

Interview

with

Joseph McPherson

December 9, 2004

by David Cline

Transcribed by Cathy Mann

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

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START OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

JOSEPH MCPHERSON  
December 9, 2004

DAVID CLINE: Today is December 9, 2004. This is David Cline for the Southern Oral History Program Long Civil Rights Movement Project and I'm in Louisville, Kentucky. If you could just introduce yourself for the record that would be terrific.

JOSEPH MCPHERSON: Okay, my name is Joseph McPherson. I was born and raised here in Louisville, Kentucky. Attended the Louisville public schools. Attended Central High School 1948 to 1951. Left town and went to school at Tennessee State University in Nashville on a football scholarship. Graduated in 1956. Came back to Louisville, worked at Lincoln Institute in Shelby County for five years. Returned to Louisville, taught at a junior high school, Jackson Junior High School, for one year then I came to Central in 1961. Worked at Central High School in a lot of different capacities for twenty-two years. Taught history, coached in the athletic department, head of the history department, athletic director for eight years, assistant principal for a year and a half, and principal for ten years and left Central in 1982. Went to the Jefferson County Board of Education as the director of the county Title One, or Chapter One program at that time. I worked there for ten years. I retired in 1992, been retired now for twelve years. And that's my life story.

DC: So were you born here in Louisville?

JM: Yes, I was born here in Louisville, Kentucky. In fact, only about four or five blocks from here over by Manual High School.

DC: How many children in your family?

JM: There were seven of us, four girls and three boys. And then my immediate family, my wife Sarah and I have five children and you have to listen to this. The day I became principal I lost my oldest son. He was playing football and had a heart attack. That was August 30, 1973 and that was the day that it was announced in the paper that I was going to be the principal of Central High School.

DC: Just a freak thing, just a young kid playing football?

JM: Yeah, sixteen. I mean he had had physical examinations and everything just to see if he was okay. In fact, he had gone to two doctors. Had a heart attack in practice. He was about six-three, two sixty-five, good student, all A's and one B. But that's the way it goes.

And I tease people at Central a lot of the times. I go up there now and tell them I know more about the building than anybody in the building, places that I've been in there that nobody else would even dare to go. And some of it was as a result of busing.

DC: What do you mean by that?

JM: Oh, when some of the kids who were bused into Central decided they were going to have, in fact, one kid decided he was going to have his own private studio, and he found a place on the top of the building, little alcove. I don't know how he got this chair up there but he had a lounge chair similar to one of those [he indicates wing back chair in the room] and he had a lamp.

DC: (Laughter) He made himself a little apartment up there.

JM: And a twelve pack of beer. So somebody informed me that he was up there and I climbed the ladder and went up on top of the building and there he was.

DC: That's too much.

JM: Oh, boy. I enjoyed it. I didn't have any major problems with anybody, especially any of the kids. I could probably count them on one hand.

DC: So you originally you went to, where did you go for elementary school?

JM: I went to Central High School.

DC: I see. That was all the way through?

JM: Right. Oh, that was a long time before busing. I went there in 1948.

DC: Right, so you went to Central.

JM: In fact, that was the only school that we could go to at that time.

DC: Okay, right.

JM: Now if you didn't go there some few black kids went to a school called Catholic High and then some of the others in Eastern Jefferson County were bused out to Lincoln Institute where I taught before I came to Jefferson County. Busing is not new, you know. It's been going on for the black kids for years and years and years. When I worked at Lincoln Institute kids came in from as far as Paducah to come to Lincoln Institute because they could not go to the schools in that area. In fact, right there in Shelby County they came to Lincoln Institute until maybe around 1957 and then they opened their schools because I know we had some kids that would come to Lincoln all the time that said hey, coach, can I come down here and go to school, that lived in Paducah.

DC: Where would they be sent?

JM: They went to school then, in 1957, they let them go to school at Shelbyville High School in Shelby County but before that they would come to

Lincoln. When I first went to Lincoln, in '57 when I first went there, they would bus those kids in from Shelby County to Lincoln. So you know busing is not new to black kids.

DC: How far is it from say Paducah out there?

JM: How far?

DC: Yeah.

JM: About two hundred and sixty miles.

DC: Are you kidding me? That's a serious ride.

JM: Yeah, because it's two thirty from here to Paducah and about thirty more to Lincoln.

DC: Ooh, everyday?

JM: Well, we had a campus, no, not everyday. They would come up and they would stay on the campus.

DC: Okay.

JM: And I would stay on the campus sometimes and act as peacemaker I guess you'd call it. I'd stay up there maybe two days a week, coaching football, basketball, and baseball, you name it.

DC: And you played football as a high school student and college student?

JM: Yeah, I was captain of the football team at Central High School.

DC: How'd your football team do?

JM: We did okay for two years. My senior year we had about five guys got hurt and we didn't do too well. I think we lost maybe three games, which was pretty terrible back in those days.

DC: Yeah, it seems like the sports teams are pretty central to Central, to the pride at Central.

JM: That's part of the busing problem, athletics, in this area in particular. At one time Central High School, Shawnee High School, and Middle High School won all of the state basketball championships. And some of the powers to be, you know, decided well, we have to break that up. So when forced busing came in that took care of it because, you know, we have kids scattered all over the county, no continuity in anything and it got pretty bad there for a while.

DC: So you were principal at Central starting in what year?

JM: Seventy-three.

DC: Seventy-three, okay.

JM: August 30. I had been in the principal intern program two years before that. I went to [the] University of Louisville to get some advanced training. I already had a master's degree from Indiana and bachelor's degree from Tennessee State. But we had to be certified to be principal. We had a program at the University of Louisville that we completed and J. W. Hackett was the principal when I was the assistant principal intern. So the next year when he retired the system brought a fellow in from Florida by the name of Joe Orr as principal and I was the assistant principal under him. Of course, I did all the scheduling before he got here. I did all the disciplining once he got here because he didn't know what was going on with the people. He stayed one year and he left and went back to Florida. So then I was named principal.

DC: You had been principal all along.

JM: I put my office, I sat my office next to his because I knew he was going to need some help from his office to my office. But it turned out okay. That was '72. That was before busing.

DC: What was the breakdown of black teachers, white teachers, administrators, at Central?

JM: Our school was well integrated before forced busing. When J. W. Hackett was principal we had white faculty. I'd say the staff at that time might have been about seventy-thirty, [seventy percent] black teachers and white teachers thirty percent. But then when busing was forced on us, well, let's don't say forced on us. Let's say when busing came about.

DC: Tell it like it is. (Laughter)

JM: Our school had already been, the staff had already been integrated. In fact, I remember one of the supervisors came by and asked me and another teacher, who was our best English teacher, if we wanted to go to Atherton to teach and we said no because we said the kids here at Central need us. And you'll find out that I'm a realist. I'm not an intellectual person. I'm what you call a workaholic realist. So anyway, Thelma Lauderdale was [one of] our better teachers and she said Mac, they came over and asked me if I wanted to go to Atherton. I said they asked me the same thing. So we figured we needed to stay there with our kids because they needed us so we declined to go. But they systematically took the black teachers out and sent them out to different schools like Butler and Eastern, you know, one here and one there.

DC: So did you lose some teachers that you really wished you had been able to hold onto?

JM: Yeah, of course, and we got some that we really didn't want.

DC: Did you feel that the teachers that were sent to you were ... were other people getting rid of their teachers they didn't want?

JM: In some cases, yes. In some cases I thought they were coming to Central High School because they felt like to come there and not do too much hard work. I can remember I had one teacher who had a law degree and he started out fine but then he got kind of shaky as far as dealing with kids. We had teachers that transferred in from Male High School that in my estimation weren't worth a dime, you know, didn't know how to get along with anybody. Sometimes too rigid and you can't be too rigid with kids. You've got to be a little flexible in some cases. Every time you have a discipline problem you can't run to the office with it but that's what they did. When I left, I left some of those what I call no good teachers there and later on I'll probably end up telling you why later.

DC: Okay. So after forced busing and after they started moving teachers around, what was the racial breakdown then?

JM: Teachers?

DC: Yes. There was seventy percent black before that.

JM: Just the opposite, maybe twenty percent black, eighty percent white teachers. It reflected the same ratio as the students.

DC: Of the student body. So your student body changed drastically?

JM: Student body changed drastically after the first year. After '75 our senior class was all black and '76 with the alphabets, A, B, F, Q, D, E, N, W, Z, or whatever,

they bused the white kids in and we went from say seventy-five twenty-five to eighty [percent] white and twenty [percent] black.

DC: Where were those kids coming from, all over?

JM: They were coming from, no, a cluster [of] schools. The system came up with a cluster. After the court order came down that they had to merge the system and integrate the schools, our cluster was Eastern High School, Ballard, Waggener. I think it was just those three. Some of the kids bought into it fully. You know, we had some kids who said I'm glad I'm out of Ballard. They said they've got a class system out there and I was not included in it either way, you know, and this is a chance for me to have a new start. And after they got to Central they found out that we did have as good a school as other schools and they bought into it and they said well, we're going to stay. And I got some old articles in there you can take a look at a little bit later on that will attest to the fact that they did want to stay. I remember one year. This was later on in busing. There was a hundred and sixty-something kids who decided to stay. They didn't want their education starting in the tenth grade, staying a year or two, and then being disrupted and have to go back to another school for the next year.

DC: I would think that would be so difficult. That part, I'm having a hard time getting my mind around it.

JM: Well, right. In some cases it was a traumatic experience for some of the kids because, like you said, they didn't want to make the changes. But some kids they didn't want to make the change to come to Central in the beginning so they were glad to go back. You know, I had one of the principals, I had his daughter and son at Central and they wanted to stay. He couldn't understand it. I mean he was upset. He

could not understand why they wanted to stay at Central. I said well, they like me better than they do you. (Laughter) But it's, I don't know. You know, you might ask what's your opinion on busing. I've got two or three different thoughts about busing. It could have been good if they hadn't made it so mandatory that some of the kids in certain alphabets come to the inner city schools. Now traditionally -- I don't know if you found this out or not but this is true -- traditionally, when they merge the systems the inner city schools are either torn down or transferred into elementary schools or junior high schools. Now with that in mind, there was one time when the merger first started in '75 we had a huge assembly. The county parents, the white parents came to Central just to look around to see if it was a real school, you know. Some of them were amazed and they said well, this is better than where our kids go.

DC: They'd probably never been over in this part of town before.

JM: Right, hadn't been downtown really, hadn't passed Fourth Street. The word was out that they came down there to change the name of the school. And some of the Central High School older alumni were there to check to see what I was going to say or do about it. So my speech to the faculty, the audience was don't come down here trying to talk about changing the name of the school because we're not going to change it. The word was out they were going to call it River City High School or River Glen, something like that. But I told the people, no, we're not going to change the name of Central High School. We've been here too long. You know, our tradition is stronger than most other schools because they came along after Central. Central has been there a hundred years. So instead of talking about changing the name and closing the school down they decided well, we'll come in and do some cosmetic work,

you know. Some of the things were really needed. Like I said, in here [indicates the book "A History of Louisville Central High School, 1882-1982"] it talks about chemistry labs that they had to come in and renovate. Our schedule, our class offerings, changed and they changed because they had to reflect the offerings at the other schools. For example, if Eastern taught Latin 4, and some of those kids were at Central, we had to offer Latin 4 if we had enough or calculus or trigonometry, you know, advanced classes. So we had to put those classes in. Never will forget, we had to work hard and long on that schedule. When busing hit like that we had to go back and change the whole schedule.

DC: You weren't given much time?

JM: No, not to get the schedule filled, but really, you know if you knew how to do the schedule it wasn't that bad. At that time I had one or two assistant principals that really didn't understand the scheduling so I did most of it. You know, I have a guy down that calls me and says yeah, Mac, I remember you knew where everybody was supposed to be because you had that big schedule up on the board, you know. I said well, I didn't remember where everybody [was] but I remember the schedule. And it's kind of funny because I remember early one morning I woke up and said, uh-oh, just like plain as day, I could see the schedule, I'd made a mistake. One of our older teachers taught math and she would have died if she got two classes at one time. Got to school at five thirty and changed the schedule.

DC: (Laughter) Averted that!

JM: Yeah.

DC: You said you had a couple of different opinions about busing.

JM: Like I said, it could have been fine but some of the students, both black and white, who were assigned to Central didn't want to be there. I don't know. You know, we'd get out and walk the halls in the morning, especially when the buses were coming and going. They would pick up students going to Ballard at our front door. Ballard had black students who lived across the street in Village West who would come inside of our building to wait on the buses and raise holy you know what. So when we would approach them, [they'd say,] "I don't go to school here, I go to Ballard." I said that's fine but from now on you stay outside. Some of the white kids would come to Central, "Well, I don't want to be here anyway. You know, I'm just here to put in my year or my two years and I'll get out of here." And some of them were really, really destructive. Those are a few of the bad things. The good part about it was the academic part where you would have an expanded curriculum. You would have more offerings. We had a lot of good students at that time. We had students who were Merit finalists. In fact, at one time we had more of the higher academic kids than the other schools in our cluster. They couldn't understand it. They used to tease me and say well, you got those kids from us. Well, that's fine but they belong to us now, you know.

DC: How about resources, supplies, and things like that? Did that improve at all?

JM: Well, it had to improve because if your expanded curriculum required you to have those higher academic classes you had to have the supplies and the books to go with it. And we had some parents, our PTA flourished a little bit more than it normally had. We had some parents who were in the know at the board. We had one

of the little state senators who treated the superintendent like he was a kid. You know, when we needed something we'd approach them and let them go after the board of education to get the supplies. So the supplies and the equipment was increased. Like I said, the chemistry lab, [we] tore the whole lab out and refinished it. The language labs, we had to redo those.

DC: So you don't think things like that would have happened except for busing?

JM: Eventually it would have. The system changed its system of accounting. Just like in the system now they give the schools X number of dollars and you decide where it's going to go. I saw Central get extra -- I don't know how to voice it -- they got the leather upholstered chairs in the office and the leather couches. When I was there I had basic stuff. You know, I didn't need all that stuff. I'm saying now, where did the money come from? The money came out of the money that the board allotted them. I guess he still had enough money for his books and supplies but, you know, to go ultra fancy office, that wasn't necessary.

DC: This is after you left? You're talking about the person who followed you?

JM: Oh, yeah. I looked around and said, is this the same place I worked at? I was down there yesterday and I was teasing the guy [Principal Daniel Withers] about it. He said well, it wasn't me. It was in there [when] I got here. (Laughter)

DC: I sat in one of those chairs. That is a fancy office.

JM: Some of the negatives on busing, as I said, like I said some of the kids did not want to be at Central and some of them were really, really destructive, both black

and white students. We had a grand piano in our auditorium on our stage. We came in one morning and the grand piano had been thrown off the stage. Ceiling tiles knocked out, just a lot of—

DC: Vandalism, right.

JM: Anything, writing on the wall, you know, "I don't want to be here!" Just stupid stuff I call it. Before busing we had cleaned up all of our, I guess you'd call it dope peddling or gambling. We'd cleaned all that up because we had security guards. I think I started that security guard program. But after busing when the white kids came in from other schools drugs increased for a while. They would bring in, one girl we caught had pills that her mother, her mother was a nurse. [She] had these pills on her and she would bring them to school trying to dispense them to the kids and we tracked her down and when we found her she was in, we had this courtyard. You've been over there. You've seen the courtyard. We found her, pills were laying out in a puddle of water where she'd thrown them down. We got on one boy that was trying to peddle dope over on the corner of Tenth and Chester and some kids from Village West saw him. They came over and took his dope. He came into the school and said oh, those kids jumped on me! Well, you know, the lady had already called to tell me what she saw happen and naturally he got suspended. He said, you know, said you got to take it easy on me. The other school I went to, they let me go. I said I'm going to let you go. I'm going to let you go *out of here*. But a lot of silly stuff went on. Some of the black kids said that some of the white kids got preferential treatment and vice versa. Some of the white kids said the black kids had preferential treatment. But you know, if you're in charge of it and you've got assistant principals and you do the best

you can and you tell them to be reasonable with both sides. Treat them like they're people, not because one is white and one is black. Things happened like--

DC: Now did you choose your assistant principals or were they sent to you?

JM: No, they were sent to us.

DC: Were they white?

JM: Yeah. My first year they were black because the school was still black. I had two black assistant principals then. After merger I had two white assistant principals.

DC: How was your relationship with them or getting them acclimated to Central?

JM: For the discipline part of it we split it up. I took the twelfth graders because I said I can keep a good handle on them because they're getting ready to graduate. And with all the other duties that you have as a principal you don't have time to deal with too much discipline. So you put the fear of God in them when you get them, you know. Don't come into my office. You come to my office you're in big trouble. And back in those days it was hands on procedures, you know. If somebody got in trouble and you really didn't want to do anything you'd just jack him up and talk to him, let him go, it would usually pan out okay. I told a parent one time. Her son was in trouble. I told her, I said you know if your son was a golf ball I'd lay his head on that ground, I'd hit him about five hundred yards. She said oh, would you do that? That was all of it. That guy straightened up. Man, he was a model student. I know another guy that used to sit in the hall zonked out all the time. Last name was, well, I won't call his name. Name was Eufleerts. I used to call him "Useless." Lo and

behold about three or four years ago got this call from Stuart Euferts. "Hey, Mac.. Come on out to my place and fish." What are you talking about? "Said I've got my law degree now." I mean some of those kids were good kids, they just were misguided, you know, didn't know what they wanted to do and I don't know, they needed help from a lot of people. One assistant principal I had was, he let his work pile up on his desk, you know. Teachers sent in discipline forms. He let his pile up on his desk because he didn't want to deal with them. You know, he was a pragmatic guy, just talked philosophy all the time. Like I told him, that's not your job.

DC: Roll up your sleeves, yeah.

JM: I had a decent staff. I won't call it excellent but I had a decent staff.

DC: You mentioned before or we mentioned briefly that after forced busing that athletic teams really got hit by that. Can you talk a little bit about that and sort of what that meant to the community?

JM: One of the negatives that came out of forced busing at Central High School was no school spirit. We had a school song. The kids that were bused there [said], we don't want to learn a school song. We won't be here but two years. The athletic teams were ... kids were spread out all over town back in those days and kids came to Central, a lot of the athletes. We had guys walking the hall at six-six that wouldn't play basketball. Our football team went down. We eventually had a fairly decent team one of those years. I don't remember exactly the number of years but we had a fairly decent football team. But the first year of busing we still had some of the leftover basketball guys who survived and went to the state tournament I think a couple of years. They were integrated teams during that time. One team had the

superintendent's son on it and he was our big rebounder. He was about six-four. But after that, after the first two or three years of it, athletics went down, both participation wise and spectator wise. We didn't hardly have anybody that would show up for games, basketball or football because the kids lived in the Ballard area, Eastern area, Waggener and Atherton area, they didn't want to come to Central. They wouldn't come back at night. It's still that way.

The good part about it as far as athletics is concerned [is] we had a large variety of activities. We had fencing. We won a fencing championship. We won a girls cross-country championship two or three years. Before that the black kids didn't run cross-country but when the other kids came in from the different schools and we got the kids together they had black and white kids on the team running and they won the state championship in girls track one year and cross-country three years. We just put those in the Hall of Fame earlier this year. We had a baseball team that prospered a little bit more than it had. Track team wasn't too good. But basketball was our main athletic event and that went down because of, you know, moving, some of the guys that would normally come to Central out to Ballard and Eastern and those schools. And then when you'd come to a game you'd have a hundred people when we used to have ... we played Shawnee one time and one single basketball game we had eleven thousand people, high school game, no preliminary or nothing, just one game.

DC: About when would that game have been?

JM: That would have been just before busing.

DC: In the early Seventies?

JM: That was like maybe '71 or '73 maybe, yeah '73, late part of '73.

DC: So this athletic thing had a big impact then? I mean not just on school and school spirit but the community then?

JM: Oh, yeah, athletics in this community was tremendous. This is a high school college town. They talk about professional teams coming in here. They won't survive. The economics won't let it survive really. People don't have the money to go to games every night. But with the parents, you know, parent involvement at the games and the students knowing the fellahs on the team, we had tremendous crowds. Back in the old days before busing we turned people away from Central gym. In fact, one night when I was athletic director we didn't even let the superintendent in. He kept saying I'm the superintendent. I said well, the fire marshal said nobody else could come in here so you'll have to go around and come in the back door or something. (Laughter)

END OF TAPE 1 – SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE 1 – SIDE B

JM: But things got tight in this area as far as athletics is concerned. I remember our basketball coach was up in arms because he would put his team on the floor as an all black team playing the all white teams and he felt like he was getting the shaft as far as, you know, the calls. So he instituted or instigated change in the officials. He said now every time Central plays we need to have a black official on the floor. That worked out okay in some cases, in some cases it didn't. We went to the state tournament in 1969, yeah, was the first one. Played Ohio County at the tournament and had about fifteen thousand people in there. Central had its little section in the corner. Everybody else, not everybody but I'll just say everybody, the

majority of the people from the other fourteen thousand had placards, Go Ohio County. Didn't work. We beat them by a hundred and ten.

DC: Was there anything overtly racist going on in that do you think? I mean is that all the placards said?

JM: There were a couple of incidents. One of the athletic directors from one of the other schools who was partially in charge of the tournament came over to me. I was sitting down near the floor. And he said Mac, you need to come up here and get your students in line and keep them quiet. I said keep them quiet? This is a basketball game. I said well you know you're working the tournament. You go over and tell them to be quiet. But they were raising sand when we started scoring. Like I said, we beat them a hundred and three to seventy. And that goes down as one of the great games in Central's history.

But things got kind of rough around here back before that time in athletics. I remember the first time we ever went to the state tournament. One of the officials later after the game was over, later said no black team or no Jefferson County team will get out of the tournament if he can help it and he blew us out of there. We had one of the best teams. We beat some of the college teams around here then.

DC: And he just laid that out?

JM: Yeah, we had four guys that had four fouls on the first half and the other guy was playing like this [indicating hands up, body pulled back] to keep from fouling. So we lost to a little, I love to call [it] the "little country team" called Hazel Green. And people were mad. I mean some of our fans went off. I mean literally went crazy, you know, started fights and threatened people. One girl had a hairpin

about that long. She said she was going to kill this official. I happened to see her. She was one of my students. I calmed her down and took her hairpins. She started crying. That's how tight it was. That's how athletics is, was, not now. You know, we would play Male High School, which was one our great rivalries, down at the Armory. People [would] tear the doors down trying to get in, just that crowded. We'd have a full house inside. But that's down to the point now where you can go to any game and find your own seat on the fifty-yard line. No school spirit.

DC: So it never came back really?

JM: No. Because you've got the kids spread out and the parents, you know ... at Central if you put an all black basketball team on the floor and your school is integrated eighty percent white and twenty percent black, the parents don't feel like they need to come and watch those kids play so they don't show up. I remember another incident. We were doing the Miss Central contest and my daughter was one of the contestants. They let the football team vote on who they think should be Miss Central. I'll say this on the side. My daughter was a good-looking girl. But anyway, the team voted. The team at that time was about seventy-five percent white, twenty-five percent black. All the white players voted for this little white girl and black players voted for my daughter so the other girl won. She made a statement, well she didn't want to be at Central anyway. I mean that shows you how the school spirit was.

DC: That's sad, yeah.

JM: A funny thing about it, later on, it might be in the book [indicates "A History of Louisville Central High School"], when they voted on, had the superlatives, you know, the kids best this, best that, well, the white kids won who had the best afro.

DC: I heard about that. Somebody told me about that.

JM: (Laughter) Oh, it's in here. It's in here. Those were the kind of things that, you know, just kind of stand out. Cheerleader wise, I had a white cheerleader sponsor and she had tryouts and she came to me. Well, one of the cheerleaders came to me, little black girl who had been in the squad two years came to me and she said you know I didn't make it. I said, what do you mean you didn't make it? Well, she just told me I didn't make it. I said well, you made it. I called the lady in and I said, look, I'm putting this girl on the team. I said, do you know where you are? You're at Central High School and if you put this all white cheering squad on the floor at Central High School they'll make life miserable for those kids. Said if you don't understand that, I just said I'm going to put this girl on there to save your hide. [She said,] Well, I don't think that's right! I don't think it's right! I said I'll tell you what. Give me your keys. You don't need to be sponsor if you don't want to. I don't remember whether she resigned or not. It really didn't make much difference. Just like I said, the girl had been on there already for two years.

DC: In those days there weren't like activity buses or anything after school, right, so kids got bused in?

JM: Yeah, they had activity buses but we didn't need too many activity buses because a lot of those kids had their own cars, the ones that decided to stay. And that was another negative. The parents from the East End School, some of those kids had some luxury cars. They would come to school driving cars, wanted to leave, get in the cars and ride around and come back. That was a no-no. And one young lady, you know, had this brand new car that her daddy bought her. He lived in Cincinnati and

she lived here in Louisville. She'd go around and pick up some kids and they'd come to school late. So I threatened them a couple of times, you know. Kept coming to school late. I said I'll tell you what, put you in timeout room for a week. She went off. I got called all kinds of names and everything. Every time she would use another superlative I said that's another week. She kept on going. I said you're up to four weeks now and then she realized what I was doing and she stopped. So I suspended her but, you know, I've been called all kinds of names. Doesn't bother me. So I called the guy at the school board. I said Adam, I've got a young lady here I just suspended for being habitually late and then using a lot of profanity towards me and everything. I said I'll tell you what to do. When I send her out there you rake her over the coals and I know you can do it and then send her back down here in about two or three days. Didn't bother me whether she rot or not. So he did that. He sent her back. She came in and I signed her back in and I heard her tell a kid, "Don't go in there and mess with him, he's crazy." (Laughter) I said, it wasn't me, it was you, sister. But a lot of funny things happened. Somewhere at home -- just like I said, we're tearing up my house right now.-- somewhere at home, I've got notebooks of all this stuff in it. I kept notes.

DC: Oh, you did? Oh, excellent, excellent.

JM: Yeah. I remember I had to go to court and the judge said do you keep a log of what happens? I said I sure do. He said well, go back over there and get it and write it down, bring it over here and let me see it. I said you haven't see anything but I'll bring a whole stack of notebooks over here. And that happened to me when I went to the Title One Program. They had a national case going on about who could be

taught with Title One and Jefferson County had a court case going on when I got the job. I ended up going to court four or five times and they asked some really different, stupid questions, if you ask me. We had to give the Catholic schools some of the Chapter One money. We had to give them services. We eventually bought trucks, vans to go to those schools. Since they outlawed us going inside the school, we'd take the vans and drive it up to the curb and the kids would come out and go in the van. We'd teach and then they'd go back in. So this one lawyer asked me said if you go to this Catholic school and you look up and you see that stained glass window, what do you think is behind that glass? I won't even say what I told him but the judge raised up and said now, now, now. Shoot, I don't know what's behind that glass. Could care less what's behind there really.

DC: What did you think about the lawsuit at Central, the recent lawsuit?

JM: It could be good and it could be bad. I think like this: If you can have an all white school on one end of town then you should possibly have an all black school on the other end. That's just the way it should be, you know. To say that we're going to take care of this school and that school and we've got to have enough kids to go to this school, we've got to have enough to go to that school, something's wrong with that. I know what it *should* be. It *should* be that people should be able to go where they want to go because they really want to go there. But it's not that way and it hadn't been that way. When you start forcing people to go to different places and things don't come out right.

And another negative, some of the kids and I'm talking about some of the black kids now, who are at Central now, possibly are there because they don't want to

go out to the other schools and face what they have to face. Even back when busing first started you would hear of incidents of mistreatment of the black kids at some of these schools, Ballard, Eastern, Waggener, and Atherton. I remember one parent, this was I call it a special ed kid. I think that's what he was when he came to us. The system had a habit if you go to Ballard and you act up and you're a black kid we'll send you back to Central. We had to fight that. So this kid went to Ballard, got in trouble out there, they sent him back to Central and his mother came over and I talked to her about it and I said now if he gets in trouble here we're going to put him in an alternative school. I said now PTA meets next week. We'd like to see you at the PTA. We haven't seen her as of this day. My son goes to Ballard! I said well, you know, he *went* to Ballard. He got in trouble and they sent him down here. And that's one of the things I had to fight is if you got in trouble at one of those other schools don't send them to me. Send them to an alternative school because they come down here and they don't want to cooperate.

DC: Did you have success in fighting that or was that an ongoing battle? Were you successful in fighting that or is that something you had to keep fighting?

JM: Oh, I don't know. It's just one of those things you have to do.

DC: You said that kids who, some of the kids are going to Central now sort of to get around having to go out to these other schools and face that stuff. Do you think there's value in having to face that kind of a challenge?

JM: I don't know if the kids are there because they want to come there and buy into the school's program, you know, they call it traditional school or a magnet school, okay, that's a ploy to go where you want to go, you know. They've got kids at

Male High School talking about we want to go to Male because they've got this kind of program and the kids in special education, football team logo, a bunch of good athletes. But if you're there because you want to buy into the program and you're going to be in the law magnet and you're really going to get into the law magnet and do whatever you're supposed to do, that's fine. But if you're over there at Central because it's close by where I live and I don't want to get up early in the morning and go out somewhere, you know, you need to bite the bullet and go on out there. And those are the kids that create problems for you. Some of the kids, the makeup of the school now is really unique because, and I'll back up a little bit. My last year there the school system, maybe a year before that, was systematically excluding some of the schools that I had in the cluster, Eastern, Waggener, Ballard and Atherton, okay. They told all the Atherton kids and I know behind closed doors they were telling those parents well, you don't have to go to Central anymore. The kids in the Atherton area they took those kids out of a cluster.

DC: How'd they justify that? They didn't?

JM: You have to ask them. (Laughter) You have to ask them. And I told you I said I'm not one of these educational gurus, you know. I'm a realist. I went to a meeting with one of the superintendent's supervisors one time and I was asking for more teachers and got to talking about kids being taken away from Atherton. And I said well, Bob, you took Atherton away from us last year and that only leaves us those three schools. No, we didn't. I said yes, you did. Mac, we didn't take those kids away. Yes, you did.

DC: "Haven't been any in my school."

JM: Bob was sitting over there. I said look, don't say it again. I said if you do I'm going to come across that table after you. Now, now, now, hold on, hold on. He said, Bob, yes we did. We took those kids away last year. He said well, nobody told me. That shows you how they were operating. There were some good guys out there but they still had this idea of, you know, we can pull this or we can do this. Okay, took Atherton away. The next year they started taking some of the Eastern kids away from the cluster. Now these are good kids coming to Central basically. Academic wise and personality wise most of them were okay. I said well, now who are you going to assign to Central. They wanted to assign to me at Central some of the kids that lived out in this area who were not going to Manual to the magnet school. Okay, the kids who were going to the magnet school are the brainy kids who were going to get in a certain kind of course. The other kids go to school whenever they feel like it. They want to give me some of these kids in a place called The Point up River Road. Those kids didn't want to attend school and we had worked hard on getting our attendance up. We were three points above the county average as far as daily attendance was concerned even with the busing. And when they started taking those schools away and they wanted to give me these kids I said hey, I've had it. That's enough. So when the Title One came open I opted out. I said well, ten years is enough. Took the Title One and survived for ten more years in a good program.

DC: So that's why you left here?

JM: Yeah.

DC: Do you have any regrets about leaving Central?

JM: No. It took me a year to wind down from some of the things that I had to do and some of the thoughts that I had about the school. But no, I didn't regret leaving. Like I said, when I went to Title One I had a real good program. I had twenty-five, I always talk about twenty-five ladies that I had that really knew what they were doing. You know, all you had to do was take care of them. We had a real good Chapter One, Title One program. Didn't regret leaving. And I don't go by there now trying to get into what should be done. Only reason I go up there now because I help them work on the Athletic Hall of Fame and the Outstanding Citizens, what we call, Hall of Fame. We're trying to decide who goes in that. That's the only reason I go by there now. I don't talk to the principal about what he should do and shouldn't do.

DC: What's the situation at Male High School? What's it's relationship with the community or the racial dynamics there?

JM: Well, Male High School was and still is the most influential school in the city system. They used to be at Brook and Breckinridge. After merger and integration of school and everything their powers [that] be tried as hard as they could to get out of this downtown area. They used everything. They said the expressway made too much noise, the building was deteriorating (which it was), so they finally worked it so they could get out of that building. Then when they closed Durick they finally moved Male to Durick. Now they say the alumni paid for this, the alumni paid for that. That's a bunch of bunk. School board paid for all of that stuff. And they've got a fabulous school out there now. I worked in that building the year before they moved in and it was, I won't call it dilapidated but it was on the lower class and they've tore out some

walls and painted and fixed it up. It's real nice out there now. They are a traditional school where, you know, you can say you're going for certain programs. I guess it's okay. My brother used to be a football coach over there years ago.

DC: I'll tell you why I asked. I'll just get your reaction to this too but I mean I'm very interested in race, obviously to be doing projects like this so I pay attention to that. And I saw Male now on TV in two different places. The first was maybe last year in the fall on ESPN2 they were having the cheerleading or dance team competition, national, and there was a team from Male that I think was all white girls. And then last night I was watching TV here and there was the "Light Up Louisville" Christmas celebration and they had Male's choir and they were doing a number with the choir in which it was all male-female couples together. They were each paired off and every single couple was each of a different race. There was an Asian girl here with a white guy and a black guy here with a white girl. And I thought, I mean it just struck me as interesting and I wonder what your reaction is to that?

JM: They've come a long ways in race relations. As long as the kids mix like that and you don't have the older people interfering and voicing their opinion about it, it'll work because young kids don't care. You know, they've been mixing at Male since back in the '60s. I didn't see the program that you were talking about but that's. You know, sometimes the cheerleading squads are all white because some of the black kids feel that if they don't like the kind of cheers that they do that they don't want to be the only one in a program like that. I know at Central one time we had the advanced placement classes and one of our smarter kids, black kid, I called him in one day and said John, why don't you sign up for the AP classes. He said no, coach. I

don't want to get in there. I don't want to be the only one in there. I said well, you're as smart as any of those kids. He said I know it but I don't want to be the only one in there. I mean that was not only his attitude. That was the attitude with some of the other kids. But I think Male has come a long way with their race relations because, like I said, they hired my brother as a football coach over there one year. He worked over there maybe two or three years and then he left and went up to Detroit.

DC: Yeah, it was just my reaction, you know, that seeing these kids in the choir and I think they were even singing like "Dancing Cheek to Cheek" or something and they *were* dancing cheek to cheek and I just thought if this was 1975, you know, what would the parents be doing?

JM: It wouldn't have happened back then. No, it wouldn't have happened back in '75. Although, like I said, they've been integrated over there since back in the Sixties.

DC: When did you first start to see interracial couples in the schools, the kids dating each other?

JM: I'd probably say late Seventies because I can remember seeing, you know, some of the kings and queens at the homecoming festivals. They were integrated. You know, it takes a lot of work to really force integration on people. When I was at Central we had our senior prom one year and after we had met and talked about it they couldn't decide what kind of music they wanted to have. We solved this one though. We had it at a large enough place we had a black band on one side to play for a while and a white band on the other side to play for a while.

(Laughter) I said, you know, that was a hell of a way of solving it but that was the

only thing we could come up with at that time. And both of them had a good time. But then later on I say around in the Eighties, [I said], "Just have a prom," and, you know, kids got used to it whatever was being played and they danced together. Of course, most of the time nowadays kids don't dance together. They do all of that individual stuff.

DC: Is there anything that I haven't asked that you thought I might ask or that you'd like to add?

JM: No, we'd ramble on and on about it. That's just about sums up what happened. Back when busing first started they thought that the kids coming downtown to the Central area thought blood was going to flow because our feeling about Central was so strong. You know, don't bring these kids in here. My senior class president came in one morning and said don't worry about it, Mac. They called me Mac. Said don't worry about it coach, we'll take care of this. They said, this is our school. We're going to see that everything goes okay. We didn't have any incidents at Central High School when out in the Valley area they were standing on the streets with guns, you know. "Honk your horn against deseg." I remember one night I went to might have been Southern or Eastern or somewhere to a football game, riding by myself. Got banged on my car. "Honk your horn for deseg." Back in those days I wasn't quite as civil as I am now so I got my little piece out and I said I'll tell you what, get away from my car. That's how tight stuff was. I mean that was all over the county when they sent those kids. Some of the excerpts in some of these articles I've got in here [indicates clippings, copies appended to transcript] talking about some of the kids and how they were treated at some of the other schools. You know, they

were there in small numbers. They were taunted by the kids, by the students and the teachers but we couldn't verify all of it because we weren't out there. But we were mainly interested in taking care of our own. I used to carry a video camera just so if something happened, you know, they could say here he comes with that camera again. They were running out in the street ( ) so I got you whether I had film in it or not. Our location at Central at that time is something, you know, left something to be desired because we had a lot of kids, they put Village West over there and they had a lot of kids in there that didn't go to school, get out of junior high school and that's it. And they wanted to come over to Central and, you know, catch one of the other little kids out somewhere and think they've got something and take their money or take their watch or something. We had a parent one time whose two sons stayed for wrestling practice and they were sitting out on the school waiting on somebody to pick them up I guess. They said well, these black kids stole his watch. Came in the school. I was in there with my assistant principal after school. I said John, you watch these two boys while I go over there to Village West because I saw a guy go around a corner. I'm going over to see if I can spot him and see if I know who he is. So when I came back the two kids' mother was there. Oh, you so-and-so-and-so, you know, done left my kids. I said I didn't leave your kids. Where's the telephone. I'm going to get you fired. I said here's the telephone. She didn't even know how to work the telephone. How do you work this blanked blank thing. So anyway, she called the school board that next Monday and told them what I had done and everything. They referred her to my immediate supervisor and she told him what happened. After he listened he said ma'am, he said, you know, everything that you said is not right. She said how do you

know. He said did you see the man standing by the door when you came in raising all that sand talking about what you were going to do? He said I was standing there. He said we had been talking. And she said oh, you're a nigger too. (Laughter) I laughed about it and Joe ( ) said, oh, well, you know. Her kids needed help. Her kids didn't want to go to school. She had two boys and a girl. They didn't want to go to school. I think we got one boy out of school, one quit, and the girl got pregnant. But I saw her later. She came over to the school begging and pleading, oh, will you please help me with my kids. I don't know what to do with them. I just need help. I said, well, you know, we could help them if they would cooperate. But two of them didn't want to cooperate. One we got out of school. But those kinds of things and that parent came from the Portland area, not the other school. Those two kids cut school one time and went up to the St. Matthews area. There were seven kids in the car when the police spotted them. The policeman said I caught five of them. Said I didn't know where the other two went. He said where did the other two go? He said I looked up in the tree, they were up in a tree, this ladies' two boys. The same lady came and raised sand. They were her two boys. I bet this has been twenty-five years ago. I know their name now.

DC: Do you still see kids from those days in town that say hello to you.

JM: Do I see them?

DC: Yeah, I mean kids that you've taught through the years.

JM: Oh, yeah. One of my track guys died last Friday. I won the Jefferson County track coaches award one year and he was really responsible for it because he was my best runner. He had a heart attack last Friday and died so I went to the wake

the other night and all the kids, I call them kids. They're in their fifties now. All the students were there, you know, they hollered at me and everything. My wife said I can't go anywhere with you without somebody hollering Coach Mac, hey Mr. Mac, do you remember me. I say no, I don't remember. I knew his name though. But I enjoyed working at Central. I enjoyed it all the way through the busing other than when they started taking those kids away, the good kids, because we had those Merit finalists. We had those academic kids, good kids. Only complaint really they had when they first got there, we don't like these lunches. (Laughter) And the way I broke the ice I told them I don't like them either. You know, we used to have, when I first got to Central, in the lunchroom they used to cook from scratch. Then back during the busing days they started bringing what they called satellite lunches, you know, pizzas, and hamburgers, and all that stuff. I told them I don't like it either but there's nothing we can do about it.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW

TRANSCRIBED MARCH 2005 BY CATHY MANN