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## Interview Conducted by Joseph Carl Ruff with Herbert Alexander Oldham (FA 166)

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## Folklife Archives Project 166

Interview with Herbert Alexander Oldham (B1, F41)

Interviewer: Joseph Carl Ruff

Interviewee: Herbert Alexander Oldham

Project: African-American Education in South Central Kentucky

Date: May 15, 1993

Location: Home of Herbert Alexander Oldham

Transcriber: Amber N. Slaven

Transcriber's Note:

1. Interviewer is abbreviated Joe. Interviewee is Herbert.
2. Ellipsis (...) are used to indicate significant pauses in the interview as to indicate a trailed off sentence.
3. Square brackets ([ ]) are used to indicate information not obtained directly from the interview, such as notation of noises or time count.
4. Throughout, the interviewer often interjected words such as "yea" or "O.K.". These were mostly left out because they added nothing of importance to the interview and were distracting.
5. Square brackets around "indistinguishable" means the words being spoken could not be understood by the transcriber or they did not form any sort of sentence or thought.
6. Filler words such as "um", "uh" and "ah" were left out because they distracted from the interview.
7. Spellings of names not indicated in the interview are those of the transcriber and may be incorrect.
8. Commas and usage of grammar were at the discretion of the transcriber and do not necessarily reflect the actual interview.

**Joe:** Tuesday, May 15 1993. This is Tape J 14 of the project on African American education in South Central Kentucky, and I'm going ... I'm here in Bowling Green. I'm going to be talking to Mr. Herbert Oldham who is principal at State Street and High Street schools. ...

Hi there, this is Tuesday June 15, 1993 and this is Joe Ruff and I'm at the home of Mr. Herbert Oldham and we're going to be talking about education here in Bowling Green. And go back to when he was growing up and then he was also the principal at the High Street Elementary School. So, I guess just the basic starter would be something about when you were born and everything.

**Herbert:** I was born in 19 and 32 in Christian County Kentucky, Hopkinsville. ... I have five - five in our family. I have a brother and three sisters. My oldest sister attended school and graduated in Christian County at the all black school that was known as Attucks High School in Hopkinsville. The family moved to Bowling Green. Later on, when I was probably three years old, and we lived in a little community about six miles from Bowling Green called Memphis Junction. It's around the area of Lost River. It's about 2 miles from Lost River, right on the Memphis Junction and Nashville split of the railroad. My daddy was a railroader. He worked on a railroad gang. We lived in a sort of [laugh] communal housing area. And I guess the strange thing or... today to look back on it, it was integrated housing area. Of course that was back in approximately 19 and 40, 41, some, some time during that time. But there was approximately three black families. There was about four white families and we lived right there together. I can remember my daddy sharing, you know, heartaches and experiences with the whites and the whites doing the same thing with us. Particular when mother died, when I was around three years old. So though I came up in an area of segregation and my background is close association with some very close white brothers and sisters that I call my friends today. From Memphis Junction my daddy moved to Bowling Green, and we still continue to live in the same type of community that was located on 10<sup>th</sup> Street in Bowling Green. It was 144 10<sup>th</sup> Street. It's behind what is currently now Graham-Motley Lumber Company. [4:17] We lived there for several years, well actually lived there until I finished high school at

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State Street, but we had the same type of community. I remember there were a couple families that were very close to me today. They were the Bradford family. Mr. Bradford was the supervisor of the railroad gang. Later on the Sidebottoms came in and acted as supervisor. As I said, my dad was a railroader and he did labor, hard, hard labor. Back in those days they did everything by hand, there was no machinery. They laid their tracks by hand they drove the spikes by hand. They carried the heavy rails ... by hand. [5:35] Therefore he was a very, he wasn't a big man but he was about 5'11, very muscular and strong individual. But we lived at 144 West 10<sup>th</sup> Street. As I said, until I graduated. And I attended State Street High School, which is located on the corner, approximate corner of State Street and what is now currently 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue. The only thing that remains of that school is the original gymnasium, which is still on the corner. And later on the school had an addition built to it, which was, I guess, a multipurpose room but was built as a cafeteria. And it's still standing. It was used for cafeteria and a band room. But I, as I said, I attended State Street High School. I lived in the part of town which was called Delafield and that basically extended from the, from the railroad tracks to, in my day to L & N railroad tracks, to CSC...

**Joe:** CSX

**Herbert:** And that extended all the way to the river. And the community of Delafield was a close community. It was segregated, but a couple blocks down you would have white neighbors. You became very close, you know, to one another. There was a black school that I did attend. I forgot [indistinguishable] too many years called Delafield. It was Delafield Elementary School. [7:50]

**Joe:** Ok, so there was a black school, elementary school?

**Herbert:** Elementary school, really was a high school. It was a black county [laugh] school

**Joe:** Is that right?

**Herbert:** And it was located on the low end of Main Street. It is currently, it was behind and on the property that is occupied by the Girl's Club now, the Bowling Green Girl's Club ...

**Joe:** [indistinguishable noise]

**Herbert:** occupies that property. The school faced what is called the lower end of 10<sup>th</sup> Street. It's closed today, [8:34] but that lot is still there. That school would have had, like I say, was probably 1-12. I can recall ... at least maybe 2-3 teachers there. The principal of the school was a gentleman by the name of A.P. Pool. [9:02] He was he was a combination principal and teacher.

**Joe:** P-o-o-l-e?

**Herbert:** Uh-huh. There were several teachers there. There was one that stayed there for years. A Mrs. Clara Cole. ... And later on the school name was changed to Carpenter School, and it was named after Mrs. Carper, Carpenter. I cannot remember her name right now. But she was the principal of it. It went from Delafield School, which was a county school, to Carpenter School.

**Joe:** O.K., what years are we talking about now?

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**Herbert:** [9:52] And we're talking about the early, the early, the early days [indistinguishable] that I can remember. So it had to be in ... 39, 40, in 41.

**Joe:** O.K.

**Herbert:** During that period, I don't, I can't recall when the school closed, but the school closed. What happened, the students attended that school. Black students were from Warren County, from the county area and they went and that's where they would go to that school. State Street was in existence, ... but it was a city school.

**Joe:** O.K., so if you were a county student you probably went to elementary out in your community. Maybe Rockfield or something like that.

**Herbert:** They would come to ...

**Joe:** but you would come to high school at Delafield?

**Herbert:** That's right.

**Joe:** O.K.

**Herbert:** They even came to elementary school at Delafield. If you lived in Rockfield, in that area, you rode a bus into town to Delafield. I can recall years ago, like I say I lived in Memphis Junction, and I had to walk my brothers and sisters and others in the community, there was another family out there the Vontrees. I had to walk from Memphis Junction to Lost River to catch the county bus to go to school.

**Joe:** There was a county school bus?

**Herbert:** County school bus. ... It actually was a private [laugh] bus. They, they farmed it out to someone [laugh].

**Joe:** Right [simultaneously].

**Herbert:** But the bus would not come up the road about 2 miles to pick us up, which was in the county. We had to walk to a central point and it was three miles to Lost River.

**Joe:** That's when, you began school, you were living at Memphis Junction and you came and you rode the bus into Delafield School?

**Herbert:** Delafield School. [12:02] In, like I said, that was the high school. I can recall in my earlier days they had some of the, some of the best athletic teams at Delafield. Outstanding students, some of our outstanding students came from Delafield and then they closed the school. The county closed the school. And when they closed it the high school part which was Delafield, then those high school kids came to State Street, but then the elementary school remained and it was called changed to Carpenter School. I can remember the high school kids playing basketball in the dirt court. Behind the, behind the school and that community out there. There was a very prominent black community around the Delafield School. So

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when they had urban renewal, years ago all that was just cleared out. Hobson Lane goes through it. But all that was black neighborhood and to the north of it, where the current Delafield School is, was the ... was extension of the black neighborhood but it was also the white neighborhood [laugh] and they had another school out there called Delafield. And I assume that is probably where they changed the name to Carpenter because there were two Delafields [laugh] [13:37]. Two Delafield schools, one was white and one was, was a black school.

**Joe:** O.K. so what year did you switch to State Street?

**Herbert:** Well that was so many years, I can't remember. I came to State Street. I must have been around the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade when I started attending State Street School. We were living on ... on 10<sup>th</sup> Street.

**Joe:** O.K. What year did you graduate?

**Herbert:** [simultaneous] I graduated High Street in 1951.

**Joe:** Let me just make clear that's, you graduated from High Street I thought ... you said it was still State Street till about ...

**Herbert:** I'm all confused. [laugh] Let's see. We changed the name. I graduated from State Street in 1951 [14:41]

**Joe:** Right.

**Herbert:** Yes

**Joe:** O.K.

**Herbert:** umm huh

**Joe:** and they moved to High Street ...

**Herbert:** I think in February of 55. Somewhere like that.

**Joe:** About what I...

**Herbert:** umm huh.

**Joe:** O.K., well lets ... I'm glad that you, we had this other school experience in here because... So the county, the county school system, the county ran a separate black school system even here in Bowling Green and the city also had a segregated ...

**Herbert:** had a segregated school.

**Joe:** O.K.

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**Herbert:** And another strange thing, well not strange but during that time, the surrounding counties of course were segregated ... and they did not have high schools for black kids, and some of them did not even have elementary schools. Like Butler County, the kids from Butler County I can, I can remember... individuals talking about it. They rode the, the boat down the Green River to the Barren River to come to Bowling Green to school. Now there was another, there was couple another private schools in Bowling Green, black schools. [16:14] One was called the Academy, the Bowling Green Academy and those students that came from Butler County that was what they were doing. They were riding the boat and they, they got off at boatlanding, you may have heard of boatlanding? Which is at the end of Church Street and they even tell me that the boat even came up as far as the State Street bridge in that area. And you could debark the boat there. Those students came in here and attended what is known as the, the Bowling Green Academy. There was, there was another private school ... that was located on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street between the Chestnut and State ... [17:18] I can't recall what's in that area, what's there now...

**Joe:** It's across from the hospital now.

**Herbert:** No it's one block up from the hospital. There's a building on the corner there and I forget what used to be there. Automobile dealership used to be there, the Nash automobile dealership and they became an adult education center. ... And the building behind it was a warehouse and that's where the, that's where the Academy was located and the Academy principal was a man the name of E.E. Reed. ...

**Joe:** E.E. Reed was the Bowling Green Academy?

**Herbert:** Academy's principal and then later on he became, far as I reckon, as far as we know became one of the early principals of State Street.

**Joe:** O.K., apparently this is 1913, would that have been, he would have been the State Street principal in 1913? O.K., I wonder do you have any idea how long the academy lasted until or what, what year..

**Herbert:** No that was quite a bit [laugh] before my time. I can remember the building but I did not, I can't recall how long it remained as a school, was Miss Grace Taylor, if you talk to her she may, she may have a little better knowledge ... of it. [19:00]

**Joe:** I've spoken to her on the phone... So let's see [indistinguishable] you mentioned there was the Bowling Green Academy, you mentioned there was another one that you said was the one that was on Chestnut and 3<sup>rd</sup>...

**Herbert:** Yea they, they called it, well they, I'm getting my names mixed up. They called the Academy, it was located a diagonally from State Street School along State Street. Currently there is a ... a boat company there on State Street that occupies that land. Next to it is the ... is the recreation center and the George Washington Carver Club. That was directly across from State Street, but there was a big building that occupied that whole corner of 3<sup>rd</sup> and State Street and then, one about half way back that block going down 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, it was a big building

**Joe:** Weren't those run by churches or were they associated with churches?

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**Herbert:** I can assume so. I'm not sure but I think it was ran by the Methodist, Methodist church but I am not ... It was so long ago ... and now the history we're receiving came from older folks I remember the building because we used to, as kids, come into High Street had to walk through the property and we used to explore the building and go through the different floors in the building.

**Joe:** [laugh]

**Herbert:** So the building was there and the other building was, like I said, was on 3<sup>rd</sup> and it was there. But I, I don't have the dates in my mind maybe at a later time I could put those together. [12:01] But and in a sense one could have, like the Academy on 3<sup>rd</sup>, could have been I understand they probably exist, well all three schools to my understanding existed approximately the same time. The Academy on 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, and that Academy on State and plus State Street High School. The two academies were private schools. State Street there was, was a public school. ... I don't know who in Bowling Green now ... who could give us some background history on dates and so forth. I can't recall back then.

**Joe:** I've seen a book with the, that was the county or the state did a survey of black schools, this was during the, right around 1910. So it has the documentation if it was that at that time. I've seen a picture of it, but I haven't ... yea there aren't too many people apparently Dr. Moxley and his aunt attended the academy

**Herbert:** That's right, I'd forgotten about Dr. Moxley. So it was there and they were very prominent ... you know a very prominent schools.

**Joe:** ... Tell me what you can about your parents' education. Do you know if they ...

**Herbert:** My parents, they were basically background in education was probably an 8<sup>th</sup> grade education as far as I know. That was, that was about it. [22:41] ... they didn't really have a time to ... you know, to get a formal education. My parents were very positive about education. At least my dad because, like I said, my mother died when I was about 2 years old and my dad raised the five of us. And of course he encouraged us all to go to college. My oldest sister attended Kentucky State College which is now Kentucky State University. She went there two years and she had to drop out because she didn't have, she didn't have money to finish. My other brothers and sisters were high school graduates and I was the only one that had the opportunity of my family to go ahead and graduate from college.

**Joe:** What was your father's name?

**Herbert:** Dad was Lloyd Abraham Oldham.

**Joe:** And he raised five kids?

**Herbert:** Five children on his own

**Joe:** Wow

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**Herbert:** My baby sister was a baby in diapers and he, like I said, we lived in a very close community and white families in particular gave him assistance. You know in taking care of young [indistinguishable] my sister and myself. And that was what kept us going [microphone interference] [24:18]

**Joe:** That's impressive. That's an achievement. So I guess that the community did work together.

**Herbert:** Very closely together and if it hadn't been for a close community he probably would not been able to do that, but he kept us all together. So at least we were all able to finish [laughs] finish high school.

**Joe:** I assume you, people, kids took their food to school.

**Herbert:** Oh yea.

**Joe:** What did you all eat? Did you all work together to make the food and get your food to school and everything?

**Herbert:** I can't remember back that far. Um ... I can remember we were so poor even though my dad worked on the rail road ... you know we, uh, somebody, I can't remember who did, but somebody fixed a lunch. I can recall ... brown bag lunches. And I can recall sandwiches made of homemade biscuits and black berry jam. [laugh] I can recall bacon, you know, sandwiches things like that. Egg sandwiches. I can recall those and I assume dad and my older sister ... when she was there at the time you know must have been doing it. But there was no division of labor [laugh] anything like that [25:52] To my, you know, to my knowledge ...

**Joe:** everybody just worked together.

**Herbert:** yea ... That's a long time ago. [Laughs]

**Joe:** Did you have ... books around the house or did you, did, were you, uh... you had the bible probably and did you have anything else to read around the house or was it mostly just ... stories and games that you told ... to entertain yourselves?

**Herbert:** [26:24] well [indistinguishable] I guess it was just more of sitting around, sitting around the kitchen table ... umm you know with dad and the kids, doing homework, ... sitting around the table. At meals we always had a family style meal that was cooked by my dad. Especially on weekends when, you know, on ... Saturdays and there was always Sunday morning full-course breakfast. And there was always that Sunday afternoon ... dinner. ... I assume we, I can't recall, I assume I had books. ... Like I said, we were so poor I don't know what kind of books, I can't recall. I can recall [27:28] from school basic education, learning to read. I developed from reading comic books. I can very vividly remember that. In elementary school I had stacks of comic books and that's what I read. There was some history in some of them ... there was the Batman, the Superman, the Shadow [laugh] Cosmicman [laugh] you know things of that nature. [dishes clanking in the background] older years when I became old enough – 10, 11, 12 – movies were very prominent. Segregated, but at least you had the news reel and you picked up a lot of knowledge, news reel. Of course you always had your church. We had the chance, you know, you went to BTU had a chance to read the Bible, discuss the Bible. A lot of competition between ... individuals,

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which this helped to nurture, nurture your growth. You wanted to learn because of that you didn't want to be a dumb body. So we had opportunities to ... that were there. That could have been overt but, but they were there and we got an education. [29:08]. Like I said, I can't recall. We were a poor family and yet we weren't poor.

**Joe:** Did you work for extra money to get these comic books and go to the movies and stuff, I guess?

**Herbert:** Oh yea, every, every Saturday morning I would get my little wagon and you go to the neighborhood picking up iron. Tin. And you could take that to junk yards and you could sell it and you could, you know, you could earn 25 cents, and 25 cents [cough] would get you into the movie, a nickel to get into the movie. Popcorn, sandwich and you could, you could sit at the movie all day long. And you did that every week, that's, that's what you did. Least that's what I did to get my, to get my little spending money. Course dad would give us money, but mainly that money you really wanted to splurge with you had to go out and do something extra. That's the only job; I never really had a job as a kid. You know where I had to go out and earn money. Like I said, my dad provided, he provided the necessities. Food, clothing and shelter. So I'm very fortunate on that line. I didn't have to, you know, get out there and work so that the family could get by. He was able to do that. But extra money, I can recall later on, I had a paper route but the *Courier Journal*. [30:55] Strange thing there too. As a kid growing up there is two newspapers in town: the *Courier Journal* which came from Louisville and the *Park City Daily News*. But as a black kid you could not carry papers with the *Daily News*.

**Joe:** Is that right? [31:14]

**Herbert:** They were segregated. [laugh]

**Joe:** You could buy the paper but [laugh] [Joe and Herbert talk over one another]

**Herbert:** You couldn't carry the paper. So that went on like that for years and finally they did allow one young man, one black kid to carry papers for them ... but all of the times I finished, that I attended high school, that's when I was carrying papers. You couldn't carry *Park City Daily News* but ... there were some experiences back in those, you know, those days. Education, educational experiences were good. Good in the sense that you were attending a school where teachers had an interest in you. [32: 07] ... You had competition among, you know, fellow students. But on the other hand, like I mentioned, I lived in a kind of communal community where I had white friends and black friends. We played together all day long. We would leave home together in the mornings going to school and we would walk up Main Street to Center Street. We got to Center Street, my white friends went to Bowling Green High School. I turned left on Center [laugh] and went to State Street. In the afternoon, we'd meet [laugh] on the same corner and we come on back home.

**Joe:** Did either the kids or the parents, did you ever hear anything about the, the situation or

**Herbert:** [overlapping Joe's last sentence] About segregation? No.

**Joe:** Did you, did you remember, did you have conscious feelings about it or about being in an inferior situation or anything like that?

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**Herbert:** Not, uh, as a kid, I did not. [33:22] Like I said, I didn't think about it because, the only difference was we just, we weren't going to church together [background noise] went to school together but we were playing together. We shared the same cup, you know, you couldn't go to Woolworth's store and drink out of white water fountain but we shared, as boys playing, we shared the same soda pop the same cup. We, the kids didn't pay it any mind. And I did not receive anything from parents of, of my white friends. So I'm different. I know that's not the case of everyone. But my experiences are, you know, were very different. I had support not only from my black friends and families but from, from white. One of the times I saw signs of segregation, like I said, was when I went up to the square and went to the Woolworth's store and saw the water fountains and couldn't go to the food counter. But [microphone interference] and you go to the movie and, of course, you had to go upstairs in the movie and you couldn't go to all movies in town. You could only go one movie. There were three movies during my day. There was the Princess and there was the, the Diamond Theatre ... and the one Capitol [laugh] you could not, you could not go you could not go to the Princess and the Capitol [35:16] Even sitting in the balcony, but you could go to the Diamond, which is, name was changed to, I think, State Theatre. It's where the church is now [Joe talking simultaneously, indistinguishable]. You could go there but you had to go up in the balcony. I guess, after I left Bowling Green and came back, that's when they were, you know integrated. But I never went, I never attended the Capitol. I never been in the Capitol in my life as a theatre, even after it integrated. I did go to the ... didn't go to the Princess. I've never been to a theatre in town. I hadn't never really thought about that. I've never been to an integrated theatre in Bowling Green [laugh].

**Joe:** Is that right? You haven't been to the movies since you got back?

**Herbert:** That's strange isn't it?

**Joe:** [laugh] [indistinguishable]

**Herbert:** I haven't thought about that until just now thinking about it. ... Never ... hum. That is strange.

**Joe:** Well, maybe you're not a big movie fan?

**Herbert:** Well, back in those days when I was a kid, I was, I was a big movie fan. Every movie that came on, new, you went to see it, you know. But today I'm not a movie fan. So no. I quit, I guess. And that could have been part of it. I know most of the kids during that day when I came back here after college. They were going to the drive-in movies and the drive-in movies were out of town they were going to. They couldn't go here in town. So that was in 1950. [37:00]

**Joe:** I never thought about it but the segregation at the drive-in movie would that, the same thing? They had to park somewhere else or [indistinguishable, Joe and Herbert speaking at the same time] you just couldn't go?

**Herbert:** Couldn't go. And that was in 1950. See, I returned here, I returned here in 1955. And ... you couldn't go, we had one drive-in over here on the By-Pass. And later on, you know, they did start [indistinguishable] most white people were going to Horse Cave. They had a drive-in movie up there. They used to go up there to the drive-in movie. ...

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**Joe:** Well, let's see if we can [indistinguishable] two things. O.K. If you could just kind of, if you can remember back, I'm kind of interested in how, just how the curriculum and a typical school day went when you were in elementary, high school, both around. What, what, how did the day begin and everything and ... [38:07]

**Herbert:** Well, that's so far back. The typical day began with prayer, you know. You'd have your little devotional program and you're in your classroom. Then [indistinguishable] you'd have prayer, song and from that you would go into your subject area. I remember [indistinguishable] where you did math and your social studies. That was the, that was the basic day. With your recess period come back in and do the same [laugh] and do the same thing is what I remember.

**Joe:** Who, Who lead the prayers and songs? Was that...

**Herbert:** Teachers.

**Joe:** Teachers led a prayer. Do you remember what kind of songs? Was it some people?

**Herbert:** You'd sing like "God Bless America," you know, and things like that.

**Joe:** Did you ever sing the, the, the "Lift Every Voice and Sing?" Negro National Anthem?

**Herbert:** No. [39:10]

**Joe:** Some people in Russell County mentioned, Logan County mentioned that.

**Herbert:** Yea. ... Later on, after you got into high school, you could become aware of the Black Anthem and you, and you sung but I don't recall it in elementary school. But I do recall in high school. And high school you were always regularly you'd have an assembly program that was regular every week. All kids would come together in the gym, in the gymnasium in the High, at State Street. For an assembly program, you'd go through, you'd have a song, prayer and then you'd have Dr. Buford or some other teacher to give you whole student body a lecture on something. It might be mannerisms, you know, black history, very prominent during that time. Dr. Buford always did that. He would, he would lecture on black history on the origins of, you know, blacks.

**Joe:** Is that right? [40:25].

**Herbert:** He would come up from, from the tribes of Africa you know right on through it, very, very educated, very educated man. He'd even go back to Australia and [laugh] talk about those tribes. And just, oh it was, I always, could have made recordings of the things that, that he talked about. Some I can't remember today but I can remember, I can remember this going on with the kids. So the kids had a chance to, you may, maybe didn't absorb it but you heard it. You know, it was repeated, over and over. You had a chance to, know that you were somebody and you could, you could achieve. That was, that was always in you, you know. The teachers kept saying that not directly to you but, like I said, indirectly through programs and things of that nature. So you had pride ... you had pride in your race because during that time also there was very prominent black business community. [41:41]

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**Joe:** Here in Bowling Green?

**Herbert:** It went right along with the school system. Yeah, very prominent. On Main Street, well yea I guess Main Street. Yea on Main Street between, between Clay and Kentucky streets, I guess you're going all the way up to Center Street to the to the federal building on the right hand side. That's a strange thing too. On the right hand side of the street going up Main Street were black business. On the left hand side of the street was white business.

**Joe:** So there would have been stores ...?

**Herbert:** Well, there were things like, there was one exception of the, not one exception, he was on the right hand side. There were things like shoe shops, shoemakers, restaurants, cleaners, barber shops.

**Joe:** Was there, there was no black paper, newspaper? I know there was one in Louisville. Did you ever see that or did that ever get it down here?

**Herbert:** Well we used to get what was called the *Louisville Defender*, you know. And then there was another one. I don't know if it was the *Afro-American*. *The Louisville Defender* was very prominent during that time. That was your newspaper, you know for black news. And, like I said, the, I think it was the *Afro*, that paper was probably one out of Virginia. But there was another one. I [cough and indistinguishable] someone started a, a black paper or some kind of means of trying to get, you know, black news. But I can't, I can't...

**Joe:** A time here in Bowling Green there might have been something?

**Herbert:** There was something. It may just have been some little old tabloid. But ... It was something during that period. ... I can't put it together. But I do remember the Louisville, the *Louisville Defender*. [43:53]

**Joe:** when, E.T. Buford gave these, do you think he presented, because I'm assuming that you and what I guess I've heard, is that there was nothing in the books of course, the history books, didn't contain black perspective at all.

**Herbert:** Nothing.

**Joe:** Did he present that even up through slavery and the civil war and that ...

**Herbert:** Yes [simultaneously], like I say, he was very learned. He could tell you, give you, illustrate inventions by blacks you know. Right on through uh the Civil War right on up. Talking about the Cyrus McCormick taking credit for the reaper, he would tell how blacks invented those thing you know. It was, he was constantly doing this and he was good at it. And I found today that things he said were true, you know. We see now this type of history coming, coming forward. That blacks did do and he, he made sure. That's what he did. But it wasn't in the books. And I think that's why they had the assembly programs. The assembly programs gave an opportunity for that to take place. Because I don't recall teachers in the classroom, per say, doing this. No, they, I wasn't a teacher during that time, they probably weren't [laugh]

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allowed [45:23] to do it I guess. I guess they had to follow the curriculum, but that was extra curricular [laugh] so you could, you could do it.

**Joe:** That's the first I've heard of someone like that...

**Herbert:** He was very good at it. Now whether all of them could do it? I know in Russellville there was another very learned man who was the principal down there. I think it was A. B. McClaskie. He was the, he was the principal of Knob City High School in Russellville. Now he was there for years up until it closed. I'm quite sure he did the same thing. ... There was another young man that was down there, Gilbert, J. T. Gilbert became the principal. ... Later in Russellville at Knob City, I know they did the same thing because I hear people talking about, you know, about them. Those kind of things happen in a, you know, in our community and they probably happen more so than other communities than it did in Bowling Green because we were metropolitan, we were a big place [Joe and Herbert laugh].

**Joe:** What was the message other than they instilled pride, what was the message about, O.K. so if, I assume and the curriculum included Latin and, and advanced science and that sort of thing, but the opportunities weren't so great for blacks at the time. What was the message about getting educated and the need to learn those sorts of things?

**Herbert:** Now you know the curriculum changed in, it didn't change for the better, for the better because ... prior to my education in 19, say coming to high school in the early 40s the curriculum changed ... uh ... by that I mean this. [47:27] Deloris Moses, Frank Moxley, and Joe Owmbly, and all the other prominent blacks that were educated prior to me ... they had the opportunity for the things you just mentioned. They had the opportunity for strong Latin, Greek... the tough sciences

**Joe:** These are the ones older than you?

**Herbert:** Older. I would say when we came along the curriculum had been somewhat watered, [laugh] watered down, changed. The teachers would give you an opportunity like in the, in the sciences you know but I, but I think this is something that happened over a period of time that Latin is not important anymore, you know. So they stopped all that. The foreign languages, Greek and all that wasn't important. So they stopped it. I don't recall, I don't recall that. The penmanship ...

**Joe:** So you had less of this?

**Herbert:** I had less of that...

**Joe:** [simultaneously] but you had a little bit, did they...

**Herbert:** ... [48:59] and all of us kind of came. Incidental they would talk about them. ... but we didn't have the hard core, like they had. I think their education was ... it was great, I would say it was greater than ours. They would, they would give us opportunities like I said, in the science areas. But I don't know because they didn't have the books and things that they were allowed, you know, to go beyond that. But I know looking at the books and things they had, from what we had there's no comparison.

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**Joe:** Right. Did you have, did they have, did they offer music at State Street? You could have musical training? ... Some?

**Herbert:** They begin to offer music training and the, well they always had the choral. So you could get the voice.

**Joe:** I'm always curious. My interest is in music really and in what was the, did they teach the classical European stuff or did they teach did you mix spiritual hymns and black hymns?

**Herbert:** They did all, Mrs. Moses, Deloris Moses, was the music and I think that was when, it first came in. She was the choral music director and I never participated in it but you know go to the assemblies and they would sing at the assembly programs. And they would have their spring recital. She did that and it was varied music. Then later on we had an instrumental program put into the curriculum in the 50s. Late 50s. ... From that we've had some ... some, well I know one, several outstanding students but one in particular that still lives in Bowling Green here John Burrell Edmonds. I don't know had any but John Burrell is a very gifted individual. He came through our music program. James Owmbly, Sr., Junior. Well he, I guess that's he came farther on. He went to, he went to Bowling Green High School but John came out of High Street.

**Joe:** Was there distinction between church music and popular music at that time?

**Herbert:** I was backwards. [laughs] I can recall back in my days basically church... you know we went to church and you had the gospel hymns. I was kind of backwards kid. I didn't know anything about [laughs] I didn't, I didn't have an interest, I had an interest I guess but I just didn't know about it. ... But I guess I never, I never was around it. [52:39] And to this day I still, I listen to all kinds of music but I always wanted to play an instrument. When I was in high school but I never had the money to buy the instrument. That was the downside of the music program. You know, we were poor kids and, you know, in order to participate you had to have a horn and you didn't have money to buy a horn you couldn't participate. So I always wanted to pay a trumpet but never had. Daddy couldn't afford it. So I never became involved in it. But, of course, like all parents when we have our kids we push them towards these things [laughs].

**Joe:** What happened with, I better get down what we're, what you did right after you graduated and you went to Kentucky State, I assume.

**Herbert:** No, I, when I graduated in 1951, I went as far from Bowling Green as I could get. I went to Raleigh, North Carolina. I attended a church school out there. The name St. Augustine College in Raleigh, an Episcopalian school. St. Augustine. As I said before, I was, I was a poor kid. I played, I participated in sports athletics. By participating in athletics it gave me an opportunity for an education. I had scholarship offers to several schools like Tennessee, Tennessee State and Nashville, Morehouse in Atlanta, schools like that. But I choose to go to St. Augustine because some of our other students and friends had gone out there. Dr. Moxley's son graduated a couple of years ahead of me and he had gone out and there was another young man his name was Godfrey Smith had gone out. And then there several of us, in our class, who were athletes we wanted to stick together and we decided to go to St. Aug.

**Joe:** Now was that a black school? Or ...

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**Herbert:** Yea, it's a black Episcopalian school but financed by white [laugh] Episcopalians. Yea, it's a very strong academic school. There's only about two Episcopalian schools in the nation. One is down at, in Tennessee, Shawnee, Sewanee

**Joe:** Is that where Sewanee is?

**Herbert:** Sewanee ... Chin... is that in the mountains?

**Joe:** Yea, I've seen...

**Herbert:** O.K.

**Joe:** That name...

**Herbert:** That's, it's an Episcopalian school out there and St. Augustine. There was a junior college in South Carolina, Episcopalian, St. Paul. That's a four-year school but those schools were financed by Episcopalian church goers in the northern cities. Mainly they were white, later on they, you know, the church became very prominent with blacks. But today it's still going, very prominent school. But that's where I had a chance to go out there and I went there and played sports. I played, my friends of course left me, that I went out there with. They decided to come back, come back to Bowling Green and I stayed. And I was very fortunate I stayed out there and became a little all-American in football. I played basketball. I received, I was one of the first in Bowling Green, white or black, to receive pro offer in football. So I did, I signed a pro contract for the outstanding amount of 7200 dollars to play with what used to be known, today they are the Phoenix Cardinals but in my days they were the Chicago Cardinals. And so I had an opportunity to try out with them. I got my education at St. Augustine and, and back in those days, well I majored in physical education at St. Aug. I wanted to return and be a coach, I wanted to coach.

**Joe:** You did know you wanted, that you wanted to come back to Bowling Green?

**Herbert:** My ambition, I went to school... I went to school with the intent to come back to Bowling Green. And that became about because of my coach here in Bowling Green, which was Owmbly, J.S. Owmbly. He was, he was a our coach and he gave me the inspiration to go to college and to want to come back this is part of Dr. Buford this is part of indoctrination of, by the teachers, you once said, he always instilled in me that I could go to school and matter of fact he carried me. Like today you go visit a school to see where you want to go, well he was very instrumental in carrying me bodily to visit schools like Tuskegee Institute...

**Joe:** [simultaneously] He did take you...

**Herbert:** Yes, I didn't know what he was doing at the time but he was trying to broaden, you know, broaden my horizon. We did this but finally I, like I said, I finally decided on St. Augustine in Raleigh and I had a very good experience out there. And I stayed out there and graduated in four years with the intent of coming back to Bowling Green that I, when I finished school, I came back to Bowling Green applied for a job and it, it was segregated, couldn't get a job [phone rings] but Mr. Owmbly carried me to

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talk with Dr. Buford about employment. We talked to the board of education, which was white about [laugh] employment. They, in return, said go back to talk to Dr. Buford. So we kept doing that and talking to Dr. Buford and all at once the Lord blessed me. He offered me, he offered me a job. [59:54] And I started to work at High Street in August of 19 and 55.

**Joe:** Now was that physical education or ...

**Herbert:** I taught science. I had a minor in science. So I started teaching 7<sup>th</sup> grade science at High Street because the school, it moved in February of 55. So I started teaching 7<sup>th</sup> grade science.

**Joe:** I believe you were assistant basketball coach?

**Herbert:** Well, later on I, a long history there. ... In, in September of, in September of 19 and 55, I received my papers to go [laugh] to the military. So I, so I was being drafted

**Joe:** Right after you got hired?

**Herbert:** Right after I got hired [laugh] I, and it was nothing wrong with it because I had been given four year deferment while I was in college and I was hoping, of course, I wouldn't have to go. President Clinton don't want to hear that but I was like president, I was hoping I wouldn't have to go because I was I was doing the, a part of Vietnam War and the North Korea War and, but soon as I finished college I was drafted and in, like I said, I was drafted in September. ... So I was able to teach from August to [laugh] you know, to September and I went into the Navy. And I spent 16 months in the navy. I went to Great Lakes, Illinois to the north ... I was educated in dental technician and I went to Paris Island, South Carolina, like I said, stayed 16 months then I returned back to State Street in 19 and 57 and when I came back in 57, I came back in science again and I started working in sports with, with Mr. Owmbly. ... Of course from the sports part, a lot of work went in and he encouraged me to go back to school. Matter of fact he went with me and we went to Western up here. He was very instrumental; he really encouraged me. We went to Western. That's right after they opened their doors to blacks. [1:02:52]. And we got our master's degree together, we graduated together and we continued to coach. He was coach and I assisted him in football. We weren't much in basketball. Dr. Moxley in basketball. I did the 9<sup>th</sup> grade team for Mr. Moxley. But I worked with Owmbly in football. And then, you know, the rest of the school finally closed and when the school closed I went to, I was one of the fortunate black teachers that were chosen to go to Bowling Green High School. The others were, there were about 5 or 6 of us and the other teachers, there were about 19 teachers at ... High Street, and the other teachers were just fired. They...

**Joe:** Now was that about half the teachers lost?

**Herbert:** Well more than half the teachers. Yea, like I said, about 5 of us that...

**Herbert:** Yea, well there were, there was Mr. and Mrs, Nichols that went to Bowling Green High School, um Mr. Owmbly, Dr. Moxley, Claude Newton, Margaurite Douglas ... and myself. There was 6. [1:04:20]

**Joe:** Now you went on to the, you went to Bowling Green High School or did you go to the elementary?

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**Herbert:** I went to Bowling Green High School. I went to Bowling Green High School [cough causes words to be indistinguishable] I taught science, biology at Bowling Green High School. And later on at Bowling Green High School I became, I'd gone to North Carolina with my wife, that's her home in North Carolina, they called me and asked to be the junior high school football coach at Bowling Green High School. And I returned and I did that for, for one year and at the same time I was still going to Western, working on education above the master's degree, becoming certified in administration. And then later on they, Mr. Jones, Dr. Jones left High Street and I became the principal of High Street. And I stayed, stayed there ... then from the principal of High Street, when they closed that school, I went back, I went back to ... to the Bowling Green, then it was Bowling Green Junior High School. I went to the Bowling Green Junior High School and I worked in as curriculum coordinator for the Bowling Green Junior High School for about 8 or 9 months. Then in 1973 I went to the central office as director of pupil personnel. Then I stayed there until I retired in August of 93. [1:06:18]

**Joe:** August 93. So this is the first full year...

**Herbert:** First full year ... First full year. Enjoyable year. [Joe laughs] I miss it but it's been enjoyable. I spent 37 years in the Bowling Green city schools. The only job I ever had was with the Bowling Green city schools. So I started out as a teacher and went to, from teacher to administration. But, so my education was in Bowling Green city schools, I was employed [laughs] by Bowling Green city schools. That's the only job I've ever had.

**Joe:** Well ...

**Herbert:** That's unusual. Well I guess around the house, to come from a, to come from a segregated background in Bowling Green and to become an administrator in that same system is unusual. I was, I was the only black graduate of State Street or High Street to ever, to come back and you know and get an administrator job. The only one. ...

**Joe:** Well we got that, I've taken up a lot of your time, but I did, one thing if we could just kind of describe for me a little bit about, my impression in Bowling Green there were no real problems with integration. [1:07:56]

**Herbert:** Well yeah there were problems with it. Was there turmoil from it? That's what you're saying, no. There was not but you know there were definitive problems because when I, well for instance, when I started, when I started teaching at High Street in 1955 ... there was two pay scales. There was a pay scale for white and a pay scale for blacks. So that was a problem. [laugh]

**Joe:** What did you start at?

**Herbert:** Oh it was so low, about 70 something dollars, about 70 dollars a month.

**Joe:** Well that's surprisingly low...

**Herbert:** But the whites were making much more...

**Joe:** And you knew that?

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**Herbert:** We knew that, yes we knew it. When I left, when I left in 55 and came back in 57, the state of Kentucky adopted what is called the Minimum Foundation Program, where they guaranteed every child in this state of Kentucky a minimum education. Which meant that they, this opened doors for blacks. It meant that all black kids, all white kids, all teachers got the same thing. So when I came back it was like opening up to heaven from that very minimal [laugh] salary that I was getting as a teacher. Because we had to get the same salary then.

**Joe:** That was...

**Herbert:** That was 1957.

**Joe:** [Simultaneously] That law required that the teachers be paid the same...

**Herbert:** Everybody would get the same.

**Joe:** [simultaneously] and this was 1957?

**Herbert:** That was 1957 that I came back. Foundation, minimum foundation probably came in about 1956. Started during that time.

**Joe:** So that equalized the pay?

**Herbert:** That equalized the pay scales. [1:09:59] No longer could they segregate you. From that stand point. So it brought us all up, it made us all equal. It gave us all an opportunity then at that time, Western opened. So they couldn't say that by me attending St. Aug. and not going to Western that my education was inferior. Because then I began to go to Western. I got the same education that the white got coming up through the years. ... It's hard to say, I don't, like I said, I didn't witness those ... those things as a kid, you know. I guess I was shielded from it. Other than going to the water fountains. Later on, as an adult, subtle segregation still existed and existed because of, you were a minority. You weren't in charge. So many times I felt down because promotions would come up and you weren't, you know, you weren't considered. For instance, I don't care what education I had and my education was equal to my white friends ... I know and knew that I couldn't be a superintendent of schools in Bowling Green city schools. So those kind of things hurt. ... [1:11:40]. I knew that things, that I had to work for was to be ... and the doors opened for me because I was prepared. I had to work towards being and that's what I planned to be principal of High Street. But as a results of getting in High Street then some other doors did open because I did become the director of pupil personnel of the entire, you know, school district. So some of those things did hurt but I didn't let them stand in my way as a barrier, you know. I could have followed them but you kind of went with the flow and prepare yourself so that when times, when times did come around...

**Joe:** My impression is that you did, that there wasn't a lot of direct struggle or call for changes but you, there were kind of subtle ways of getting through.

**Herbert:** Yea well... most of our direct call for change came about in the desegregation of schools. Of course you realize Bowling Green city schools were forced. They were forced to desegregate. That

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struggle came about from people in the community you know wanting equal, not separate, schools, you know equal schools. They had to fight for that. They went to court over it. There was no bloodshed but it was done in a legal, in a legal way. [1:13:15] That's about all I can remember in Bowling Green. You know, we've had some, we've had some... I guess some uprisings, you know, where we get together [laugh] Like when we had Urban Renewal and they destroyed our community. That's one thing that they destroyed. On the disguise of Urban Renewal and you're going to benefit your city. Communities were destroyed. Jonesville was the first indication when Western wanted to expand they just wiped out an entire black community.

**Joe:** There's still a lot of anger about that...

**Herbert:** Oh yea. See, those kind of things, they hurt High Street area. We're going to clean up the neighborhood and we want to bring in new dwellings; forced blacks out but they didn't clean up, they didn't bring back the new homes. People felt bad about that but yet there is an improvement as the results of that. You got the beautiful Medical Center, you know, and the things around it. Same thing happened over here on High Street. I mean the Parker Bennett, just to reverse, so it goes on both sides. This area here was a poor white neighborhood and they cleaned them out same way. But at least homes were built, were built back in the neighborhoods. So we didn't have some of the things that you had further down south and I think the basic reason for that was that the blacks were just out numbered. I mean you were truly a minority and when you don't have numbers you have to use other methods of achieving your goals. And I think that's what happened with us. [1:15:13]

**Joe:** And there was no real backlash on the part of the white community when it actually, when the kids, when the schools actually came together.

**Herbert:** No, no

**Joe:** And ...

**Herbert:** It went well. It was surprising but uh...

**Joe:** Was your experience when you got white students, was that fairly positive?

**Herbert:** Far as I know, yea. That experience was, was ok. Like I say ... my contact with white kids had been all my life see. So it wouldn't have shocked. And it wasn't a shock to the black teachers. Blacks easily accept whites more than whites accept blacks. And that was no problem. Even doing the peer, there when we had our schools desegregated, black kids were given the choice, for a time they were given the choice to go to High Street or go to Bowling Green High School and some of the black students went to Bowling Green High School. And they did fine, there was no problem. Later on when the enrollment started falling at High Street, they said you'll all go, you know. But, no Bowling Green really it didn't have a problem. We do have problems but they're subtle problems. That continues to keep us, you know, keep us back. There are those out there who are working very hard to eliminate these but we still have some problems.

**Joe:** Has integration of schools been all-positive or has there been positive and negative aspects of it?

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**Herbert:** See, I come from two areas. I would say it's been both ways. It's been very, it has been negative in that it destroyed a core, a community core. It split us up. [1:17:22] It destroyed business. Things of that nature. Another negative thing about the segregation, I recall the things that used to hurt me more than anything. We're going to desegregate High Street and let you go to the utopia: Bowling Green High School, so that you can get a better education, more opportunities. Now that's not true. The whites didn't know it but we had utopia at High Street. We had the best equipment, we had a low pupil-teacher ratio, we had teachers who were interested and when they closed the school, and they sent me to Bowling Green High School, I never shall forget it, I had it wrong. I had the Science wrong and equipment and everything. When I went to Bowling Green High School and I taught science I didn't have a ... I was going to this utopia. I didn't even have a classroom. I was what you call a floating teacher. I taught science everywhere. I taught science on the stage of the auditorium. I'd go from room to room. I had nothing. We had an industrial arts teacher, Mr. Newton, who went, he had a shop that was just outstanding. He was given a place in the coal den in the lower part of the school. It still had coal dust in it.

**Joe:** Without much equipment?

**Herbert:** Nothing to work with. In there is something, Mr. Owmbly went into science. He was chemistry, physics teacher. He went to that so-called lab. They had nothing. [1:19:33] They backed the truck up to High Street and loaded our equipment and stuff up and carried it up there to bring their program up. So a lot of people just didn't know.

**Joe:** And now it sounds like probably the white teachers got the better, still got the best part...

**Herbert:** Still got the best part of it, yea.

**Joe:** And they actually had, you were teaching white students down in industrial arts, there were white students going down to the coal...

**Herbert:** Oh yea, oh yea, so they weren't really, they weren't trying to segregate us. It wasn't that. We were just low on the pole, the totem pole. [laugh] We were new. I imagine they would have done it for a white teacher coming in, you know. You were overcrowded, that was one thing, poor facilities, the school was poor, it was a poor situation. But we had been told and the blacks had been sold that they were going to utopia and that wasn't the case. And we, as educators, could not tell the parents that. You know, it is all right to go to a better place if that's what it is. But you were giving up an outstanding school, one that was very positive, for something that you didn't know a thing about and it just didn't work out that way. One reason we integrated as soon as we did is because of our athletic program. High Street was very strong in athletics and they, the whites, schools up here was very poor in athletics [laugh] and they saw our athletes and this was an opportunity for them to ...

**Joe:** Absorb some good ...

**Herbert:** Yea.

**Joe:** Athletes ...

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**Herbert:** Because we had been beating them, you know, when we were segregated at High Street. We were beating them regular. Our kids was competing with them academically when they and the opportunity, you know, to compete with them. So we could compete and, that was the main reason we went so fast was because of our athletic teams. And it didn't work out that way. Didn't work out very positive. [1:22:03]

**Joe:** If you summed it up, what would be, what is the, the greatest change in terms of ... during your lifetime, of the, for the black community in the area?

**Herbert:** ... Well the greatest change, I assume, for the greatest change was that we were able to make adaptation, make the change. We were taking advantage of, you know, the situation. It went well. It gave us a broader view of the entire personal relationship with, you know, with whites. It is instilled in some of our older students, who were the initial recipients of the change, a very positive attitude. At the same time, I look at our current students and they don't appreciate the opportunity that they have that they would go ahead and take, you know take advantage of it.

**Joe:** What do you think has happened in the last 20 years or so?...

**Herbert:** Brainwashed.

**Joe:** In terms of what?

**Herbert:** They've been brainwashed. See when we were, when we were as a people, segregated and we knew we were segregated and discriminated against, we knew first that we had to be one. We had to be together in order to survive. So what we did was trained our minds and our bodies to adapt to the situation so that we could survive. I, as a parent, I've come along and I want my children not to have to witness and go up against the same things that I went up against and I have sort of substituted for them all of these experiences [laugh] of being discriminated against. Uh providing them with an easier avenue so they don't remember picking the cotton. They don't remember picking beans 2 cents a pound, working in the tobacco fields all day long, throwing bales of hay for 2 cents a bale, working in the kitchen of white families, you know, and taking the scraps home. They, going to segregated movies or walking everywhere. They have been given, we have given them everything and they see everything. And they don't, they don't appreciate. I can, my kids don't appreciate it, they don't know the value of it, because they have it.

**Joe:** Yea and now, is that, I have the same, I feel the same in terms of that, I feel like more a failure because my parents protected me from all that...

**Herbert:** That's right.

**Joe:** You know, they didn't have discrimination, but they had to work hard, they had to work harder than I ever had to.

**Herbert:** And you don't appreciate it.

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**Joe:** Is that good or bad? [1:26:11] I think kids, that don't have to go through that or don't get to go through that. Which one?

**Herbert:** They need some of that. Some way, we need to get out kids back to the rudiments of having to work, to provide for the necessities. So that's the difference. We had to work to get necessities. They don't have to work for the necessities. They work for the car [laugh] and that's, that's a big difference. When I attended college because I was poor I had to take advantage of that opportunity right there because if I didn't take advantage of the opportunity that was right in front of me, I wasn't going to get it again. My kid goes to college, you know, what the heck. If I don't make this, this grade this semester, you know, I get it somewhere down the line [laugh] because daddy going to provide for her. But see, we knew that if you don't get it now [laugh] it's not coming. Uh I don't know how we going to get that over to our kids. But that's what we see. It's an easy life. It's a welfare life. You know, I don't have to go to work because my check's coming. Now if your check wasn't coming, you'd go to work.

**Joe:** Exactly. [1:27:49]

**Herbert:** You have to do something. Now I use that, you know, but I think everything has been made too easy for our kids both black, black and white. And we don't appreciate white kids, not all white kids, but prominent white kids. Kids who have an advantage, who have a good, who have parents who have businesses, you see they, you don't have to worry. Basically, if you desire to go into business with your parent, you got a legacy that going to be there. But blacks don't, you know, they don't want to have that. They must depend, we must depend, and I think this is what hurt us, we must depend upon the whites. Like I said, we lost all our business. We used to have a little community; we spent out money in that in our community. We don't have that anymore. We must depend on somebody else for our livelihood. If they decide to cut us off, you know, we don't. I was fortunate. I was fortunate; I stayed for 37 years with the same employer. Was able to retire, retire as much money as when I was working everyday. But my children are not going to have that opportunity and I can't get that on to them. [1:29:11]. Those days are gone. You won't have an opportunity. Those days are gone. You may not have a retirement program. You won't have one if you don't start planning for it. And they don't understand that, you know. They can see us now, we've been off a year, and we haven't done anything [laugh] you know and the money is still coming in but that could run out. You know.

**Joe:** Yeah, well going to college now is really like going to ... I mean, four years of college is like four years of high school was, only like 20 or 30 years ago. But kids put off growing up and having to get that job until, and I'm, heck I'm mid-20s and I still haven't had to get a real... [laughs]

**Herbert:** Yea its, its well when I was 21, see I was working. That's, 21 I was working. My daughter will be 20 her birthday and she doesn't think about working. [Joe laughs] Yea. Not a bit. It's just different. I have 2 children. I have a daughter who is 33, O.K. and I have a daughter who will be 20 her birthday. There is 13 years difference between them. And they're different. They are different. The oldest child came through a different period when we were struggling you know when we were going to school on Saturdays, going to school on Saturdays, during the week. She could, she could see that. The baby, she's been around when we so called had it made, you know. She hadn't seen us struggling and going to, you know, going to school, things like that. And uh it's a difference with them. Always [laugh]

## Folklife Archives Project 166

Interview with Herbert Alexander Oldham (B1, F41)

**Joe:** I'm sorta struggling with the same thing. I mean my parents never ever say anything to me but I feel like I'm less, I certainly had it luckier.

**Herbert:** That's right.

**Joe:** Didn't have to work as hard. Now I don't know if it's good or bad. I mean they wanted to provide for me ...

**Herbert:** [simultaneously] Sure we did. We wanted to do that. But I think in our doing that and having to do it, we robbed you of something. Yea we have robbed you of something, because you know in the back of your mind that you have some place you can go if you don't make it. You can always go back home. But when I came along that wasn't the case. You see it wasn't the case. I couldn't go back home. I could go back home, but there wasn't anything at home.

**Joe:** I think from the best homes, people get the idea. They at least have the ideals of working hard and everything. They don't get as much experiences at having to do it but I think there are a lot of people going through college who haven't made it and they really are missing out on something...

**Herbert:** A lot of kids going through college and might get an education. Going to college, going to college and that's important, to go to college but you got to have an education with it because when you finish you going to have, there are certain expectations that are expected of you. If you meet those, you might, you might make it [laugh] you might make it. But it's a big difference; it's a big difference today. Big, big difference. We going to see some changes. I mean changes. Changes have got to come and they're coming. We got to get back to the family. [1:33:23]. Mom and dad, we got to have a mom and dad, you know. Too many single family homes. You got a strong mama and no dad. Whites and blacks you know. This is what's happening now. And this hurts. You got a very mobile society. Get in the car, here today and you can be in California in two days, you know. So all that, an explosion of knowledge. Things just, just so much so much different. I wished I could have, when I grew up, I had a typewriter. I wished I had a computer. [indistinguishable] [1:34:19]. And yet, but yet these things around they have an opportunity for and they don't take advantage of it.

**Joe:** Well I'm convinced also that there's going to have, there is going to be some pretty big changes coming up in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Well I'm taking so long of your morning up.

**Herbert:** Well I don't know if I've been any ...

**Joe:** [simultaneously] No actually this is actually a wonderful ... information just about Bowling Green community and about, about yourself.

**Herbert:** I had a stroke about 2 years ago and I don't, I don't remember quite as ... and my memory and I don't remember quite as ... quite as well. Because things happen and I've, as getting ready to take my wife. She lives in North Carolina and unique situation, much different than, than Bowling Green she lives in a community where 71% is black [laugh] and that makes a difference. Superintendent of schools is black, the mayor of the city is black. That makes a difference. It's, it's as different as night and day. I'm black but when I go home with her and I can understand how whites feel this culture shock. Blacks can only [indistinguishable] you got to record. But I feel because of my situation in Bowling Green and

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Interview with Herbert Alexander Oldham (B1, F41)

because the way I was brought up, I feel more comfortable with a 1000 whites than I do with a 1000 blacks. It's because the way I was brought up.

**Joe:** You never were exposed to having...

**Herbert:** I tried. That's right. It's a difference and that's why whites get excited and that's why it's necessary to have. And that's one of those advantages of integration. It's necessary to mingle with one another for that reason. And that's what I said because I'm black and I can feel it. But I make the adjustment with my white friends and white group, when we had to go to Bowling Green High School they didn't even think to, to ask us hey, are you going to be afraid to go? We were expected to go and expected to succeed. And we did it because of our backgrounds. We have to make adaptations in order to survive and that's a difference between our kids today. We gotta work. We made it. But I see some of my white friends going into an all black situation where students, population and they going to a classroom and they get 25 black kids and 2 white kids and they scared to death. But they have to make that change and if they hadn't had an opportunity [1:37:55] [abruptly ends.]