around.

CW: Yeah, made it a middle school. So now—

DC: When was that?

CW: That was '81.

DC: That was '81 and you were still there?

CW: From '75 to '81.

DC: What did you teach?

CW: I ran a program called Occupational Work Experience, OWE. What this program was, it was a state program for kids who were having difficulty and we tried to take those kids, identify them, and get them into jobs while they were working. Really it was Big Brother. It was compensatory. It was a thing that the state of Kentucky saw as being needed to give these kids a leg-up, a jump-start, highly successful.

DC: And was business involved too?

CW: Yeah. I was a coordinator. In other words, I went to school with them four hours a day and then two hours a day, I tried to locate work for them or see that they got certain services. They have another thing, they call them home school coordinators now. I mean the state did that and put those home school coordinators, but that's really the same principal that was involved.

DC: Did you have black and white kids with you in your program?

CW: Yes. Yeah, yeah. Highly successful.

DC: Did you coach also?

CW: Well let me, oh that's really funny. I refused to coach football and basketball, but I did coach track and I probably had maybe fifteen to twenty individual state champions. Every time I quit, I got hijacked again, so I coached it. That's really funny. I coached at four or five—four, I coached at TJ [Thomas Jefferson], I coached at Shawnee, I coached at Manual, and I coached at Moore. So I coached at four high schools and I had state champions at all of them. So the individual principals would ask me and I'd say no, I'm not being bothered with that bullshit again and I'd get sucked into it when the kids need you. So I don't know why you asked that question about coaching. I didn't tell you about—

DC: Well you're an athlete and you had coached before, so I thought they would keep hitting you up for it.

CW: Yeah, and they did. I didn't tell you about my experience in Hopkinsville.

DC: No.

CW: Okay, let me tell you. I told you that there were only two people that were head coaches in the state of Kentucky. Hopkinsville is about a hundred and eighty miles from here. It's a little hotbed of athleticism. Every year, a team from Hopkinsville is doing something statewide, whether it be basketball, football, track. And there's a very good reason for that. I don't want to sound racist but Hopkinsville has the highest percentage, Christian county has the highest percentage of black people in the whole state, the reason being that blacks worked those tobacco fields down there during the Civil War.

DC: And what direction is it from Louisville?

CW: It's in western Kentucky. It's really southwest of here. It's down on the Tennessee line, down near Fort Campbell. Let me go to Hopkinsville for you.

DC: Okay, please.

CW: Are you tired of hearing these Carman stories?

DC: No, that's why I'm here. I'm here for the Carman stories. (laughter)

CW: Okay, so the principal—

DC: I got plenty of time.

CW: Okay the principal at Hopkinsville, somebody told him that I was a good coach and we went to the state tournament. And he asked me would I come to Hopkinsville. Incidentally—

DC: This is when now?

CW: This is before I had come to Louisville. This is before I go back to my alma mater to work. This is after I get my masters degree. Then I come home, you understand what I'm saying, and he hires me in Hopkinsville. He's one of the few black principals left. There were forty-three black principals and when they integrated all the schools in the state of Kentucky, not one of those forty-three black principals were made a black principal. So forty-three black principals who were all qualified high school principals were wiped out. This is one of the last black schools in the state, this is Attucks, so I'm there at Attucks.

DC: Attucks?

CW: Attucks High School, named after Crispus Attucks. They have a head coach who's been their basketball coach, who's been there twenty-five years, and a head football coach who's had thirty years in the system. So I went there as an assistant in both basketball and football. The football coach was also the track coach. The two high schools in Christian county, one is the county school system, the other, Hopkinsville High, is the

city school system. These are two distinct school districts. If you're in the city school district, you have all the blacks in Christian county. The county school system has no black people, so the county schools pay the city schools to educate their kids. I'm letting that sink in. All the black people in Christian county, their children go to Attucks. I needn't tell you about the dominance of the teams, right? So the people at Hopkinsville High say we can't get to the state every year. Paducah knocks us out or Owensboro knocks us out, and the reason they knock us out is that they have their--, and we don't have our--. So how you can we get our--? So they say well, you can get them if you say to Attucks they can no longer support football.

DC: Rough, yeah.

CW: So they have a board meeting one night and they said now you can stay open, but you cannot support football. We want your football players.

DC: So they just closed the program?

CW: Football, closed it down. Took the head coach, who'd been coaching thirty years, I told you about him, and he was the track coach, and put him over there and he became the locker room towel boy.

DC: At the county school?

CW: At the city school.

DC: Okay, at the city school.

CW: At the city school, right. So when the county said uh uh, you can't have them all because some of *them* technically belong to us, so we want our *you-know-who*. I'm sitting in a high school that can't play football that's still dominating in basketball because the basketball players wouldn't leave.

DC: Did the football players leave?

CW: Yeah, they left. And Hopkinsville won five straight state championships with the kids that they got from Attucks.

DC: Right, and did they keep their white coach that they had had?

CW: Oh yes, Coach of the Year in the state of Kentucky for three of the five years. Okay? So, the county school said we want ours too, so we're sitting on a school that just has these fragments left. The principal asked me to take the track team. To make a long story short, I took the track team and won the state championship by one point. Now I got a little status now.

DC: That's a story I want to hear later.

CW: Huh?

DC: I'll listen to that story later. I want to hear that story.

CW: Yeah, I won it by one point.

DC: I used to run track.

CW: The thing that kills you about that one point, I got another one point story to tell you too, was that on the eight-hundred-meter relay there was this question. It was a photo finish. If they declare me the winner, I win by one point. If they declare me second, I lose by one point. So that was a controversy.

Back to Attucks, while I was at Attucks another thing happened that kind of put a stamp on me is that they printed the salaries in the paper. I looked in the paper and a young football coach at Hopkinsville High was making more money than me, was making more money than another black assistant at Attucks. So we asked our principal could we go see the superintendent? He said certainly. We went over, to make a long story short, we argued and argued and he cursed and told us it was his responsibility to determine the worth of people and the value and so on and so on, and the white people insisted that he pay them

more. I said well there are some laws that insist that you pay us the same. I'm not going to argue with you; I'm going to let my attorney argue with you. To make a long story short, we went back to school and the next year, we made more than the head coaches. So the next year, that's when they took the head coach over there, okay.

DC: Was it that conversation that did it or did you have to get an attorney involved?

CW: No, the conversation did it. But anyway, my principal is looking at this, okay, and he says to me I'm very glad you stood up. My time will come. He said I'm sure glad you stood up. When his time came, he said I refuse to be an assistant middle school principal. I want to be assistant superintendent because they merged the city and the county and knocked out Attucks and they wanted to make him the assistant principal at a middle school and he refused. A long story, though, but when Jefferson county was going through their things, you understand what I'm saying, they needed an experienced black administrator from out in the state and they choose him. So when I come home, now you understand what I'm saying, after I stayed at my alma mater coaching for five years, when I come home, my principal is now an assistant superintendent here in Jefferson county. He recommended me for a job as an administrator.

DC: What's his name?

CW: Frank Simpson.

DC: Oh I've heard, okay.

CW: You ought to talk to him. Highest percentage of kids—you know how many Rhodes Scholars I taught at Attucks?

DC: Four.

CW: And that's saying something from a little bitty town in Kentucky.

DC: In western Kentucky, yeah.

CW: I'm talking about Rhodes Scholars were—one of the times I taught the school anatomy and physiology and I taught anatomy and physiology on my planning period so our kids could have it, four of the kids in that class turned out to be Rhodes Scholars. He's always really felt good, Mr. Simpson, because his daughter was in that class; she was a Rhodes Scholar. I felt like our kids needed to have the same advantages, they needed to have the same exposure, so when they took their ACTs and SAT tests that they would at least have an opportunity to show. One of my Rhodes Scholars in here now in the state of Kentucky—I mean not the state of Kentucky; he's here in Louisville, Raymond Burse.

DC: So what do you think enabled those kids? Was it the teachers, the leadership?

CW: At Attucks?

DC: Yeah.

CW: Tradition too. An inordinate amount of kids from Attucks went to college. All-black faculty, good, strong, no-nonsense, get it. I mean that was a high school.

DC: What about discipline?

CW: Oh, we don't even want to mention discipline. I mean that was no-no. I really enjoyed that. So let me tell you what happened. When they stopped Attucks from being a high school, they didn't know what to do with me. They didn't know where to send me, to Hopkinsville High or Christian County High School. Since they were both in the same system and I was tenured, they had to have me, so they sent me to Christian County High School. I was for awhile the only black at Christian County High School. Five hundred blacks out of two thousand, and myself.

DC: The only black person on the faculty?

CW: Right, and of course, I made my obligatory proclamation that I am not here to be the black coach so don't bring me the black problems. Of course, you know what they did? They brought me all of the black problems. As best I could, I tried not to solve them. That's where the captain of my football team was Raymond Burse, who was the Rhodes Scholar that I'm talking about; he's here now. Maybe you ought to try to interview Raymond.

DC: He sounds interesting, yeah, definitely.

CW: Raymond went to Center College. You can tell him his old coach recommended it. We don't get along. Raymond was a past president of Kentucky State University. Raymond's politics, in my view, kind of changed.

DC: So you clash on that level?

CW: Hmm?

DC: You clash, you don't agree on that level?

CW: Right. Well you see, I have enough sense to understand that in different positions, some of my positions would have had to be different. I mean under different circumstances, some of my positions would have had to have been different, but I've been fortunate enough to always not be apologetic about being pro-African-American and doing the things that I think serve the best long-term and short-term interests of African-Americans. That may or may not be where I need to be, but I think, after having thought through, that this is where I need to be. So Raymond was the interim president of Kentucky State University. They had problems up there and he was a Rhodes Scholar. He was a very prominent lawyer, finished near the top of his class at Harvard Law, very influential. In a certain way, I admire him today, but our politics are quite different. So I see him, I run into him at meetings here and there and da da da. Well we haven't had any

relationship; we used to have a very good relationship. In fact, I signed him to a football scholarship to my alma mater, Jackson State. He was scheduled to go until the people in Hopkinsville decided that he need to go to Center. Whatever the circumstances were, you hear all kind of stories, I don't know. I know he asked me for a release and I released him from his football scholarship so he could play football at Center.

DC: So how long did you last then at Hopkinsville?

CW: You mean at Christian County High School?

DC: Christian County, sorry.

CW: Two years and then I went home. I went to Jackson State.

DC: Then there for five years and then here. So Frank Simpson was here at that point?

CW: Yeah and recommended me for a job. They needed black administrators in the county school system and he recommended me for a job. My politics didn't allow me to get the job because I talked to them just like I'm talking to you. That didn't go over well, so I didn't get the job.

DC: When did you first—have you always talked, speaking truth to power or is this—

CW: All my life, because people always ask me that question and as I look back, all my life. I was encouraged to by my family and I saw no need to not do that.

DC: Can you tell me just a little bit about that family environment that nurtured that in you?

CW: Yes. My hero, heroine was my great-grandmother who reared me. My father was there before World War II, but he went off to World War II, so you're talking I had to be nine or ten years old before he became really an influence. He came back here and he

moved to Detroit and my great-grandmother kept me. She was my inspiration. She encouraged me to do basically everything that I think important educationally. Education was very important. I was reared in a housing project.

DC: What part of town?

CW: Beecher Terrace. You know where Beecher Terrace is?

DC: In Beecher Terrace.

CW: Mmm hmm, 1010 Fisk Court. I could run right out of my front door and run two blocks and I'd be at Central High School, run right through Eleventh Street. I went to S.C. Taylor. That's the school that's right across from Central now, but at that time, it was in the housing project. They built around it. Yeah, they built around schools when they were building public housing, built around schools and churches. That church at Eleventh and Muhammad Ali, that's where I played. Our Merciful Savior.

DC: What was the project like in those days?

CW: I was just going to tell you. A microcosm of black Louisville. Next door was a college graduate. Two doors down the court was a physics PhD from Dartmouth and right next door to him could have been somebody who'd been in LaGrange Penitentiary. It was everything you wanted to be was there. If you wanted to find inspiration, you could find it -- to be a criminal or to be an intellect. The first blacks who attended two of the [military] academies from the state of Kentucky, the Naval Academy and West Point, grew up in Beecher Terrace. I was a part of that experience, knew them well, played with them. Everything you wanted to be was there: people on the move, people that were never going to move. So you had some clear choices as to what you wanted to be. It was there.

My great-grandmother who reared me insisted that, if you can believe this, I played the violin when I was in elementary [school]. (laughter) My girls get a big kick out of that

now when I talk about it. But then, I played the violin and I was also the state boxing champion at ninety-five pounds. This was quite a switcharoo and an only child, so you had to take care of business. I mean when you came out of the house, you had to understand that you might have to take a stand, that taking stand was part of your upbringing. So you were constantly called on to take a stand. I was reared in that environment.

DC: Was she your primary parent then, your great-grandmother?

CW: Yeah. Well you know, my dad was not there. He had moved to Detroit and I'd go up there during the summer, but he was an older brother. He didn't feel—this is speculative, I can't get inside—but he didn't feel like he could come down hard because he wasn't there all of the time. But she could come down hard because she was there all of the time and she came down hard. It was always what was expected; learning was valued, very much so.

DC: So she instilled that?

CW: Oh yeah, my love of learning. I have a grandson now who turned five yesterday. He's reading and I bought him one thing that was bought for me when I was five: an encyclopedia. He can name just about every European capital there is. He can name already all the capitals of all the states in the Union. He just turned five yesterday. That's my oldest daughter's child. Learning was always [paramount].

Another thing that happened, I don't know whether this is relevant or not, but I saw the way she responded to a lot of things and that was the key, I think, later on, whether conscious or unconscious, the way I responded to things. She was a domestic and she worked for this family and the family's children and I were the same age. So as little ones, we played together. I saw how she responded to that family and her lack of intimidation. I guess I've never been intimidated by people outside of my experience when I was growing

up. In other words, what I'm saying is white folks didn't overwhelm me, because I was never reared around them, but I was reared around them in the sense that I saw how she responded to them when I was growing up. They didn't make a decision without consulting her, so she had to have some sense, I used to always say. He was a lawyer. She helped kind of rear him and then she helped rear his children and they were my age. She taught his mother English when she came here from Germany.

DC: Did you have any interaction with those kids?

CW: Yes. Yeah, I played with them as much as you could play with kids. I mean we went out there. They would give us a big day once a year. Oh brother, I can remember when they discovered I could read. I remember my grandmother's response to reading. She used to always say to me: some of the things you can do, you needn't let everybody know you can do them. See I used to get all their books. All his—I won't call his name. He's a big attorney here. I'm not going to call his, I started to—but I used to get all his old books. When he got tired of them, they would give them to my grandmother to give to me. But when he found out I could read, I never got any more books. I got everything else, but I didn't get books anymore. That's another thing. We can all speculate as to why I didn't get any more books, but that was an experience for me.

DC: Why do you think?

CW: Why do I think? I don't know. I can speculate historically that one of the things that white America has always had a problem with is black intellect.

DC: He found that threatening?

CW: Yes. It always has been. Today they insist that well, let's look at the achievement level in terms of your worth and they know the achievement level's not going to be the same because you didn't start out the same. We have a legacy that we have never

been able to overcome in this country. The first thing you do when you're at war or when people have been kidnapped or victimized, you have a deprogramming, you deprogram them. You convince them that this experience should not impede your development from this point on. Black people have never been deprogrammed. What has happened to us is the same legacies about their inferiority that were present after the Civil War are still present, promoted by black people themselves unknowingly; they don't know that they promote that. The only way to get away from that is for black people do it. Nobody else can do that. We have to deprogram ourselves to our worth and we can't do that in schools controlled by white people because white people are not going to let you do it.

White people are not going to let you do anything that they deem advantageous to you. I don't say this because Carman says it. I say this because history says it. I mean I read history. History says that white people have been opposed to everything, every move that's ever been made in this country by black people that has been perceived to be advantageous; it has been opposed by white people. I don't need to say that; white people say that. I mean all the first books that I read were written by white people. It's just recently that black folks started reading so white people said that. I mean some little old person from France, what's his name, in 1840 said that. You know who I'm talking about.

DC: Yeah, yeah. It'll come to me in a second.

CW: Yeah, he said that in 1840. Carman didn't say that. I just look at it and agree with it. I mean there are certain things that are observable and that's one of them.

DC: Tocqueville.

CW: De Tocqueville, yeah. He came over here to evaluate democracy and he's so intuitive because here it is again all of these many years later—Alexis De Tocqueville,

right. I'm just using what you have said and if you look educationally, you look at all of Dewey's tenets, educationally you may begin to understand.

I fought for Central and this is why I fought for Central. I fought for Central, not for Central that was, but for the Central that could be. That I see Central with the proper leadership as being the only high school that could adequately deal with the problems present among black students. I see that because other schools are not going to do it.

DC: And how could Central do that?

CW: It can do it because it can say, since most of its students are black, it can become an educational problem, not a racial problem.

DC: Right, I get it.

CW: At other schools, it can never become an educational problem. It always has to be a racial problem because we're in a minority. You have to see Central as different and if you don't see it as different, you're either blind or a fool. It's different for any number of reasons. It's different because of its historical mandate and it's also different because of its population. It's also different because of its proximity to the black community. And it's also different because of its potential for good and bad. So it's different. It's not just another Jefferson County public school. You've got to be crazy if you don't understand what I just said. I'm not talking to—I'm saying that to certain people. You understand what I'm saying? If you don't understand what I just said, you're either dumb or you're crazy as hell. It's different. It's not another school and it can never, for the sake of its history, be just another school. Do you understand? Listen to me: do you understand? Here I am again being profound. Central is the only historically black high school left in the state of Kentucky.

DC: In the whole state, yeah.

CW: And they want to close it, this current superintendent, because what it is, it messes up the plan, okay. If we get rid of Central, we have fourteen-fifteen hundred kids that we can put anywhere. And then we don't have to—

DC: Same idea you were saying before.

CW: Same idea.

DC: Spreading out the black students in white schools.

CW: Same idea. Then we don't have to confront you as a unit. Central can be a battering ram.

## **END OF DISC 2, TRACK 1**

## **START OF DISC 2, TRACK 2**

CW: See, it's much easier to confront people as a school than it is as an individual. Yeah so funny thing about Central, when I graduated from Central, there was but one school in the whole state of Kentucky that had on its faculty everybody with a masters degree, just one. That was Central.

DC: That was Central, incredible. What year was that, that you graduated?

CW: '54.

DC: '54, and everyone had a masters degree. Was it an all-black faculty?

CW: All-black. I'm going to venture to say this now. Now I'll bet you in the whole South, there wasn't a high school that had everybody in the high school faculty have a masters degree, but Central. If it were, it was another black school because we had some giant black schools then. But Central, everybody, okay. Now these were not masters degrees from Okolona University. These were masters degrees from the proximity graduate schools and the proximity graduate schools then were Big Ten schools, masters degrees from Indiana University. My principal had three masters degrees from the

University of Chicago. Now you might ask why he had three masters degrees from the University of Chicago and not a PhD. It's because he felt that if he had a PhD, he'd lose his job because the damn superintendent didn't have a PhD. So he kept going back and getting masters degrees from the University of Chicago. Now as you well know, the University of Chicago does not pass out degrees. So for a black man to come up in the 20s and 30s and 40s and 50s with three masters degrees from the University of Chicago--. Omar Carmichael, who was the superintendent at the time, was not Dr. Omar Carmichael. We've always had to hide how intelligent we were. It's threatening. See that's a part of that accomodationist stance that we had to take. See that's what was so—

[conversation breaks off as telephone rings]

#### **END OF DISC 2, TRACK 2**

#### **START OF DISC 2, TRACK 3**

CW: Where was I now? Oh, I was talking about—see black people always had to learn how to code-switch and learn how to have a face for blacks and a face for white America. One of the strategies always used by black folks was accomodationist. You see evidence of it now. You see evidence of it in our institutions. You see evidence of it in all things that cross racial lines; you see evidence of the accomodationist. I don't feel like I have to be an accomodationist, not in America. If I were in some other damn place, I could understand it, but ya'll been bullshitting me, y'all tell me—y'all—America tells me that I don't have to do that, that I can tell it like it is and that's what I do. People always apologize for me. They say oh here's Carman, as if that—

#### **END OF DISC 2, TRACK 3**

#### **START OF DISC 3, TRACK 1**

CW: That background gave you a whole lot of stories about how I arrived at where I am, but let me see if I can tell you how I see myself, because I think it's important that you lay how you see yourself on anything you do and then whoever's looking at it can get maybe a better idea of who you think you are, because that's what people always want to ask you. They have an idea of who you are, but they want to know who you think you are. So this is who I think I am. I think I am an American of African descent who is pretty informed, both culturally and historically, about his history and the history of his people in this country. Out of that comes some notions of where we ought to go and what we ought to do to overcome the current problems that are a result of the problems we've always had ever since we have been in proximity.

See there are the proximity problems that I like to call them. I mean if you've got a bullshit neighbor, you might not have a problem until you come into proximity with the bullshit neighbor. Our problem in America is we don't have problems, we have proximity problems. We have problems that arise as a result of our bumping up against white people. As long as we don't bump up against white people, the problem might be there but we don't see it or we don't have to deal with it. But the moment we get ready to bump up, we get what I call these proximity problems that are a result of not what I think of me, but what he thinks of him.

The reason I told you about what I think of me and how I see myself, because that always has to be laid on whoever I'm dealing with and what they think or how they see themselves. If you see yourself as an American, as a human being, and da da da da da, we're not going to have any problem. But if you see yourself as a recipient of white privilege, then we're going to have problems because I don't acknowledge that you deserve white privilege anymore than I deserve black privilege. We all, I think, deserve

American privilege, since that's what we all are. When you deal with folks, I like to tell people who I am before they decide who I am, because that's been a problem, I think, in America, that we have been using other peoples' definitions for ourselves, especially black people. We use those definitions now. We see ourselves as basketball players and rappers and singers and entertainers. I see myself as involved in a war, a struggle, don't see it ending because the adversaries are strong, entrenched, resourceful.

DC: How did you communicate this? I mean, you're in the position of being an educator and able to express that to your kids. How did you do that?

CW: You mean to—

DC: To introduce yourself in the way you did to me and to talk about this struggle.

CW: You mean in the classroom?

DC: Yeah.

CW: It was difficult. Yeah, that was difficult. Because it was ongoing. There were always events or instances where you could say well see, this is the result of this or that or so-and-so, and you had to explain it. On a one-on-one basis, you could do it. It was difficult to do it. Sometimes you could do it in a classroom, half-white and half-black, because some white kids are fair. They understand that you can spot shit without stepping in it. But some don't, some took me on and failed to see why that was relevant, sure. That didn't stop me from doing what I needed to do. If I was in a classroom and an opportunity presented itself for me to use this as a teaching technique or a teaching opportunity, I did.

DC: Did you get both support and resistance from parents?

CW: Yes, yes, yes.

DC: Can you tell me about that kind of stuff?

CW: Yes, always. You see, embedded somewhere, I don't know how deep it is in black people, is the accommodationist strategy. It has to be there because it allowed you to stay alive. There was a time when feeling like I've felt was hazardous to your health. So, in all of us is that accommodationist stance that we must have. Now how deep it is depends on the individual and the circumstances. There are any number of black people that look at me and say Carman, don't piss white people off, as if not pissing white people off will ensure that white people won't do what they want to do any damn way. So it's been my notion, it's been my *observation* that whether you piss white people off or not, they're going to do what they think is in their best interest. So I always try to do what I think is in my best interest, whether that involves pissing people off or not. That's how I operate.

DC: I want to talk about Central, but I just want to get your CV, your resume down first, because we only got as far as Thomas Jefferson.

CW: Okay.

DC: I just want to know where you taught and when.

CW: Okay, a friend of mine who is now over all security at Jefferson County Public Schools, Maurice Riseman, in fact I helped him get that job, was over Buechel, which was an alternative school populated by the worst in the system. He asked me to come and help him. I decided to come and that's where I spent my last ten years, Buechel Metropolitan. We had the best school in all of Jefferson county. We had the worst students to go there, because these were students who were there for assault and everything you can name that you can get put out of school, they sent to Buechel. They didn't have a ratio, so it was eighty or ninety percent black; the ratios don't stand up there. So I was there and I went back to teaching physical education.

DC: Now did they justify that because it was a special program?

CW: Yeah.

DC: Okay, alright.

CW: See they can justify any damn thing they want to justify. So I was there—

DC: What years?

CW: I came out in '93, so I was there from '83 to '93.

DC: And before that, you were at—

CW: Thomas Jefferson.

DC: Thomas Jefferson, alright. And retired in '93.

CW: Mmm hmm. So we had all these kids to come in and my principal used to say Carman, I'm going to let you run the orientation. When they would come in, he would allow me to come in and speak to the mothers and fathers; a parent had to bring them. I don't want to put him down or embellish what I do, but we worked together as a team. Part of what I did was to let them know that they were welcome there, that we were going to do all within our powers to see that the school system lived up to its mandate. We're going to try to educate you. We're going to do everything we can to make it go for you here, but the thing you have to understand is that we're not afraid of your ass, understand that first, and you're not going to intimidate anybody. If you come to school as a student, your experience here is going to be unbelievable. If you come in here as a bully, you're going to get your ass kicked and you're going to get locked up.

DC: So you meet them right at the door with that, yeah.

CW: We had more kids who did not want to go back to their school. They'd come in for like a semester, some would come in for a whole year, but they didn't want to go back because they didn't feel threatened, they learned. All the teachers there were on the same page. We just ran a good school.

DC: What was the racial breakdown of the faculty?

CW: About half—no, about a third black. Some good, strong teachers and he parlayed that principalship into he's over security for the whole system now, Maurice Riseman, a good man. I used to tell him all the time, we'd laugh and play, that damn it, I'm going to send you your tuition because I'm teaching your ass. (laughter) He used to say, oh here you go with your bullshit, Carman. (laughter)

DC: So you worked together.

CW: Oh we worked together well, well. I'm going to leave this with you, Carman. Yeah, we ran a good, tight ship.

DC: What was your position there?

CW: I was the physical educational teacher. Full circle.

DC: So tell me about joining the fight for Central.

CW: Okay. I told you that [former Superintendent] Ingwerson, to deflect criticism of the plan in '81, the plan that came in '81, he formed a citizen's committee to monitor the program. He put me on there to shut me up, knew they weren't going to do a damn thing. We met every day for twelve years, I mean once a month, monitoring the plan.

DC: For twelve years?

CW: Yeah, twelve years. Let's see, '81 to—I had to stop in '93. Yeah. All the complaints, we looked at that plan—

DC: There's a big revision in '84, right? Wasn't that the April fourth, '84—

CW: Yeah, see '84 is when Ingwerson was going to change it and make it less restricted, if you understand what I'm saying. The integrationists among us rose up and saw it as a betrayal. I didn't see it as a betrayal. I saw it as sensible and that's another reason he put me on there. But you see, shortly after he put me on there to shut me up, he

left. Then this dumbbell came in, this current one. So I was on the committee; he couldn't get rid of me. Then I got a good friend of mine on the committee: I got Dr. MacMillan, University of Louisville, and I got Dr. Robert Douglass, University of Louisville. We've been friends since the ninth grade in high school, I mean not only worked together. We are best friends, so I got Robert on there. I got him on as a parent. We had kind of a little nucleus; whatever's left, we tried to get them to amend it. We said look, we know that there are some people, black people in particular, that think integration and progress are the same thing. They can't make the distinction between integration and we understand that. But why don't you try to do something about Central because of its uniqueness? No, Central's going to do what everybody else does.

DC: So Central became a goal early on?

CW: Yeah, because I saw it as the only place where the kind of change that we needed to take place could take place. Then if you saw it being successful there, you could replicate it elsewhere. But you weren't going to get the initiative to make the kind of changes needed to transform black students unless it was black. See if you tried to do that at another school, you would get opposition both from black and white people. Black people would say aw, this is just a dumbed-down thing, and white people saying well, we're giving you an unfair leg-up. The things and the kind of programs we envisioned could only take place at Central and could only take place with the kind of leadership they don't have now. I don't know whether you heard that or not. I said it could only take place with the kind of leadership that they do not have now, because he's kind of confused about who he is, not kind of, he's very confused. All we can count on is Central outlasting him. Sometimes institutions have a way of outlasting the people that are supposed to lead them.

DC: That's interesting. I picked up on that from people's tone of voice more than what they've said, but I've picked up on that.

CW: Yeah, but Carman said it. (laughter)

DC: Yeah, but that would be consistent with you! (laughter)

CW: Yeah, you're right. He's....

DC: Trying to keep too many people happy?

CW: That's right, trying to keep them happy. He's forgotten what his mission is. Your mission is not to keep people happy. If they're not happy on your faculty, they've got the transfer policy, get the hell out. Central was here before they were and it'll be here, we hope, after they're gone.

DC: So do you keep on him?

CW: No, no. I backed off last year. We had a class reunion last year. For some reason, after all these years, they saw fit to elect this old dumb football player the class president. So I led a reunion effort both to have a reunion and to raise some money for scholarships.

DC: That was last year?

CW: Yeah. That's just between you and I, but we just put the money in the bank and let it draw interest until we get that kind of leadership that we need. It's not going away, it's earmarked for Central, but they're just not going to get it while he's there. That's a decision of mine. Now maybe after I resign my position in about a month, because I'm tired of it, maybe they'll decide—but that's where I am because I don't really think much of him. Whoever you are in life, there are times when you have to stand up and you're asked by circumstances, who are you? When those circumstances ask who you are, a definitive answer is needed at that time. I don't think he knows who he is, or if he does,

he's willing to answer or give the answer needed for him in that position. I don't know what it is. I know that he's not giving the answer I think the position that he's in cries for; I don't think so. There are consequences to that. There are individual consequences and there are cultural and there are racial consequences, group consequences when you're asked, "Who are you?," and you don't stand up and tell people who you are. I don't feel like he's standing up. That's not to say that you need to be a martyr, da da da da da, but I don't think he really understands what institution he's leading; I don't believe he understands it. And he should. He's a Central grad. The lady who reared him, Mrs. Highland, she loved her some Carman Weathers. I mean, when I was at-- Did I tell you the reason that my great-grandmother reared me?

DC: Uh uh.

CW: Oh, I sure didn't. My mother and father married out of high school. My mother died when I was born. So there was this great debate about who was going to take me, my father's people or my mother's people. You asked me what I'm influenced by and I thought about her because she knew my family and she would always say to me—she taught me algebra in tenth grade—"boy, you're going to really be something." Then when I came back, we invited her to speak at one of our reunions and she acknowledged, she really made me feel good. She said, "boy, your mother would sure be proud of you now," because she knew, she taught my mother. But she reared him.

DC: And she was what relation to him?

CW: Auntie, some relation, yeah.

DC: So you think he should know better since he had the upbringing?

CW: Yeah, he should know better. Some people don't know who they are because they've never had the connection to people who know who they are. Then sometimes, you

find out who you are through your connection with people that don't know who they are, but you say I don't want to be like that.

DC: I hear that.

CW: Shit. I mean the other way, the positive way, is to be around people that can inspire you positively, but negativism can inspire you too. I don't really think much of it. In other words, when you're in a crisis—let me see if I can be a good teacher again—if you find yourself on a battlefield and you talk to somebody, you would like to think that whomever it is you talk to understands that they're shooting out here, that, shit, people are shooting. This is a battlefield. I don't know how in the hell I got here, I might not even want to be here, but those are guns and shit going off over there. You ought to know where you are and what the hell is going on where it is you are. Now if you don't know that, I don't care what your preparation is. You in the wrong place at the wrong time. This world is populated by people who wind up in places that they don't know what the hell's going on. Therefore, it's impossible for them to react consistently in the right way. Every now and then, they might do it just by just being there. But to consistently do what needs to be done, you need to know where you are and what people there are doing. If you're in a war, people are shooting. It's not like I wanted to be. It's not like, "Well, I think we...", no, you don't need to think about where you are. Everybody knows where you are. How in the hell did you miss that? So if you don't know where you are, you are destined by your behavior not to do as best you can. If I find myself in the middle of the ocean and somebody says you need to think about swimming.

DC: Right. (laughter)

CW: Well no, I think that somebody ought to come and rescue me. (laughter)  
Better learn how to swim and quick. Yeah, okay. I told you how we got involved with  
Central, right?

DC: Yeah. Sorry, let me ask you what your schedule is, because you said you were  
going out of town—

CW: Yeah, we're going to go; I'm either going tomorrow or Friday. We don't  
know; we're going to decide tonight. We're going up to see the Bengals. We are old  
football fans. They're in Georgetown, Kentucky. I can't ever stop coaching, so some old  
coaches and myself, we're either going up tomorrow or Friday. We're thinking about  
going Friday because the Bengals are going to scrimmage Friday, but we're going to  
decide tonight.

DC: Well here's what I'm thinking, because we've been talking for two hours and  
I'd like to keep going. I've got another interview set up with a former principal, Dr.  
Deanna Tinsley.

CW: Oh shit.

DC: (laughter) We're hitting everybody. It's a significant look you're giving me.

CW: Shit, that's one of my explainers: Oh, that's Carman.

DC: Oh, somebody who apologizes for you.

CW: Yeah. She was always what I called the spear catcher. Gunga Din? She could  
articulate white objectives better than white people. She's a spear catcher. They always put  
her out there; she was the face. She was my...my adversary, yeah.

DC: Well what I'd like to do, I'd like to come back if you've got more time for me.

CW: Yeah.

DC: I could come back late this afternoon or tomorrow morning.

CW: Come on. Yeah, either one.

DC: You want to do first thing tomorrow morning, because if you go tomorrow, you won't go until—

CW: Until about five o'clock, right.

DC: Okay, so how about what's good for you tomorrow morning?

CW: Same thing.

DC: Ten o'clock?

CW: Right.

DC: Done.

CW: Deanna: an accomodationist who could never explain to us what it was in this system that would allow black folks to make headway, other than more of the same. But maybe she feels, obviously, I hope she does, I hope she is committed to that position that she has taken, as I am to mine.

DC: Any particular questions you think I should ask her?

CW: Right. Tell me how the position you took about this school plan helped black kids overcome their achievement gap? If the compelling need for integration was so strong, why didn't you extend that into the classroom?

DC: Okay, yeah.

CW: And let these black kids and white kids interact with each other in a learning environment? If educationally, you as an educator knew that special schools and special classrooms do not enhance the learning process, why is it that you allowed them to continue? See that's anti-educational, but that's what white people wanted. White people wanted special ed and advanced programs and we both know--. Yet on one hand, you're

for black kids and on the other hand, you say you're for advanced programs and you would not terminate them under any circumstances. But that's what they did.

DC: Well we'll talk about that more tomorrow. I want to talk about the advanced programs because that comes up a lot.

CW: Oh yeah.

DC: I'm going to turn this off.

**END OF DISC 3, TRACK 1**

**START OF DISC 3, TRACK 2**

**August 4, 2005**

CW: And they don't want to admit that. I mean all the evidence is right there that maybe there should be another way to do this thing. Have you heard or done any research on the schools in Detroit that are operating?

DC: No.

CW: I don't want to call them charter schools because they're not really charter schools, but we asked that our superintendent at least look at the possibility of making Central different because it could be different and it could—

**END OF DISC 3, TRACK 2**

**START OF DISC 3, TRACK 3**

DC: Okay, we're talking about Kentucky laws.

CW: In 1988 or '89, McCreary County, Kentucky, which was at that point in time supposed to be the poorest county in the state of Kentucky, sued the state government, saying that it was being denied an opportunity to compete with the more prosperous counties because of its lack of funding. Because funding at that point in time was set up on the property tax that you generated locally.

DC: Right.

CW: Okay, and so if you didn't generate enough locally, then the state would kick in their share, but your share plus the state share would never equal the shares of an affluent county like say Jefferson. So you had always less per student output than the more affluent counties. Well the State Supreme Court ruled that they were right in their assessment that they were being treated unfairly and so it instituted a series of acts called KERA, K-E-R-A. As a result of these, every child in the state of Kentucky is funded equally.

DC: Oh, alright.

CW: So whether you're in the poorest county or the richest county, the amount of money that you get to educate each child is the same, which was unique in the whole country. And it told the richer counties you can't decide to kick in something extra to protect your [ass]. It's going to be the same no matter what you do, because when it was going through the legislature, the more affluent counties, they agreed, but they said well we want to kick in some extra. No, no. If you can kick in some extra, it goes in the pot and everybody rises. Then it dealt with nepotism and all the other little shortcomings of school systems, so you couldn't hire your sister. It dealt with qualifications, da da da da da. And it dealt with some consequences as a result of your school not measuring up. Principals can be replaced, can be moved around. Kids can opt to not go to one school. See old Bush's No Child Left Behind tried to copy some aspects of KERA.

DC: So pretty good legislation as far as you're concerned?

CW: Yes, right. In other words, each school in Jefferson county gets the same amount of money based on the number of students that they have and the previous year's enrollment. What that means is this: it means that you get to make some decisions at the

local level, at the school level, that you never got to make before. In fact, all principals now are chosen by the school.

DC: Oh, okay.

CW: Now the politics are still in it, mind you, because the board sends you the pool, if you understand. Did you look at yesterday's paper? I held it out for you. I think that's it over there. They got all the new principals, I think it's sixteen principals in Jefferson county, two black. We make up forty percent of the student population and no black males.

DC: Really? That's interesting. That's a question I haven't asked and just off the top of your head, the past twenty years or so, of black principals, very few males?

CW: Very few *black* males.

DC: Interesting. Why do you think that is?

CW: Well, he's the warrior type, should be anyway -- this sounds sexist. At least they should be represented. Now you expect that to be at the elementary level, but when you get to junior high school level and you get to high school level, these young black males, they're not going to bow down to a—it's unlikely. Let me not say that they're not going to do this or that. Let's talk about the likelihood of certain things happening. All things being equal, I think that they would be more positively responsive to the urgings of a male than a female, a black male in particular. It just seems to go with wisdom, okay. They've had female leadership, elementary, middle, and now they get to high school, I don't know why that is, but I know the outcome has been and it used to be when I was coming up, black males were everywhere. But also, we were progressing in the system. We had the first black female assistant principal that I can remember. She ran the school. She took care of all the discipline when I was in high school, but my principal was the

intellectual, that's the one from the University of Chicago. He provided that and she provided the muscle. She's really funny. When we played football, you had two teams to make. You had the football team to make and you had her team, because she'd come on that bus on the first trip and take people off there by the collar: "I don't care what your average is or you didn't fail, no, you're not going out here and representing the school." I mean it was, that's the way it went down.

DC: I talked to Joe MacPherson and he was talking to me about how he handled discipline in the school and he said it was no big deal. If a kid was causing a problem, he'd just jack him up and deal with it right there in the hallway.

CW: Yeah, well that was Joe. See he's old school. He came out three years ahead of me. He was under Miss Porter.

DC: That's the same woman you were talking about?

CW: Yeah, Miss Porter, Maude Brown Porter. She had a Ph.D. That was partly Joe's—because see a lot of people didn't want Joe to get the job. An awful lot of people, okay. Did I think that Joe did a good job? A marvelous job. But they didn't think Joe was in the tradition of let's say Mr. Wilson, who had the three masters degrees.

DC: That intellectual tradition, yeah.

CW: Right. A lot of his resistance came from the old guard that was still there that had taught him or in the building; they didn't necessarily have to teach him, but were in the building when he was there. Because people saw him operate on a variety of levels. First he was a coach. Then he was the head coach. Then he was the athletic director. Then he was assistant principal. Now he's the principal. So at each one of those levels, you've got to show your laundry. It's not like "I don't know" or "I'm speculating"; they've seen you

operate. That's good and bad. In my view, now I was not there, but in my view, Joe ran a good ship.

DC: He was there at a particular time, right—

CW: That he needed the right to ship, yeah. He was there at a good and a bad time.

So back to where were we before I got to Joe? What were we talking about?

DC: The new principals.

CW: Oh yeah. That's in yesterday's paper. I told a friend of mine, he was over here last night and I told him you'd be here, he said he might try to come by. He was kind of a leader along with myself to keep Russell open. It's really funny how I came to Russell. It was almost like it was a divine act of some kind. The principal at the time was a teammate of mine in high school; we played football together all three years. He went to Kentucky State and I went to Jackson State; we played against each other. Yeah, because we played Kentucky State two years. Beat them too.

DC: What position did you play?

CW: I was a running back. But his name was Broadus and he happened to be in the personnel office dealing with another issue and he happened to pick up the listing of all the new teachers coming in and my name was on the list. I was not assigned to him at Russell. I was assigned to Male High School, but he took me off the list and had me reassigned. So I was instructed to go to Male—see I came here from Jackson and I went to Male. They said well no, we don't have you listed on our list. Let me call the central office. They called and they said well you're supposed to go to Russell. I said on my correspondence it says Male. I went on down to Russell. I had no idea that Broadus was the principal. He starts laughing when I come in: "Well I finally tracked your ass down," you know, that

kind of thing. He just died a couple of years ago. I thought he was a strong leader at Russell. He was good for Russell because we needed him at the time.

We had a superintendent when I came in here and they were dealing with a new program called Focus Impact, one of those feel-good programs that were rampant in the 60s and 70s, about let kids feel good and anything they want to do and they can call teachers by their first names and all the local bullshit. He tried it at Russell and he didn't try it at any of the suburban white schools. He had about eight schools that he tried his Focus Impact on and all of them were where the minorities were in the majority. And it was terrible. A good thing that Broadus was there because Chico and myself and Broadus and we had about five or six heavyweights, we made it work. It wasn't the same program designed by the central office, but we made it work.

DC: You adapted it?

CW: Yeah, it was "ghetto-adapted." (laughter) You had to tweak that program, yeah, it was "ghetto-adapted." Here's what I used to say during my tenure as monitor for the student assignment plan. If you want us to remain stupid, all you have to keep doing is more of the same, and that's what they did. We really started talking about we were trying to get the board to see Central as different, therefore to allow some different approaches to be tried at Central. But the board saw this—when I say the board, I mean the central office led by the superintendent—as bending over or giving in to the direction of a few people that were really opposed to integration in the first place. That was myself and maybe eight or ten or twelve people around town that saw that integration wasn't bad, it was the way it was being implemented that was bad. And it was being used as a tool to placate the white population, because they're aren't being bused now. Why wouldn't you have the best of both worlds? Not one single white kid gets on a bus now in Jefferson county unless he

chooses to, not one, not one. He can opt to go to his home school or he can opt to get in any one of the magnet schools that operate in the county. Yet every child that's black does not have a home attendance zone, I mean geographic area. They all have to get on a bus or they might opt to go to one of the schools, but now they are allowed to get in there on the basis of race. That's the reason we beat them in terms of Central, because Central was a magnet program.

DC: So at what point did you decide to use legal means?

CW: After about eight years of pleading, because I'm certainly far from a lawyer but I felt that black kids in this instance were not being treated fairly on the basis of race.

DC: Who were your main allies in this fight?

CW: Well, we formed a little committee. Robert Douglas—

DC: I saw him yesterday. I didn't talk to him, but I saw him in town.

CW: You did?

DC: Mmm hmm. I was at the main library yesterday and saw him from afar.

CW: He was up at the main library, huh?

DC: Yeah.

CW: Okay. Were you able to look up Will Jackson?

DC: No, not yet.

CW: Okay. You will find that interesting.

DC: I talked to my colleague last night about all the Rhodes Scholars. He was blown away by that, but yeah, unbelievable. So Robert Douglas, is this CEASE, the organization?

CW: Yeah, we just put some letters together sitting right here. We had to have an organization. We interviewed about five attorneys before we got one and we were quite

pleased with Teddy Gordon. Teddy's a good man, civil rights during the 60s, civil rights attorney who saw that as being a betrayal to civil rights until I explained it to him that it wasn't a betrayal. It was really about civil rights, but in this case, the civil rights of black people. I finally convinced him and he always kids me, he's a very good friend of mine now, that that first day, I called him a bullshit lawyer. (laughter) He said he laughs about the fact that we didn't start out being friends. I said you ought to stop calling your damn self a civil rights lawyer if you don't see the civil rights that are being abused in this plan. So he said he thought about it and he called me back the next day, said I'll take the case. That's how we got Teddy Gordon. We interviewed, he was about the fourth or fifth lawyer. He's white. We interviewed both white and black lawyers. All of them were scared; they didn't want to oppose City Hall, because City Hall gets a lot of mileage out of the fact that we're so integrated. When they try to bring businesses in here, they talk about we're the most integrated school district in the country. We fuck over black children, but that's alright. We're still integrated. All the local politicians flaked on us.

DC: So you got your attorney on board and then you had to look for plaintiffs?

CW: Yeah. They weren't hard to find.

DC: They weren't?

CW: No. All we had to do was find kids who had been denied admission to Central on the basis of race. See they were determined that they didn't want Central to grow. They were determined that Central was going to lose population and if it continued to lose population, they were going to close it. So Central went from let's say eighteen hundred, back to about seven hundred, because black kids couldn't get in because there had to be a proportionate number of black kids as opposed to white kids. White kids had decided they weren't coming.

DC: So the whole thing dropped.

CW: So it just steadily dropped. That was the next, that Central could no longer, based on its population, be a viable high school; that was the next thing. Then we get rid of Central, we got the problem. We get rid of a bunch of people who can collectively identify with Central, we do the whole thing. We do it just like we've done forty-three other times in the state of Kentucky. It's not unique. You don't have to be bright. Just do it just like we did in forty-three other instances where we had—fifty-four other high schools, not forty-three, fifty-four other high schools, not a trace of them. They even tore them down in all of the other--. You had black high schools in every population center in the state, it was fifty-four. Where you didn't have them, you had school districts paying each other to "you take my black people so I won't have to build a building," and all that kind of thing." I told you about the situation in Trigg and Christian Counties, adjacent counties in western Kentucky. Attucks had all the blacks in Trigg County, all the blacks in Christian County. So you're talking about three high schools there who didn't have any blacks: Trigg County High School, Hopkinsville High School, and Christian County High School. All the blacks were at Attucks High School. They weren't willing to get their butts whipped athletically, said no, we can do it another way.

DC: So that's basically busing before busing, right?

CW: Of course it was busing, across county lines and across district lines, two different districts.

DC: I think MacPherson told me that when he was at Lincoln, he had kids coming from Paducah or something.

CW: You're right. You know what Lincoln was?

DC: Tell me.

CW: All of the districts got together from all across the state of Kentucky and said look, we have black populations but we don't want to build a school. If we all pool our money, one place, we can save and then we can meet our obligations to black people too. So Lincoln was a boarding school for black kids from all over the state of Kentucky.

DC: A dumping ground to send them out of their small towns, so they wouldn't have to be served by the local school.

CW: Well they had to do something about them.

DC: Right, they had to educate them.

CW: Right, so what they do is they put up an elementary school and then send them to a boarding school, Lincoln Institute. Yeah, that was Joe's first job, I believe, back when he finished Tennessee State.

DC: Now did Lincoln survive for awhile?

CW: Well after everybody had to take their own kids, it kind of petered out. It took Shelby county's kids because it's in Shelby County. So Shelby County's kids, it wasn't a boarding school for them, but it was a boarding school for kids from around Paducah and Clinton County down on the line, down on the Mississippi river, all these little counties in eastern Kentucky.

DC: Like hours away?

CW: Hmm?

DC: Hours away from here, right?

CW: Oh yeah. Paducah at that point in time was five or six hours away. That's down, you go across the Mississippi river and you're in Missouri. So Clinton and all those counties down there in far western Kentucky, Lincoln had all those kids. But across district lines, Attucks was very, I mean we had the black kids who lived in the county and the

black kids who lived in the city and the black kids who lived in the adjoining county. Of course there was busing; it was convenient. It meant that you could get away with less financial support. You didn't have worry about it all and you met an obligation to the state; you didn't meet the moral obligation to do the best for your kids. Of course, that's never been, and that's America's weakness and she hasn't paid for it really yet, she'll pay for it, is to never live up to what you say you do. The real weakness is to think that everybody is stupid enough to believe what you say. Now that's the weakness, to regard your people as being stupid enough not to see what's actually happening. It can't survive in a crisis. The old football coach in me says you look for things that explain what you're trying to say. I'm a good football team but I have a weakness for pass defense, but the weakness never shows up until I encounter somebody who can pass. America has been blessed in that it has never encountered another heavyweight. When it does, some things are going to happen.

**END OF DISC 3, TRACK 3**

**START OF DISC 4, TRACK 1**

CW: It has never encountered a heavyweight that could stand there and punch with it. So what I'm talking about, I'm talking about a moral heavyweight. We have always thought that we had the moral high ground and believed it and tried to convince the world. Of course, the world always knew we didn't. It was only us zealots here at home who thought that we did have the moral high ground. Then that's the reason we're so, "Well why don't people like us? I like us." (laughter) You want a cup of coffee?

DC: Yeah, that would be great.

CW: I've got the best coffee in town.

DC: Thank you.

**END OF DISC 4, TRACK 1**

## START OF DISC 4, TRACK 2

CW: To endure that kind of abuse, it's not that we just like the abuse and it's not that we dislike white people. But we thought that at the end of that abuse would be an educational experience that was worthy of the abuse.

DC: Right, well that's what the promise was, right?

CW: That was the promise.

DC: That was the deal, yeah.

CW: So okay, so they stop giving you that kind of abuse and give you another kind of abuse and no education, because education has not moved forward. If it had moved forward, then why do we have a gap now all of these years later, thirty years later? I mean, how long does it take you to get rid of a gap? I mean you've had thirty years. People are going to school now, grandchildren.

DC: Sure, right.

CW: This is beginning to go into the third generation of this social experiment that has not yielded any progress to black people. It would seem to me, just as an educator, you would want to amend this process, change it, tweak it, do something to it other than say continue to get on this bus, come out here, and go back just as ignorant as you were when you got on the bus. Black people still believe that somehow or another at the end of that bus ride, with no evidence to support it, that they're better. They say things like, "Well it teaches you to get along with other people." That's the most ridiculous thing I've ever seen in my life. If you are a human being and I'm a human being, I don't need to get on a damn bus to learn how to get along with you. That implies that wherever I come from, we don't teach how to get along.

DC: The other way I hear that said is we're preparing students for the real world.

CW: The real world is this ghetto that you live in. That's the real world that ninety percent of the black people who are in Jefferson county live, where they see each other; that's the real world. I mean if you respect people and you see the larger society has certain rules and these rules operate whether you're in the black or the white part of town, you're courteous to people, you're considerate, da da da da da da. If those rules are enforced, it doesn't matter where you wind up. To suggest that you have to be in proximity to white people in order to be prepared for this new world is ludicrous. It's saying that you have nothing in your experience or culture that equips you to deal with the real world and therefore, you must be a part of me. I must compensate for this cultural deficit that you have and now you're ready; see, we can get along. Now that's ludicrous.

DC: It says the white world is the real world.

CW: Yeah. But of course now, if you can imagine me saying that in a meeting, I was at a meeting about two years ago, a board meeting. We had one of the television personalities, they were giving some awards or something. He got up and it was impromptu. He started talking about integration and that he had blacks in his neighborhood and he was so proud of his neighborhood because they were integrated. Of course, I just couldn't let that go. I got up and I said I'm so proud of my neighborhood because it's not integrated. Not having white people in my neighborhood means my neighborhood is no less a neighborhood. I don't have a next-door neighbor that's white, but I know how to treat white people and I didn't learn how to treat white people from white people. I learned how to treat white people from a black woman.; she said that people were the same and treat them respect and dignity. No, white people didn't teach me that. I don't need to be honored at this program for knowing how to get along with white people. My honors go to her. She taught me how to get along with people. But the notion that you will stand up

there and say that a culture that you have produced is so good that it teaches the world how to get along--.

The sick thing about that bullshit is we got black people believing that. I know you believe it, because that's self-aggrandizement; I know you believe it. But for black people to sit here and believe it, they've got to be crazy. I always get the, "Oh, that's Carman." But that makes sense to me. Anything that I am, if you show it to me logically, than I have to go--. What does it mean to be educated? It means to me that you can handle all of the biases, you can get rid of them, and you can look at things that are sensible and logical and see the sense and logic in the things that you look at. Anything else other than that, then you're not very well-educated. You might be trained to do certain things. That might be the response that you want from me, to be trained, but logic kind of drives me. If it makes sense, then I can go along, even if it's not in my best interests, if it makes sense. Sometimes you can be a slave to logic, but sometimes logic is the only thing you have. So if it makes sense, but if it doesn't make sense, I reject it.

DC: And this school deseg program didn't make sense to you?

CW: Didn't then, doesn't now. Every year and every day it goes on, it gets worse because that means we have made an investment that we cannot retrieve.

DC: Can you tell me about going through the lawsuit and what's that all about?

CW: Okay, we filed suit. A lot of people didn't like it, a lot of black people didn't like it, all of the liberal white groups in this town didn't like. They came together and they got all the publicity. I can't even remember off-hand all the groups that came together, that anything that got in the way of integration was bad. We had a judge, a Republican—it was so overwhelming that me, with no legal training at all, I didn't think we could lose and we couldn't—but he rendered his opinion as narrow as he could. He limited it to Central.

DC: Right, didn't want to set a precedent.

CW: Precedent, right. But if it goes to any court higher than him, goes to an appeal court, he's going to lose. He had to come out on behalf of where it was. He was almost forced to do that and the reason being that—

DC: Did that case get appealed?

CW: No, ours didn't get appealed. The latest one is getting ready to be appealed.

DC: Right, what's that one called?

CW: That was on white parents.

DC: McFarland, is that--?

CW: Yeah. What happened was that—

DC: Is that the same lawyer, is that your lawyer?

CW: Yeah, same lawyer, Teddy Gordon; they used him. I had a hell of a point there.

DC: Oh, I'm sorry.

CW: Oh, I do that all the time; I just blew it. Here was their defense, is that we have a mandate for diversity and that the vestiges that initiated this situation in the first place are still here thirty years later. Therefore, we have an obligation not to alter this plan. This plan came up to address these vestiges of racism and we submit that these vestiges are still there. Therefore, we're doing what's best for the community by keeping this plan alive. Did I say that well?

DC: Mmm hmm.

CW: Okay. But they couldn't make up their mind in our case whether the vestiges of racism were still alive or not. So they didn't make a compelling case. See the Supreme Court says that, or intimated, or hinted in some cases that if the interest is compelling

enough, you can do certain things that are even later on deemed constitutional to overcome those cases. So let's say if racism is there, you could do something that would normally we wouldn't allow you to do, but because racism is there and you see this is as a way to get rid of or address the racism, we'll allow you to do it. But later on, when racism is no longer there, we're going to come back and say you can't do that. That's where Jefferson county is. They didn't want to say that in thirty years we couldn't deal with racism. They said that in ours, but the second one, when Teddy tried it again—of course, he and I talk all the time: "Teddy, I'm not a lawyer, but I don't think you went after this one the same way you went after ours," and they went after it differently. They went after it so that this ally in the federal judge could do what he needed to do. See we pinned him into a corner.

DC: So what was their case in the McFarland case? What were they claiming?

CW: White kids said they had been denied—

[conversation breaks off as telephone rings]

## **END OF DISC 4, TRACK 2**

## **START OF DISC 4, TRACK 3**

CW: They went after the same thing, but they went after magnet schools. We went after one magnet school.

DC: What did they allege? They said that white kids are being denied access to certain schools?

CW: Because of race.

DC: Okay.

CW: They just flipped ours over. But now the board said you're not being denied. You can go anywhere you want to go, but these ratios have to be there so this other thing that we want to do will stay in place. That's what happened.

DC: What did you think about their, not the ruling but the case itself? Did you think they had a case?

CW: No, I didn't think they had the same case we had, because on top of all of it was the fact that they're not being bused here anyway. They were talking about something that was a bonus: magnet schools.

DC: Do you think they were racially motivated, those parents?

CW: I think that they wanted what was best for their children under the circumstances. Let me go about it another way, let me say this, that the black folks can get redress of their grievances through the court system; why can't white people? If that is a racial motivation, yes.

DC: So you had empathy for them?

CW: Yes, of course, because I don't like the plan, period. I think you can educate children without that plan. Ninety-eight million dollars that we've spent on buses, it doesn't make sense at all, doesn't make sense at all. That money could be spent, oh I don't know how; you count the ways. I knew that it was just a matter of time before white parents, for whatever reason, attacked the system and they're going to do it again, anytime they perceive that it's not fair to them or they perceive that someone else is getting something out of it that they're not getting. And that's what they saw, they saw that black people at Central—because see Central can no longer be governed by those ratios, that's what came out of Central. Black people said to me, well it will go back to being all-black. That's not a concern of mine. I mean I'm all-black and the black people I'm talking to, I'll say aren't you all-black? Are you afraid that somebody might see you as being all-black or do you have a piece of you that you'd like to attach to say I'm integrated? What's wrong with being all-black? If all-black is bad, then make it good. It makes sense to me. I don't

see anything wrong with being all-black. Somebody has told you that all-black is something wrong.

DC: Do you see anything wrong with being all-white?

CW: No. That's a good question. All I've ever asked for is movement. I don't need any barriers. That's all I've ever wanted. I don't need any mandates. I don't need any social engineering. I don't need any government interference to put me there and you here, no. Just give me access and if I want to be there, fine. Can't cut out the access, though. If being all-white is a result of something that the government has participated in or has not participated in and it allows certain things to happen, yeah, I have problems with all-white, but I don't have problems with all-white simply because that's a personal choice. That's un-American. You have every right to be all-anything you want to be, but don't put up any barriers if somebody else wants to be a part of that. So you can't have an all-white neighborhood and have legal barriers or you have chosen to have barriers that are not legal, that are still barriers, like these selective covenants and all this kind of bullshit that folks use to ensure.

There are black people who love to be around white people; they love it. I don't know what they get from it, but they love it. That's their thing. I don't want folks to reject me on the basis of what I choose to do; that's legal. I don't see any problem with that. In certain areas, we read inferiority into things that are integrated from the other perspective. We see NBA teams that have got three white boys starting and we know that they might not be the best team. What I'm saying is as long as merit is a criteria, then let it fall where it is. Now look, I'm not naive enough to think—let me go back to affirmative action. I am not naive enough to think in the year 2005 that as a result of all this other things that

preceded 2005 that some affirmative action is not necessary, okay. I'm not a bootstrap person in that sense that I don't think that some things are traceable back to 1865.

**END OF DISC 4, TRACK 3**

**START OF DISC 4, TRACK 4**

CW: Anything else you want me to talk about?

DC: Yeah, I have a couple more things: faith, your faith. I heard you were at vacation Bible school last week and so faith plays a role in your life. I'm just wondering how that fits in.

CW: Okay, here's where I am with that. I don't look at it as any day-to-day thing that the Lord or the God that I serve is at work in every aspect of what I do, of human behavior. I feel like he's given us an opportunity to do what it is we want to do. He's given us some guideposts and then he's left it up to us and I don't see him interfering. I see us doing what needs to be done and on the basis of the direction he told us to go in. I don't see the God I serve being a part of some of the bullshit that's happening here and I have problems with people who say things like, "Well things happen for a purpose."

DC: I'm with you.

CW: They are beyond my contempt. I'm reading a book over there; I'm going to have to do a little thing on lynching. See that book right up under those cameras over there?

DC: Yeah.

CW: Now you're going to tell me that all those people that got lynched in this country, that God said well I need me three hundred lynchings over the next forty years to prove a point? How can you assign things like that to the God that you are, and then reduce it to "Well he does it for a purpose"? No, that's just what human beings do. You try to,

how do I want to say this, connect with some higher wisdom and so you say that some higher wisdom is at work here. No, I don't believe that. This thing that we do down here on earth about faith, I think that ultimately we're going to have to deal with it, but right here on earth, it's up to us. Did I pray that God would let us win the suit? No.

DC: You got out there and worked, right.

CW: That's the only--. And if we lost, would I blame it on God? No.

DC: Do you see the black churches in Louisville as playing a leadership role—no, you're shaking your head.

CW: No, we tried that and then they backed off. You're getting ready to start something between me and my pastor again now. I go over to St. Stephens, which is a mega church and Kevin and I have been good friends for—

DC: Is this Kevin Cosby?

CW: Mmm hmm.

DC: I called him yesterday.

CW: Did you talk to him?

DC: No, I haven't gotten him to return a phone call yet, but I'm working on it.

CW: Well I'll tell you how you might be able to get him to do it. Tell him that you talked to me. Leave that message. Now that might be good or bad. (laughter) But I tell you what, it'll serve you better than not saying it, okay, because we have our problems. Our last problem was the principal at Central. I don't think.... Kevin could have saved the whole thing. I don't think Kevin came out; Kevin wanted to be neutral and at certain times, neutrality has its virtues but this was not the time. See to be a good leader, you have to choose your times to be neutral and choose your battles that you're willing to fight. I don't feel like he did that. Of course, who am I to say? My perspective is not as large as other

people's, but I can only comment on my perspective. So if I have a three-hundred-millimeter camera and it can see over there and you say, "Well what do you think?", and I say, "Well with my view, I think you should do this," you say, "Well I have a five-hundred-millimeter camera and I think you shouldn't do that because around that corner that you can't see is this," then I'll defer to that. But I can only comment on what I see.

The role of the church has changed a lot of times in our historical development here in this country. It's been good and it's been invisible. Now we are reaching the invisible. With the big black mega churches, they don't want to be political at a point in time when they could serve their people best by being political. I was reading in the paper today, Betty Bayai wrote an article about Jakes. It's going to have a hundred and fifty thousand people in Atlanta.

DC: Right, I saw that.

CW: He is about as non-political; he's vanilla. I tell you when it really became apprehend to me how useless he was; the old folks used to say "as useless as tits on a bull hog." Have you ever heard that expression?

DC: I have, yeah.

CW: Tavis Smiley had the State of Black America on two years ago and Jakes was one of the speakers. He sat there, there were eight or nine speakers on that stage, and he had really nothing to say, nothing.

DC: So do you see Cosby, I mean I know he's your pastor, but Rev. Cosby as totally apolitical or just choosing his battles?

CW: No, he is not. Well you see, he's run the gamut. He used to be, fifteen-ten years ago, when we became real good friends, I mean really close, now we're not close—is that yours going now?

DC: It is. I can turn it off or we can—

CW: Well what I'm saying is as long as you understand why I'm not, I wouldn't want that to come up that we're not close and that I was with some interviewer and I--. But Kevin—

DC: I'll take that out.

CW: Okay. Kevin and I started off fifteen years ago. Kevin's father was on the school board.

DC: That's Laken Cosby?

CW: Laken. Laken is the one who got me on the monitoring committee through the superintendent; that how I got on, through Laken. Laken told me that you and my son have such great ideas and they're almost identical. That's how Kevin and I became friends. I joined the church and when I joined the church, it was about as big as this room and I mean that literally. When I joined the church, it was about the same size as this house. You can go over there and see because it's still there, the little church; they just built around it, but you can still see the little church and it's about as long as this house when we started.

DC: Do you know how many people go to it now?

CW: Oh, six, eight, maybe nine thousand.

DC: That's huge, yeah.

CW: But when it started, it was about as big as this house is long. This house is seventy-two feet long and that's about what that church was. You can see it when you go over there. It would remind you, if you turned it around and the pews go this way out to the garage and all, yeah. Kevin understand what it was and there was a hunger in this community for identifying with two notions: the notion of black solidarity and the notion of black solidarity through Christ; that took off. I used to teach a Sunday school class over

there on the role of the black church in the liberation struggle. I would teach it twice a year. Then we went from that to being—I don't want to criticize the church. The churches are not doing what they need to do.

DC: Because they got less political, basically.

CW: They are less political, right.

DC: Do you think that's as they became more established, more establishment?

CW: Well see what happens is this: if you look at the history of this country—and that's one I appreciate, you're a historian, I'm not; I'm a physical educator by training. People say no you're not, Carman, you're a historian—if you look at the history of religion in this country, the more it became political, the less religious it became in the eyes of mainstream media. So then when you begin to get political, they start throwing words at you like cult and anything to get in the way, because when you get to be political, what you mean is that you are trying to bump up against the political establishment and how dare you as a religious entity start bumping up against something that's political. Then they fall back on separation of church and state. Now I believe in separation of church and state, but I also believe that church has a responsibility, the people who organize around a certain belief system, have a responsibility to organize and maximize whatever it is they do. If it's maximizing their citizenship, then maximize it under the auspices of your organization, whatever that organization might be: boy scouts, Kappa Alpha Psi, a fraternity, whatever. You ought to be able, as an organizing tool, it should go towards maximizing your participation as a citizen.

So I think that as Kevin grew, as his status grew both here in the west end and in Louisville, that it became incumbent from the powers that be that he become less political, therefore less threatening. Now how did they articulate that to him, I don't know, but

seemingly he got the message. Now every now and then when I talk to him or I'll read something in the papers that he said, it harkens back to times past, but not as consistent as it was fifteen years ago.

DC: Did he declare a position on the Central lawsuit?

CW: No, but the position that we declared, the position that we formulated on the Central lawsuit came out of his proclamation, he made a proclamation. Remember I told you when we decided that we were against the whole student assignment policy? See he made a speech at the church and the reason he made the speech at one church is because the other church booed him down. They thought that he was a segregationist, that's what the local integrationist blacks called it. They wouldn't let him speak one night, so we had a rally about a week later at another church, but they called him a segregationist. He was talking about organizing a school for black children and da da da da da. That was threatening.

DC: So he didn't publicly support, though, the Central case, but did he privately?

CW: Yes. Yeah, that's about it with him.

DC: We're about done, I think, but one thing I didn't get down yesterday, that I forgot to ask about was you referred to your daughters and everything but I just wanted to find out more about your own family and where they went to school.

CW: I have four girls and I have two U. of L. graduates and two Jackson State graduates.

DC: So you were married?

CW: Yeah, Geraldine Peterson Weathers. Four children came out of that union.

DC: Father of four girls, huh?

CW: Yep. Two are Jackson State graduates.

DC: Two Louisville.

CW: And two University of Louisville. One is an attorney in Dallas. One works for Bank of America. One is over science education at the Louisville Science Center. And the baby girl is in a doctoral program in epidemiology at the University of Louisville. So there we are.

DC: That's impressive.

CW: Well I don't know how impressive that is. Let's wait until the final thing, that's what I tell them, because you're going to get knocked on your ass; can you get up? Like everybody can get degrees and things but I don't know if you have the toughness or not, that's what I tell them, to get up. So at the end of your life, you can say when you got knocked on your butt, did you get up. That's what I tell them. We have a pretty good working relationship. The older I get, the more bossier they become. (laughter) Oh I have to hear about all the footballs that I gave them and they rejected being made athletes, but they were all very good swimmers.

DC: Did they get bused in the school system?

CW: No, because their mother took them out at about the time that this all started, shortly thereafter. Their mother and I separated and eventually divorced, but she took them out of public schools. So they all graduated from Catholic schools. As long as we were together, they went to public schools. Their mother is from Birmingham, Alabama and she went to, it was Catherine Spalding College then, small liberal arts school that's the Sisters of Nazareth.

DC: I've heard of Spalding, yeah.

CW: Tough, rigorous. The reason she came here is because her high school in Birmingham was run by the same sisters. So they have three high schools in Alabama and

Catherine Spalding, and the mother house is here, the Sisters of Nazareth of Charity. It's about thirty miles from here down to Bardstown. Their mother was a great person, middle-class from Birmingham, Alabama. Now that's a notion that you've got to live with. Her father, my dad-in-law, my children's grandfather, went to the seventh grade. But when his children got in the seventh grade, he went back to school with them and graduated from high school with them. When they went off to college, he went to college and he rose from being a person with a seventh-grade education at U.S. Steel to one of the managers. Their mother never went to work; she stayed home with the kids. So my wife's mother was very middle-class. That's the reason I laughed about being middle-class in Birmingham, Alabama, that you can find middle-class values anywhere. (laughter) All you have to do is look for them, or in fact, know what you're looking for; that's the key. She always said that I did a very good job with the kids, but Lord knows that she did a wonderful job with those kids. Everybody thinks that my kids are, and I try to stay away from this, but they are bright, they are political, they have all the social graces, without that edge that I have that came out of being reared in a housing project. They don't have my edge, no. That's always a source of humor.

DC: But they must have some of your fire.

CW: I didn't say they didn't have the fire. (laughter) I said the edge.

DC: They don't have the edge.

CW: See I have both the edge and the fire. They might have the fire without the edge and I wish I were like that because I could probably get more done. But then sometimes I question that.

DC: But that's not you.

CW: No. Sometimes I question whether not having—people ought to be able to read you. They ought to know what it is you are, because when they know what it is you are, they can feel assured that you know what it is you are.

DC: What's the name of the Catholic school that they went to?

CW: Presentation.

DC: Were they in the minority there?

CW: Oh, it was about five or six hundred students and there were maybe ten or twenty of them. There's a little joke about Carman, that's my oldest daughter. I named my oldest girl Carman knowing I wasn't going to have any boys. (laughter)

DC: You just had a feeling.

CW: Carman likes to tell the little story about when she was at Presentation, that when she was a junior and senior, she made all of the announcements over the intercom. This little white girl said to her one time: what's your name? She said my name's Carman Weathers. She said oh, no, no. Isn't that the person who makes the announcements? Carman said yes. "But that's a white girl," because she speaks so well. Well all of them speak well, I mean they speak well. They have a command of the English. They've all done fairly well in school.

DC: Do you want to stop there or is there anything that you want to add, anything that I may have missed?

CW: No, only if you have some things that you'd like for me to comment on educationally. There's somebody that I want you to read: Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

DC: I know it.

CW: You've heard that one before?

DC: Oh sure, yeah.

CW: Yeah, you need to—

DC: Paulo Freire, yeah.

CW: Hmm?

DC: Paulo, is that the first name?

CW: Yeah, Paulo. So that's still a popular book, huh?

DC: Oh yeah. I mean I think I first heard of that in high school.

CW: Is that right?

DC: Mmm hmm. I was doing civil rights history in high school; not all of us, but there were a couple of us who wanted to know.

CW: Okay, what about, I know, Carter G. Woodson's book? Good Lord.

DC: Alright, I'm shutting off the tape.

CW: Okay.

**END OF INTERVIEW**

Transcribed by Emily Baran. December, 2005.