

**Kennesaw State University
Department of History and Philosophy
Summer Hill Oral History Project**

Interview with: Robert Brown
Interviewed by: Jennifer Jongema
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THE FOLLOWING ORAL HISTORY HAS BEEN EDITED BUT MAY STILL CONTAIN ERRORS DUE TO TRANSCRIPTIONIST'S LACK OF FAMILIARITY WITH PARTICULAR PLACES OR PEOPLE. USERS ARE ADVISED TO LISTEN TO THE ORAL HISTORY RECORDINGS IF A NAME IS IN QUESTION.

Biography: Robert Brown was born in Cartersville on May 25, 1936. He had one sister. He earned his Bachelors degree from Morehouse College, received his Master's degree from Purdue, and finally his Ph.D. from Ohio State University. Mr. Brown also joined the armed forces as a military policeman during the late '60s.

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(Tape 1, Side A)

J.J: This is Jennifer Jongema for Kennesaw State University. This is an interview for the Summer Hill Oral History Project. First, if you'd please state your name?

R.B: Robert Brown.

J.J: Okay. And, Mr. Robert Brown, where were you born?

R.B: Cartersville.

J.J: You were born in Cartersville. And what's the date of your birth?

R.B: 5-25-36.

J.J: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

R.B: One sister.

J.J: One sister? Younger?

R.B: Younger.

J.J: Did anyone else live in your household other than parents and your sibling?

R.B: No.

J.J: No? And what did your father do for a living?

R.B: He worked at first for a limestone company out at [Ladd's?]. Then we moved into the city, proper, and he worked for Firestone Tire Company, and he left there and went to work for Cartersville Chemical Corporation until he retired.

J.J: Did your mother work?

R.B: My mother worked as a maid.

J.J: When did your family actually move into the Summer Hill area?

R.B: Before I was of school age.

J.J: That would be the early forties?

R.B: Had to be early forties.

J.J: Why did you move to the neighborhood from your previous home?

R.B: We lived in the county, but we moved into the city so that the kids could go to city schools.

J.J: Where in the neighborhood did you live? What street?

R.B: I lived on Tabernacle Street that later became Jackson Street.

J.J: Could you describe your home for me?

R.B: Well, it was a block house that was later stuccoed and that was later covered with some kind of exterior paneling or covering. I don't remember exactly what it was, but it

resembled brick but it wasn't really brick. It contained how many—one, two—we had a living room, we had what we called the den, and that was where we watched TV and where we ate our meals—it was off the kitchen—and my parents' bedroom and a bedroom and a bedroom for the kids, so it was, like, one, two, three, four, I guess five rooms including the bathroom, one bathroom.

J.J: Did you have a large yard or a rather small yard?

R.B: It was a small yard that at first was basically dirt, which we swept clean during the early years, and later we planted grass.

J.J: Were you close with any of your neighbors? Did you have family that lived [near]by?

R.B: My grandmother lived next door.

J.J: Your maternal or paternal grandmother?

R.B: My maternal grandmother lived next door, and my paternal grandmother lived in [Whites? White?], Georgia.

J.J: Were you friends with any of the other neighbors or neighbor kids?

R.B: Neighbor kids play with neighbor kids, and we were all friends with each other. Who were some of the people who lived on our street? There were the Woods, which lived next door. They lived next door to my grandmother. And the Smiths; they lived next door to the Woods. They had kids. There was a Mr. [Gude?], who owned a neighborhood, like, grocery store, but he didn't have any kids my age; his kids were adults when I was a kid. There were a family called the Wileys, which lived next door to us, and we played with those kids, and the Sullivans, which lived on down the street. But all kids played with the kids in the neighborhood.

J.J: What type of games did you play? What'd y'all do?

R.B: What did we do? We played mainly basketball. We played Tarzan. We climbed trees and built tree houses. That was about the only game kind of things that I remember. I never played marbles, although some of the kids did play marbles. Hide and seek was a favorite game, too. That's about it.

J.J: Growing up and during your youth, what were your chores and jobs around the house? What were your responsibilities?

R.B: There were only two of us, my sister and I, and I was responsible for the outside of the house. I did not have to chop wood, but I did have to bring in wood for the—I'm really going way back—wood for the stove until we stepped up and got an electric stove. We shared the chores within the house, like mopping and vacuuming and making our beds and that kind of thing, because my mother worked during the day so we had to have the house cleaned and in order when she came home from work so that we could go out to play.

J.J: How old were you when y'all got an electric heater or stove?

R.B: I don't remember.

J.J: You don't remember?

R.B: I don't remember. [Chuckles.]

J.J: Okay. And you said every night that your sister and you had to have the house clean and in order so you could go outside and play. Did your family eat together every night?

R.B: Always.

J.J: Was that a big thing?

R.B: Always.

J.J: Always. And what was it, like, typical to eat? Like, your meals.

R.B: Well, I don't know. We ate a lot of vegetables because my grandmother had a garden in the back of the house, and she had chickens in the yard, which provided us with eggs and chicken on Sunday. But to me it was just regular food, you know?

J.J: Right. Was there a favorite childhood food or anything that still sticks with you?

R.B: No.

J.J: A special treat or anything?

R.B: No, I loved macaroni and cheese and orange Jell-O salad made with pineapple and pecans. My mother called it Golden Glow. I loved to eat that, with [unintelligible] crackers and mayonnaise, a little dab of mayonnaise on the salad, and that was served on a lettuce leaf. But no, I didn't have any favorite foods. We learned to eat whatever Mother prepared, and if you didn't like what she prepared, you didn't have any food. That can only last, like, one or two meals and, you know, you get hungry and you eat whatever Mother prepares, and that was the way she brought us up, that we were brought up.

J.J: You said on Sundays y'all used to have chicken. Was Sunday, like, a special meal or a big meal?

R.B: Sunday was always a big meal. We always had pork chops for breakfast. That was my father's favorite, and he always made biscuits on Sunday morning, and generally for the evening meal we always had fried chicken.

J.J: What about holidays? What holidays did you family celebrate or observe? Christmas, Easter, the usual?

R.B: The usual, no special ones, Christmas and Easter and Thanksgiving.

J.J: Those were the three biggies.

What was your first job, growing up, your very first job?

R.B: Probably mowing lawns. I'm remembering that—no, that wasn't it. I washed dishes for an old lady. She used up all the dishes that she owned in her china cabinet or wherever. She used up everything, and then when they all dirty, then she hired somebody to come in and wash them all up. I would do that first, and then I went from the inside of the house to the yard, but my first real kind of job was mowing lawns.

J.J: Where did most people in Summer Hill, the adults, work?

R.B: I don't know. Many of them worked at Lockheed in Marietta. Some of them worked for families of people. Okay, families I'm remembering, like the Dillingers were big, wealthy family.

J.J: What family did your mother work for?

R.B: She worked for the Lesters, and they were the owners of Cartersville Chemical Products. Later, my father went to work at the plant, and Mother worked in the house.

J.J: Did a lot of people work at the Firestone plant?

R.B: Only two people. They mainly recapped tires, and my daddy was one of those who recapped tires, but that was his job at Firestone.

J.J: Now we're going to talk a little bit about the neighborhood, itself. If you were walking down the street in Summer Hill, how would you describe it to me? The houses, the people, what was in the yards, cars, things like that.

R.B: At first, the neighborhood at Summer Hill was kind of slummy, kind of deteriorated, kind of dilapidated, but bit by bit the houses on Summer Hill were all razed or rebuilt into a nice neighborhood along that stretch that goes—well, I guess the entire bit of Jones Street. I'm looking off into space. But at first it was easy to recognize where the wealthy

or the well-to-do white people lived, and the pavement stopped, and where the black people lived, on the other end of Jones Street. And as the city grew, then the look of the neighborhood changed.

J.J: Did you have any nicknames when you were growing up?

R.B: I was called Bobby by my family, and that's the only nickname that I have.

J.J: Was your father also named Robert?

R.B: Yes.

J.J: Are you a Junior?

R.B: Yes.

J.J: When you were little, what did you do for fun and entertainment, other than playing with the neighbor kids? Did you do anything special?

R.B: No, I read a lot.

J.J: Really!

R.B: Reading, I guess, was one of my favorite pastimes, other than listening to the radio. I'm one of those people that grew up listening to the radio. But I think that was good for us because it stimulated our imagination. Listening to the radio and reading was my basic kind of entertainment. I did draw a little, but just as a hobby; I never claimed any special skills, but I do pretty good.

J.J: What did you like to read? What were your favorite books or authors?

R.B: I knew that question was coming.

J.J: [Chuckles.]

R.B: I love historical fiction, stories of adventure that allows the reader to travel back in time. To me, books were like magic carpets that took you to other lands of kings and castles

and that kind of thing. Later, I developed a taste for science fiction, and I *love* science fiction. I don't have any favorite authors of science fiction, although I like Frank Herbert kind of stories, and C. S. Lewis' stories. But I don't recall any favorites as a kid, just almost anything. I'd pick up a book and get into it and get carried away, and I couldn't wait to get to the end of it to see how it ended.

J.J: Did your parents encourage you with the reading?

R.B: They did and they didn't. I think they encouraged me by providing reading material at home that I could just pick up and read. They didn't say, "Go sit down and read this book" or "you haven't spent any time reading today. You need to spend some time reading. You spend all your time playing." Play time was until the sun went down, and when the street lights came on, we had to be in the house. That had nothing to do with age, but that was it. When the street lights came on, we had to be at home.

J.J: Did you parents read a lot? Were they avid readers as well, or was that encouraged by your teachers, or a little of [everything?]?

R.B: I would say it was more encouraged by my teachers. I never saw my father reading much of anything except the newspaper.

J.J: Do you carry on that love of reading now, as an adult?

R.B: Yes.

J.J: What was [sic; were] your favorite radio shows?

R.B: My favorite radio shows were "Superman," something called "The Green Hornet" or something like that, the "Shadow"—[makes chuckling sound as in the introduction to the program] "The Shadow knows what evil lurks in the hearts of men." But I could listen to those while I was helping clean up the house after school.

J.J: As an adult now, do you have any other hobbies or interests that you've developed over the years?

R.B: Well, if I had to claim a hobby, it would be theater. I love being on the stage as well as directing others on the stage. It requires a lot of time, but I do enjoy it.

J.J: Did you do that as a youth or well or did it kind of develop over time?

R.B: It kind of developed over time. I did participate in one or two plays in high school, one or two in college. The love for drama kind of developed ever after college.

J.J: What were your favorite, you and your friends, your favorite hangouts or places to be in the neighborhood?

R.B: Like I said, we played Tarzan sometimes. The places to be would be climbing trees or at the end of the street I lived on, there was a cable on the branch of a tree, and we'd swing around the tree and do Tarzan kind of yells. Everybody walked to school in those days. We did not have cars or even bicycles. We walked to school. Trips to and from school sometimes became an adventure, to stop by an old culvert, those big round pipes that go up under the street, go up under there and look for snakes and all things. I have a fear of snakes. But we really didn't have any favorite places where everybody hung out. At the top of the street I lived on was a big wooded area, where a tabernacle at one time had been constructed, and sometimes we'd go up there and play in the woods. And there was a school at the top of the hill that we passed by on our way to Summer Hill, and we would stop by the school sometime [sic; sometimes] and play on the swings.

J.J: Was the school you passed by a white school?

R.B: Yes.

J.J: Do you remember the name of it?

R.B: Cartersville High School.

J.J: Cartersville High?

R.B: Mm-hm.

J.J: Okay. Did you live in Summer Hill and attend school there all through high school?

R.B: Yes.

J.J: What did you do as a teenager? Did y'all go to the movies?

R.B: Well, everybody went to the movies.

J.J: Really?

R.B: Yes, you'd go to the movies and you'd stay all day.

J.J: At that time, were they still showing movies at the Grand?

R.B: Yes, at the Grand and the Legion, at both of those. I remember both those theaters very well.

J.J: Do you remember any particular customs or celebrations that the neighborhood had, like street fairs or anything?

R.B: No, I don't remember any street fairs or anything like that. I remember going to the fair. How did we go to the fair ground? The fair ground was on the south side of town. We'd go to football games; I remember that. I did not play football because I thought it was a little bit rough. I didn't want any broken legs or knees or arms. But I enjoyed the game. We never played football in the neighborhood, either. That's strange. We always played basketball.

J.J: Looking back from the time that you moved to Summer Hill as a child and then when you left Summer Hill—have you been back recently, or over the years, have you been back?

R.B: Yes.

J.J: How has the neighborhood changed and evolved, in your opinion?

R.B: Oh. It's changed tremendously. It reminds me of the Thomas Wolfe saying that "you can never go home again" because even going back, it's never, ever the same, it's changed so greatly. The street I grew up on is now a paved streets with sidewalks, and growing up, it was red clay and dust. The school that was at the top of the hill was Cartersville High School and Cartersville Elementary School, and they've closed both of those, I think. I don't know what is up there at the top of the hill. There's a civic center up there that was not there when I was growing up. There's a gym on Cherokee Avenue that was part of the Cartersville High School system, and it's now, like, part of the recreation system.

Downtown has changed. The Legion is no more the Legion, and the Grand is no more the Grand, although the Grand is still there and it's kind of like a little theater playhouse. Many stores have moved away or changed. The whole area that's off of 41 has grown tremendously. The hospital isn't where I remember the hospital being. It's somewhere over off of 41 now.

J.J: You remember where the hospital was over next to the new hospital, where they have the nursing home.

R.B: Yes. I remember it being off of Cherokee Avenue, near the First Baptist Church. That's where I was born.

J.J: Do you think that the neighborhood has changed in its racial composition?

R.B: Oh, yes. As a child, there were both white people and black people living on my street. It's kind of strange that, as the neighborhood grew and improved, the white people

moved away, and there are no white people on the street that I lived on. But at the top of the hill, there are still white families that live there, so [unintelligible] move out of black flight, but they moved on to better places, I guess.

J.J: Do you think that neighborhood has changed economically, and if so, for the better or worse?

R.B: Oh, for the better.

J.J: For the better?

R.B: For the better.

J.J: Were you there when they tore down a lot of the housing and put in the public housing there?

R.B: Yes.

J.J: What were your feelings at the time about that?

R.B: Well, I don't know exactly what public housing you were talking about, but I think public housing has always been a good thing, even though it meant displacing people to build them. But the public housing was a great improvement over what the people had been accustomed to living in.

J.J: What's your fondest memory of growing up in Summer Hill?

R.B: That's hard. One would be a fifth-grade teacher, who made me aware of my name. She would say, "What's your name?" And I'd say, "Bobby." She said, "That's not your name." She says, "You go back home and you ask your mother and your father if that's your name. That sounds like something they just call you." And she said, "No," she said, "your name is Robert." Her father was a doctor who delivered me, by the way. So she actually knew my family and knew that my name was Robert, and she made me

aware of the fact that my name was Robert and told me. She said, “From now on, when people call you Bobby, you tell them your name is Robert.” That took a little getting used to, but it made me aware that children should never be repeatedly identified by their nickname because they grow up thinking that that is their name rather than their authentic name.

J.J: What was the teacher’s name?

R.B: Ethel Moore.

J.J: Ethel Moore. Do you think that was kind of a pride thing for her, to kind of uplift you and say, “You’re an adult. You’re important.”?

R.B: I don’t know, but it made me feel good. Being a little fifth-grader, I was just eleven. I wasn’t even that. I was ten years old. During those early years, kids were able to enroll before they were six, and my birthday came in May, which meant that I would have lost a whole year, waiting to become six years old, so they went ahead and enrolled me when I was five, and at the end of that school year I was, like, six. So in the fifth grade, instead of being eleven, I was ten years old. But anyway, that was a memorable step for me, to know who I was. “That’s your name.”

J.J: Any other memories that come to mind? Important or significant? Funny?

R.B: In the eleventh grade, my English teacher tricked us into reading by planting seeds in our minds by saying, “I want you to take this book and take it home and tell me what were Hester [Prynn] and the minister doing out there in the woods.” And that’s all she said. And you know kids. “I’m goin’ home and *read* this.” So we went home and read and read and read and read and read, and became engrossed in the story, rather than just looking for what the minister and Hester were doing out in the woods together.

- J.J: And, of course, you're referring to *The Scarlet Letter* [by Nathaniel Hawthorne].
- R.B: Yes.
- J.J: What was that teacher's name?
- R.B: Nancy Robinson. She's now Beasley, Nancy Beasley.
- J.J: Yes, I know her.
- R.B: Mm-hm.
- J.J: Where in Cartersville did you go for fun? I know you went to the Legion and the Grand theaters[s]. Where else did you go?
- R.B: We'd go up to we called it the beach, which was George Washington Carver State Park, past Redtop Mountain, and we would go up there for picnics and outings and swimming and wading and pretending we were at the beach.
- J.J: Did your family ever go on vacations like families do now, or was that not something that you did? Did you go on a day trip?
- R.B: No, that wasn't something we did. We never ever took a vacation as a family. Sometimes during the summer we would be allowed to visit relatives in other cities and stay for a week or two. I don't think I ever stayed longer than two weeks anywhere, which made going to college very traumatic, because it was like being thrown away. *They've left me here and they are gone and I'm not gonna see 'em anymore.* But having only spent, like, two weeks away from home at the most, it was a big kind of step.
- J.J: Where did you visit, have relatives at?
- R.B: I had relatives in Rome. I had a cousin who lived there. My father's sister lived in Rome, so I would go and stay with my aunt, who lived in Rome, who made delicious cakes. I don't remember anything significant we did while we visited over there, but it

was just to get away from home, to be in a different place for a while, to be able to go back to school and say, “Well, I spent the summer in Rome, Georgia.” [Laughs.]

J.J: Where did you go to college?

R.B: I went to college at Morehouse in Atlanta, and after Morehouse in Atlanta, I wanted to go elsewhere. I wanted to go somewhere out of state, so I went to McGill University and I spent one, two—two summers at McGill University, in the summer school. Then Uncle Sam grabbed me and said, “All right, you’ve been to college, and you’re two years out of school. You need to do your military service or you won’t want to do it.” I said, “I don’t want to do it, but I guess I should go ahead and do it, since the draft board has been so gracious to me.”

I went and was blessed to have been sent to France for two years. After France, I came back and said, *Well, you better get back on this study kick or you won’t ever want to go back to school.*

END TAPE 1, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B

R.B: —back to France as a civilian, and I went back for three weeks and traveled all over Europe by rail and discovered that the classroom French I had learned really worked. Although it was somewhat difficult for me to understand them, they understood me. I guess it’s like hearing a person who has learned English, who [enunciates with great precision] speaks. it. so. perfectly and sounds all of the “t’s” and the “l’s” and the “y’s.” But anyway, I went to Europe and had a nice summer and then came back and said, *Well,*

you've gotten your master's down. You better go ahead and start on the next one, so I started at Ohio State University.

I completed all of my work for the Ph.D. degree except for the residency. Okay. By then, the years are ticking by, and it dawned on me that I was pretty close by now to retirement age, and if I did not plan to pursue higher education (that is, teaching in college somewhere), that it seemed to me not worth the effort and the time it would require to do a thesis and that last little step, so that's where I stopped. And within the next three years, I guess the next three years, I retired from teaching after thirty-three years of service.

J.J: Man! Let's get some dates on that so I can nail all this down. So you went to Morehouse—

R.B: Yes.

J.J: And you earned a bachelor's there?

R.B: Right.

J.J: And what was your bachelor's in?

R.B: In English and foreign language and secondary education.

J.J: What year was that?

R.B: Fifty-seven.

J.J: Fifty-seven, okay. And then you got your master's at Purdue.

R.B: Yes. By now, it's 1966.

J.J: Okay, and what was your master's at Purdue in?

R.B: My master's was in foreign language education.

J.J: When did you get drafted?

R.B: I got drafted in '59.

J.J: And then you said you started to work on your Ph.D.

R.B: Okay, I started to work on the Ph.D.—it had to be in the seventies because I got my master's in '66. I'm going to say 1970.

J.J: And where was that again that you were doing your master's work?

R.B: At Ohio State University.

J.J: Ohio State, okay.

R.B: No, that's the Ph.D. at Ohio State. I did the master's at Purdue.

J.J: Okay. All right. Let's move back to the neighborhood for a minute.

R.B: Okay.

J.J: Thinking of Cartersville and the area and the time that you grew up, did you feel there was anywhere in Cartersville that you shouldn't go or you wouldn't go or that you weren't welcome?

R.B: No and yes. "So what do you mean, no and yes"? No, I didn't feel there was anywhere that I wasn't welcome, and I felt free to move about the city, but although I knew, within my heart in mind, that there were places that I would not be welcome. I thought I would get a newspaper route, and I didn't know what a newspaper route really meant, but I saw those *Grit* newspapers. I don't know if you ever heard of *Grit* newspapers.

J.J: I'm not familiar with that.

R.B: Okay. But anyway, I made the mistake of going to the front door of some white people, who told me to go to the rear, and that was one of the first indications that I had that I should not always go to some people's front door, although that didn't happen very often.

Playing in the neighborhood with white kids that were my own age, I never felt

that we were not welcomed as playmates until one Christmas I went to play with my friend, and the mother came to the door and said, “He can’t come out. They’re studying.” Well, I thought that might have been, but every time I would go back, they were just unavailable anymore, and that’s one way of saying, “You’re not welcome anymore.” I played with boys and girls in the neighborhood that I lived in and always felt comfortable playing with them until one day my parents said, “You don’t need to be going over to her house anymore. She’s getting too big.” That didn’t make any sense to me. Says, “Well, you just don’t need to be going over there anymore. You’ll find out about all of this later. They just don’t want you coming. They just haven’t told you, but they don’t want you coming over there. I’m telling you, you better stay away from there. You’re going to get in trouble.” So I stayed away.

Or eating establishments and places like that. I remember the Four Way Café, and the Four Way Café had two entrances, and one was white and one was black. There was another café downtown. You could get food there, but you’d have to go around to the back door to get the food. I don’t recall ever having seen any sign that said “black people go to the back,” but at the Four Way Café, it did say “For Colored” around there.

And at the movies, there were two different entrances. Black people went up to “the roost,” as we called it, and that’s where we sat, in the balcony, and you just never went to the front because that wasn’t where you went; you went where black people went.

J.J: Were there sounds in town that would specify “colored only,” “white only”? Or you don’t remember?

R.B: I don’t recall ever having seen that, but I did know that.

J.J: [cross-talk; unintelligible] back of the restaurant.

R.B: Yes.

J.J: In the community, where did people gather? Were there fraternal associations?

R.B: We went to church.

J.J: You went to church. Where did you go to church?

R.B: Wherever there was a church service. No, the family belonged to a little church out in the country, and it was called Ladd's Chapel. For a long time, we went to Ladd's Chapel. The church moved to Cartersville, and it became Mount Cavalry, and that church was located out on [Tomblin's?] Farm, out near where Dillinger Park is now. And when I went away to college, when I left Cartersville, that church had all but closed its doors. I don't know when people stopped going there, but right now I know it's kind of like a housing development that's just out there now. But we went to church in Cartersville as well. My mother and father later went to Macedonian Baptist Church up on Martin Luther King. It was called Moon Street back in those days. And we went to church at Mount Zion often, attended the Sunday school and the BYPU in the evenings. That's when we went to church for socialization.

J.J: What's the BYPU?

R.B: Baptist Young People's Union, Baptist Young People's Union.

J.J: I'm Methodist, so—[laughter].

R.B: Okay.

J.J: Were you parents from Cartersville?

R.B: Not originally. My mother was originally from Birmingham, and my father was originally from [unintelligible].

J.J: Did your parents belong to any associations, like the Masons or any lodges or any things like that?

R.B: My father did. It was called The Brotherhood. But I don't know if it's still active or if it went defunct. I think it's kind of inactive. But anyway, he belonged to The Brotherhood and went to the Brotherhood Hall, which was like a group of people who paid, like, a [unintelligible] or dues so that at their burial they would have this fraternal kind of ceremony that they went through. The brothers and sisters who belonged to the lodge or The Brotherhood would have some special kind of service that they would do at the funerals. Mother never belonged to one of those, but Daddy did.

J.J: Were there any—I don't know how to say it—any, like, major community institutions, like if you would think of your neighborhood—like, when I think of Cartersville, I think of the Grand and I think of Four Way. What would you think of when you think of Summer Hill, as far as, like, commercial establishments and things like that?

R.B: Well, there was a deli that did not sell, like, sandwiches, but it was like an ice cream shop. I think it was called The Deli [sic; Delicacy Shop?]. We'd stop and have ice cream. Dan Wheeler—you probably know of the Wheeler family name—owned a barbershop on one side, and on the other side was, like, an ice cream shop, and we'd stop and have pineapple sundaes. I thought that was real classy. Would say, *Cartersville is coming on*. But that's not there anymore. They now have that center down on Bartow Street.

J.J: Who were the prominent, recognized members of the community during your time?

R.B: The Morgans.

J.J: The Morgans.

R.B: The Morgans.

J.J: What was the scope of their influence and their work in the community?

R.B: He was the principal of the school. Way back then, I want to say teachers had a greater influence than they do now because your teachers knew your parents, and your parents knew your teachers, and anything went awry at school, parents were [visited in the?] home, and you got it at home and you got it at school, so principals and teachers played a pretty big influence in the neighborhood.

J.J: Would you describe the neighborhood as pretty closely knit?

R.B: I would say so, yes.

J.J: Were there any areas of Summer Hill that were considered to be the white area or the black area? What were the boundaries, do you think?

R.B: What were the boundaries? Well, like I said, I can't think of any boundaries except to say that it was visually obvious where white people lived and where the road stopped and the neighborhood changed and it became black, almost there at the end of Jones Street. There are one, two, maybe four homes that are right there, and after that, the road stops, and there's a street that goes down—I don't know the name of that street—there's a hill that goes down. It's the first street to the right as you enter onto Jones from—see, I don't know the name of that street.

J.J: Aubrey?

R.B: No, Aubrey is on the north side. If you go to the end of Jones Street, there's a short street that comes—

J.J: Williams?

R.B: The Sam Jones Church there.

J.J: Okay, I know where you're talking about.

R.B: The health center is on the corner, and it crosses Bartow, and it comes across. I don't know the name of that street. Is that—[pause].

J.J: Carter? That's what it's showing on my map. They changed the names so often.

R.B: Okay, I know where Carter Street is. Now, it's after Carter Street. Just after you cross Carter Street, it became obvious where black people lived and where white people lived, and you moved in the area where the projects and [Saint Lou?] and the rest of Jones is all—you know, all that is black.

J.J: Reflecting back to church and the role it played in your life, do you remember if there were any particular sermons or themes that stick out in your mind that were reinforced regularly?

R.B: No.

J.J: No? Did the churches or the ministers, for that matter, or the elders or whatever—did they ever take any sort of political stances or positions on issues?

R.B: They probably did, but as a kid, I don't recall having heard any significant sermon that stirred me or stirred up the community to react in any kind of specific manner, but I feel pretty certain [if?] there were, because the words of a minister had great power.

J.J: Do you feel there are divisions between the different denominations? Like, you knew that this family was Baptist and that family was Methodist, or was it more that you were all Christians?

R.B: I think it's more that we were all Christians. Growing up, there was no great division, as I can think, between Baptist people and Methodist people. [unintelligible] a division between those that were called Holiness people because they conducted their service with

drums and tambourines, and that was kind of unusual for Baptists and Methodist people. In some of those Baptist churches today, you can't really tell the difference between any of them. But growing up, you were either Christian or non-Christian, or saved or unsaved, but not as particular denominations.

J.J: If you'll describe your map to me again. Tell me about the school, what it looked like inside and where the classrooms were.

R.B: Okay. [Opens map.] Okay, coming down [microphone noise; unintelligible name] Street from you, in front of the school is a stone—

J.J: Hold on just one second. Okay.

R.B: Coming down Jones Street, going—this way being north—the school is, like, at the end of the street and there's a stone wall that goes across here and a stone wall that goes across there, with the entranceway between. You come into the school yard, and you would go up some steps, and on your left would be the principal's office, and on the right there's a typing room, and you would enter into a huge auditorium. (This is not drawn to scale.) It was a big auditorium, with a stage at the end.

These were steps that led down to a lower level, and the cafeteria. Also down here was a hallway underneath that led across to this wing, where there was the first- and second-grade classrooms. Above those was the fifth-, sixth-, seventh-, eighth- and ninth-grade classrooms, on this wing here, which would be the west wing.

On the east wing were the other high school rooms. Twelfth grade was right here. The principal's wife had that room. Eleventh grade was right here, and a library—I was trying to remember [what I thought?] was a library there—and the tenth-grade classroom.

This was, like, an alleyway or a roadway. It's a huge embankment that led down to the football playing field, and these were steps in the bank, cut into the bank, itself, like stadium seats. And on this side, which is the east side, was the gymnasium and a roadway between the gymnasium and the school building, itself. And in the very back was a home economics building. And that's basically the way it looked.

Right across the street from the school was the principal's house. This on the west side, the principal's house. And on the east side of Jones Street was Mount Zion Baptist Church, and this was a hill that led down to the railroad tracks and that way.

J.J: What's this over here again?

R.B: This over here was where the trash pile was, and often there was, like, burning embers of trash at the end of this playing field.

J.J: So the school was built on a dump.

R.B: Right next to the city dump.

J.J: Hmmph.

R.B: The school was here, and the dump was down there. And the new school was built right past the dump.

J.J: You went through Summer Hill all the way through high school, right?

R.B: Yes.

J.J: What [were your] favorite subjects, favorite teachers?

R.B: I liked all of my teachers for different reasons. My first-grade teacher was Miss Bessie Shell, and I don't remember much about being in the first grade except being in the first grade and carried my lunch to school in a paper bag, and big kids wanted to take my lunch away from me.

J.J: [Chuckles gently.]

R.B: My second-grade teacher was a Mrs. Curly Lay. She was a sweet kind of lady, as I remember.

My third-grade teacher was Mrs. [Kaye? Kay?]. Mrs. Kaye had a favorite little saying, “I’m a little piece of leather, but I’m well put together,” meaning that if you went into her classroom and you did not have your lesson, you got your little behind tanned.

My fourth-grade teacher was Mrs. Juanita Johnson. I don’t remember much about Mrs. Johnson except I remember her giving me a paddling for telling somebody how to spell a word. She was a huge kind of lady. But there was a pretty little girl in my fourth-grade classroom, and she wanted to paddle her, and I told her she couldn’t do that—

J.J: Uh-oh.

R.B: —and she said, “Oh, you’re gonna take it for her?” And I said, “Yes.” [Laughs.] And she gave it to me.

My fifth-grade teacher Ethel Shell, and I told you about Ethel telling me my name was Robert.

My sixth-grade teacher was a Mrs. Fanny Richards, a Miss Fanny Richards at the time. She wasn’t married. I don’t remember much about being in the sixth grade except that she moved away to Pontiac, Michigan, which seemed like far, far away to me.

Seventh-grade teacher was a Mrs. Thomas, who was a fashion plate. She always dressed real fine, and she had pockets in the back of her dress. I don’t know why I remember that, but I do.

Eighth-grade teacher was a Mrs. Anderson. She was kind of like a tyrant, but if you got out of her classroom, that meant that you were going into high school, so that was a big transition grade.

In the ninth-grade—tenth grade, eleventh grade and twelfth grade presented a totally different kind of...I want to say atmosphere because we changed classes all the time, so you didn't have just one teacher then, you had several. You'd have one for math, one for this, one for that, and one for something else, and you had those teachers for the rest of your high school career. But you did have a homeroom teacher. I guess a homeroom teacher was kind of like an adviser who kept tabs on the students on the class roll, but a homeroom teacher did not have the same kind of affinity with students that you had all through the grades where you had that same teacher all day long. So it was kind of different.

Mrs. Beasley, Nancy Robinson, was inspirational to me because she made learning exciting. I don't ever praise her too much. But she made it exciting, made reading fun and helped me decide that that was what I wanted to do, to be an English teacher and give students an opportunity to explore the thoughts and lives of other people, through reading. I kind of got tracked into foreign language because I took Latin in high school.

J.J: Really!

R.B: Yes, the principal's wife taught Latin, and I found it useful in looking into meanings of words.

J.J: Right.

R.B: Words that I had never seen before, I could look at them and tell, *That's "trans"; that means "across."* Transcontinental is across the continent, and transmigration means to

migrate across somewhere. Transfiguration is a figure to be changed into something across something else. But I wanted to learn a foreign language that I could actually use and speak. My father had spent his time in World War II in France, and I said, "I think I'd like French," and that was how I got into French, teaching of French.

J.J: And you didn't start studying French until college.

R.B: No. Been studying it forever since. [Laughs.]

J.J: Did you belong to any clubs or organizations when you were at Summer Hill, school-wise? I know you said you didn't play football.

R.B: No. I belonged to a library club, which means that you would go to the library, check out books, and you would read them. I can't think of any other kind of club. I might have belonged to the Drama Club, because I was in at least two plays.

J.J: Which plays?

R.B: I had a very minor role in something called *Who Killed Ann Gage?* I think I was a Butler, and my name was Keane.

J.J: Do you remember the other play?

R.B: No. I'm trying to remember. I can't think of it right now. I liked that play, *Who Killed Ann Gage?*, because it's kind of like one of those Agatha Christie mysteries. The person that you think committed the crime did not commit the crime, and the way you thought it was going to turn out doesn't quite turn out that way.

J.J: The school library. What types of books were in it? Was it a large library, or small?

R.B: It looked large to me, but it was small, when you've never known what large is. You know, it's all by comparison.

J.J: You weren't allowed in the county or city libraries?

R.B: Didn't even know where they were. No, I didn't even know where they were. I started to say if you wanted a book from the county library or local library, you asked your school librarian and she would get it for you.

J.J: Who was your librarian?

R.B: Nancy Beasley, Nancy Robinson.

J.J: Were most of the books donated or borrowed from teachers, or how did they get the books? Do you know?

R.B: We got the books from the white school.

J.J: Second hand?

R.B: Second hand, books that they didn't want. We got them. If the white kids got new books, we got the old books. I never saw a new book at Summer Hill. It might have come later, but not while I was there.

J.J: After school, what did you do? Obviously, had homework. Did you have lots of homework?

R.B: We always had homework. After school, go home, do your homework, clean up the house, do your chores [telephone rings; unintelligible] go out to play.

J.J: Was Summer Hill known for sports? Or what type of sports teams did you have? You mentioned the football team.

R.B: We had a basketball team called the Summer Hill Blue Devils. I think we had a football team, too, because I can remember going to football games, but it wasn't known for sports. I guess if it had a reputation, it was known for singing. It had a very good choir.

J.J: Who was the choir teacher?

R.B: The principal's wife, Mrs. Beatrice Morgan.

J.J: What other schools did you play in sports? Do you remember the names of other schools that y'all played?

R.B: We played Stevenson High at Calhoun, we played Main High School out of Rome, we played Ringgold, but I don't remember the name of the Ringgold...I specifically remember Calhoun and Rome. Those are the ones that I recall right away.

J.J: You said most of the time y'all walked to school when you had games and things. How did they get the team to other schools?

R.B: Bus.

J.J: Bus? Did the school own a bus or did they borrow it from somewhere?

R.B: The school owned a bus. The PTA got together and bought a bus.

J.J: Do you think a lot of the fund-raising or one of the funds for the bus and the books and things like that—was that a community effort?

END TAPE 1, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A

R.B: The parents have stood behind the school, and fund-raisers are buying a bus, buying uniforms for the players or that kind of thing.

J.J: I know schools nowadays do a lot of fund-raising, like we have car washes and sell stuff. Did y'all do that?

R.B: Well, I don't recall.

J.J: You don't remember?

R.B: I don't recall students doing car washes or things like that. Maybe the parents did, but I don't recall the students having done that.

J.J: Looking back and comparing your education at Summer Hill with the education of your white friends, do you think there was a different in quality?

R.B: I think there was a difference, but I also don't think there was a difference in quality. Now, "What do you mean, there was a difference"? I'm thinking specifically about classes like chemistry and biology. I think that our chemistry and biology teachers did the best they could with the materials that they had, but it was mind-boggling to me to go to college and be in a chemistry lab and see all of these beakers and Bunsen burners and—I'd just never seen anything like that before, and they expected me to feel comfortable in an atmosphere like this, that I had had enough background and preparation to conduct in experiment unsupervised? I was afraid to turn on the gas.

I remember hooking up a thermometer in a test tube, and the stopper was a one-hole stopper, and the chemistry teacher came down and looked at it, and he says, "What are you doing?" I says, "I'm looking for the boiling point of alcohol" or whatever. And he said, "Are you sure you have the right kind of a stopper in there?" I said, "I think so." And he just walked away. He did not tell me that, with a one-hole stopper with the thermometer in the hole, that I had blocked it off, putting fire under there, that that thing was going to explode. He just walked away. He walked away and let it happen.

Well, I learned right then that you can't do that. You have to have some way for that steam or pressure to escape. But I think our teachers did the best they could with what they had and provided quality as best they could, but I think we were deprived in the fact that our experiences were really limited. It's one thing to read about an experiment, and it's another thing to conduct one.

J.J: Right. Was there ever a present sense of segregation within the community, within Cartersville? Did you feel that Summer Hill was a separate entity from the city?

R.B: I think it was. I didn't expect that question to go where you took it. I think it was because that's just the way it was. I thought you were going to ask about where people lived. People lived all over, but they lived all over in segregated pockets. There was a group of black people on the west side, and they lived generally together; and there were people over on the east side up in Mechanicsville and that area. They lived there. And there were people who lived on the south side, in their little pocket. And there were people who lived up there in Summer Hill, and that was that little community kind of pocket. But I think Summer Hill existed within—Summer Hill as a special kind of place of learning, of growing and becoming. It was all these people—it was all they had. So I think it was segregated in that sense.

J.J: Was there ever—I'm sure there was, but was race a very conscious issue in your life when you lived in Cartersville? Was it something that you always—

R.B: Thought of?

J.J: —thought of.

R.B: Not really.

J.J: Not really?

R.B: No.

J.J: Did your parents ever express any views about the segregation or the changing times? Because you grew up during very tumultuous times.

R.B: My grandmother did. My maternal grandmother did. My paternal grandma was kind of out of it, but my maternal grandmother often told me that “you're gonna get yourself

killed fooling around with those white folks 'cause they don't mean you any good." And I told her, I said, "Well, now, you can't really mean that." There was a family that was just like members of our family that would come and visit my grandmother, and they would sit on the front porch and talk, although we knew that they were white and she knew that they were white, but they were different. She said, "Well, they're different." And I said, "Well, that's true of everybody. Everybody is different until you get to know them," and that's what made them different. It's not because they are white they are going to be down on black people. There are good white people just as there are good black people, and we've got some black people that I didn't want to have anything to do with, just like there are some white people that I wouldn't have anything to do with, and we have to learn to judge people for their individual worth. And she says, "Yes, but they are different. I'm tellin' you, they don't mean you any good and they're gonna get you killed." I said, "No." She said, "I worry about you up there in [unintelligible], up there all by yourself." I said, "I'm all right."

J.J: What was her name?

R.B: Cory Colquitt.

J.J: And then your other grandmother, her name?

R.B: Was [Annie Jo?] Brown.

J.J: And she was the one that—she didn't really say anything about it?

R.B: Oh, my father's mother never said anything about it. She was a happy-go-lucky kind of person, who—

J.J: Didn't want to rock the boat?

R.B: Who didn't want to rock the boat, who went with the flow, who just went with life.

Whatever life dished out, she just kept rolling along. She was jolly, always happy. But my mother's mother was kind of like a mother hen who watched over the family and said, "You better watch them. I'm tellin' you, they're not out for any good when it comes to you. They don't mean you any good, I'm tellin' you right now."

J.J: What was your parents' reaction or feelings about the times?

R.B: I don't really know. I think growing up when they grew up, they learned how to cope and to manage and to just keep going. Now, I remember one incident. I drove Mother to Hilton Head to a wedding. This was the wedding of the little girl she had reared up. We went out to Hilton Head and went to Sea Pines Plantation. You come to this gate, and you can't get in unless they know you're coming. So anyway, they told them we were coming, and they expected us. We went on in, and when we got there, she said, "Would you like to have something to drink?" Well, I wanted something to drink. [Chuckles.] And I said, "What are you offering?" And she says, "Well, I can give you some juice or some coffee." I said, "I'll have some coffee." And my mother's eyes got big as saucers because you just did not do that. She said, "I cannot believe that you asked her for a cup of coffee." I said, "Well, she offered it." To me, that was the time...So I told her, "Don't invite me to your church. I may show up. If you don't mean it, don't say it. If you want me to come by and visit you at home, don't offer me any invitation because I just might come."

J.J: What about your father?

R.B: Father was like Father, who never had much to say about those kind of things. He never did. Sometimes it's a puzzle as to what he actually thought. I don't really know.

J.J: Was there an air of wariness or caution with them? Sometimes with their dealings with—

R.B: I'm sure there was. I'm very sure there was. That's why they told me—that's why her eyes got big when I said, "Yes, I'd like a cup of coffee," because with her generation, you didn't do that. You didn't dare do that.

J.J: When you left Summer Hill to go to Morehouse, did you ever come back and live there, or that was it, you never lived there again?

R.B: That was it. Just to visit.

J.J: Are your parents, either one, still living?

R.B: No.

J.J: When the school was razed and you found out about it, how did that make you feel?

R.B: [Sighs.] Well, it created a kind of an emptiness because I have very real feelings about having a sense of history, and I think not just things that represent the black community or black culture, just even as a community, we are quick to tear down the old for the coming of the new. Sometimes I realize that may be necessary, but in the same manner, I think that we need to have a greater sense of history about what is important to a community and keep some of those symbols of the past or we're never going to have any kind of history. In a greater sense, I think Cartersville has been more cognizant of that fact, as I have seen very few...But I was distraught to see it gone, didn't understand why it was necessary to tear it down at all. They built a new school in a different place; that was fine. But they razed both the gym and the school and have in its place—I don't want to say a [tent?], but another kind of gym that did not represent what that wooden structure

represented that was there. Maybe it might have been too old to save. I don't know. But I think more effort should have been made to save it as a symbol of our history.

J.J: It was more than just buildings to you.

R.B: Yes, mm-hm.

J.J: Do you think in modern times, in modern society there's still a place for historically black or all-black or all-female, all-male schools?

R.B: I think there's a place for that. As I think about it, I think there's a place for that, but...I think there's a place for that because of social growth or social needs. At the same time, I think those all-black schools need some kind of input from the larger society because the world is not like that. We don't live in an all-black world, an all-male world, and all-female world, so there needs to be some kind of connection—I don't want to say inroads. But I was pleased when I went to Morehouse to discover that all of my teachers were not black, that I had a Chinese teacher, I had some white teachers. I don't think I had any Japanese. I had German teachers. But to meet people of other backgrounds, I think was an important part of my education.

At Purdue I had classes with a nun. I'd never been in the company of a nun before. To discover that they are people just like we are. I was shocked, though, that she would drink beer, because I had never seen a nun as a person. She said, "Well, sure, I can drink a beer," and she'd have a beer. She said, "That doesn't have anything to do with my relationship with God."

But in an all-girls school, there needs to be some males around somewhere, and at an all-male school, there needs to be some females around there somewhere, although there is value in that kind of an education.

I hope I answered your question.

J.J: Yes, very well.

R.B: Okay,

J.J: You taught for thirty-three years.

R.B: Yes.

J.J: What level did you teach?

R.B: High school.

J.J: High school level?

R.B: Mm-hm.

J.J: And you taught French?

R.B: Mm-hm.

J.J: Where have you taught in the country?

R.B: Where have I taught in the country? I taught at Jackson, Georgia, and at Dalton High School, and I should say at Emory Street School here in Dalton. Emory Street School was an all-black school, and I taught there for a short period of time before I went to Dalton High School.

J.J: Where did you meet your wife?

R.B: Here, here in Dalton.

J.J: When did you marry?

R.B: Five years ago, four years ago. We thought it was three, but—we've not been married a long time.

J.J: And this is your first marriage?

R.B: This is my first.

J.J: Had she been married previously?

R.B: Yes, she had. Her husband was killed in New York. All her kids were—I think they were grown, and she moved back here from North Carolina after her children grew up, and when she moved back here, I told her I was waiting for her.

J.J: [Laughs.] How *did* you meet?

R.B: Her sister was having a house party, and I taught her sister, and she said, “Why don’t you call Monsieur R.B:?” And she says, “Oh, he’s not interested in me.” She says, “Well, you call him anyway.” So anyway, her sister called and asked me if I would come over and have a drink and sit and talk, and I said, “Oh, sure, I’ll be glad to.” So we occupied each other’s time all that evening, and from that moment on, we’ve been almost inseparable. It seems like we’ve been together all of our lives, even though it’s only been—I mean, the years have passed so fast, that we really have not even thought about them. She says, “We’ve been married three years.” And I said, “No, it’s four.” So I pulled out the wedding pictures and showed her the date on them. And she said, “Why didn’t you tell me?” I said, “Well, I was just thinking that...” So we were trying to recall what we did on our first, second and third and fourth anniversaries.

We had an African wedding. On our first, we put on our wedding attire and we went to a Japanese restaurant. We walked in with our regalia on, and we had this food that’s cooked right there in front of us, and that was really nice. And the second time, we went to a French restaurant in Tennessee. And the third time—I don’t remember what we did the third time. The third time, we thought we went to a French restaurant again, but a different one. We couldn’t really account for the fourth one. What did we do on the

fourth one? Couldn't remember whether we went on the riverboat or whether we stayed at home, or did we go back to the Japanese restaurant? But it has been four years.

J.J: Great.

We're going to take a minute and talk about some things outside of Summer Hill.

R.B: Okay.

J.J: What year was it when you left Summer Hill?

R.B: Fifty-three.

J.J: And you went to Morehouse.

R.B: Till '57.

J.J: Did you get a scholarship or did you work?

R.B: Yes, I did.

J.J: An academic scholarship?

R.B: Mm-hm. That was a shock. That was a shock. That was a shock and a blessing. It was a shock and a blessing because first, I had, like, a half-tuition scholarship, and I was there one week and I was called into the dean's office, and I said, *Oh, what have I done now?* You don't get called into the dean's office for nothing. And he told me that the president wanted to see me. I said, "The president wants to see me?" He said, "Yes, he wants to see you." So I went in, and the president told me that, having reviewed my high school record and my age—I'm trying to remember how old was I? Sixteen? I was sixteen. I was sixteen. That he had a Ford Foundation scholarship available that I was eligible for that would pay all of my tuition and that the only thing I would be responsible for would be my books and my food. I thought that was great. And that was how I made it.

J.J: That's how you made it.

R.B: Mm-hm. I worked two summers on the tobacco fields in Connecticut to help pay for books and room and board.

J.J: Currently I know that Morris Brown [College] has lost their accreditation. How do you feel about the issues going on with Morris Brown and the associated schools?

R.B: I think it's regrettable that Morris Brown has been placed in jeopardy, obviously by a bad administration.

J.J: Right.

R.B: I don't understand how it could have gone as far as it has without some federal officials or tax officials or someone taking note of that. How could they have absconded with millions of dollars? And it floats around to what happens to people when they become empowered—

J.J: Right!

R.B: —to handle the money.

J.J: Do you think that it's making an impact or possibly a negative reflection on the other associated schools in Atlanta?

R.B: Not really.

J.J: No?

R.B: No, not really. I think it probably makes the administrators of those schools more aware of their own responsibility to the institution, not that they haven't been aware of it in the past. But even though they exist in an academic kind of community, Spelman has its own finances and its own money, Morehouse has its own finances, and Atlanta University has its own. But being a part of that university system, the administrators of Morris R.B: have certainly failed in their responsibility to the school. I had been thinking kind of

positively of what was happening to Morris R.B: because it seemed to have been on the upswing.

J.J: Yes, for a while.

R.B: There are more structures, more dorms, the stadium has been greatly improved, and I thought maybe the administration was funneling funds into building that school up, rather than siphoning them off into their own—or whatever uses, their own personal uses. That's regrettable.

J.J: I'm going to change tracks here for a moment.

R.B: Okay, okay.

J.J: Think back over the years and the people and figures that you've encountered in your life. Who would you say were your heroes or role models?

R.B: Who were my heroes and role models. I have to begin by saying [Martin Luther] "M.L." King Jr. He spoke at my graduation from college.

J.J: At Morehouse?

R.B: At Morehouse. But the president of Morehouse, Benjamin E. Mays—and I don't know if you know Benjamin Elijah Mays, but he was an inspiration to all of the students who attended Morehouse because he felt that anyone who graduated from that institution carried up on his shoulders a mantle of responsibility. I can recall his saying that "in some instances, Morehouse may have failed you or failed to equip you as it should have, but from this day forward, when you leave this institution and you go away from here, you bear the mark of a Morehouse man" and that "wherever you go, when people look at you, they will say, 'There goes a Morehouse man.'"

You'll say, "Now, what does that mean?" Well, some people say all Morehouse graduates are very arrogant. I don't know if we are, but I can recall being on a plane one time, and I was just carrying on a conversation, just as I'm talking with you, and this lady says, "You went to Morehouse, didn't you?" And I said, "Yes, I did." I said, "How can you tell." "Well, you Morehouse men all have a certain something about you."

But if the institution failed us in any way, and I don't think it did, and the more I live the more I know that I really, really, really value the kind of education background I got there. Didn't know I was getting it at the time when I got it. The hours I spent listening to classical music that I thought was an anesthetic—*it's putting me to sleep. I can't stand this.* But much of it was beautiful, and I can remember—I can sit and say, "That's *Moonlight Sonata.*" "How do you know that?" I say, "Well, you know, I learned that at Morehouse." [Laughter.] Sometime[s] listening to *Jeopardy* I'll answer some questions and my wife will say, "How do you know that?" I said, "Well, you know, I went to Morehouse, and Morehouse kind of prepared me for many things that I didn't know I was being prepared for while I was there."

I don't remember your original question.

J.J: Your heroes.

R.B: Benjamin E. Mays would be one. Martin Luther King would be another. Heroes in my life. I'd have to put my grandmother up there because she was responsible for goading the family, pushing the family from the outskirts of Bartow County into the city so that her grandchildren could go to public schools.

J.J: When was your grandmother born?

R.B: I have no idea.

J.J: Was she born free?

R.B: As I remember, she was. I don't think she was a slave, but she knew about slavery conditions. Her mother probably was. I can recall asking her about her mother, and she referred to her mother as "that old white lady," so [chuckles]...Grandmother was a fair-skinned woman. That might have meant that her life was somewhat easier, but she lived a hard life. I can recall her taking us to the cotton fields to pick cotton to earn enough money to go to the Grand and the Legion on Saturday, so we could go to the movies. But I would have to list her high on the list of being one of my heroic figures. I was one of the first people in my family to graduate from high school and one of the first, the first to graduate from college, so I give her that credit.

J.J: Do you remember when your family got their first car, or the first car that you can remember your family having?

R.B: [Thedna? My father?] always had a car. I remember a green car that had a spare tire embedded on the front wheel, on the side of the car. The spare tire was embedded on the side of the car. The car had running boards. The back of the car—there was a trunk on the back of the car, but the trunk was in a vertical composition. I don't know if you've seen them, right there at the back, but it's straight up and down [demonstrates], not like trunks are now. That's the way the trunk was, like this [demonstrates], on the back of the car, and you went in the trunk by flicking some little things back there. Some of the earlier models just opened up, and it was like a rumble seat, but on this car it was the trunk. That was our car. But my father always had a car of some kind.

J.J: What was the first car that you owned, yourself?

R.B: The first car I owned was a '57 Fairlane 500, green and white. See, I remember that. I never owned a car until after I graduated from college. Didn't have one while I was in college.

J.J: When did your family get their first TV?

R.B: It had to be in the fifties somewhere. Well, somewhere in the fifties. Probably in 1950.

J.J: Do you remember that being a big event or exciting thing?

R.B: Not really.

END TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B

R.B: —other people's houses in the community until we got one of our own. And then the next big advent was the coming of color TV. I don't remember exactly what year that came, but we weren't the first people in the neighborhood to have a color TV, but that came later, and we thought we were really something: we got a color TV.

J.J: [Chuckles.] Did y'all always have a telephone, or was that something you got later on?

R.B: No, we always had a telephone, as I can remember.

J.J: Was it, like, a party line?

R.B: At first it was a party line. I was trying to remember the number, but I can't remember the number. We had a party line.

J.J: How many other people shared the line with you?

R.B: I don't recall that. Probably two.

J.J: Only two.

During the civil rights movement you were a young man in college. Were you active, a participant in things or more of an observer?

R.B: I was more of an observer and really not a participant and not really in it when it happened. Remember, I graduated in '57. I went into the military in '59, and when many of the civil rights demonstrations and things were going on, I was in Europe. I was in the military. I wasn't here. I read about the riots out in Watts and the marches in Montgomery, and it was like reading about a different country. And when I came back in the latter part of '60—I was in there '59 and '60—the latter part of 1960, much of the marching and demonstrations and all that had come to an end. It was a done thing by that time. Things were rocking when I left, and they were somewhat smoothed out when I got back.

When I went in, I can remember getting on the Greyhound bus and taking a seat behind the driver, and he turned and told me that he could not be responsible for my safety because he was afraid of what might happen to me, and I had on my uniform. I told him—I said, “Well, if you're afraid of what may happen to me, I'm not,” and I sat there, and nothing happened. I mean, you know, some people looked, but nothing happened. I told myself, *I'm not trying to get my name in the newspaper or anything, I'm just trying to get where I'm going, and I'm going to sit right here.* And I sat right there.

But I was kind of like an observer. I don't know if I would have been more active if I had been here. I often think about one of the best ways to have participated in that was to live as I had always lived and go as I had always gone. Now, I can recall having gone into a store, I'll just say in south Georgia, and the owner of the store told me, “Side door.” And I said, “What do you mean?” I didn't understand what he meant. He said

[imitating “redneck” accent], “You know what I mean. You go to the side door. The side door is for colored.” And I said, “Well, I’m sorry, you can just keep your merchandise,” and I left.

This was during the period after I got back in I want to say ’64. In Indiana, I went into a bar, and I was the only black in the group. I was with a group of white college friends, and we went in to have a beer, and he said, “I can’t serve you.” We all reached for ID, and he said, “I don’t want to see your ID.” And I told him, “Well, let’s just leave.” They said, “Why? What’s wrong?” They didn’t understand. Well, I got the message right away. He didn’t want to serve somebody black.

J.J: Do you think when you were in Europe, could you tell a marked difference in the attitude and environment?

R.B: Well, to be honest, no. At the time that I was there, the French people were having some problems with students or people from Africa, speaking French, and I spoke French whenever I went out. I never spoke a word of English. And they could not believe I was from the United States. [Laughs.] They thought I was from Africa or someplace, which I thought was so funny. But in some places they were afraid of me. They were afraid to serve me because they thought I was a black African military person, and I said, “No, I’m an American.” They didn’t believe me. They just said, “I don’t believe you.” I said, “Well, I am. I’m American.” Then they want to know, “Where are you from?” When you say you’re an American, that includes a lot of territory, and I forget that that includes Canada, as well, you know.

J.J: Right.

R.B: I said, “I’m from the United States.” And I said, “I’m from America.” They wanted to make me from Canada. I said, “No.” Then they wanted to say, “Well, are you from Haiti?” And I said, “No, I’m from the United States.” I made the mistake of saying I was from the southern United States, *America de sud*, which would be South America. I said, “I am from the United States. That’s the answer.” They didn’t believe me.

J.J: You were born in ’36.

R.B: Yes.

J.J: So you were in grammar school during World War II.

R.B: Right.

J.J: And you said your father served.

R.B: Mm-hm.

J.J: Where did he serve?

R.B: He served with the Red Ball Express [a huge convoy effort to supply Allied armies moving through Europe]. He was under the command of Gen. George [S.] Patton [Jr.]. I took my father to see the movie *Patton*, and he said, “Well, I can tell you one thing: He’s just like him.” That may not be him, but he was just like him. Yes, he served in France, drove a truck. I don’t remember any towns in specific that he—

J.J: Any major battles?

R.B: —that he lived in or went through, but he was there.

J.J: What branch did you serve [in], in the Army?

R.B: Military police, directing traffic and interrogated French people who were involved in or [unintelligible] with military personnel, I escorted prisoners, military prisoners, not

prisoners of war, people who had gone AWOL [which he spells out instead of pronouncing it like a word], soldiers passing counterfeit money, that kind of thing.

J.J: Do you remember any major impact or events from the war, World War II, [staying as?] significant in your childhood, other than the fact that your father was gone?

R.B: No. I was glad when he came home.

J.J: I'm sure.

R.B: Yes.

J.J: Back to the civil rights. Talk about a few key events and your feelings and emotions at the time, if it's okay with you. First, the Medgar Evers killing, murder. Do you remember your feelings?

R.B: Well, I don't really remember my feelings except how I must have felt, that when he died, it seemed as though there was a concerted effort by militant whites to rid black people of any leaders that we had, that anybody who spoke up or came to the forefront to lead black people to do positive things or something good, they killed them.

J.J: What did you think of Malcolm X and the Black Muslim movement?

R.B: Didn't really know a whole lot about Malcolm X or the Muslim movement, but I think that Malcolm X, looking at his life, must have felt helpless, saw no other alternative than to return violence for violence. He did make a trip to Mecca. When he returned, I think his view of the world was somewhat different, and I think anybody's would be.

Just to digress a little bit, you know, if you live all of your life in one community, then your view is going to be limited, and when you realize that there's a greater world out there and an awful lot of it is covered by water, this really ought to be called Planet Sea.

J.J: Planet Blue.

R.B: Planet Blue. But when he came back, his view was much more worldly, and he did not see all white men as devils. It was then that when he changed his view about the racial question, that people within his own organization saw fit to remove him. I thought that was regrettable.

J.J: Okay. Brown v. the Board of Education, 1956. Do you remember that? You would have been in high school then, right?

R.B: Mm-hm.

J.J: Was that a big deal or kind of something or was it “that’s good it happened but it really didn’t change things”?

R.B: Well, it’s good that it happened, but it really didn’t change much. Having a law is good, but people have a way of circumventing the law. It’s one thing to go and apply for an apartment and being told, “I’m sorry, we have no vacancies,” and then I send you over there and they rent you one.

J.J: Right.

R.B: Which is their way of saying, “We don’t want black people over here.” It’s one thing to send an application for a job and everything seems wonderful until you show up, until I show up and they see my black skin, and then it’s, “I’m sorry, but we just filled that vacancy.” So there’s still a way of circumventing fairness or justice. It’s hard to legislate that kind of thing. I’ve often said that I’m really glad I live in the South because I feel that most people of the South are kind of overtly honest about that kind of thing. If they welcomed you, it’s a real welcome; it’s not a pretend welcome. But if they say no, it’s a real no, and there’s nothing fake about that. But you could go north, or northerly, and they pretend, and they pretend to accept you when, in truth, they don’t. They don’t really

know you. And I've had some Northerners to say, "I don't see how you could stand to live down there." I say, "Well, you just don't realize what the South has become," that there's one thing about Southerners, that they are honest and true, and if they like you, they like you, and if they don't, they don't, and they'll let you know it.

J.J: Do you remember when the 14th Street Baptist [Church] in Birmingham was bombed?
The four little girls?

R.B: I remember the four little girls, but I did not know the name of the church, yes.

J.J: What was the reaction within the community, and your reaction?

R.B: Well, community reaction was that it was horrible, it was awful. How could anyone not have respect for God's house? How could anyone go in and bomb a church with little children in there? It was that kind of reaction. People seemed I want to say hopeless. They seemed helpless and they seemed hopeless that you could not even go to church and feel safe. You go to a church, and while you're in there, you don't know what's going on on the outside, for fear that someone may throw in a bomb and blow you up while you're in there, praying, worshipping God.

J.J: Was there a sense of action or involvement within the Summer Hill community during the civil rights period, or was it more a stand back and observe?

R.B: I don't think it would be fair of me to judge whether Summer Hill was or was not. I can say that there is a large community of educated people, educated black people that reside in Bartow County, and I think the educated black community has done a lot to force the community as a whole forward. And in some places, the educated black community does not return. And for that reason, in some other small towns—I'm not being evasive, but I'm just saying that in other small towns, those educated black people choose not to

return to that kind of environment, and they go on to larger cities like Atlanta, where living is much more to their liking than to go back and try to change the community that they live in.

But saying that, when I left Cartersville, I swore that I would never go back there to live, because I had had that experience. Not that it was bad, but I had lived there, lived there all my life. I wanted to live somewhere else, to grow up somewhere else. It's difficult for a kid to become a man in his own community because they remember you as Miss So-and-so's little—

J.J: Son.

R.B: —son, Miss So-and-so's little boy. They say [imitates]: "Are you still in school?" I said, "Lord, that's been years ago."

J.J: Do you think it's a testament to the Morgan family and the teachers and the school that so many of the highly educated people from the school have returned and have stayed and have been so involved with the community?

R.B: I don't want to give that family that much credit. I think they did a lot of sponsor or to foster the educational growth of the community, but I think more it's because those educated people who returned chose to return because of their family roots there, people who owned property and businesses there. If my family owned, like, lots of land or lots of property in Cartersville, I would have probably been more influenced to return there and manage it, hold onto those family kind of holdings. The black community at Cartersville is also somewhat large, and I think because of that, it has fostered that kind of growth, if that makes any sense. Like I say, it's hard to grow up and be an adult in the community where you grew up as a kid.

J.J: I know exactly what you mean.

R.B: Yes.

J.J: You listed Martin Luther King as one of your heroes. When he was assassinated, how did that feel to you?

R.B: I did not know him personally, and I told you he spoke at my college graduation. He was an inspiration. He was a symbol of something good and great to me. He took much of his philosophy from Mohandas Gandhi, and I saw that as a force for good that was working to change the world. I was about to say to change the United States. But I was at a production of *The Miracle Worker*, working backstage. That's where I was when I got the news. And one of the little kids, little white kids in the play clapped her hands and shouted for glee that he was dead. I thought that was horrible. I thought that was awful that a kid—I'm saying she was a kid because she was—I guess she was in high school; I don't know how old a kid was—that a kid would have those kind of feelings, which must have been fostered somewhere in her home life. I'm not saying it's her parents, but in her community life, that there were people who had those kind of feelings that "I'm gonna clap my hands and shout for glee that he is dead." They had his—not his funeral, but his body—

J.J: The viewing?

R.B: The viewing at Spelman College, in [Sisters?] Chapel. And I went down, stood in the line to view him. That didn't do him any good. He didn't even know I was there.

J.J: Right. It was more for you.

R.B: Yes, but it was for me I went, that I was there. But, again, it made me wonder what would happen to our next leader or the next deliverer. Why do we sacrifice those people?

Why do we find it necessary to crucify them, to murder them, to get rid of them? How can we be that threatened by what somebody says?

J.J: Who do you think, if anyone, has taken up the reins of the leadership?

R.B: Well, I don't think they've been taken up. I don't think they've been taken up. I think they are somewhat in abeyance. I think of what happened to John [F.] Kennedy and [Robert F.] "Bobby" Kennedy and Martin Luther King. These were all men who tried to stand up for what is right, and someone within our own nation, I guess, saw fit to kill them for what they believed in. But, again, you can kill the person but not necessarily their ideas or their dreams.

J.J: Right. I'm going to close with asking you your opinions and views on some more modern issues. What do you think about the big fight and discussion over the state flag?

R.B: Well, trying to be objective, the people of the state in general have expressed an idea to be included in the choosing of the state flag. Now, I grew up with the original state flag. I say "original." As I remember, the symbol of the state of Georgia, and it was a red and blue—there might have been a white stripe in there, too.

J.J: It had a blue field with the state seal and then a white stripe and a red stripe?

R.B: Yes.

J.J: Okay.

R.B: And that's the one I remember on all the state films that were shown in school. Okay, then came the big rallying cry over integration and the insertion of a battle emblem of the Confederate flag. Well, to me, that's like a slap in the face, to say that "we don't care if the law has been passed, we're still Confederates at heart." Well, if we didn't have the

emblem on there to begin with, why was it necessary to insert it on there? The people of the state, the people of the state in general, had no say in that.

J.J: It was the legislature.

R.B: These were legislators, the lawmakers who stuck it on there. Okay. Then comes along [Governor Roy] Barnes. Was it Barnes who took it off?

J.J: Mm-hm.

R.B: Barnes who said, “We need to settle this, and we’ll come up with a little”—he has this little tiny thing across the bottom, and a blue field, and there’s the state emblem. I said, *That’s nice. Okay, that doesn’t bother me.* You can’t really see those little things anyway. But the people of the state still say that they want to have a voice in it. Well, I think that’s all well and good, but I am told that the legislators again are the ones who are going to choose. Well, they’ve already chosen. Why would they find it necessary to choose again, to decide again? Well, they’ve come up with a different rendition. And it’s going to look like this [apparently draws], which is almost a reflection or a throwback to what it originally was. Well, that wouldn’t bother me. But to put the Confederate emblem on there, I think it’s a step backwards, and I don’t think we need to go that way. That’s me. That’s me personally. We need to step forward, and the legislators need to let the people of the state decide, or if they represent the people of the state, they just need to go ahead and decide what is right, do what is right.

J.J: Thinking back to recent events with September 11th and now the war with Iraq, what are your reflections and feelings on that?

R.B: Well, I think Saddam Hussein is or was a madman, who had the dream of uniting the Islamic world, Muslims against Christians, and it didn’t quite happen. He expected an

all-out holy war to bloom, and I don't know where he got this inspiration or this idea, that this was his role in history. In the meantime, I think that he has subjugated and terrorized his own people for his own-well, for his own esteem, for his own—

J.J: Advancement.

R.B: —advancement, glory, or whatever you would call it.

September the 11th, I think, was a slap in our first, when the pilots of those planes had been promised glory in Islamic heaven for killing innocent Americans. The Islamic world likes to say that they are at war with our government and not with American people, not with the people of the United States, but yet that was an overt act of war, but how could you declare war on an unidentified enemy?

Okay, Saddam Hussein, in my opinion, working in conjunction with Osama bin Laden, planned this attack on the United States, knowing that a little country like Iraq could not—I almost said Iran—like Iraq could not successfully wage war against us, but if it's an undeclared enemy, an act of individual sacrifice, it kind of leaves us with nobody to point the figure at or to take up arms against. But when it happened, they danced in the streets.

Now, they danced in the streets at his direction. Again, here we have one government against another government, our government versus whatever, and our leaders, who sit in these high places, say, have said, "It's Osama bin Laden. We're going to Afghanistan." We went into Afghanistan, and we never found Osama bin Laden. We've bombed it here and there and the hillsides where he knowingly was hiding. And Saddam Hussein sat laughing and says, "Well, you're not going to bother us because if you bother us, you're going to arouse the anger of the whole Arab world, and it's going to be Muslims against

Christians, and it's going to be the last big war of all, and all the Muslims from everywhere are going to come to my aid. You're not going to do anything to me."

I can't understand why we didn't go in and get him the first time. This is the third time. The third time ought to be the charm. Well, I sincerely hope that it is. I don't believe that war solves any problem. I don't think that wars have any victors. I think that in a war, you only have victims, and a lot of innocent people die and suffer for political reasons. Not saying that our government is wrong, but I think it took the only alternative that it had. Even Joshua rose up against Jericho. He might not have done anything but shouted until the walls came down, but there comes a time when warfare is justified.

J.J: That is all the questions I have for you. If there's anything that you've remembered in the meantime or any last—

[Tape runs out. End of interview.]