

START OF INTERVIEW, SIDE A

MARY HOLMES: This is Mary Holmes interviewing Joanne McClelland, March twelfth, two thousand and one, Chapel Hill High School.

Ms. McClelland, would you tell me about this program, AVID, that you work with?

JOANNE MCLELLAND: Um, AVID stands for Advancement Via Individual Determination, and it is a program that started in the school system in 1996. Actually, Chapel Hill and Carrboro City Schools was the first school system to, um, start the program in the state of North Carolina. And the program comes out of San Diego, California; that's where it originated. In I think 1986 or something like that, I'm not exactly sure exactly what date, what year. But anyway it's a program that, well it was implemented in our school system because there were very few African-American students in the honors and the AP classes. And the Blue Ribbon Task Force at that particular time wanted to try to get a program that could be implemented into the schools that would give the African-American students who had potential to be really good students and who had the potential to be above average students a program that would give them the support, teach them all the skills that they need to be successful in those programs, and help them go to college.

MH: How did, exactly, did you get involved with AVID?

JM: Um, I got involved because when I came here in '95, I was doing a program -- they had a pre-college program -- which was through the math/science, I think math and science network at UNC, and it was basically a dumping ground for any student who did not have an elective, and so they, you know, it was supposed to also, sorta like, get African-Americans involved in math and science, but that was not exactly what it was

doing. So whenever I came and I took that one class, and they started talking about AVID, I was like, "This is what I really want to do, I wanna be in a program similar to Upward Bound," because I was in Upward Bound when I was a student here at Chapel Hill High, and Upward Bound did all the things that AVID has done, and that is to prepare the student to go to a four-year institution. So, I was, I went to the training in the summer of '96, and that August we implemented the program. And, so -- but the other reason I wanted to get involved was because when I left here in 1974, as a student, one of the things I had said was that I wanted to come back to my community to give back to my community to help students achieve in the manner which I achieved at this high school, to be that, that push or that lift that they needed to get that college degree, which is what my teachers did for me, so --

MH: You said you graduated in 1974, and that's not too long after the school was desegregated.

JM: Right.

MH: But they still had the program Upward Bound for students like you, who wanted to go to a four-year institution. Do you think that helped you cope with the strains, maybe--

JM: Most definitely. I think that between Upward Bound and the strong support I got in Upward Bound and the strong support that I got from, you know, my, two or three of my African-American teachers that were here at the high school, I was able to be, to deal with the stresses of being a minority that was pretty much, who was pretty much, excuse me, pretty much, in, you know, the college prep classes and was able to, I was able to, you know, to succeed and keep my focus on what the long term goal was, and that was to go to school.

MH: Where did you go to college?

JM: North Carolina A&T.

MH: Okay.

JM: And then I have my Master's Degree from North Carolina Central in school counseling.

MH: So, how exactly do you feel being a teacher here, and working with a program like AVID, and I know it makes you feel good to know that your helping students out, but just the fact that there is this achievement gap at Chapel Hill High School --

JM: It saddens me because of the fact that, you know, I was a student here in 1974, and this is 2001 and, it really hasn't changed that much. So, that's the sad part about it. The same issues, that, you know, we had to deal with in 19 -- in the 1970s are the same issues that we're dealing with now. I think that basically it's worse than it was in 1974 in that the students have become very apathetic and passive, and I say, when I say that, I think minority students have become quite apathetic about the status quo. About what is actually going on. There is definitely institutionalized racism that they tend to not see because, you know, they don't really know their history, they don't really know how important it is, and there's no one really there to explain to them the struggle, that, you know, that this is, you know, this is not what it appears to be. It is still this hidden agenda, this hidden, you know -- it's sad, it's very sad to me.

MH: That is awful to hear. You said issues from the 1970s are still here today. Can you, would you discuss those --

JM: Well, when I was in high school here, of course, you know, if you were in a class like, for example, I was a really good French student, so I took, like, French Four and that

sort of thing. It just so happened that my teacher was African-American, but still, I was in a class being probably the only African-American and maybe one other, and, you know, the challenge before us was that we always had to get, make them understand, make the white students understand that we were just as bright. And that was a constant fight for me. You know, I mean, it was always, I think I can remember constantly getting into arguments with some of the white students because, you know, my determination was that you are going to respect me and you're going to respect my mind, because, you know, you may think that, you know, that I'm inferior, but that's not the way I think. Therefore, it's going to be, you know, that I will get the same respect that I give you. So that was really, really hard. My teachers constantly, pushed me to be the best that I could be, and they, you know, helped me work on my anger. They helped me work on, you know -- Because, you know, I was very angry, and I'm still very angry about what I see. As a matter of fact, sometimes it makes me depressed. So, you know-- I've had a daughter to go through this high school and, one of the main reasons that I'm here as a teacher is that the principal, when my daughter was here, I used to come out here all the time and advocate for her and, you know, fight for her. Try to keep her in the honors and the AP classes that she, she wasn't in AP, but she was in the honors classes, and to make sure that she got a quality education, because there was racism, you know. And I saw it. I was truly an advocate for my daughter, and the principal saw that in me and he asked me the day that Nikki graduated from high school here, you know, would I come teach here, cause I was teaching in Burlington. And, so, I said, "Yes, I will," and I, I guess that was God's way of opening a door for me, to come back to what I wanted to do, and that was to

be at my high school. So it's, everyday it's, it's, I'd say, you know it hasn't gotten any better. It hasn't gotten any better.

MH: Well, can we talk about the principal who asked you to come back?

JM: Mmm hmm.

MH: Which principal was that?

JM: Um, his name was Mr. Butch Patterson.

MH: And he's no longer here.

JM: No.

MH: You also said something about the institutionalized racism.

JM: Mmm hmm.

MH: Is this a problem not only for your students, but for you as a teacher, a member of the faculty here?

JM: I would say that when I first came here, yes. And it probably still is, okay. I'm not gonna be naïve and say, "Oh, no, no." Yes, yes. Very much so. There are little subtle things that happen, and, you know, and being African-American, in every breath I breathe in every thought that I have has to be about race because, you know, I can't step outside of this room and think that the person that I meet is going to see me as a person first, and then, you know, and then my race second. No, they're gonna see me as black first and then as a person second. And I'm not saying everybody, but as a whole, that's the way it is. And so, you know, I'm always, I laugh sometimes when people say, "Oh, I don't see, I don't see your color." That's not true. Yes you do. You know, it's like, I always think about Martin Luther King when he says, "Judge my content, the content of my character," and not, you know, my color, not the color of my skin. But, you know, we haven't gotten

there yet, okay. So, you know, that means that because I cannot be judged by the content of my character that I have to be conscious of the fact that people see me first as being African-American, and I think one of the things they see me as being African-American, outspoken, and that, that's a problem. That's a problem.

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JM: One teacher said to me one day, one of my students was the only African-American in that class. And one day I was after school, I was here after school, and she came and she was just crying, and what's wrong? And she said, well, you know, my teacher, I gave him some of my work, he looked at and in the front, I wasn't in the class at that particular time, but he took the paper and he tore it up in front of all these kids, all these white kids, now. And then he started badmouthing me to one of the kids and the kid felt that she had been empowered to come and talk to me like I was a child, okay. It just so happened that whenever the child got ready to leave that afternoon her parents were picking her up and they came in because she went out there and she was crying and she was like, you know, () they asked me what was happening and I said, let her tell you, and she told them and the dad got very upset. So he goes upstairs, and he talks to the teacher, he comes upstairs to talk to the teacher. And the teacher, he said to the teacher, suppose you were the only person that looked different in that class. If you were out of that room, would you want someone to badmouth you? And so I said to the person, the teacher, I said, you know, he said, I will never ever know what it's like to be black. I said I'm not asking you to. I'm asking you to be sensitive.

MH: When that incident occurred, and, if, say, perchance, we can imagine that were a white student, would it be more that it was the teacher's teaching style? Do you think it would be a big problem?

JM: You can't, you cannot -- As a teacher, you have to be able to -- that may have been his teaching style. But again, back to what I said initially, when I said that as an African-American every single thing that you do, you have to think about race. And, you know, that child, you know, didn't see it as him talking about her, but, you know, she saw him talking about her being the only black kid. Okay, she didn't see it just me being a kid in the class. No. You know, she's the only black kid in that class, so you have to look at it that way. I mean regardless of what he said, you know, yes, it goes right back to race. It will always go right back to race. It will always. There's no getting away from it.

MH: Did you have any similar experiences --

JM: Of course.

MH: in high school?

JM: Of course.

MH: Can you recount some of those experiences?

JM: Um, I think I remember, cause I used to go to the principal's office so much -- I think I remember my teacher probably saying something to me that I felt was very inappropriate and I can't really remember what it was, but it was a white teacher that said something. Um, may have told me to shut up or insinuated I wasn't bright, or whatever. And I'm quite sure knowing me like I know me, I'm quite sure I talked back, or whatever. But one of the things I can say is that a lot of my white teachers did respect me, but, because that's the kind of person I am. I demand respect. So, you know. I, I think my grandmother

probably made me be that type of person more than she even thought she made me. She didn't, she wasn't doing it because she, she really didn't know what she was doing. But when, every time she took me to work with her at a white person's house, and every time she made me wear the clothes that a white person wore, she was teaching me then in an indirect way to make, to respect myself and to know that education was the key, and to know that, you know; she made me realize that I would never be, have a subservient mind, I would never be subservient, all those sorts of things. But like I said, she did not know that that's what she was doing. 'Cause I tell that story all the time, I think more than anything else when I think about my childhood in Chapel Hill, I always remember my Grandmother taking me to Lakeshore Drive for her -- she was a domestic worker, and how I cried, because I did not want to go. I did not understand why she had to go and clean up the white people's houses. I did not, I did not understand why I had to wear shoes that were already worn, when I say worn, I mean extremely worn. And I actually got a whipping because of the fact that I did not want to wear them. So, those sorts of things still, you know are very much a part of me, to the point that, you know, I don't wear hand-me-down clothes. I would not, you know, I'm never going to do-- and I became -- I wanted to be a professional because I refuse to ever take any types of demands or, you know, I have my own rules. I am my own person. In the classroom, that is my classroom. Therefore, you know, yes, I have certain things that I have to do because of the job, but as far as someone actually telling me what to do, how to do it -- no. I don't --that doesn't happen in the classroom. Which is why I really like it, you know. But I do have this really, I guess, thing about people not allowing me to be my own person.

MH: We were talking about your experience here; we talked about your time as a teacher.

When you first came here to Chapel Hill High, what year was that?

JM: '95. You talking 'bout as a student?

MH: As a student.

JM: '70. '70-'71, because, see, it was just a three year high school then.

MH: Right. From experiences you that you had in a segregated school prior to that, and from students maybe that were here before you came here --

JM: Well, see, I can't, I remember -- I was only in a segregated situation up until fourth grade. And then my grandmother, I was in an all black school at Northside, and then in the fifth grade I went to Glenwood, and then in the sixth grade I went to Estes Hills. And then in the seventh grade, Guy B. Phillips was a junior high school, so I went there, seven through nine, and then I came here. So, I can remember being, when I left the all black school going to the white school, I'd never felt, I was afraid, yes. But there was one other student there who became my very best friend, Howard Lee's son, Noel Lee, and he and I became very good friends because it was the two of us. So we sort of looked out for each other. But the one thing that I can say is that my black teachers at the all black school really prepared me, okay. I could read, I could write, just as well as the white kids. I remember my sister got in trouble, whenever she was in elementary school, and my grandmother always took her side, so she wanted to put us in a private school. She was going to send us to Saint Thomas More, and I got in, my sister didn't. So, you know, that meant, you know, that academically I was definitely, you know, well prepared. So, but, but, I never forget, I will never forget what the black teachers at the all black school did, and that was that they never allowed you to be average and that is the one thing that I

constantly preach to my kids, you know, that you can't be average. You've got to be more than average, better than average. "C" is not good enough ever. It's because you are expected to be, first of all, not just, I mean, white society expects you not to be even average. So that means that you've got to prove to them that you are more than just average. So that's, you know, that was one of the things that I found, that I was, you know, I could read well, I could, I was always in, like, their group one, I could write and all that sort of thing, so --

MH: But you felt you were prepared.

JM: Oh yeah. That's why one of the things, because when I went to the school, I never even in the classes with the white kids, and I may have been the only black, I never felt inferior. I never felt, I just never felt that way, you know. And I guess, you know, God protects babies and fools, and it was probably because I was a fool and thought that -- I just had this idea that, hey, you know, I'm just as good. I instilled that into my daughter. My daughter just graduated from NC State, and, she was in an engineering program there with, in biological engineering, which is, you got the tobacco-chewing white men mainly in that. And my daughter had a really tough time, but she never ever wavered to say, oh Mom, I don't want to this, I don't want to do -- and you know, because that strength that I had, like you are, and you can do, and you will do, and you know, so she finished. So, you know, it's that sense of pride, of who you are, and no one can take that away from you. That's why Nelson Mandela was victorious after twenty-seven years, so, you can imprison my body, but you can't imprison my mind, and my soul, and my spirit. You can't do those things, so --

SOHP Series: Desegregation

TAPE INDEX - Joanne McClelland

Interviewee: Joanne McClelland

Interviewer: Mary Holmes

Interview Date: March 12, 2001

Location: Chapel Hill High School

Tape No.: 3.12.01

TOPIC: Joanne McClelland, an English teacher at Chapel Hill High School, works with Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), a program designed to end the achievement gap between minority and white students. A Chapel Hill native, Ms. McClelland attended CHHS from 1970 to 1974, and continued with her education at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical University in Greensboro, north Carolina, and then received her Master's Degree from North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina. After teaching in Burlington, North Carolina, Ms. McClelland transferred to Chapel Hill High in 1995.

Themes highlighted in the interview included: AVID, the achievement gap, institutionalized racism, parental involvement, Black History Month, and segregated vs. desegregated schools.

Counter Index

Topic

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| 001 | Opening announcement/ audio test. |
| 06 | Explains the Achievement Via Individual Determination (AVID) Program, implemented in 1996 to eliminate the achievement gap at Chapel Hill High School. Teaches two AVID classes; likes its resemblance to Upward Bound. Wanted to give back to her community. Says Upward Bound helped her deal with the pressures of being a minority. The program allowed her to go |

To NC A&T; got her Master's at NCCU.

67 Saddened by the achievement gap. Claims that little has changed 1974 and racism may have gotten worse because students do not challenge the status quo. Says institutionalized racism prevalent, and students need to understand "the struggle."

117 Speaks on her time in high school and the challenge of making white students recognize her capabilities. Admits frequently arguing with white students in class. Says her teachers pushed her to do well. Depressed by racism and its continuance today. Asked to teach at Chapel Hill High by former principal Butch Patteson in 1995.

173 Says racism a problem among the faculty. Admits that seen as black before human. We have not gotten to a place where we are judged by character and not color. Considers herself a threat because race is an issue whites are uncomfortable with.

218 Describing her Honors classes, of which she has two and the students within are all white. She says that the students keep their minds open to her view. Concerned that black students underrepresented at CHHS. Mentions incidents involving the National Honor Society, the school web page, and student government. Says white kids have called the black students "lazy," whereas McClelland insists the black students feel "unwanted." The lack of black students in Honors classes and organizations

takes away from discussions, but that the opportunity not there even before the kids went to high school. Black students constantly put down.

383 Discussing proposed state curricula and institutionalized racism. Says the curricula and state tests are manifestations of institutionalized racism at higher levels. Says that AVID gives black kids the support they need to move ahead into the Honors and Advanced Placement (AP) classes and gain "ownership" in their school.

439 More on AVID. Has three white students and one Latino, Although the program created for minorities. Thinks "white privilege" disqualifies white students from taking AVID classes. Honors and AP classes as much de facto segregation as excluding whites from AVID. The Honors and AP classes have existed since she was a student, and Chapel Hill High offers twenty-two AP classes -- the most in the state. Chapel Hill High is a very competitive school and recently had twenty-five valedictorians. This decreases a minority student's chances at success.

519 On Chapel Hill itself. Divides the town into "haves" and "have nots." Describes the haves as those affiliated with the university and with money and resources. Says black students from wealthier families are not natives. Thinks the small size of the black community in Chapel Hill allows for greater intimacy. Believes

that after East Chapel Hill High School's opening in 1996, the First Baptist Church community stayed very close. Most of the black natives live in public housing, and lack of funds keeps black students from engaging in the same activities as whites.

520 On East Chapel Hill High and redistricting. Calls ECHHS "elite." Unsure how the district boundaries were drawn, but believes they run along Estes Hill, Piney Mountain Road, and Airport Road. Thinks racial situation at ECHHS worse because of elitism. Segregation exists in integrated schools.

637 On teaching white students. McClelland shares her viewpoint and allows kids to understand other worlds. Tries to compare themes from novels to current events and offers a view to her white students that her white contemporaries cannot. Upset that the school is losing black teachers because black teachers are important to black kids. There were very few black teachers at Chapel Hill High after desegregation.

718 On interacting with white parents. Talks about her experience in Burlington in 1990 when teachers and parents were shocked to discover that she was black. Had a parent/teacher conference in 1995, her first year at CHHS, and the white parent accused McClelland of using improper grammar. McClelland positive meeting occurred because she is black. Says most white parents

support her because she is fair, but she feels closer to her African-American students.

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Explaining African-American parental involvement. Thinks African-American parents not as involved because they are unsure of the system. McClelland tries to "educate" black parents about the politics and programs at Chapel Hill High School. AVID and the new system superintendent Dr. Pederson keep black parents informed and involved. Hard to gain black parents' trust because distrust following desegregation still present. Thinks minority parents often remain in the dark. McClelland helps their children apply to colleges and for financial aid because the parents uninformed.

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Talks about teachers who inspired her as a student at Chapel Hill High, including her English teacher and Chorus teacher.

Tape 1 of 1; Side B Tape No. 3.12.01

Counter

Topic

01

Recounting recent incident in Whiteville, North Carolina. Black History Month assembly upset when all but fifty white students refused to go to school. Her students shocked by the incident, but some students and faculty members speculate that the situation could easily occur at CHHS, despite Chapel Hill's "liberal" image.

- 20 Political ideologies of the town and faculty. McClelland
Thinks that the town and school are becoming more
conservative as the number of registered Democrats
dwindles. Conservative teachers seem more likely to think
poorly of African-American students.
- 77 Butch Patteson controversy. Patteson thought that white
faculty members were reluctant to teach black students
because of racism. Brought a lot of tension to the school.
McClelland thinks that a few white teachers are not
"sensitive" to racial issues and black culture, and need to
learn about teaching black students. Tells story of African-
American student embarrassed in front of class by her white
teacher. Stresses sensitivity and insists that it all goes back
to race.
- 173 On her high school experience. Went to the principal's
office frequently, but most white teachers respected her.
owes strong personality to grandmother, a domestic worker
who had to dress McClelland in grandmother's employers'
hand-me-downs.
- 235 Likes the freedom of teaching.
- 236 Compares her education during segregation to her time in
integrated schools. Went to CHHS in 1970. Attended all-
black Northside until after fourth grade, then went to

Glenwood, Estes Hills, and Guy B. Phillips for elementary and junior high school. Found comfort in friends like Howard Lee's son. Felt prepared by black teachers at Northside and continued to perform well in school. Instilled sense of pride in daughter and students.

334 Hopes for future. Wants to see all children at deserved level without needing AVID. Thinks positive energy of black males frightens white teachers. Need to accept and deal with differences positively, but have a long way to go.

379 Achievement gap growing. McClelland works with the Minority Student Network team and fears those who believe that the situation has improved since desegregation. Reality is "Walking While Black," but black kids do not want to see that. Feels her generation understood that.

422 Fighting for rights as a student. Sit in during her freshman year to get black girls on the cheerleading squad. Threatened to boycott graduation senior year if black and gold, Lincoln High School's colors, changed to blue and white. Kids today do not fight and those who do become disillusioned. Students and faculty not allowing the situation to get better.

509 End of Interview.