

Interview
with
JAMES KNOX POLK, SR.

May 13, 2006

by Elizabeth Gritter
Transcribed by Laura Altizer

The Southern Oral History Program
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Transcript and tape on deposit at
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Transcript – James Knox Polk, Sr.

Interviewee: James K. Polk, Sr.

Interviewer: Elizabeth Gritter, research assistant for the Southern Oral History Program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Interview Date: May 13, 2006

Location: Charlotte NC, at his home in the Grier Heights Neighborhood

Interview note: See the life history chronology that Mr. Polk prepared; it is referred to at numerous points throughout the interview. Also referred to is the oral history Ms. Gritter conducted of James Ross, who worked under Mr. Polk at the Charlotte Bureau of Training and Placement.

ELIZABETH GRITTER: [This is Elizabeth Gritter] with the Southern Oral History Program [electronic screech] interviewing James K. Polk on May 13, 2006 in Charlotte, North Carolina, and would you say your name to make sure it's picking up?

JAMES POLK: James K. Polk. James K. Polk. [tape turned on and off]

EG: Oh. Would you say it again?

JP: James K. Polk.

EG: All right. So the [life history] chronology you've prepared is excellent. I encourage future researchers to look at it. So I just have a few specific questions based on this. When were you born? What was your date of birth?

JP: November 7th, 1926.

EG: Okay, so you're almost seventy--.

JP: Seventy-nine. I will be eighty in November.

EG: Yeah. And Mecklenburg County, any city associated with your—

JP: Two streets over.

EG: Really.

JP: Yeah.

EG: So Charlotte.

JP: This was just out of the city limits of Charlotte at that time. But it's Mecklenburg County.

EG: Sure. You have a spouse?

JP: Deceased.

EG: Okay. What was her name?

JP: Dorothy.

EG: Okay. Children's names and years of birth.

JP: Oh goodness. Altavia help me. Altavia Polk, '44. Tavia—

ALTAVIA POLK: Yeah. Two-two-fifty-two. I'm the baby. Then my older sister Regina

Cynthia Gill.

JP: Regina C. Gill, G-I-L-L.

EG: G-I-L-L.

JP: Yeah, married now.

AP: She's fifty-seven.

EG: Okay. How do you spell your name?

AP: A-L-T-A-V-I-A.

EG: A-L-G-A—

JP: A-L-T—

AP: T-A-V-I-A.

EG: V-I-A. Then Regina, so.

JP: Regina and Camilla.

AP: She'd be fifty-five, fifty-five.

JP: Camilla Clark.

AP: Yeah, Camilla Clark.

EG: Camilla?

JP: C-A-M-I-L-L Clark, C-L-A-R-K.

EG: C-A-M-I-L-L—

JP: A.

EG: A, okay. Good. Okay. You said she was going to be—

JP: What is she fifty-seven?

AP: Fifty-five.

JP: Fifty-five.

EG: Fifty-five. Okay, Great.

JP: Then—

EG: Oh go ahead.

JP: I have some more.

EG: Okay. [laughter]

JP: Tammie Hinton, H-I-N-T-O-N.

EG: And Tammie, T-A-M-M-I-E.

JP: I-E she spells. How old is Tammy?

AP: She's forty-six.

EG: Okay.

JP: James K. Polk, Jr.

AP: He's fifty-three.

EG: Okay.

JP: And—

AP: Joseph Vincent Polk. He's fifty.

JP: Joseph Vincent, V-I-N-C-E-N-T.

EG: He's fifty.

AP: Yeah.

JP: Fifty.

AP: That's all.

EG: Okay. So are you James K. Polk, Sr.

JP: Um hmm.

EG: And what's your, what does K stand for?

JP: Knox, same as the president.

EG: Okay.

JP: K-N-O-X.

EG: Okay. I see you went to Johnson C. Smith. Did you get a degree from there?

JP: No.

EG: Okay, when did you attend there?

JP: Oh gosh. Forty-six, seven--.

EG: The high school was J.H. Gunn.

JP: Gunn, yes.

EG: The NYA camp, is that National Youth Administration.

JP: Yes, it is. Yeah.

EG: And were you in World War Two?

JP: Um hmm, at the end of World War Two. I was a Roosevelt soldier. I think I went in one day before Roosevelt died.

EG: Really. How interesting. How long were you in the service?

JP: A little better than eighteen months. It was less than two years.

EG: Where were you stationed?

JP: In Germany.

EG: Oh yes. Where in Germany?

JP: It was F-U-R-T-H, Furth, Germany. It was outside of Nuremberg.

EG: What branch of the military?

JP: Army.

EG: Army.

JP: Yes, Army.

EG: Then what did you do at the post office?

JP: I was a mail handler and letter carrier, letter carrier.

EG: Then you went, what funeral home were you president of? What was the name of it?

JP: Grier, G-R-I-E-R.

EG: () Is this the Grier Heights area?

JP: Yes, it is.

EG: Okay. Super.

JP: Grier lived up at the end of the street.

EG: Okay. And when were you appointed to the community relations committee? Was that in the early '60s.

JP: Yeah. Yeah. It must've been gosh, dates are difficult for me to keep up with.

EG: Yeah. That's common.

JP: Yeah, it was early '60s. I left the post office in '59, went to the funeral home, and it was after that. So it must've been '60 or '61, late '60s.

EG: Did you start with the post office after you got done with Johnson C. Smith?

JP: Um hmm.

EG: '47 would've—

JP: Yeah.

EG: Okay. Let me see here. So I think that's—

JP: I also attended Temple University during the time after I left the NYA. That was some skilled training. That was during the war time. You've said National Youth Administration. So you know what that is. I went to, moved to Philadelphia, worked in the naval yard and as a stevedore as you mentioned. I attended Temple at night.

EG: Okay, oh I see. So when was that? That was before—

JP: Forty, I left high school in '43. So that was end of '43, '44. I went into the service in '45.

EG: Did you, when you went to Johnson C. Smith, were you using the GI Bill benefits.

JP: Um hmm. Yeah.

EG: So after your employment with the Bureau, you went onto, Mr. Ross was telling me about the Success Motivation Institute in Waco.

JP: Right.

EG: Then you came back to Charlotte and worked for the, opened the consulting business.

JP: Right.

EG: And a franchise of the Success Motivation Institute.

JP: Right.

EG: Was that from 1971 forward?

JP: Um hmm. [laughter]

EG: What, the consulting business, what was the name of that?

JP: It was Management Manpower Associates. That was the name. Ross and I were in business together, and we were there, gosh, two or three years or more. He left to head up a program for an agency dealing with substance abuse. Did he mention that?

EG: Yeah.

JP: Okay. Well, he left. I stayed on with MMA, Management Manpower—

EG: Okay, with the program.

JP: Well, MMA was the business, and that was the consulting business. I stayed on and continued to do that. I got into doing several things like doing some consulting work for North Carolina Department of Transportation and several other things.

EG: So you and him were partners of the business, and then when he left, you remained.

JP: Yeah, correct.

EG: How long did you do that for?

JP: Oh gosh. I stayed in that until '89, '89, '90.

EG: Did you do anything after that or did you retire?

JP: After I left yeah, I left there and went to work for the governor, Jim Martin. I was special assistant to the governor.

EG: That's right. Mr. Ross mentioned that.

JP: For five years.

EG: So from like—

JP: () ninety-, '89, '90. He left office in '93. So it was like '89 I guess it was to '93, was the end of his term. He served a second term. He was eligible to serve a second term. I didn't, I was not with him his first term. I came in at the end of his first term, which was '89. Yeah, and stayed until '93.

EG: Did you have any employment after that?

JP: After that, I went to work helping a fellow give away money. That is literally the truth. While we were in the governor's office, I had an opportunity to, well, there was a fellow going around the

various southern states interested in helping communities prepare for submitting proposals to the federal government as part of the Enterprise Communities if you remember that. Okay. The, HUD I guess it was gave grants to communities for Enterprise Communities. That included various and sundry kind of () [background noise]. We visited a large number of southern communities, and most of Alabama, Louisiana, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina and made contact with people who were submitting proposals or who wanted to submit proposals and kind of helped them prepare by funding a unit or someone to help write the proposals and do the leg work to work with communities and groups.

EG: So technical assistance.

JP: Yeah, technical, that's exactly what it was.

EG: Yeah. Was that for a government agency?

JP: No, no. It was an individual.

EG: An individual, okay. So what should I put down for like your job title or () employed—

JP: Umm. What do we call? I guess consultant. Well, the company was AQUOLA, A-Q-U-O-L-A, and Thad Rowland operated AQUOLA and I worked for him and worked for AQUOLA, A-Q-U-O-L-A. I'll give you the name of it in a minute. But anyway, that's, yeah. I was a consultant to them.

EG: Okay. So you did that from '93 to—

JP: To I guess three years until I retired.

EG: In like '96.

JP: Yeah, something like that.

EG: Okay. Great. Well, I think that takes care of (). Now we can delve into the more exciting, I mean () isn't exciting but just the other stuff. Something that Mr. Ross brought up was the establishment of the Eastside Council on Community Affairs, and tell me when that was and how that came about.

JP: Okay. The Eastside Council of Community Affairs was a, we formed an organization. I think it was twelve guys. We have the names of all of them in there [referring to life history chronology]. We really, we were concerned about the community, and it was this community, Grier Heights. We were concerned about certain aspects of the community and came together to talk about it to see what we could do, what contributions we needed to make to the community. There were things like education, schools,

things like beautification, clean up of the community, jobs and training, et cetera, et cetera. I think there's a list, some of them listed [referring to life history chronology]. We formed that group, which was really kind of a unique group. Unique in that we got together. We didn't have any officers. We made sure that we didn't do anything that would cause our demise. Sometimes you get together and you elect officers and this kind of thing—[interruption] This is the old lady on the tape you just wrote, Cynthia. [side conversation with Cynthia]

But it, and what I'm saying is that we made a conscious decision that we're going to operate as a unit and of the whole. We would not have officers or anything, which was kind of unique. That's the way we operated. Each person had an area of concern, and in effect they kind of chaired an area. So that if they needed support or help—[talking to his daughter] you want to sit down and learn something. [side conversation] Anyway, back to the group. Each person kind of operated as chair of an area. If there was work that the chair needed some assistance, we would all kind of chip in. We would all help out and take on tasks to accomplish whatever goal that area or that group or that chairman was working on. It worked extremely well. It worked extremely well.

EG: What were the areas, the divisions?

JP: Like jobs, education, health, I think we listed some of them in there [referring to life history chronology]. But those were the areas, kind of broad community--. The concerns that you would have in almost any community. So that's what we were approaching. That's what we were trying to work on. We did work on it.

EG: Did you do voter registration work at all?

JP: We didn't do that. We didn't get into voter registration.

EG: What sort of impact did you see the group having () successful?

JP: I think it had huge impact. So much so that well, let me--. One of the things that we employed was bringing leaders, Charlotte leaders--and we mentioned that--to the table, and the table was two card tables and some chairs in one of the guy's home up the street. We would put that person--. It was probably the mayor or the president of the Chamber of Commerce or the head of the hospital authority or and on and on and on. We would ask them to take the head chair, and we just had some frank, honest discussions. We have problems in this community we need to address, and we need your support. You

have influence. You can do something about it. We think you ought to do, we insist that you do something about it. We would do the follow up.

Now one of the things with the people we brought to the table--in the chair it was called. We made it clear to them that if it was told that they had been there, it was not because we divulged it. If you want to go back and tell folk at the Chamber or at a council meeting or in town that you have been in the chair, that's your prerogative. But we're not here for the purpose of broadcasting. We had the mayor in the chair. We didn't. We held to that. What we learned later that they would go back and tell it, tell people at the Chamber of Commerce or at the Rotary club or at their country club or whatever, "I have been in the chair." So much so it was very popular to know that you had been, that this person had been in the chair. That got around. There was some write ups like in the Southern Journal, Regional Journal and other publications that we had no idea that that was taking place. That's where Philip Stern learned about this group and what was going on and came for an interview.

EG: [Referring to life history chronology] That's interesting that you said he was the grandson of Rosenwald because I know Rosenwald did a lot of, like you put here, philanthropic [work].

JP: My grade school was a Rosenwald school in this community, and it still stands.

EG: How interesting. Why do you think it was that it became so popular being in the chair. I mean here are whites coming to blacks and you would expect the opposite reaction.

JP: Right. Right. I'm not so sure on--. I think the people who were interviewed or we talked with, I think that they realized that we were very sincere. I think that they were concerned. They too were concerned with the city. They were concerned with some of the things that we were concerned about. They maybe on an individual basis had not taken the time to stop to say, how can I use my influence to help that community and the city. When you help this community, you help the city at large. They probably had not stopped to think about that.

It was interesting to us that they would go back and kind of brag about, "I've been in the chair." That really helped. So much so that a young reporter, Jim Bakke, and a guy from WSOC TV literally begged us--because they had heard what was going on-- to be allowed to come sit in on an interview. There's an article. I have an article somewhere. We said, "Okay. We will do that providing that you talk to the person we're going to interview, and you make a commitment to them [regarding] how that will be

handled, and you will not call the name of the person." They did that. We said to the person, "Okay, we're not revealing what is going on, but if you want to do that, fine. We have no problem with that." So it was a great night. It was a great interview. It was later learned it was the superintendent of schools. Craig Phillips, if you talk to people at Chapel Hill, they'll know Craig Phillips. Bright, interesting person. It was a great night. It was a great night. The reporters just sat there in awe. They didn't believe what they heard. They didn't believe what they were looking at. Craig being the kind of person he is, you know he could handle it. He did handle it. No (), but he handled it well. So Jim Bakke wrote an article about it and was given an award, a writer's award, for that article at the end of the year. You know they have these little awards every year. But yeah. It was nice. It was nice.

EG: Was the reception, so the reception generally was positive. Were there any times where it wasn't positive?

JP: Oh you mean during the--. With the people in the chair?

EG: Yeah.

JP: Oh, oh we had--. We had some knock down drag out fights. Now that was within the conversations. We differed. Sometimes the person said, "Well I can't do anything." We said, "That's not true. You can do something." "Well, how can I do it?" "Well, here's the way we think you can do it." Oh yeah, it got testy sometimes. But it was fortunate we had guys who had a lot of respect for the folk we had in the chair. The people in the chair learned to have some respect for those twelve guys around that table because they realized that they were very serious, and they couldn't get away by saying they're not going to do anything.

EG: Did you ever ask them to do things like take down white and colored signs or do things to break the system of segregation or was it more kind of improvements within the existing system?

JP: Well, at that time, I'm trying to think, most of those things were down at that time I think if I recall. Yeah, a lot of that. Now there was still some conditions going on at that time that we felt that they could do something about and one was a specific--. We really just gave them, well, we pushed. They did make the change, but then at the same time there was some civil rights activities going on in Charlotte where well, they picketed the hospital.

EG: The group did.

JP: No, no.

EG: The—

JP: Some other group. Picketed the hospital. There was a thing going on [where] they closed the black hospital, and people then could go to what was then the public hospital. The doctors with one exception were not certified to practice in that hospital. So there was a furor. What should we do? Well, they picketed the hospital. See in the meanwhile we had been talking to the administrator and other people there about practices. A number of people who lived in this community worked there. They had segregated dining facilities for its workers. We said, "You can't do that. No longer will you do that." And on and on and on. So now we never talked about that. To this day most folk really do not know what happened. We're not saying that we were the reason for making all the change. I can tell you that we got commitment--that a lot of them were made and they were made. So when the picketing was out there, it was just a matter of picketing. We went to San Francisco for the All American awards thing, and part of the documentation on the hospital thing is the group faced up to it. Yes, we have a problem. Yes, there's some picketing. However, we're going to do the right thing, and we did the right thing.

EG: So some of the desegregation things that happened, you and your group got commitments from the public officials and that kind of went concurrently with the picketings that took place and the demonstrations.

JP: Well, I don't want to say that we got commitments that they would, that they would stop the desegregation (sic). I don't want to say that. The fact is that much of it happened. I don't want to say it was because of these twelve guys on the Eastside of town. But I'm saying that along the way the change did occur. I was a member of the mayor's Community Relations Committee. Jim Ross was. That is pretty much where the decision was made to desegregate the city of Charlotte, open the public accommodations before the Civil Rights Act of '64. That's a fact. That's history.

EG: If you could talk more about the Committee on Community Relations and what was like working for that for—

JP: Well, we were, you know we were appointed to it, and it was something new and a lot of things needed to occur, and a lot of things did occur because I think the folk on that committee made a decision that we're going to change Charlotte. We're going to integrate Charlotte. We're going to, and it

set out to do it and went through--. I'm not so sure that I would today go through what we went through at that time. That is they would ask restaurants and eating establishments, those kind of places, you really need to segregate, I mean you need to desegregate, and we want your commitment, and some of them did it in writing. We said, "Okay we're going to test this." So some of us were assigned to go to various and sundry places to see if they would serve us. I went to one place [which] was a drive-in. The guy said, "Please don't do this to me. I'm kind of a minority." "Oh but you agreed to do it." The curb folk who served would not serve me. So I went to the guy and said, "Hey you agreed to do this." He said, "Well, I can't make them do it tonight. So will you agree to come back tomorrow night and I'll get it cleared up. Those who refuse to serve tomorrow night, they will no longer work here." So I backed off. I said okay. Okay. We'll come back. Of course it changed.

EG: So you were served.

JP: All of the, yeah, all of the--. () Went across the theatres, restaurants, all those public accommodations, chains. It was a lot of work involved now. I mean, it was a lot and lots of work involved in that thing.

EG: Mr. Ross was telling me too how you gave the staff full rein to participate in civil rights demonstrations and so forth when you were there.

JP: From the Bureau [Charlotte Bureau of Training and Placement].

EG: Yeah.

JP: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yeah, it, very active group, very dedicated group, and we felt that that was the thing to do and they did it. They did a good job. We [had] kind of [a] unique situation. In one instance, I don't whether Ross mentioned [this to] you. We were in an office one block off of South Tryon Street. The building had a large picture window. There were two clerks sitting out front. One was black, and one was white, very beautiful blonde haired white young lady, very beautiful black lady. They were sitting there working. My uncle came up and looked, peeped in the window. Well, he was peeping around, looking in. Somebody came back to the office and said, "Somebody's out there looking in the windows. Will you come check?" I went out, it was my mother's brother. I said, "Uncle John, what's wrong?" I said come on in. So anyway, we went in and he said, "Son," went to my office, said, "Son you can't do this." I said, "What you mean?" He said, "You can't do this. These people will kill you having an

integrated workforce sitting here, two blocks off the square in Charlotte. That's unthinkable." But it wasn't. That's a good example of where certain people were at that time and what happened as a result of these establishment of the Bureau and all the thing. That's just one thing.

EG: Did, with having this open display of integration, did you face—

JP: That was not on purpose. It just happened that it was a picture window in the office that we were in, which was a street front office and people were working. They were not the only people working in the office. But you could see part of the staff, the receptionist and typist and things. You could see them. There were other offices you couldn't see. It was not, it was not a display. It was just the offices we used.

EG: Mr. Ross did bring that up as well. Said people would just come to the window and stare.

JP: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

EG: Did you ever face any sort of negative response or opposition to things being as they were?

JP: No, no, no. If it happened, I didn't know about it. Not me personally no.

EG: I see too you, that you helped establish the Westside Council on Political Affairs.

JP: That was a group of guys on the Westside after the Eastside was established, and we started to do some things. The Westside guys got together and said we need to have the same organization as Eastside. We met with them and said, "Okay this is what we suggest the way you do it. You form the group and you work together." One big thing at that time was, and we were working on that: In the black community the sanitation department refused to have roll out—no, no, no. They demanded that people roll cans to the curb for collection. We always look at what's going on in Myers Park. It's across the creek. What's going on over there? We learned then that they went behind the house, got the cans and then rolled it to the truck. We said, "We're not going to do that anymore. You're going to come to the back of our house and get the cans." So that was one campaign that we put on that the Westside Council jumped on right away because they were experiencing the same thing. It wasn't much of a fight. We jumped on the city manager who was a good guy at that time and got on other people, and they [said] things like okay, if we collect from the rear of the house, the can must be certain size, certain gallon, certain kind of metal et cetera, et cetera. "Okay, we'll do that." So we changed our cans to comply. "Now you come get them," and it worked.

EG: Yeah. When was the Eastside Council started and when was the Westside Council started?

JP: Eastside Council, gosh.

EG: Was that in like 1960 or '59 or—

JP: Yeah, it was in [interruption]. The Westside was not maybe six months after the Eastside. Some () period of time. [tape on and off]

EG: You mentioned that you thought if I was hearing you correctly the reason that the local leaders were receptive to you and your demands was that you had mutual goals. If you could talk about some of the mutual goals, what you mean by mutual goals.

JP: Well, I think that we were concerned about certain kinds of concerns. The sanitation thing was one specific [one] and that got worked out. There was the () school situation and of course, somebody I guess mentioned to you that the kids in this community then attended Myers Park High School because that was the closest high school to them. So that got worked out. But prior to that time I attended high school. JH Gunn was---. We rode a bus eleven miles to high school, which was absolutely crazy, and we passed two white high schools to get there. But anyway, that was a sign of the times. There were other---. Again the whole matter of employment and jobs and things like that, pretty much what you would expect the community to be concerned about, the people in the community. That's what we worked on. We really did receive a lot of cooperation from people that we talked to and support from them. They used that influence to try to make the thing happen and advised us in some cases about things to do and how to go about making sure that we could get them accomplished.

EG: What was an example of that? That's very interesting.

JP: Hmm. I guess, I guess the school situation was one example. Just prior to the whole integration of school things, we and our neighborhood school, we didn't have the facilities that other schools had at the time. In fact the elementary school, our school did not have a kitchen, a feeding facility, a cafeteria, didn't have health room and that kind of thing. So it was suggested that what we do is look at similar kind of schools in the area. Same size, so what do they have? Well, we learned. We decided that then we needed to [make the] request the board of education that we get the same accommodations. We ended up a meeting with the board of ed and had a whole bunch of people to go down to the meeting. Now later on we got them. I guess that has some influence in helping them to do the right thing. But we pointed

it up. Here's Merry Oak School and here's other schools, they are the same size and they have cafeteria, they have health room; they have all of these things we should have. We're a school in the school system and we should have them.

EG: Was this in the early to mid '60s?

JP: Um hmm.

EG: Going on.

JP: Yeah.

EG: You were saying out of this came, I mean this was the root of the employment bureau. If you could talk about how Phillip Stern played an instrumental role of funding [the bureau]. If you could just talk about the, a little bit more about the founding of the employment bureau.

JP: Well, as mentioned, often times when I was at the funeral home, often times students or graduate students would come through and stop and interview [me]. Well, I guess because they had my name. We had been involved in a lot of things political, community affairs things. So somehow they would get my name, and they would come by and stop and talk, interview, which was fine. Often times I ended up with them and carried them to lunch and spending my children's lunch money to carry them to lunch. It was all right. But often times we would do it, because they were students, not like you. They were not rich graduate students. They were just regular students in the probably four-year program or something. I learned from that too, having that meeting with them and they learned and captured some stuff, but anyway this guy came in one day and—

EG: Were these white or black students or both?

JP: White. Most of them were white. This guy drove in and talked--. I noticed he drove and parked on the street in a white two-seat Thunderbird or something strange about this guy. But anyway, we got in the conversation. What he was really started. The conversation started. He was interviewing me for an article he was doing for *Harper's Magazine*. It had to do with the South and the whole, that whole thing. But then as we talked and he apparently—

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

EG: () both sides to make sure it gets on.

JP: Now which, how far back, the Thunderbird.

EG: Yeah. That's good. Back at the Thunderbird.

JP: Okay. So this guy drives up and parks across the street, and I looked out not knowing who it was, but I noticed that he was driving a white Thunderbird at that time. So we got in the conversation about the article he was doing for *Harper's Magazine*. Things about the South and all, and I did get in the article, quoted in the article later on. But during that discussion I think he learned, had learned about some things that the organization, the Eastside Council was doing. One of the things that they were interested in-- I think the foundation because they had funded or had been funding institutions like Xavier and other such institutions, and they had a concern for employment and training and that kind of thing. So we talked about it and [he] ended up saying you will receive a call on Monday from New York. Okay. Guy will want to talk to you about doing some things. I did receive a call. And we ended up arranging to get together. The guy came down from Charlotte. I mean, came down, and we talked about what about setting up a manpower training program. Fine. What is that?

So he later brought down, David Hunter later brought down a guy from New York University, and I really never did remember his name, who was on staff at the University, New York University, but apparently was an expert in the whole manpower field. So we and I had some-- On an envelope we laid out what would be a manpower training program. The components of it and all of that and how you get it funded, who was responsible at the national level for a neighborhood youth corps project. We kind of laid it out and kind of went from there. And in working along with David, we ended up setting up the Charlotte Bureau, and that's what the proposal was--that we establish this outfit and that we do these things that we kind of designed on an envelope and make [them] happen. That's really what happened.

We were fortunate to go. He proposed to the board, Stern board, that they fund us \$60,000 over a three year period to kick off, jump start the organization. That is what happened. We, of course, we were not a 501(c)3 because it was not an organization. The Eastside Council said, okay, we need to name a board, and the board ought to have diversity. That's what we were doing. Only I think three of us served on the board out of the total number of board members. We were somewhat careful in selecting those board members to make sure we had broad coverage and different kind of occupations, concerns, racial

identity, et cetera, et cetera. That's the board that you see [we] ended up [with]. People on there had a lot of influence political, religious, otherwise. [His life history chronology lists the board members.]

EG: What was the white/black breakdown of the board?

JP: Gosh. Let's see what we've got there. In the meanwhile while we were getting it together, the North Carolina Fund was established. It was already going. They worked along with us in helping to put some of this together. We were always grateful to them, to George Esser and all those people who helped us to make things happen the way in fact they did happen. When this, oh here--. [He's looking at his life history chronology.] David Gillespie white, recently died in Raleigh, was [an] editor; Vera Swann, black; George Nash, black; James Pierce, white; Emanuel Ross, black; () black; Calvin Watson was black; Charles Lowe was white; Julius Chambers, black of course; Reginald Hawkins, black; Stan Brookshire, white. So it was a pretty good mix of people we thought.

EG: Yeah, that's very impressive. How were you able to attract that distinguished group of people to be on your board?

JP: Well, we knew them. We had worked with them in various and sundry things. Is Dr. Patrick on there? Did I call his name?

EG: Umm.

JP: Louis Pat—Reverend Patrick. His name, Reverend Louis Patrick who was pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church, and [he] was the vice chair at one time and was chair at one time. But anyway, we knew these people having worked with them, church, political, on and on. You probably know the names of some of these people there. Julius Chambers and—

EG: Hawkins.

JP: Hawkins, and Jim Pierce was a labor leader executive and on and on and on. That, they, Emmanuel Ross was a politician from the Westside. At one time it was the largest precinct in Mecklenburg County. It was very active politically in the community and otherwise. So we had a good assemblage of people who could come together and agree on making some things happen, and they did. Charlie Smith was a banker. Of course one of the real politicians in Charlotte, kind of--. Charlie was kind of well, he handled it--. I don't want to say under the table kind of politician, but a very interesting guy. He worked at one time with Zeno Ponder. [Restricted material is in this part of the tape per the interview release form; I

have not included in the transcript and instead put this sentence as a placeholder. E. Gritter, editor of transcript.] Charlie was a good guy. He had political connections even into the White House. He was the cause of Lyndon Johnson writing us a letter to the bureau commending us because we did a report that went to the White House. But those are some of the kind of people that we were able to put together to make some things happen, had a lot of clout in Charlotte, that group.

EG: Do you think a reason that politicians were receptive to being in the chair with the employment and training bureau was because people in the Eastside voted and had political clout?

JP: Now remember, remember the Eastside Council was operating prior to the Bureau.

EG: Yes.

JP: So their willingness to try to be a part of making some things happen was prior to establishment of the Bureau. I think it without any question once the bureau was established it helped, it helped the Bureau in identifying and doing some of the things it was able to do because of-- The former president of the Chamber of Commerce Ed Burnside had been in the chair. He was head of American Trust Bank, on and on and on. So that helped. It was not because, I don't think it was because the Eastside Council-- [There were] not that many votes in the community that we could say we delivered to politicians. I mean it, so we think that's not the reason.

EG: And you mentioned that you had a report that went to the White House. So if you could talk a little bit more about that.

JP: Well, at a point in time we were, we were funded with close to two million dollars in funds. We had some of those things like the Neighborhood Youth Corps, the on-the-job training program, and they were funded from various and sundry places like Department of Labor, HUD, OEO [Office of Economic Opportunity] and all of those. We were one of seven cities in the United States that did a special project for the Department of Labor test, working on testing, alternatives to testing because, and I just read something the other day. What is the test that we give for graduating seniors in high school?

EG: ACT or SAT.

JP: SAT.

EG: Okay. Yeah.

JP: At one time in employment you had certain kind of tests that you could--not the Wonderlic, there was another one. Everybody had to go through that test. Well, we felt there ought to be some alternative to that, and [the] U.S. Department of Labor set up a program in about seven communities. We were one of them. Philadelphia, Trenton, New Jersey and all to test the use of some alternatives to that written test that were, that they were using at that time. It really had to do with kind of mechanical, how do you manipulate certain objects and things to get results to test your dexterity, et cetera, et cetera. Hand to eye coordination, et cetera, et cetera. We were fortunate to be one of those cities that got to experiment. But anyway, we thought that we were doing a good job, and we wrote all of this up one year in a publication, and we then sent that out to the community. We sent that out to our senator and () by him, and he was good at that. Ended up with a copy to the White House. The White House responded to Charlie Smith, saying we received, and it was from Lyndon Johnson. I have a letter here somewhere. It got some national attention.

EG: Wow, do you remember the name of the report?

JP: I don't remember what, how we labeled that. It was just Charlotte Bureau and Employment Training. Maybe annual report or something.

EG: [Referring to his life history chronology.] Yeah. And I see too you received an invitation to attend the welcoming of [Hubert] Humphrey as a platform dignitary.

JP: Yeah. Yeah. Which was interesting. I think it had something to do with the work of the Bureau. George Lee is on there, is a minister or was a minister. He was invited to do the invocation for the vice president at this political affair. He was awesome, probably one of the greatest speakers in America. There's no question. I understand that Hubert Humphrey told him, said, Preacher, if you'll just follow me all around the country. I guarantee you, if you pray before I speak, I'll win the election. He was that good. George Lee was really that good. Later was elected a bishop of the AME Zion church.

EG: But he was black.

JP: Um hmm.

EG: Wow. I, general question about the employment bureau. What were the goals?

JP: Well, okay we, the attempt was to go out and seek out clients for the Bureau. We had a special funding from the US Department of Labor. We, interesting that funding allowed us to hire, oh

gosh, probably ten or twelve individuals. Their job was to go out on the highways and byways and find people who were not working including those who stood around the barrel and smoked dope, et cetera, et cetera and bring them to the Bureau so that they, we could find some employment for them or encourage them to become a part of the workforce. That group was cited as one of the best in America by the US Department of Labor. It was interesting that all of the guys were guys who at another point in time in their life did not always follow the legal way of doing things. Are you with me?

EG: The legal way, okay.

JP: We had some former crooks. But the interesting thing is that some of them came to the Bureau driving big cars and wearing shiny suits and the best of shoes. But they turned over their ways of doing things, and what we were able to pay them, it was a drop in the bucket to what they had been accustomed to making. But they were able to forego that way of life at least to work for us and did one heck of a job. Musicians, one was a store, small store owner in a community, kind of on and on and on. If they went and met somebody on the street and they know that the person had not been working and they had been accustomed to hanging around, when they told them that I'll be back tomorrow you need to go with me, they were not playing. I guarantee you the people would go with them. In other words they threatened and it worked.

EG: So—

JP: Now you can't, well, it worked. They brought-- The recruits brought the clients to the office. They went through our process of interview, trying to assess what skills they had if any and how you can match that up with the kind of jobs that we were developing for the clients. It worked. Now that was not the only group that were going out, but we were constantly letting folks know that this was a place where you could come to possibly find employment. We were trying to find employment for you. So that was an ongoing kind of thing.

We were working like with employers and employers, some employers say well, folk in that population do not have the necessary skills to do what we need to do. So okay. What criteria? What do you need them to do? What kind of skills do they need? Well, they need this; they need to pass the Wonderlic test; they need to do this and that. So we would go out and search our population profile and try to match them up. Oftentimes we would go back to them and say okay, here ()-- They can learn

how to operate Bell system that they had at that time. You answer the telephone and you know how back in those days. Sometimes they would say well, but you have two or three people in here who have had college training, some college graduate, some who have been in the teaching profession, they're too highly educated and they, we can't use them. But oftentimes it was an excuse. So we got that worked out. I mean—

EG: What were your strategies of getting by that ()?

JP: Just continued to press and move on. If we worked with one group of supervisors or one office and if they didn't comply, then we move up to the next level. We ended up one day with having a group from, come from Atlanta, and the regional manager and his person and we met in a hotel suite and we had lunch. We had steaks and all. When the meeting was over, the assistant then cut the cigars and lit up the six of us. We sit back smoking the big Cuban cigars, getting ready for the conversation. If they thought that that was going to work, it didn't. So we insist that they do the right thing, and they end up doing the right thing. So the point I'm trying to have is, we just continue to move up the chain of authority until we got the right people who would do the right thing.

EG: Did you have a kind of typical way of like selling your clients or persuading people to hire blacks for the first time?

JP: Well, it was a matter of, I think it was—we had a job development. We had job development teams. Depending on where we were going, that team could consist of a lady, two guys, it could be a black guy and a white guy and a white lady. They would go to the company and start. But we had some people that should be in your workforce. We noticed that you don't have any people doing these things. It's obvious we look around, you don't have any clerical people. We see all these people working, and it's a public company. We think that you ought to consider hiring some people. It would start like that. Our job developers were very forceful from time to time. Let me put it, they were persuasive.

EG: How did you pick what businesses to target?

JP: We went after all of them. At the time—I'm talking about from the time Uncle John looked in the window--there were no black bank tellers. There were no black folks working at telephone operators at Southern Bell. There were no black folk in upper level jobs with Duke Power Company. Lance Packing, the largest employers even with city government, county government. They were not there. We did a

survey and found that there was not one black person in Charlotte at that time who made \$10,000 a year in salary. That was it. So the targets were there. So we went after [them] and it worked.

EG: How many—

JP: It worked.

EG: How many people did you place or how many businesses?

JP: Oh, we ended up, I'd like to think because of our activities we ended up with people in all of those institutions. Now I'm not saying that we put everyone in there. But I'm saying, I think because of the activity, once they started to employ people, they realized that it is good to hire people and that there's a workforce, a very stable workforce out there that they have not used. So they just started using them with a lot of urging. There was, sometimes we had to get kind of--. I think one or two times the word came back to me, what kind of, what in the world kind of people are you sending out to do job development.

EG: Oh with the, knowing they were formerly crooks?

JP: No, no, no. Job developers were, most of the job developers were a different set of people. Recruiters were after the clients, our clients. The job developers were sophisticated, and they knew what they were doing. They knew how to approach management and all of that, and they perfected a way to do it. We had one lady, white, and she and a couple of guys who happened to be black always would form a team and one white couple, a couple of white guys on the job development team, they would always--. We would sit down and analyze. Okay, we're going to company X. What do we know about company X? What about their management? What kind of techniques do we need to employ to get to them to make sure that they're clear on what we want and what they can do? How can we sell them that in the end, in the cool of the evening, they're going to be better off because they got a better group of potential employees to do their work. They had just never had any workforce before. It worked. It worked. There's some stories in the naked city. I can't tell you all of them.

EG: What obstacles did you face? What were the challenges?

JP: Well, the challenges were one that I've already mentioned about too much education. If we brought people with education--. I'll tell you this one. They set up, the airline set up a call center here in Charlotte. We felt that we needed to place some people with the call center. At the same time they had,

they did not have any reservation people, nor at that time did they have any females working as--. What do they call the people who work on the plane.

EG: Stewards.

JP: Stewards. They didn't have any. So we started to zero in on that. So in walked a guy one day from Rockefeller Plaza, New York. Slick suit fellow with shiny shoes who happened to be black and said, "You all are off on the wrong foot." Said, "Let me tell you one thing. We have set up testing all over this country. The only person who passed the test happened to be my daughter." We said, "In America." "Yep." So we ended up, we ended up having a meeting out at the facility. They brought in the head of NAACP and a bunch of other people at the meeting and I didn't go. [Jim] Ross and another guy, Freddie Ford attended that meeting. When the deal was over, it got into kind of a shouting match. So the New York guy told the other people, said, we told you not to set up this meeting. You messed up. Well, we just exposed them. Make a long story short, the first guy they hired ended up in the personnel department and went to Miami to head up one of the personnel divisions down there, the Morse guy. So people got hired. We say it is absolutely absurd for you to say that people can't operate this call center thing: you've got the telephone and you've got a typewriter and you talk to people. You've got to be crazy. Who do you think we are? You're going to think we're going to buy that. But anyway, it changed.

EG: Did people, you mentioned the talk about the recruiters. Did eventually blacks start coming to you for employment, [blacks] that found out about your employment bureau?

JP: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Oh absolutely. From day one. Yeah. Yeah. We didn't have to--. The recruiting unit was just a very special thing. But no, people were coming all the time. Yeah.

EG: [Referring to his life history chronology] I see here you put you challenged Charlotte Business League members at a fall meeting about the practical link between politics, social issues and economic development. If you could--

JP: The Business League was a group of guys, both men and women, who owned businesses. We formed this Business League, and I think that, I think I was president of the league at that time. I think what we were saying, the practical thing is that if you are business people, you know you need to understand the nuances of politics and what role it plays in your being a businessman in this city. You need to take an active role in things. You need to be, you need to join the Chamber of Commerce. You need to

do all those things that will help your business become a larger better business. That was kind of the challenge I think that we were talking about. A lot of that happened. I served on the board of the Chamber of Commerce for several tenures. A lot of other of those guys served on the board of the Chamber for example. They got a little more sophisticated about how you do business in the community.

EG: This is a league of white and black businessmen.

JP: Uh uh. This is just black.

EG: Oh just black. Okay. Interesting. I see too from here that you--and Mr. Ross talked about that a little bit too--[participated] in War on Poverty programs like the Youth Corps, and he mentioned the mayor's summer program.

JP: Yeah, which was very outstanding. They did a lot of good work. A friend of ours, you might have talked about Reitzel and the mayor's program. They brought in a lot of kids and put them in training with various and sundry city departments. It was very effective. It was very effective. Meanwhile we had the Neighborhood Youth Corps, which was young people. They went into all kind of--. They had an opportunity to work in various and sundry kind of occupations. That worked well. I mean it was, it gave them exposure to a lot of things and I, every once in a while I see one of those kids on the street, and they say thank you. Not that I personally did it. But--[tape turned off and on]

EG: Questions I have. Are there topic areas that we haven't covered that we should discuss?

[interruption]

JP: What other topic areas? Oh, most of that Charlotte Bureau operations really kind of folded into city government.

EG: Oh if you could talk more about [that].

JP: Well, one of the guys who was deputy director or the number-two person in the Neighborhood Youth Corps went over to the city government under neighborhood development department and headed up pretty much a project of doing, pretty much a manpower project. I think they pretty much had a take off from the Bureau's program because prior to that they didn't have any such thing like that in city government, nor county government. So I think they learned that there are some effective things that happened that can help people. They kind of employed some of these tactics and operations over in city

government. They don't talk about that. But the guy who was over there I think has since retired from the city.

EG: So other programs () too that became part or city government modeled for their programs after it or—

JP: Well the summer program of course. They still have what I think they call the mayor's summer program, is really kind of a takeoff of the Neighborhood Youth Corps, which is a national program as you know. I think they are still doing some of that in Charlotte, I think. They don't call it that. They're not going to say it was modeled after the Bureau program. But it's all right. Yeah. The on-the-job training program, I don't think we have any of that around now. There were some things that happened of course at the national level that became kind of a OJT program with US Department of, you know, highway department where contractors then recruited people to work in that industry and provided on-the-job training programs for them. They were paid, which was a pretty good thing. Pretty good program, but it's a version I think of the OJT project that was started with US Department of Labor. Yeah.

EG: Mr. Ross was saying too that you would follow up with the different people you placed as employees.

JP: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We tried to do that you know went to () to make sure that they were. We had kind of a programmed kind of thing where we knew based on experience the difficult times in employment, the first month or the first three weeks were critical times to get through that, and we kind of had then three months and six months. So that was kind of the follow up mechanism that we were aware of, that those were critical times for new employees with companies. We really tried to follow up on that and make sure that people were okay. Sometimes it was the matter of being able to talk to somebody about that new experience of supervision. Sometimes they were encountering difficulties with supervision. If they had a problem getting to the job because they didn't have a car or something, oftentimes they needed to do some things and make sure that they were going to get there if it means getting up an hour early and taking the bus to get there. But some adjustments. For new employees, there are adjustment periods. You can pretty much figure out when it occurs.

EG: So it was like the first few weeks and month, and then you would check up with them after three months and then after six months and so forth.

JP: Right, as a follow up to them. That was helpful for many people to see them through, to help them get through those periods.

EG: Were they generally, what was the reaction like particularly of ones who were the first ones to integrate the workplace?

JP: It was interesting. It was interesting and the majority of people made it I'm happy to say. The majority of people made it. Again we and, I'm sure Ross and all of us who worked in that--. Occasionally people would come up and say, you all placed me on the first job at Woolworth's store. Or you all placed me with the first car salesman at so and so. I made it through and I retired et cetera, et cetera. So and I'm sure there were some various kind of experiences that many people went through. But they made it. Many of them made it. You really feel pretty good about that. They did, and again oftentimes they'll come up, "I know you all don't know me but—" "Well, no I'm glad you mentioned that. I really feel proud for you that you were able to make it."

EG: Yeah. Yeah. Did you feel this particular effort with the Charlotte Bureau was part of a larger civil rights movement?

JP: Oh I think so. Oh I think so. I think that--. It's my understanding that one of the last conferences that was held by Dr. King was up in the mountains of North Carolina, western North Carolina. That conference was on employment. I think the sense at that time was we've got some rights. We've got some public accommodations. We're doing some things. Now we need to concentrate on making sure that people have equal access to jobs and businesses et cetera, et cetera. So that's where we need to concentrate our efforts. And I think that's right. If you get the opportunity to go to the restaurant and you can't pay for the meal, okay. But if you get the opportunity and you can go there and you're having jobs that afford you the dollars to pay for it, you're all right. That's what happened in some cases. That's what happened in some cases. So I think the bottom line is that economics ending up being the be all and where-with-all for all of this. Now you've got to have the rights. You've got to have the opportunity, but once you get them, you've got to be able to afford them. Sometimes we don't think about that in terms of next step or prioritizing the steps of full opportunity. We don't think about that. But yeah, it's crucial. It's essential. You get to attend the right schools. You learn the things that are necessary to make it in the labor force or in the world today. Then you've got a, you've got to, you really need to equip yourself so that you can get

a good job to accommodate, but you want a good quality of life. You've got to pay for it. The only way you can pay for it is to get a job now unless you are rich and you don't have to work. Some people are fortunate enough to have that. But not the majority. So yeah, funding quality of life is important. You hear me.

EG: Yeah.

JP: Paying for it, yeah. But we don't usually think about that most of the time. We talk about freedom, right. But sure want to be free--. But once you're free, then there are some other responsibilities and obligations to being free to do what you want to do and what you need to do. I'm free to get on an oceanliner, but I can't get on there if I don't buy a ticket.

EG: Right.

JP: Okay.

EG: I'm going to stop it—

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

EG: Testing. Yep. Why don't I ask you the questions about, we focused really on the Eastside Council and the employment bureau but about your childhood? You said you were the son of a brick mason and housewife, who your parents were, what they were like. What their names were.

JP: Was that the question, their names? Oh my father's name was Haywood Polk, Hay, yeah, Haywood Polk, Charles Haywood Polk. Charles Haywood Lynde David Polk. Don't write all that down. Charles Haywood Polk. They called him Haywood. That was one of those long names. A lot of kids, black kids during that time, their parents would name them about a name that long for some reason. Now it was Haywood, Charles Haywood Polk. My mother is Ruth Ella Polk. She was a, her maiden name was Vaughn, V-A-U-G-H-N.

EG: You said your dad was a brick mason and your—

JP: Yeah.

EG: Mom was a housewife.

JP: Right. He, yeah, that was his occupation. At one time he owned and operated a barbershop in the community. But his trade really was as a mason. He was pretty good at it too. He really was. In fact

it's interesting-- Kind of as an aside if you look back on the community, the majority of people, the older people during that era, the men had trades, some kind of trade or they were in some kind of business like landscaping and cement and on and on and on. Kind of very independent people. The community as a whole was that way. Most of them were landowners et cetera, et cetera. Kind of a unique community.

EG: It, was it like that with when the Eastside Council of Community Affairs was around?

JP: Yeah, well, it was, the Eastside Council was late, late. I'm thinking back years prior to that. For example the school that I, we talked about. Billingsley School was a Rosenwald School. What happened was that a former slave gave part of the land to the board of education to build the school on. The Rosenwald people then said okay, we'll build a Rosenwald School. Rosenwald School is a four-room plank building, usually white plank building. People in this community said appreciate it and all that, but we don't want a four-room plank built school, and they raised the money to brick veneer it. That kind of gives you some sense of the people who, the men and women who lived in that community. They didn't want just a handout, the meager kind of stuff. They wanted to be something special.

EG: Yeah, so it's a little bit wealthier than your typical black community of the time.

JP: Yeah, I guess you could say that. Probably so because people were doing, again, various and sundry things. I guess they probably had a little more income than most communities because they were doing the kind of trades thing that paid more than common labor. If you were landscaper, it paid more than just regular common [labor], particularly if you owned the company. The cement finisher paid a little more than common labor, and if you owned the company and you employed ten to twelve people to do your contracts, a little better off.

EG: And a degree of independence too [from] being employed by white people.

JP: Absolutely. Absolutely. Absolutely. Most of the folk, most of the men during that time had their own thing, pretty much. Again, they were landowners as well. So it was a different kind of independent group of people. Yeah.

EG: So you growing up, your family was middle class or—

JP: No. We were poor, but I didn't realize that we were poor as it relates to relative wealth kind of thing. We were poor. My daddy built a brick house with a slate roof, and it was the only one in the community. So that kind of set [it] apart from the average house in the community. It's a little bit

different, but we didn't, we didn't think about that. We, being my family. I don't think we thought about that. Or my brother, I had one sister and a brother. I don't think we thought about that. We [were] set apart because we have a brick house with a slate top on it.

EG: I see with being born in 1926 I was wondering if you had any memories of the Great Depression and the sort of impact () that had.

JP: Yeah, I remember, I remember some of the Roosevelt programs like the NRA and the CCCs and that kind of thing where they made work for people so they could eat. That's what it amounted to. I recall that people had jobs where they kind of took care of the road or roadbeds. At that early time the streets were dirt streets, and they would pay people to dig the trenches beside the road so the water would flow and generally do that kind of thing. I remember that--. That was a way to pay people to work, to kind of earn a living because they didn't have many jobs. That was during the depression era.

EG: Were these black and white people?

JP: Um hmm.

EG: Who were employed doing these work.

JP: Right. Right. There were a lot of people, they had the CCC camps, and people who went into that. They did a lot of parks and stuff all over this country particularly in the South. They built parks and public places and all. So at least folk had a place to work. They did some meaningful work. They had clothes on their back and three meals.

EG: If you could talk too a little more about what it was like to grow up in this sort of community.

JP: Well, again it was real interesting. Again I really think this community, I like to think the community was unique in that it was very small at that time much smaller than it is now. We liked to talk about we remember and we know the time when we knew all the people, all the babies, all the cats and dogs by name. That whole thing. So it was a unique, a different, we assumed that it was a different kind of experience. Some of our teachers in grade school lived in the community, which kind of different from the way it is now. There was a special kind of bonding with our teachers, and they felt obligated to make sure that you were doing to do right thing. If not, they'd take a twelve-inch rule and cut you right down across the ear. Then you know the old story, you'd go home and tell your mother and you'd get another whipping. That kind of thing. But it really was kind of special.

We had baseball teams. We had sports teams. The guys out here, out here being Grier Heights, always had a competitive nature about sports, and we played Cherry [which] was another community, a black community over here. Then across Monroe Road over there was a white community. We always had a competitive thing with Brooklyn, Cherry, [Ennitt?] and those happened to be black. But the guys over here across the railroad were white, and we had that same competitive thing with them.

There was a swimming hole, the creek is right down there. The other side of the railroad there was a swimming hole. That was a competition, who could get to the swimming hole first, the black guys or the white guys. Whoever got there first, you kind of controlled it. That didn't mean you didn't let the other guys swim, but you were kind of in charge of it. But then we had boxing teams. We had football team. We competed again, pick up against each other. It was just-- We knew each other by name and blah, blah, blah, and it was the way a community is supposed to be, what I think the community ought to be about and the way people should live together. It was interesting, and we've had because of that kind of environment, because it allowed for people to participate in sports things, we had a lot of guys come out of this community to do well in football, in baseball and all. One of the kids that would've played on Branch Rickey's Pittsburgh team was in an accident, a Mazeroski and the guy from—

EG: ()

JP: No, the guy who got killed in the airplane wreck.

EG: Roberto Clemente.

JP: Clemente. Watson would've played on that team. I understand that Branch Rickey himself had kind of said this will be my guy, my second baseman, but [he] was in an accident [which] just ruined him. I mean, split his head and after that he couldn't, if he looked up he'd see, have double vision. So he could never get, but several guys who played at the professional level of baseball. One of our real prides was in football. The guy was at Second Ward, in the black high school, during integration transferred to Myers Park High School, which was the white school, and Cindy attended there. But Jimmy Lee did his last year at Myers Park and was recruited by Purdue University and played out there. In his last year he left school. We sent a delegation of us, must've been fifteen, twenty guys went out to Indiana his third year to see a game against Wake Forest. They played Wake Forest. Wake Forest had a heck of a team that year, had a black quarterback who wore white shoes. That was a heck of a game. But anyway, I had the

privilege of sitting on Purdue's bench because-- Anyway, I was on the bench. The academic coach told me, said, "Jim, next year Jimmy Lee Kirkpatrick will be an All American because we are going to put the whole resources of the school behind him. Leroy Keyes, that was his last year, and Leroy Keyes had made All American on offense and defense. Juice beat him out that year as the top. O.J. Simpson beat him out as the top college player in the nation that year. But he said, "Jimmy Lee Kirkpatrick, I promise you will be All American." Jimmy Lee left school. I've never gotten over that. So but we've had some guys that have done well in sports.

EG: But you said some, there are other professional baseball players that came out of this community.

JP: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EG: Who were some of them?

JP: Well, Davis, we call him Butch Davis, a guy he used to live down the street. Now some of those, well Davis played Triple A professional. We had a few that played Negro ball, which was the—

EG: The Negro League.

JP: The Negro League, played in the Newark Eagles, guy used to live right down the street played. Parks, Charlie Parks played with the Newark club. So yeah, we've had a number of guys play at that level of baseball.

EG: Do you remember when Jackie Robinson integrated the major leagues? If you could talk about that and [its significance.]

JP: I had the opportunity to play against Jackie Robinson.

EG: You did!

JP: Yeah. Every year they would barnstorm and come-- They'd start up and come down to the South. So one year, I played on a team here in Charlotte. So one year they came down, Jackie Robinson, [Roy] Campanella, Luke Easter, a guy who played with Boston, Larry Doby and all those guys were on this barnstorming team. So they played us. I was playing second base. The guy I'm talking about who was going to Pittsburgh—

EG: Martin.

JP: No, no. This was Tommy Watson. Tommy was playing, I played first base, but Tommy wanted to play first base so I moved over to second base. Tommy played first base. But later on, once he started to go up in the division, they moved him back to second base. But anyway, I played second base that day. Jackie Robinson had not received a hit all the way down the line. So he hit a ball over second base. I went back and threw him out. When we changed innings he cussed me out. He cussed me. He didn't curse me. But that was an interesting experience. But we would oftentimes play those guys when they came down.

EG: Well, when was this that you played them?

JP: That was in it had to be '48, '49 something.

EG: So right after the integration of the major leagues.

JP: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

EG: Oh.

JP: I played baseball at [Johnson C.] Smith, and he, I think was about the same year that he went into the majors. Didn't he go in the '47, somewhere—

EG: Yeah. '45.

JP: Yeah.

EG: Then the barnstorming, were you in a Charlotte league or—

JP: Charlotte, well it was just a baseball team, it was not an official league team in Charlotte. It was, we had a lot of communities with teams. They would play in competitive kind of things on the weekend, play each other. Oftentimes we played, you would have a team that played kind of barnstorm and what, down in South Carolina and North Carolina. That kind of thing. It was not organized as such, but in a sense it was organized.

EG: Was there a name of the team?

JP: Yeah. There were teams with names?

EG: What was—

JP: Charlotte Black Hornets was one of the teams. Asheville Blues and on and on.

EG: What was the name of your team?

JP: It was the Charlotte, yeah.

EG: Black Hornets.

JP: Um hmm.

EG: It wasn't part of the Negro League.

JP: That was not, no.

EG: It was just a local team () barnstorm.

JP: Just a local team, yeah, yeah. But at that time you had the national league. You had Atlanta, Newark, New York, Baltimore and all, and that was the Negro League.

EG: Monarchs.

JP: Right, Kansas City Monarchs.

EG: Yeah.

JP: And on and on.

EG: It's just that when I was little, in particular, I was very interested in baseball history, and so I've read all about these barnstorming. I don't think I've ever met anyone [who was part of it]. This is very personally exciting for me. When you played against Jackie Robinson, who won?

JP: They won. They won. But we had a good game. I think Luke Easter hit two homeruns. It was a good game. It was a good game. We felt good playing in a local group competing against. They were, I mean, these were all the guys, all the guys, the majority of guys, black guys, Afro-American guys who were in the major leagues at that time.

EG: There weren't many, right.

JP: No, no. It was, yeah. It was, it must've been--. It was a team full. It was a team full. Not many more than that at that time. But all the big names, Larry Doby, Luke Easter, Jackie Robinson, there was a guy who played in Boston and all. I can never think of his name. He was on the team. There were some other guys who played in the major leagues, but then at the end of the season they would barnstorm. And oftentimes they would play local clubs. They would start in New York, come down [to] Washington, Baltimore, Virginia, Richmond on down to Atlanta and all. So it was really kind of interesting.

EG: Yeah, I read a book recently about Satchel Paige and how about how he, even into his '60s was barnstorming.

JP: Yeah, yeah. We used to see Satchel play. I never played against him. But was an interesting time.

EG: You did, so () with him.

JP: No. No, I didn't. I never played in the same game with him.

EG: Oh but you saw him play.

JP: Oh yeah, oh absolutely. Oh absolutely.

EG: When he would barnstorm.

JP: Right. Right. Then you know he played for Cleveland at one time.

EG: Yeah, Indians, yeah. Like the oldest rookie, forty-two-year-old rookie. Were there [when you were] growing up other sports figures that you admired or looked up to or followed?

JP: Well, baseball was pretty much it. I guess baseball was pretty much it. It was later that black guys played in the National Football League. Yeah. The Buddy Youngs and the people like that. You just didn't have a whole lot of () guys playing in the National Football League at that time. And even basketball you didn't have. Most of the basketball teams were made up of white college stars. Maybe a few, maybe a few.

EG: Yeah, I know baseball was the sport at that time for—

JP: It was the national past time, without any question. Willie Mays, we played on a team when Willie Mays-- Now Willie Mays barnstormed. At one time Willie Mays was in service in North Carolina. He was in the Army and played with some teams like down in Laurinburg, North Carolina, down around Fayetteville. I think he played with some of those teams. Again kind of barnstorming, kind of playing within competitive group or competitive--

EG: So you played against Mays as well.

JP: Never played against him or did we? I don't know.

EG: You saw him play.

JP: Yeah. Oh yeah.

EG: Did you ever-- Like with some of these players was just your contact with them playing with them or did you socialize with them afterward or get to meet any of them?

JP: No, not really. Just playing. But never socializing really. Yeah.

EG: It makes sense. () Well, I could dwell on sports forever. () so much more.

JP: There is a guy, there's a writer, a writer did a lot of work in writing about the Negro League stuff and South Carolina and some things that went on down there.

EG: There was a book, *Only the Ball was White* about that ().

JP: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, but there's been some writing devoted to, I've called kind of cornfield baseball I called it [transcriptionist note: he says later he said cotton field but he specifically says cornfield]. Not organized, not organized as such but organized in that they play communities, different communities play against each other. That kind of thing.

EG: I see too you went to the [school?] for the National Youth Administration camps.

JP: Um hmm.

EG: I wonder how that came about and what you did.

JP: Well, immediately after high school, I don't know, there was some guys from the community up there, and I was sixteen when I got out of high school. So we went up there. It was kind of a something to do because I couldn't, it was not the time to go in school, go to college. So went up there for this training and I was () skilled training as a machinist. Also knowing that I was going to ask my parents to let me go to Philadelphia and live with my uncle, and there was going to be some time between going to service and that, like two years or something.

EG: Because you were too young at that point [to go in the service].

JP: Too young, just too young. So that worked out. Played one of the best softball teams ever assembled in this country. I promise.

EG: At the [NYA] camp.

JP: At NYA.

EG: Really, yeah.

JP: I promise you we had probably one of the best ever assembled, yeah. That was at Rocky Mount, North Carolina, real interesting.

EG: So you played local teams there as well.

JP: Yeah.

EG: ()

JP: Yeah, that was just great. I'm trying to find a book. The guy who wrote the book on the South Carolina stuff is a writer, and he moved from Charlotte not long ago, moving from Alabama, moved to Alabama. Gosh. What in the world happened. I had a little book that he wrote on Charlotte religious wars. Charlotte religious wars. I stuck it in something somewhere. But anyway, he was the guy that also wrote the book on baseball in South Carolina and around. Oh he did a lot of work on the Negro League. In fact I think they inducted him in the hall of fame, Negro League Hall of Fame.

EG: Did they. I've been there in Kansas City.

JP: I've been there.

EG: You have too, yeah. I, the only Negro League player I've met is Buck O'Neil. I was out in Kansas City and ran into him. He's still around.

JP: Yeah, I think I read something about him just recently.

EG: Yeah. Well, I can probably if you don't remember the name find out about the South Carolina author.

JP: Well, he was really from Charlotte.

EG: Oh from Charlotte.

JP: Lived in Charlotte, wrote about the South Carolina, there was a special team in South Carolina that he wrote about, and they used to play between communities and all. But in addition to that he did a lot of work on Negro League stuff of the big guys, not that group, but yeah. He spent a lot of time working on that.

EG: Did you go to any Negro League games? () there were teams around.

JP: Yeah, well, yeah. Occasionally they would come to Charlotte and play. The Atlanta Black Crackers would play some other major league team, and they would again in the summertime they would play when the regular season was over. We had a Double A, Triple A team, Double A at one time. When the season was over, they would barnstorm too, those team called Cuban Black Joints and on and on and on. So yeah, we used to have a chance to see all those guys play.

EG: So the Atlanta Black Crackers would play other Negro League teams.

JP: Yeah.

EG: Like the, what was the team in Washington? Josh Gibson played for them. I can't remember the name. I know the Monarchs.

JP: Right. Right. Yeah, Josh Gibson was supposed to be the first black in Major League. The story is that Branch Rickey selected Josh to play, what was it Brooklyn at that time. He had the New York team. Branch Rickey.

EG: Brooklyn Dodgers.

JP: Right. Right. Josh Gibson, now, according to the story Josh Gibson was supposed to play on that team. Branch Rickey went to see a game, Negro League game, the last game before they announced that he was coming on their team. Somebody came in and slid into home plate and put their spikes up, and Josh went in his pocket to get his knife out, and that was it. That was it. That's why Jackie [was selected instead of Gibson to integrate the major leagues.] Now that came from Parks who played with them who lived right down the street there. That's the reason that--. And you know what his record was, Josh Gibson.

EG: The home runs.

JP: Yeah, the home run thing. They said he was awesome as a batter. He was really awesome and as a baseball player, he was awesome.

EG: You were saying you did remember when Jackie, the integration of the baseball, that happened. If you could talk about your memories of that, what that meant.

JP: Well, actually at that time we were pretty active, and I was playing in college at that time. So it opened some opportunities. People who had an opportunity to play some organized baseball, just opened some opportunities that had not been opened previously by him going into the majors. Of course his going into the majors also opened opportunities in the minor leagues. See there were a lot of minor league teams up in South Dakota and all over the country, Single A, Double A ball, Triple A up the Montreal with Triple A ball and all that. In fact Jackie played at Montreal I think, didn't he. Yeah. But yeah, it [signified] new or different opportunities for guys to play baseball. Yeah. In fact I had an opportunity to go, but I [was] married to her. So I couldn't, I couldn't leave.

EG: So you had an opportunity for minor leagues after the integration with--.

JP: Yeah.

EG: Isn't that interesting. Because you, I mean the reading I've done you hear about with integration with the major leagues and people () this angle of what it meant to the lower leagues. [Gritter is saying that you hear about the integration of the major leagues but not the integration of the minor leagues.]

JP: Oh yeah. The lower leagues and see, there were teams all over. Charlotte had, Charlotte had a Double A team, and Hank Aaron played in the league that Charlotte was in. Gosh, I could name you--. There were several guys who went to the majors from even from the Charlotte team, Charlotte Hornets. So yeah, it was farm teams. That was the thing. You'd get in the farm team. You'd do well. You move up, and hopefully everybody is hoping to move from A to Double A to Triple A to the majors, or sometimes you could go from Double A to the majors. It all depended on what their needs were at that time. If they needed a good pitcher or a good batter or whatever, the opportunity was there sometimes. A guy might go up. May not make it but at least they would go up, the opportunity was there. The word was a guy would go up and they'd run into problems with batting, and they'd say, "Well, he'll be back soon because the sun is shining and they take off their jackets." Then when you look at the pitcher in the outfield, you see white shirts. Well, that helped blind the ball that's coming in from the pitcher. You with me. Well, it won't be long because he can't see the ball. So all of those that were really with what was happening stayed there and made it, but that was a big joke in baseball. They'd take off their shirts, take off their jackets in the outfield and you see the light colors and it does make a difference. It does make a difference.

EG: Yeah, because I hear about that with the lights, but not, I hadn't heard that before with the shirts.

JP: Yeah, the shirts are light background back there kind of, and the pitchers are throwing the way they throw in the major leagues. The speed with which they throw made a big difference.

EG: So you, when you were, what minor league team could you not play for?

JP: Oh I had a number of different, now remember at that time they used to scout. They would come from different places, different teams, different organizations. Each major league team had organizations, and they'd have farm clubs in different places. If they hear of a player somewhere that was a pretty good player, a pretty good hitter and player, they would come and scout and sometimes talk to them

to see one, if they were interested in playing in playing. So they'd recruit for the team and all. That happened a lot.

EG: This was, you were recruited in the forty, late '40s or—

JP: Oh yeah, it was yeah, late '40s. Yeah. Well, I never reached the point where I got beyond showing an interest because at that time I was married.

EG: Is that something that dissuaded them that you were—

JP: Not, me--. [My] concern was the concern for the family, leaving the family. At that time they liked--. Depending on which major, which minor league level you played in depended on the amount of money that you made. So if you were recruited to play Single A ball, then—[coughs] excuse me. There's a difference between the pay [regarding] Single A or Double A or Triple A. Once you got up to Triple A, you were close to the majors, and they paid more money because they were in larger communities, and consequently their income, I'm sure, was higher so they could pay more for playing. So depending on how that worked out.

EG: Was there anything else more about sports that you wanted to add?

JP: No, no. No.

EG: Well, that's--. Oh, go ahead.

JP: No, I was just trying to think, whatever kind of sport, Mike Tyson's daddy grew up out here.

EG: Really! Mike Tyson, yeah. Was he a—was his dad a boxer too?

JP: No. No. No. No his dad was a good baseball player. Yeah. Was a good baseball player. Interesting that Jimmy moved to New York when Mike was young, and he never, he didn't get--. Well, Mike came to live with him after he had gone to prison or something up in the mountains. They didn't make it. They didn't make it. Mike left his dad's home and went back up in New York. Cus D'Amato, that was his name, you remember, [who] trained him as a fighter. Mike Tyson when he was real young. He really kind of became a part of the family. He went from there. But they finally got together. I think there was an article in the New York paper or New York magazine that they finally acknowledged each other, and in fact Jimmy came home one time and left here going out to where was he in jail, in Minnesota or something.

EG: I'm not sure.

JP: It was a Midwest--. You remember he got into that thing. He left here, went to visit with him, left there and went home to New York and died. Yeah. But again Jimmy was an independent person, and he said he didn't need Mike. He didn't look for Mike. I think Mike gave him an old Cadillac car at one time. So he was just that independent [even] with all the money that Mike had and made.

EG: You played a role in revitalizing this neighborhood.

JP: Well, they say "revitalize." Well, I really lived here most of my life. I left when we went down to Waco, and at the time I was in Philadelphia. Those were the--. And in the service. Those were the times I was away. But even when I came back, back home, I really didn't spend a lot of time in the community because in business--. Most of the time was spent working on trying to get business and doing business. So you just didn't have a lot of time to do those community kind of things that we needed to do. But I spent a lot of time since I've been retired in the community. The community has grown tremendously as I mentioned. It was a time when you would know all the people, but now it's just too large to know, to know all the people. There's one housing project here with 160, I think, 8 apartments. And if you multiply that by three you know what you have. It's larger than some small towns in eastern North Carolina. It's pretty compact. So it's a different community.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 2, SIDE B

EG: Okay. Has it stayed a predominantly black community or has integration had an impact?

JP: It's stayed predominantly black. There have been times when I guess the first during the, what year was that. When the boat people came over. There was some integration of the community by people who came from where did they come from? [transcriptionist note: perhaps Montegnards or Cambodia] Somewhere in the Pacific Ocean area. But then there have been more recently a lot of Mexicans, Latinos people living in the community. But it's been a going and coming really by and large. But you still have some families here. Not a lot of white families. So it's predominantly Afro-American.

EG: I wanted to ask you too about working with the ships in Philadelphia, what that was like.

JP: Ah, yeah. Again when I went up, when I went up to Philadelphia, I worked in the Navy yard, attended school. Also—[interruption]—also worked. That was an interesting experience working on the shipyard, on the waterfront as a stevedore. I must've been and I'm almost sure I was the youngest person

up there. What would happen is they have what they call gangs, and I didn't realize it, but the waterfront was controlled by the Mafia.

EG: Really.

JP: Oh yeah. Yeah. I didn't realize what was going on. [moving away from mike] The loading and unloading of ships that would come in and what would happen, you'd go down and stand in the street and a ship foreman would be there. So what they would do: They would hand out tickets to people they wanted to work. So they would look around and say, well looks like he'll work hard or he'll do this or do that or he'll--. They've had some experience with you and you get a ticket. If you didn't get a ticket, you didn't work. But that was kind of--. That was my longshoreman badge. [showing badge to EG] It reached the point you had to have a badge and [eating/talking] you get, you really end up with the labor thing. Isn't there a number on there?

EG: Yeah, the ILA is that the international—

JP: Longshoreman's Association.

EG: Longshoreman's Association.

JP: Mafia.

EG: The labor and the Mafia.

JP: Yeah.

EG: When did you realize that was—

JP: Long after I was away from there.

EG: This was your number, what did these numbers mean? [Were these numbers] of the union or the local?

JP: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. You register with the union. Again I didn't know what was going on. I was just working.

EG: Did you, did any union sort of ()?

JP: No, no, no. No.

EG: How did you feel when you found out it was the Mafia?

JP: Kindly interested. To look back on it and not know that at the time or to learn that the Mafia pretty much controlled or it was said that they pretty much controlled the water front, what went on with the loading and unloading of ships and that kind of thing. That's exactly what it was.

EG: It's funny. You hear more about that in the '50s--the connections between the Mafia and organized labor. So yeah. Then from there you went to Germany or wherever on the--what was your World War Two service experience? Well, at that time the troops weren't integrated, right? That was before the--

JP: They had just starting to do that.

EG: So when you were there they just, were you there when they first started that?

JP: Yeah. We were, actually my company was an all-black company. Because we were among the first occupation troops to go to Germany. In fact we went over on assignment, and we ended up not working. I played baseball and ran track.

EG: Wow, well you hear about--

JP: We didn't do anything. We didn't do any--.

EG: Because you hear about the major leaguers going, like Ted Williams and Joe DiMaggio, and them playing on these military teams.

JP: Yeah. Yeah. Well, they had teams at that time. They were labeled as special service, and almost every sport you had teams that competed against each other. You had these teams in Europe that competed against armed services, competition and things. Well, we were in a small company out in Furth. Well, we would come into Nuremberg where Hitler's stadium thing was built and--

EG: With the Olympics.

JP: Yeah. Yeah. But we were, we would compete against the special services guys in track and field kind of thing. That's really, that was about all we would do. But it was just happened that we got there in assignment. We ended up at the end of the tour guarding prisoners that they'd brought up from France, SS prisoners. They were building, they were building stockades for the American prisoners of war that they were bringing from France up into Germany. But that only happened a short time. So we, I guess I was kind of lucky in a sense that we didn't have very much to do. A lot of the guys in the company, they

would go to class at night. They would teach different classes. But we were pretty free. Being during the time that we got there.

EG: So did the integration of the armed forces affect your work at all or did you experience that at all?

JP: Uh uh. Actually I didn't experience any of it. Some of it happened prior, during that time. But it was with different companies. I know my cousin actually was in the fighting. He got transferred from a company and put into a fighting unit that, and a number of guys did, black guys. They got put into units that were fighting rather than doing back up of shore kind of work. But I never experienced that.

EG: Did you experience any sort of discrimination when you were in service?

JP: No, I couldn't tell. I was never in a situation where that really presented itself. Always being in a separate company, but that didn't, no.

EG: I was wondering too with growing up, when your kind of first memory of like racial consciousness was, that the larger society treated you separate and unequal.

JP: Yeah. We experienced some of that. But again I guess it was not, I guess it didn't weigh on us, us being in this community, as much it would some other places because of the attitude and nature of the people who lived in the community and didn't have to do, be exposed to certain things like certain other people. It did make some difference. I experienced of course the white and black water fountains. I just didn't drink out of the black fountain. I drank out of the white fountain all the time. That was just protest.

EG: When you were a little boy.

JP: Yeah. The employment thing, the same kind of thing. You experience some of that and certain people got certain kinds of jobs. In fact the other thing that, the top job at that time, the top job for a black person in Charlotte was working [as an] elevator operator in the big buildings downtown. The guys would have a bunch of keys like that hanging on his side. Well, those were the keys to the offices. They run the elevators, taking people up and down to their offices. That was a big thing back then. Or you were a chauffeur for one of the rich guys who could afford a chauffeur. But that's the way it was.

[interruption—tape turned off and on]

EG: The growing up too going to segregated schools, you mentioned the () teachers you lived near them and so forth. What I mean what () thank you very much. If you could talk

more about that experience going to segregated schools, and if you were--. Like I know some people I talked to went to segregated schools [and they] didn't feel they had as good of resources as other schools and so forth.

JP: Again, again our situation was a little bit unique. It was a neighborhood school. Several of the teachers lived in the neighborhood, which kind of put a different flavor on things. But the teachers, I think the teachers were really concerned about the students doing well, and they kind of forced your hand in some cases to do the right thing. That was beneficial. I think that was beneficial. On the other hand as I looked back as I got to high school, I'm not sure, no I know that my teachers didn't challenge me as much as they should have. Now that I'm awake and as I look back on it, they didn't. I did all right. I got by. I made decent grades. In fact I made pretty good grades, but if I had been challenged I could've made better grades. I know that now. But that's, that's late. I think well, I don't know if some of the teachers didn't realize the need to challenge, to challenge students as much as they should have. It maybe just not a part of them, not having experience of having to do that. One of those things. But I think () better.
[eating]

EG: Pardon.

JP: Not bad, it was not a bad experience. It was not as good as it could have been. () on an individual basis.

EG: And the high school you went to, was that an all black high school?

JP: Um hmm. Um hmm. It was built as a comprehensive high school. It went from grade one through actually grade eleven at that time. There were four or five schools built in the county of Mecklenburg around the perimeter of Mecklenburg. They were built as colored high school, okay.

EG: And it was that school that you were bussed to.

JP: Um hmm.

EG: Yeah. Switching gears a little bit, I wanted to ask you about being special assistant for the governor, what that was like and how you ended up getting that position.

JP: Well, I happened to know the governor when he was, he was a chemistry professor at Davidson College. He also served on the board of county commissioners here in Mecklenburg County and also served as chair. I got to know him quite well. When he left the county commission, he was elected

Congressman from this area, and I guess served four or five terms up there and then came back to North Carolina to run for governor. I did not go down, I didn't serve until the end of the last year of the first administration. I think Jim Martin was the first one to serve successive terms because they changed the rules. [transcriptionist note: Jim Hunt did just prior to Martin].

EG: Before you () do that, North Carolina, yeah.

JP: But I went down the last year, yeah the last year of his first term. So I ended up making five years, the last four years full term. But it was a really good experience. It was a really good experience. I, of course I had been involved in private enterprise before that. Not a lot of public things, not working in public sector before that time. So to be exposed to that was really, really good. I got involved with a number of things in that particular job. I was fortunate to serve in the cabinet, attended cabinet meetings and that type of thing and got assigned from time to time to do some-- I was really special assistant. It was called special assistant for minority affairs, but it got outside the realm of that, whatever you call that. It was that. So we were called upon to do a lot of different things dealing with, again, jobs and highways and building prisons and all that kind of stuff. So it was a pretty broad thing. We also, I chaired what was called minority, what did we call it? A group that was put together of the top minority officials in state government. Jim Martin did a good job of appointing minorities to high level positions in state government. I chaired that group, about thirty, thirty-five people. It was effective. It was good. Did a lot of good things. So overall the experience was good, got to meet a lot of people, got to work in some things in the university system. We worked on a project where we brought in some thirty, thirty-five countries from West Africa for the first time in the history of the United States, and that was kind of interesting. These were either ambassadors or high level executives from these countries. All I did was to try to talk about trading with African countries in North Carolina. So that was good. That was good.

EG: Did you subsequently establish the different trading relationships and—

JP: Um hmm. Um hmm.

EG: I talked also to Tawana Wilson-Allen and she said that I think it was she said you had gone to [Ghana] when the sister city [agreement between] Kumasei [and Charlotte was consummated], [that you] had been part of that delegation or whatever.

JP: Right. Right.

EG: I also interviewed Margie Worthy who I know [went] too. That seems like that was a fascinating trip.

JP: Oh yeah. Oh yeah and that was good. When I went to Nigeria in '83 or '4, '84--that of course was before the Ghana trip--but that too was interesting. We were there just before the military coup. I looked forward to doing some things in that country. Really I was invited to go on a challenge. I met the governor of one of the states at a party here in Charlotte. He was talking about the fact that the sanitary conditions were bad, that people would bring garbage and put [it] at the end of the street in a hole. They would dig a hole—

EG: In Africa.

JP: Yeah, this was in Nigeria. This was Rivers state, one of the largest states in Nigeria and where the majority of the oil is from.

EG: Where the what is?

JP: The majority of oil.

EG: Oh okay.

JP: In the country, the majority of it. The biggest deposit of oil and natural gas. But anyway, they were experiencing--. I said to him, "I don't understand why you can't handle that. You are the authority. Why you can't you do it?" He said, "Well the communists get into the play." "What do you mean the communists?" But anyway, I said "Well, I could take care of that problem." He said, "Okay you come on over and do it."

EG: So you went to—

JP: But in the meanwhile there was a group going from the University of North Carolina on educational things. So I got to tag along with that and another guy who--. Norris was up at--. He's at Queens University. Was a professor and he had some business kind of thing. But anyway, the two of us were kind of dealing with the business aspect of the trip, while the others were dealing with education. But it was, the unfortunate thing is we arrived there like on Saturday. That Sunday the governor left going to China or somewhere. Just really blew a lot of things for the trip. We did get a chance to visit on the business side. We visited some new facilities like a beer refinery distributor, the beer distribution thing, and they made glass and cans and bottles. State of the art. Distilling outfit. A bakery and they didn't have

the wheat to make flour mill, (). So we had a chance to look at a lot of stuff and would have been able to follow up on that if we had gone back, had it not been for the coup. That was just devastating.

EG: So you weren't because the governor was gone able to do anything with the sanitary service.

JP: Well, the governor didn't-- Well, we couldn't follow up on our conversation because he was not there. I could've told him exactly. Over there he is the authority. When his entourage rolled, people would run out of the street. He led by two motorcycle groups and then his car and four or five secret service people, agents behind him. They'd gone. He couldn't get somebody to stop dumping trash on the corner. You've got to be serious. But I accepted that challenge right away.

EG: I wondered too, have you always been affiliated with the Republican Party?

JP: Um hmm.

EG: Or was that—

JP: I changed parties after I went to Raleigh to work for Jim Martin. As I said we had been friends through the years, and I was always Democrat. He was a Republican. We never well, it stayed that way and after I went to Raleigh, and he told me. You don't have to change parties. I decided to do it because we were working with people of the other party and I really didn't think it would be fair in my position to be directing these Republicans to do certain things and I changed. I haven't really regretted it.

EG: You what?

JP: I haven't regretted it, regret that I decided to do that.

EG: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I just had a few more questions and anything else you wanted to add. One was when you were doing this work with the employment bureau and Mr. Ross said the one piece of advice or direction you said was don't do anything silly or stupid to them. If you yourself participated in any of the civil rights protests or demonstrations.

JP: Oh yeah. Yeah. Yes, very much so. I had a picture right here on the table where we were marching down Trade Street with one of the protest things. I think Ross was along and Ford and the pastor of then Friendship Baptist Church, which is now Friendship Baptist Church, Reverend Coleman Kerry and some other. Yeah, we got involved in a lot of that stuff. Oh yeah. I think that my thing is if he were talking about in the pursuit of the work, probably of going out and doing job development and that kind of thing, don't do anything silly. You don't need to do anything silly. Don't let people drive you up the wall

and then you say something or do something that is not necessary. You're supposed to be able to be cool and calm and business-like and challenge them at that level rather than becoming angry and you lose your perspective on why you're there. Don't do anything silly. It was a good group. It really was a group of good, good group of people to work with.

EG: And I wanted to ask you too, finally, have you belonged to a church over these years or has that had any sort of impact on your activism?

JP: I have belonged to Grier Heights Presbyterian Church over the years, all these years. I've been active in the church. I've served as an elder of the church. I'm not in the present class of elders, but in the Presbyterian Church once an elder, you're always an elder. So yeah, I've been active in church work all of my life.

EG: Okay. Was there anything else at all about the employment bureau or your life history that you wanted to discuss?

JP: I don't know. I can't think of anything at the moment. No. It's been interesting, had an interesting life, and I am happy to be here. I'll be eighty years old, and I can't believe I'll be eighty in November. But we've tried to do, we've tried to do the right thing. We've tried to be civil. We've tried to exercise our contract with our fellow man by doing the right thing. I think that in a lot of cases because of that I guess that you continue to have hopefully a full life and can make it. As I look around a lot of folks that we were there with years ago even with the whole civil rights struggle and things, they're not longer with us. I know it had nothing to do with that. But sometimes you look back and say, I'm glad I'm here. Thank you.

EG: Yeah, super. I just then have some of these words I need to know the correct spelling of. So I'm just going to leave the recorder [on] to ensure accuracy. You mentioned Enterprise Communities. Is that a proper name?

JP: I think it is. You may want—there was a program at one time, the Enterprise Community. I think it's funded, it was funded through, funded by HUD I think.

EG: That would be easy.

JP: Through the city. Yeah, you can get that.

EG: You mentioned AQUOLA.

JP: A-Q-U-O-L-A. The Quality Of Life in America.

EG: Oh so that's an acronym.

JP: Yeah, that's an acronym.

EG: With Dan—you said it was with Dan something.

JP: With Thad, T-H-A-D Rowland, R-O-W-L-A-N-D. He was the man with the money, giving away the money.

EG: Oh right that you worked for yeah. You mentioned the *Southern Regional Journal*. Was that a proper—

JP: I'm not positive about that. It was publication about the South, a lot of stuff that's going on. It was like a magazine.

EG: Was it affiliated with Southern Regional Council.

JP: Probably so, yeah.

EG: Okay, yeah. I'm familiar with that.

JP: And I think the reference is that apparently some articles got in there about the work of the Eastside Council. That's where Stern picked it up I think.

EG: Yeah, I'm sure then that would be affiliated with the [Southern] Regional Council. You mentioned Craig Phillip, is that—

JP: Craig Phillip was the superintendent of Mecklenburg County Schools.

EG: Who sat in the chair.

JP: Yeah, he was the highlighted guy in the chair. He is quite a person. He is quite a personality. I think Craig is still living and out in eastern North Carolina somewhere. Yeah.

EG: Is that C-R-A-I-G and then P-H-I-L-L-I-P. [transcriptionist note: It's Phillips]

JP: Yeah, right.

EG: Mario School.

JP: What?

EG: () School. I can't, I might have to get back to you about that later. Anyway. Keep going here. Reverend Patrick Lewis.

JP: Louis Patrick.

EG: Oh Lewis Patrick. Is it L-E-W-I-S or L-O-U-I-S?

JP: L-O-U-I-S. It's Reverend Louis Patrick. He was the pastor of Trinity Presbyterian Church. Was a board member of the Bureau.

EG: Charlie Smith. Is that just how like, is it Charlie with an I-E.

JP: Yeah.

EG: And you mentioned Zeno [laughter].

JP: They might not let you put that in there. Zeno Ponder. Zeno Ponder was a character up in, I forget the county he was in [Madison County]. He and his--

EG: How do you spell—

JP: Zeno Ponder I understand worked on the--. He worked on was it the Manhattan Project or one of those projects like that. But his brother was the sheriff of the county, and they controlled the county, the whole(). That's almost folklore. If you ask somebody around Chapel Hill in political science, they'll tell you Zeno Ponder.

EG: How do you spell his name?

JP: I think it's P-O-N-D-E-R, I think, Ponder.

EG: Then his first name.

JP: I think it's Z-E-N-O, Zeno.

EG: Yeah, unusual. You mentioned Galvin Atkins. Does that ring a bell?

JP: What is it connected with?

EG: I'm not sure. Is it okay if I have follow up questions to contact you?

JP: [Indicates agreement.]

EG: So I might just get back to you with that. Ed Burnside.

JP: Ed Burnside was chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and that was during the time of the Eastside Council.

EG: Is that B-U-R-N-S-I-D-E?

JP: Um hmm.

EG: You mentioned American Trust Bank. Was that proper—

JP: He was, I think it was American Trust Bank. He was the CEO of the bank and was chairman of the Chamber of Commerce. Burnside was.

EG: You mentioned your Uncle John, is that J-O-N or J-O-H-N.

JP: J-O-H-N was Vaughn, John Vaughn.

EG: Oh John Vaughn.

JP: Yeah, he was the guy looking in the window.

EG: Yeah. V-A-U-G-H-N. You mentioned Lance Packers or Packing.

JP: Lance Packing Company. They make crackers. That was just one of the large employers in Charlotte.

EG: You mentioned oh, this was your dad, Charles Haywood Polk was it.

JP: Yeah.

EG: But you said he had another part of his name was long.

JP: Oh yeah, I can't remember all that. That is officially Charles Haywood.

EG: And your mom was Ruth Ellen—

JP: Eller, E-L-L-A.

EG: Ella Vaughn Polk.

JP: Right.

EG: Let's see. Oh the person who Branch Rickey had thought about or Watson who had injuries.

JP: Thomas, Tommy Watson, W-A-T-S-O-N.

EG: Tommy with a Y.

JP: Um hmm.

EG: Oh, Jim E. Lee Kirkpatrick.

JP: Jimmy Lee—

EG: Oh Jimmy.

JP: Jimmy.

EG: Lee.

JP: Kirkpatrick, K-I-R-K-P-A-T-R-I-C-K, Kirkpatrick.

EG: And Leroy Keyes.

JP: Leroy Keyes was yeah, he was the football player at Purdue. He was an All American at Purdue.

EG: I remember you mentioning that. That was K-E-Y-E-S, Keyes.

JP: Um hmm, I think it is.

EG: L-E-R-O-Y.

JP: Um hmm.

EG: Butch Davis. Is that just like how it sounds?

JP: Yeah.

EG: B-U-T-C-H.

JP: He was a, yeah, baseball player played in the Negro League and played some minor league.

EG: And Tarley Parks.

JP: Charlie, Charles Parks.

EG: Charles Parks. Okay.

JP: Played with the Homestead ().

EG: Oh, he was that. Yeah. Luke Easter.

JP: Luke, L-U-K-E Easter.

EG: E-A-S-T-E-R.

JP: Yeah, Luke played with Cleveland, played first base wasn't it. Was it Cleveland.

EG: I'm not sure about that one.

JP: I'm pretty sure it was.

EG: I know most of the () with these baseball [laughing]. I want to ask you about them. It was the Charlotte Black Hornets.

JP: Um hmm.

EG: The Asheville Blues.

JP: Now that was just a couple of the teams. There were many more. Birmingham Black Barons—what were some of the others. There were a number of other teams. That was in organized baseball, organized black [baseball].

EG: Yeah, not the barnstorming.

JP: No, now maybe they barnstormed, but that was organized. They had, they actually had the Memphis Red Sox. They actually had, they were organized just like the major leagues.

EG: Wait, so the Negro Leagues, were these teams in the Negro Leagues.

JP: Yeah, yeah

EG: Buddy Young.

JP: Buddy Young was a football--. Played with New York Yankees I believe it was at that time named but was the football league. Buddy Young I believe played college ball at Illinois I believe.

EG: And that's B-U-D-D-Y and Y-O-U-N-G.

JP: Um hmm.

EG: You said Cullin Field Baseball or—

JP: Cotton, CO-T-T-O-N. I called it Cotton Field.

EG: () kind of tripped me up. Cotton Field. Okay—

JP: That's what I called.

EG: One word or two words for Cotton Field.

JP: Two words.

EG: Cotton Field baseball. See, you said oh the Atlanta Black Crackers, the Cuban Black Joints.

JP: Cuban what were they called? Did I say, yeah.

EG: Maybe it was something.

JP: But that was, yeah that was a New York team that was called the Cuban team.

EG: You mentioned Jimmy Tyson was that Jimmy, J-I-M-M-Y.

JP: Jimmy?

EG: Jimmy, Mike Tyson's.

JP: Oh, oh. Jimmy Kirkpatrick was Mike Tyson's daddy.

EG: Jimmy Kirkpatrick.

JP: Yeah.

EG: His train, Tyson's trainer was?

JP: Cus D'Amato his name, wasn't that it? He's well known.

EG: Okay I—

JP: He's Cus D'Amato.

EG: I can do the history. Do you know the spelling of that or I can usually find that.

JP: I don't. Yeah.

EG: The professor at Queens you mentioned you said was Nora.

JP: Frederick, Dr. Frederick Norris. We went to Nigeria. He was on the trip to Nigeria.

EG: Is that N-O-R-R-I-S?

JP: Um hmm.

EG: Then you mentioned Friendship Baptist Church.

JP: I did mention that yeah. That was—

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by L. Altizer, June 16, 2006