Kathleen and William Brown—Interview Summary

Interviewees: Kathleen Brown and William Brown
Interviewers: Sam Raimondo and Ben Perkins
Interview date: November 17, 2016
Location: Meeting room, Hampton Public Library, Hampton, Virginia
Length: 1 audio file, WAV format, 83:38

THE INTERVIEWEES: Kathleen Brown was born January 5, 1947 in Weldon, North Carolina, but moved to Newsome Park in Newport News early in her childhood when her father remarried. Brown attended Newsome Park Elementary, Carver Elementary, and Carver High, after which she attended Howard University for three years before transferring to finish her last year at Hampton University. Mrs. Brown later received her Master's Degree from Old Dominion, as well as an Advanced Teaching Certificate from William and Mary. In 1972 she began teaching in the Hampton Public Schools. She taught at Davis Junior High until 1980 when she received a teaching position at Thomas Eaton Fundamental School. After eight years at Eaton, Mrs. Brown was hired to the position of court liaison for the Hampton Public Schools Central Office. She also served as Director of Student Services and Assistant Superintendent there. Following her retirement, she returned for a stint as Interim Superintendent. William Brown was born April 19, 1946 in Newport News and also grew up in Newsome Park. Mr. Brown was one of four brothers, and like his wife, attended Newsome Elementary, Carver Elementary, and Carver High. However, after graduating from Carver in 1964, Mr. Brown attended the Apprentice School of Newport News. He was the first African American to play basketball, the second to play football and one of the first two to run track at the Apprentice School. In 1964, he won Apprentice School Athlete of the Year. In 1968 he graduated from the Apprentice School and began work in the Newport News shipyard. Brown worked in several different departments, but ultimately ended up in engineering for much of his time there. Later in his life Mr. Brown earned an online degree in General Studies from Columbia University in 2001. The two met in the third grade, and went on their first date when Mr. Brown had just graduated from Carver High.

INTERVIEWERS: Sam Raimondo is a senior, and Ben Perkins a junior, at Christopher Newport University. They have conducted this interview to contribute to the Hampton Roads Oral History Project, an oral history collection that gathers personal life histories regarding the Civil Rights Era and race relations in the area.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW: The interview was conducted in a meeting room in the Hampton Public Library. Kathleen and William Brown begin by explaining their childhood growing up in Newsome Park. Both speak incredibly highly of the tight-knit, loving community that played an instrumental role in making them the hard-working and determined people they are. They also fondly remember their schooling, and agree that their education in Newport News schools prepared them to excel in higher education and in their careers. Mrs. Brown discussed her experiences as a young African-American teacher in schools that had recently been desegregated. She stressed how relationships between students and teachers have changed over the years. Mr. Brown then described some of his work experiences at the Newport News shipyard, as well as his experiences as one of few African-American athletes at the Apprentice School. He explained that, while his shipyard experience was more successful than his father's, he (and many other there)

still did not feel that African Americans got the promotions and recognition that they deserved. Similarly, even though the Apprentice School was willing to give him the Athlete of the Year Award, they still did not feature him in the yearbook, and he later discovered he had received a different trophy. They both agree that growing up, they felt like they had to constantly "perform" and that they always could tell that they were going to be treated a little different than whites.

After discussing their work experiences, the Browns discussed some of the leaders of the '60s Civil Rights Movement such as Dr. King and Malcolm X. They explain the intense disparity in how African American communities viewed the two leaders, and describe that most of their family and friends simply carried on with their jobs and daily lives so they could provide for their families and keep their job. To conclude the interview the Browns actually asked the interviewers about their opinions on current race relations, and the four had a discussion regarding modern day issues.

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START OF INTERVIEW

Sam Raimondo: Mrs. Brown, where and when were you born?

Kathleen Brown: I was born in Weldon, North Carolina, January 5, 1947.

SR: And you, Mr. Brown?

William Brown: Newport News, Virginia, April 19, 1946.

SR: Mrs. Brown, did you have any siblings?

KB: I have one brother.

SR: Ok.

KB: He's younger.

SR: Do you know what your brother did? What has he done most of his life?

KB: Was he here?

SR: Yeah.

KB: Yes.

SR: And you, Mr. Brown?

WB: Three brothers, and they lived here most of their life.

SR: What age are you in that group?

WB: I'm seventy; I'm the number [two] son.

KB: Number two.

WB: Number two son, yeah.

SR: Number two, okay. Mrs. Brown, what did your parents do for a living?

KB: My father was a bricklayer. My mother was a school teacher, but my mother died in 1951, and my father remarried. My stepmother was a waitress.

SR: And you, Mr. Brown?

WB: My father worked at the shipyard for over forty years--Newport News Shipbuilding. My mother was a housekeeper.

SR: And Mrs. Brown, what made your family move to Newsome Park?

KB: I was born in North Carolina, and we lived with my paternal grandparents. But once my father remarried, he brought us to Virginia to live with him. We originally lived in a rooming house in Newport News, downtown; and then, when an apartment became available in Newsome Park, we moved to Newsome Park in 1954.

SR. Yeah. And you, Mr. Brown? What made your family move--?

WB: My father was born in Staunton [Virginia]; my mother was born in Afton [Virginia]. My daddy got a job in the shipyard after he was in the military and they moved to Newport News. And I guess Newsome Park was the best place for them to go, to find a home and raise a family.

SR: Excellent. For these [next] questions you guys can answer either or [together or individually]. What was it like growing up in Newsome Park?

KB: It was wonderful.

WB: It was great. Everybody cared about each other. If you had something, your neighbor had something. It was a community where you say “it takes a family to raise a child.” Everybody in

the neighborhood would discipline you, make sure you did the right things that would need to be done to be successful.

SR: Yes.

WB: I asked my wife, I said, "We were in the housing projects when we were living up and growing up?" It didn't feel like one because you had everything you needed.

KB: Well, at the time, we didn't refer to things like that: the projects. I mean, that's a relatively new term. Obviously it was all black, but it was a close-knit community, especially on the various streets. We called them blocks. People in the 800 block were all, you know closer than the ones on the other blocks.

WB: And we thought our block was better.

KB: It was the best. Everybody thought that.

WB: 700 block on 44th Street, of course we were the best [laughter].

KB: That's right. So it was all about blocks. So that was fun.

SR: How many blocks did Newsome Park take up?

KB: It actually started on 41st and went to 48th. 41st to 48th. And from Madison Avenue up to--

WB: Chestnut? Or Roanoke?

KB: Roanoke.

WB: Roanoke.

KB: Roanoke, I believe. It was Roanoke, yeah.

SR: Interesting. What kind of jobs in the area did people hold in Newsome Park?

KB: Everything. In Newsome Park, your doctors, your lawyers, your teachers, your shipyard workers [all lived there]. Do you know the movie that's coming out, *Hidden Figures*? About Katherine Goble?

SR: No, actually I don’t.

KB: It’s coming out in December, [about] the ladies that worked at NASA. They’re making a movie about them. *Hidden Figures*.

SR: Oh the Hampton center?

KB: No, Hollywood.

SR: Oh no, the NASA Hampton center?

KB: Yeah, NASA Hampton. So, you had everyone living there: laborers; domestics; everybody that was black could live in Newsome Park. There was no distinction of career. [computer noise] Everybody.

SR: That’s good though.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: [speaking to Mr. Brown] Anything you have to add to that, or no?

WB: No, she covered it. She covered the whole waterfront.

KB: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

SR: Do you guys remember the physical structure of the houses of the community?

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: Yeah, absolutely.

KB: Some houses were two together, and some were four together. They were all white.

WB: They were two bedrooms, three bedrooms.

KB: Two bedrooms, or three bedrooms.

WB: Most of the heating that was done by coal. But you had oil.

KB: Most of the houses had coal heating, and outside you had what we called coal bins. Every house had a coal bin. I guess about five by five by five deep bin, and the top came off.

WB: And, we played in it [laughter].

KB: We played in ours because we didn't have coal. Most of the people had--

WB: --coal.

KB: Yeah, we had oil. But most people had coal stoves, and so you had a coal bin that stored your coal. You'd go out there--it had a little hole in the front with a little trap door--you'd go out in the morning.

WB: And shovel in a bucket--

KB: And shovel in a bucket and get yourself enough coal for the day, and go on back inside.

SR: Interesting.

WB: But they weren't that well-constructed.

KB: No.

WB: If you ever had a fire, it was gone just like that.

KB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. But, they were all white and just clapboard, I suppose, is what they were.

WB: Yeah, not much.

KB: That's all. Everyone was the same. It was either a two--a duplex--or a four.

WB: Yeah.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: And that was for [people] no matter what job you had?

KB: No matter what.

WB: No, no matter what job.

KB: No matter what.

SR: Do you remember any of the businesses in Newsome Park?

KB: Newsome Park had a strip mall back before we knew the word "strip mall" [laughter]. There was Bob and Ted's Store, there was Younger's--

WB: Barbershop.

KB: Barbershop. There was a drug store, a dry cleaner, a beauty salon, and I think that was it.

WB: That was about it.

KB: That was all we had.

WB: In that one little strip.

KB: On one little strip.

SR: Was it walking distance from your place?

WB: Yes. Yes.

KB: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

SR: Did you have that much interaction with Copeland Park?

KB: Copeland Park was almost the same thing, but it was for whites; so, the answer is no.

SR: Yeah, unfortunately [laughs].

WB: But, later on, blacks moved in.

KB: Yeah, later. But, that was way after us.

WB: Yeah. That was when I was in high school.

KB: Yeah.

WB: Blacks had moved in when I was fourteen or fifteen--

KB: But you had moved away, by then.

WB: No, because I used to have to work, I used to help [Mr. Owens] carry coal and carry ice down there in Newport News.

KB: Oh, ok.

SR: Yes.

WB: It was later on, probably when I was about fourteen or fifteen, that blacks began to move into Copeland Park.

SR: Oh, Ok.

Ben Perkins: Do you know of any others' interactions with Copeland Park? Are there any stories related to Copeland Park?

KB: Now, when I was in the eighth grade I worked as a babysitter [for] some women who lived in Copeland Park. But, that was my involvement.

SR: What was that like?

KB: It was different. It wasn't all that unusual to find black people taking care of white kids. But we weren't playing with the kids; I was taking care of them. There were no age appropriate relationships that I was aware of.

SR: Ok. Was it a strict environment? Or, was there it some level of friendliness between you guys?

KB: The people that I worked for?

SR: Yes.

KB: Yeah, there was a lot of friendliness. They were very, very friendly. They were young mothers and I'll leave it at that today. I'll tell you when you cut off [laughter].

SR: Without a doubt. Let's see. What were the race relations like in Newport News at the time, in regards to the whole area?

KB: Because we simply knew what things were, it just was what it was.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: We went to school with all blacks. We went to church with all blacks. Everything we did--we went to the movies--everything you did, you did with nothing but blacks. You just didn't consider white people at all, because you knew that there was not going to be any involvement.

WB: Until you got older.

KB: I guess--. What year--? When did you graduate? You graduated in 1964.

WB: Yeah.

KB: And went to the apprentice school, a culture shock.

WB: Yeah.

KB: He can tell you about that.

WB: There was like eight-hundred young men there. They didn't have ladies there. Only three of us were African-Americans.

SR: What were your experiences like there?

WB: It was ok. I mean, I found out that people are people, just like blacks or whites. Some good, some bad, some in-between. But I ended up playing football, basketball, and running track at the apprentice school. My teammates were great and the ones I met in the classrooms were great also. The instructors were great. As long as you did your work, and did what you had to do, they left you alone.

SR: So you think you had a more fair experience in regards to--

WB: No, it was just the experience.

SR: Ok.

WB: I played sports and I wasn't bad at it, so pretty much they left me alone.

SR: Ok.

WB: But as far as advancing in your job--not any more than anyone else, not any more than any other African American advanced. But, when I went into the shipyard, they had segregated--. They had white and colored bathrooms, white and colored water fountains. They had a dorm that I couldn't stay in. I mean, there were just things you just didn't do.

SR: Mm-hmm. So, to rewind a little bit, when did you guys enroll at Newsome Park Elementary? Or where you always enrolled there from the beginning?

KB: I went at third grade.

SR: Ok.

KB: I went to Newsome Park in third grade. You started--

WB: First grade. I walked home the first day from school and told my mom I didn't want to go to school [laughter]. She found me sitting on the front porch [and said], "Get your butt back to school" [laughter].

KB: And that's when I met him, when I was in the third grade.

SR: Oh, really ok.

WB: She chased me ever since, until she caught me [laughter].

BP: Elementary school sweethearts. [laughter]

SR: That's awesome, though. How would you comment on what the facility was like, structure-wise, and overall, the level of care you guys got there?

KB: At the school?

BP: Elementary.

SR: Yes.

KB: Excellent.

WB: Oh, absolutely.

KB: I think I was well prepared for post-secondary school. The teachers were very concerned about you. If you didn't do what you were supposed to do, they had no qualms about calling your parents. If a teacher called your parent, you knew that you were in trouble. I think we got good loving care and good instruction. When you leave Newsome Park and left Newport News to go away to college, I felt that I could compete with students from anywhere else around the country. So I would say we had a great education.

WB: I'll tell you how caring it was. When I was a senior in high school, I didn't want to take a class, so my guidance counselor called my mama. She said, "You're going to take the class and do what Miss Crittenden tells you to do." So they, even when you were a senior, they would still call your home, and your parents responded. The teachers and instructors were always right; they never were wrong [laughter].

BP: Did many of the teachers live in Newsome Park?

KB: Some. Some did.

SR: I see. This might be--. [To BP] This one's going to repeat. [continuing] So when did you guys enroll at Carver Elementary?

KB: You went to Carver Elementary as a seventh grader. You just went for that one year because Newsome Park only went to grade six. And so, at grade seven, everybody went to Carver Elementary. And then in grade--

WB: If you lived on our side of the tracks, that's where you went to school: Newsome Park, Carver Elementary, Carver High School. If you lived on the other side, you went to Huntington, you went to Booker T., and whatever. I forget the other elementary school.

KB: No, Booker T. went to seven, I think.

WB: Yeah.

SR: So you mentioned about comparing the two schools. How did you guys feel--. Did you feel like you were rising up through your educational career when you guys went to Carver?

KB: I felt like we were well-treated. I think we were well-educated. There were never, you know--any more than young people have problems--there were not problems in the school.

WB: No, no problems. That's where we encountered the first male teachers: Mr. Tabb and Mr. Stacey.

KB: In the seventh grade.

WB: In the seventh grade, yeah.

KB: Yeah.

SR: So, going to high school, what were your experiences at Carver High School like?

KB: It was wonderful. I'd rather go to school than anywhere.

WB: You went to school. We went to high school in the eighth grade.

KB: Eighth grade. Eighth grade, you went to Carver High. I was an advanced student so I skipped a lot of eighth grade courses and went to ninth grade courses. By the time I was a senior I had taken everything, so I had some free courses. I took free time. I took things like art [WB laughs] to fill the day, because you couldn't come home. There was no early dismissal. And of course we had closed campus; you couldn't leave campus. You weren't supposed to leave campus.

WB: What made it easy for me, I had an older brother that was in front of me so everybody knew him. When I got to Carver all the old guys knew who I was, so that kind of made it easy on me going through Carver.

SR: So what kind of activities were you guys involved in there?

KB: I played violin in the orchestra. I was a part of the debate team, student council. I did *Trojanic Times*, which was the school newspaper. I was the editor of the school yearbook as a senior. You did everything else.

WB: [laughter]

BP: What was it, if you don't' mind, what was it like traveling to other schools, for things such as debate?

KB: You know, you didn't go far. Most of the debate teams came when we were like in the, maybe, ninth grade. And it was just the local schools, Phenix at the time, Huntington.

WB: You didn't go to Bruton Heights?

KB: No, we didn't. I think those were the only [ones]. There was one school in Norfolk that had debate.

WB: Booker T.?

KB: And we'd travel with our teachers; our teachers carried us.

WB: Was it Booker T.?

KB: No, it wasn't Booker T. I don't quite remember. But there were very few debate teams. Very few. Now, the athletics is a whole different story.

SR: Mm-hmm.

WB: I played football, basketball, and ran track, so we went to some of every place.

SR: And what was it like going to those schools? Did you [notice] the segregation?

WB: No, you playing a game. It was just like we were.

SR: Mm-hmm. Oh.

WB: I mean all those schools--you know, Booker T. Washington also Booker T. Washington, Suffolk; Crestwood; Bruton Heights; Norcom; Maggie Walker; Armstrong; and Burley. You can go through the whole list. All of them were segregated.

SR: Ok

KB: So we never encountered any other students except black students.

SR: Interesting.

SR: Did you guys have any memorable teachers or mentors when you guys were there?

KB: I think all of them were. [pause] For me, I'd say Mr.--what's his name? Mr. Eason was one that was--

WB: Lloyd Eason?

KB: Yes, Lloyd Eason was one. Mr. Hicks. As far as the lady teachers, female teachers, Ms. Crittenden, who you probably remember as from the General Assembly; Mrs. Blanche Williams, Minerva Douglas.

WB: I had Ms. Douglas.

KB: Mm-hmm. Yes. Ms. Douglas, yeah.

SR: Did any of them communicate like their experiences with Civil Rights and segregation in the area?

KB: No, because we were all living it at the same time.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: And there was a distinct difference between a teacher and a student. The lines didn't blur like they do now. We knew our place as a student and we respected the teacher's position. Teachers were held in a different regard than they are today. There was no real socializing and being friends with.

WB: No. Because Walter Lovett and Willie Travis, those coaches of that nature were mentors to me.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: Or Mrs. Douglas.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Interesting. [referring to notes] We already asked that question. So, desegregation: you guys were in school at the time, correct, when that started happening?

WB: No.

SR: Oh, ok never mind then.

WB: Didn't happen until after.

KB: Well after: 1972.

SR: Ok.

KB: See, I graduated in 1965; he graduated in 1964. I think it was 1972 before the schools in Newport News were integrated.

WB: Were made to integrate.

KB: Yeah. Even though it should've been in 1954, it didn't happen. Hampton had already started prior to that to integrate schools, but Newport News didn't.

SR: Can you guys comment on, I guess the general community and how they reacted to integration, specifically Newsome Park?

KB: I was away a lot.

WB: I think--.

KB: I don't remember there being anything.

WB: I don't mean any big issues. A lot of people didn't like it one way or the other. Did it help the black students? Some, some it didn't. I think it took away the discipline and some of the other things that we were used to. It became a little slack, I think.

KB: Well, I think the most hurtful thing that happened is that the schools that were predominantly black--Huntington High School and Carver High School--were turned into middle schools with desegregation. And I think that, you know, as you look back on it, that was a very depressing kind of thing. And so students who had to integrate, I would imagine, felt put upon. I would imagine, because I was already a graduate. But I didn't like the idea that my school could no longer exist.

WB: The other thing we found out is that Carver's yearbooks and trophies that had been in the school for years--and when it became a middle school, somebody dumped them in the dumpster. Somebody happened to be riding by and found them. They just disregarded the history of the school. [The school had] started in 1949 and they just disregarded all of it.

SR: So, you guys feel like they completely wiped away your history there?

WB and KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: That's horrible. So to kind of touch on this, we learned about, in our class, about court-ordered busing. If you guys don't have too much to say about this, then it's fine. Were you guys aware of this? And was your family affected?

KB: We knew. Now, my brother did not go to Carver because he went to Huntington; we went to different schools. But when we were going to Carver, we were bused completely past several white schools to go to Carver. And, consequently, when the schools were integrated, those students were now in the same school with each other. Of course there's no reason for students to have an attitude because there wasn't anything they could have done about it. But [to WB] your brothers, your younger brothers went to--

WB: Younger brother.

KB: [continuing] integrated. Your youngest.

WB: Yeah.

KB: Yeah.

WB: But you know, back then they talked about separate but equal, but it wasn't equal. Warwick High School was a white high school. At Carver, we got their old books.

SR: Ok.

WB: Unfortunately--

KB: We never got new books.

WB: Unfortunately, they put the wrong answers in the books [laughter].

KB: We thought white people were very dumb [laughter].

WB: But we never got anything new. I mean, there was one football field we played on--that was Huntington's football field. Carver didn't have a field. We had lots of space out back of the school, but separate but equal was not what they said it was.

KB: Yeah.

SR: Was there any resistance to this busing and, just generally, to the desegregation effort over in the seventies?

BP: In either community?

SR: Yeah.

KB: I don't remember because, as I said before, I had already graduated. We had already graduated. We were married by 1970-something: '72. We lived in Hampton, and Hampton had already started busing well, you know, before Newport News did, so I don't remember hearing about it.

WB: No, but I'm sure there's some discontent on both sides.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: Yeah.

BP: Just kind of going off of that controversy, whether it be about busing or anything, are there any particular court cases you guys remember, like specifically? Not even necessarily court cases, but big-time desegregation events?

KB: Not in this area. And you have to remember, too, that young people didn't deal too much with the law. I don't remember anything of any significance. Of course, there were a lot of sit-ins, and college students participated in that. But not high school students.

BP: Did you all ever participate in any sort of sit-ins?

KB: No. No.

SR: How about your family? Was your family involved in civil rights, or did they just kind of want to go about their daily lives?

KB: They just went about their daily lives.

WB: They went about their daily lives, yep. The only sit-in I did was at the apprentice school.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Do you guys feel like that was generally the community's mood, just to rather go about their daily lives than to enact change?

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: Because you felt as if you were impotent to change. There was not anything any individual could do, and there was not a lot of organized resistance. There was no need for it; we had everything we needed in our community. There was nothing we wanted for.

WB: And I think most of the people that were in Newsome Park worked in the shipyard.

KB: Yeah.

WB: And, if you wanted to keep your job, you stayed in-line.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: That's just the way it was. Or if you didn't work for the shipyard, you were a domestic and you worked for somebody that was white. If you didn't stay in line, you didn't keep your job. So, I mean, people just kind of went about their daily business.

SR: Did either of you pursue any higher education, or some sort of degree after high school?

KB: I went to Howard University in Washington. I stayed there three years and then I transferred to Hampton University. So I have my Bachelor's degree from Hampton University. I got a teaching job in Hampton, and I went back [to school] and I have my Master's from Old Dominion. Then, I went to William and Mary for an advanced certificate. I continued and I taught. I worked in central office. I was Assistant Superintendent in Hampton Schools. I retired and I went back and served a year as Interim Superintendent.

SR: Do you feel like as the years progressed that it was more acceptable to be an African-American at these universities? I mean besides, of course, Howard and Hampton. But perhaps ODU and William and Mary?

KB: Yeah, I think so, I think so. And then the other thing [was that] I was an adult; I was married and I commuted, so I went part-time in the evening. I had a job, I took classes in the afternoon. So, I didn't really meet with a lot of younger folks. Most of the people in the classes that I had were also employed and taking evening classes when I worked on my Master's.

WB: I got an online degree in 2001 after I left the Apprentice School.

BP: Where was that from?

KB: Columbia.

WB: Columbia University, in general studies.

SR: During this time did you [Mr. Brown] stay in the area while she was getting an education abroad? Did you--. What were your experiences with that?

WB: Well, I was supportive.

KB: [laughter] You were in the Apprentice School, tell them about it.

WB: [laughter] I was in the Apprentice School. In 1964, I was voted the Apprentice School Athlete of the Year, and I was the first African-American to be Athlete [of the Year]. I was the second to play football, first to play basketball, and one of the first two to run track. So I was voted Athlete of the Year in 1964, and they did not put my picture in the yearbook. And we found out something (on a Saturday? 0:26:02.5) when we--because they were getting all the athletes of the year together to take picture on Saturday. Not only was I not put in the book, but my trophy looks different. Everything was different because back then I was, I think, the tenth African-American to come to the Apprentice School, and not a whole lot of African-Americans played sports. So a lot of them [whites] were not happy that I was chosen athlete of the year.

SR: Mm-hmm.

BP: Did you ever get any sort of offers or interest from colleges about playing?

WB: Yeah. I mean, when I was leaving high school I had offers from Hampton University and Virginia State. But, back then, there was a Peninsula Shipbuilding Association. It was a union for the shipyard, and they would try to get African-Americans to come to the Apprentice School. So they approached my father and asked him would I do that, and I said “Yes, I would.”

SR: So, do you think the--. For African-American males, do you think the shipyard was a lucrative thing to go work for at the time?

WB: It was probably--. Unless you work for the city, that was mainly the only place you went to work. But, your jobs were going to be in the riggers, the low paying jobs. You weren't going to be promoted to supervisor or things like that.

[pause in recording]

WB: [speaking on his father's experience at the shipyard] He worked in there forty years. So I guess, yeah. I mean, he was in the storekeeper's department, and he really didn't do a whole lot of rising. After I got out of the Apprentice School, I moved through different departments and cost engineers is where I finally worked. But I think my experience in the shipyard was better than his, though. They were more lenient and more tolerant [towards me]. I got a chance to be a supervisor, and began to move from one department to another to get better raises than what he'd got.

SR: When you first started working there, what were working conditions like initially?

WB: They were segregated: white and colored bathrooms, water fountains. When I was in the Apprentice School and I got hurt playing football, they normally would go let you work in the office; I was in the machine shop. They said they didn't have an office spot for me so I had to go home and wait until my shoulder healed to come back to work.

SR: Mm-hmm.

WB: Those are the things that happened; you were just treated a little differently.

SR: So what kind of jobs would you work at the shipyard?

WB: I was a machinist as an apprentice. I went to production control when I graduated. I went to material processing. Went to DLGN Project, and then I ended up in cost engineers, I think.

SR: Let's see. So, we touched this a little bit. There was a significant amount of African-American males who worked there. Did that number change throughout the years?

WB: I think that things have gotten better now. But during those early years, I mean, you didn't see a whole lot of blacks that were supervisors, or ones in control.

SR: Mm-hmm.

WB: They surely weren't vice presidents, or presidents, or directors, or anything like that. But it has changed over the years. I think it's changed with time.

SR: Do you remember any specific projects you were working on? I know there's a lot of military ships that come through there.

WB: I think John F. Kennedy was the first carrier I worked on when I was in production control.

SR: Let's see. And what year was that?

WB: That would be in 1968, when I graduated.

SR: At that time do you think it was significantly better to work there, or no?

WB: I think so, because when I went to production control there was only one other black lady that was there. And I became the other black that came in. Before then, it had just been her. She had been there for like four or five years. So I think it began to change then.

SR: Do you feel like there was a lot of camaraderie amongst blacks there?

WB: Yeah. That's all you did, because you lived in the same neighborhood. You knew each other, you talked to each other.

SR: So, overall do you feel like you were treated well by the company?

WB: Well is a--. Maybe later on you'd fair. Probably meant well. But some would fair, maybe. [laughter] I didn't advance the way I thought I should've advanced, and other blacks will tell you the same thing, too. You just didn't do it. You just didn't get the raises that you thought you should get. And that's probably still happening down there today, even though you do see some

blacks in management positions and things of that nature. So it has changed some. But, between the 1960s and now, [the difference] is night and day.

SR: So, moving on to you, Mrs. Brown. How were your experiences like, I guess, for working conditions in the school area that you were at?

KB: I worked in the public schools in Hampton, and I think my experiences were satisfactory. I don't think that I was treated any differently because I was black. I mean, you had to perform or, if you didn't, you were reprimanded. And I always had a good working relationship with my supervisors, my principals, and then I went to central office. I had several jobs in central office; I was steadily advancing. So I had a very good experience in the school system.

SR: And what schools did you work at, again?

KB: I taught at Davis Middle School. It was Davis Junior High when I was there back in the day. Then, I was as Eaton Fundamental School. In 1988, I went to central office as the court liaison. that was my first central office job. Then, I was Director of Student Services. And then I was Assistant Superintendent.

SR: [coughs] And what kind of communities did these schools serve?

KB: The individual schools that I worked in? Those two?

SR: Or, just in general.

KB: Now Davis was--. The students came from the North Hampton area, so it was mostly white. It was, you know, early after integration. I was there from '71 to '80, '72 to '80. Then in '80, I went to Eaton. Eaton was a fundamental school which meant it was a magnet school. So the students came from all over the city. And it was a school where students had to apply to attend. And so you had a cross-section of everyone from the city. And I was there until 1988.

SR: So your initial experiences, what was the mood like, you think?

KB: Well there were not a lot of black teachers on staff at Davis when I went. I think we had maybe eight to ten black teachers, and the rest were white. So, it had just recently been integrated when I got there--a few years.

BP: Did you feel any sort of divide, or maybe awkwardness, by being one of the few black teachers?

KB: Some. But for the most part, you had to deal with the people in the subjects that you taught. It was a junior high school, so it was pretty much like a high school, in terms of being departmentalized and so you had to work with the people in your department more so than just your overall school. But there were--. You always felt a little bit of difference in the way you were treated and the way white teachers were treated. But you could see the change over time.

SR: So do you think from the eighties on it was [cough] perhaps more progressive? Or no?

KB: Yes.

SR: Mm-hmm. And so, this magnet school, was it more prestigious than the other school you originally taught at?

KB: That's what people felt. In the community we were called the "Taj Mahal" of schools. But we did--. The premise of the school was that you had to have parental involvement. First of all, you had to apply to come. There was no transportation so, if you wanted to be there, your parents had to bring you. There were no buses. You had to sign a contract. Students knew that if they misbehaved they could be sent back to their zoned school. So parents work with you to keep their kids there, because they felt like the smaller classes, the involvement of the staff, the involvement with the parents, and our open communication--constant, steady communication--was beneficial to the students. So parents fought very hard to keep their students there. They were very cooperative and I think that made a big difference. But we did get laughed at as having no

disciplinary problems, which was not true, because they were still middle school students. But it was a good experience.

SR: Ok. What was the population like at the school, was it--. Since you had to apply for it for it as well.

KB: Most of the students at Eaton were white. Not all. I don't remember the breakdown, but they were mostly white. You had to maintain a certain amount of racial balance, so that it was not totally white.

SR: And how did you feel like--this is a sensitive subject, you don't have to bring it up. But how did you feel like your [white] students regarded you as an African-American teacher?

KB: For the most part, students didn't really care. You had one or two that you know who've been indoctrinated at home, and you can see it in your dealings with them. But I think if you're fair with students--that's what I feel--if you're fair with students, you will end up with the respect that you need. We didn't have racial problems.

SR: So, you two guys were involved with the church growing up, correct?

WB: Yes.

KB: Yes.

SR: And what church was that?

KB: We both went to Zion Baptist Church.

WB: Zion Baptist Church. She followed me to Zion.

KB: [laughter] It was really funny. It was really weird when you go back and think about it. We went to the same church, we went to the same school [laughter].

WB: Yeah. We used to walk back and forth to Bible school and church. Save your bus money and get a hot dog on the way home [laughter].

KB: Most people went to church on a regular basis.

WB: That's one thing people did then.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: And they didn't send their children; they took their children to church.

KB: Most people did.

WB: Yeah.

SR: Do you feel like that was the most important thing that brought the community together?

KB: I think the community itself stayed together.

WB: It did yeah.

KB: We played with each other, our families knew each other and interacted with each other. There was not a whole lot of socializing because there were not places for black people to go. So, all your entertaining and fun activities had to be within the community, mostly within the home.

WB: And you shared what you had with others.

KB: Absolutely did.

WB: And, we had loads of role models. I mean, every family, the mother and father were role models. We had lots of role models--people that cared about each other and took care of each other.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: If I had eggs, and you were next door and needed eggs, you had eggs.

KB: Just had to go and ask for it.

WB: If I had sugar, you had sugar. If I wasn't there, you know you could go in and get the eggs and tell me, "I got two eggs, I'll give them back to you next week." That's the kind of community it was.

SR: So, very tight-knit you'd say?

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: What kind of activities did you guys do at your churches? Or rather, at Zion?

KB: We sang in the choir, you were an usher, he was--. His dad made him go more than mine made me go, so let him tell you. [laughter]

WB: I used to go on Sunday. I used to go to Sunday school, Sunday service, come back to BTU, Baptist Training Union, and back to night service. When I was growing up, I went to church all day long. But also my daddy taught me something else, too. We would go by and pick up the elderly of the church. As we got older, we were taught to go knock on the door, open the door, walk them down them the steps, let them in the car, close the door, take them to church, walk them up the steps to their seat, after church walk them back out, down the steps to the car, back to the door, and you would repeat the whole process. So those are the things that your parents and neighbors taught you, to look out for those that didn't have the same things that you had, or they were elderly. So I mean, that's what Newsome Park really, really taught all of us. It was one big happy family at times.

KB: Yeah, I mean the kids played and, just like any other group of kids, we would fight. I mean, on your block you had families, and almost all the families had one or two kids; some had a lot more than others. And so today, the Savages would be fighting with the Kelleys. Tomorrow the Kelleys and the Savages would be friends, and they'd be fighting with the Underwoods. [laughter] It just went on like that. You know, that's what kids do.

WB: And for recreation there was one place--in your neighborhood, there was one basketball court. So everybody from Newsome Park would come and play basketball there. We didn't have

recreation centers. I mean, our favorite thing growing up when we were young were, after it rained, sliding in the mud [laughter]. People thought about doing it, but you made your own fun. That's what you did.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Were there any prominent leaders of Newsome Park? Or prominent figureheads that you could attribute [importance] to?

KB: I'd say the Epps family, which kind of managed Newsome Park; and of course the Gobles, across the street. I'd say--. You had teachers there. You had the Enochs, Mr. Enoch. He--. Even though he worked--. Did he work at the shipyard?

WB: Mm-hmm. And formed the first baseball team.

KB: Yeah he worked, he organized the baseball teams in the community for people to play, for kids to play. But I don't think about prominent people. There wasn't--. I mean, you didn't have any city council people. You didn't have any political--.

WB: School board people. There was no--.

KB: No school board people; you had no involvement in that. It wasn't a part of anything that you were familiar with. Yeah.

SR: Do you guys have any prominent stories from the Civil Rights Movement overall?

WB: I don't know about the movement, but when we used to go play games in the Apprentice School we couldn't stay in the hotels because I was black, so we would stay in dormitories. It'd be nothing to be going down to a game in North Carolina and see the Klan march alongside the road. Or, you try to go to a restaurant where it said "blacks only." Of course I was bold enough. I would be the first one walking in, and almost got stabbed one time for doing that. My teammates

stopped someone from stabbing me. But I mean, you saw those things growing up, but you just accepted them and just kept on going.

BP: Did you--hate might be a strong word for it. But did you ever sense some level, we've touched on it some, some level of disdain maybe from white athletes?

WB: No, not from my teammates.

BP: Yeah.

WB: The ones I played against didn't like me because I would wear them out. But my teammates were fine though.

KB: He said that to me the other day, that they were--that you all had a good relationship.

WB: We did. We did have a good relationship. You were called all sorts of names when you went to another gym, or to another football field, but that's just something you just let fall off your back. I mean, if you were going fight every battle, you'd be fighting all day long.

SR: Very true. Do you feel like, I guess, your teammates--. Did they always have those attitudes, that they were always very receptive to the--?

WB: They always [did], which was kind of surprising when I got there. [to Mrs. Brown:] Remember I told you when I first got there, they wanted to touch my hair? [laughter]. And that I told them, I said, "It's not like Brillo. Go ahead." Then I said, "If you're looking for the tail, it comes out after midnight" [laughter]. And they all laughed; it was a big joke. But they didn't know me, and I didn't know them, because they went to segregated high schools also. When they got to the Apprentice School, they encountered--. You know, that's when they encountered black athletes themselves.

SR: So it kind of sounds like, from what I've heard in this interview, it sounds like you guys would get respect from--not get respect but would be respected by--whites by doing your job well enough. Is that typically what happened?

WB: Mm-hmm. Absolutely, yeah.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Ok.

KB: But you always knew you had to be "on." That you always had to be in a certain state of mind. There was no relaxing. You had to do better. If you were going to compete in any activity in your school--I'm talking when I was working as far as staff members--you knew that in order to be a leader you had to be better.

WB: You couldn't be average.

KB: You couldn't be average, that's right. You had to be a little bit better, a tad above; you had to be a little more assertive, but you couldn't be aggressive.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: Because aggression was not favorable. And you just always had to take the high road.

WB: Always on time, always working.

KB: Oh yes.

WB: And no excuses.

KB: That's the way we were raised, and that's the way our teachers taught us. And so I felt, in that regard, we were prepared.

BP: I'm sure it did. But how else do you think the Newsome Park kind of community instilled those kind of higher standards?

KB: Everybody did the same. All the families were the same. If--. You knew that if you misbehaved, any parent--anybody's parent--would discipline you. And you would not talk back. I never talked back--never--to any adult. Not because I was perfect, but because I knew better.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: Not like kids today. If you say something to a child now, they just--. They would probably curse you out.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: We would never do that.

WB: But if a parent disciplined you when you got home, your mother disciplined you and your father would discipline you. We used to call that--. They call it spankings now.

KB: Yeah, spankings.

WB: We used to call them whoopings.

KB: A whooping [laughter].

SR: I was actually going to ask if you guys felt like the traditions of Newsome Park faring respect were passed down? Do you guys feel like you can pinpoint when it started to erode over time, when that community respect fell apart?

KB: Well, I think once the schools integrated and people started moving out of Newsome Park--. See, I actually moved out of Newsome Park before I graduated from Carver. We moved to Hampton. So again, I missed some of those things that went on in the community because I moved in the eleventh grade, although I continued to go to Carver. I didn't live in Newsome Park those last two years.

WB: I moved in the tenth grade.

KB: You moved in the tenth grade.

WB: Yeah, tenth.

KB: So most people were trying to improve their lot, and leave Newsome Park. By this time, you realized you were living in the projects. You didn't know it before.

WB: Yeah, and my father actually borrowed money and built a house. We built a house. He and his boys built a house and actually moved out of Newsome Park. So people were trying to do better and make things better for their children, for their family.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: And we had neighbors that were building. So if the neighbor had a stump to dig, all of us would dig it and burn it. If there's a tree to take down, all of us did it. So we built our houses simultaneously and we helped each other do it. And they moved out of Newsome Park also.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: So, as these families were moving out, did you guys still keep ties with the old families?

KB: Some of them, yes.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: Because they still are my classmates. One of the things that is very very heart-warming to me is that my class continues to have get-togethers. I mean, we not only have reunions every four or five years, but in the interim we have lunches together and we do activities together. And most of the students from Carver are involved in some way with the alumni association. So there's a whole [connection]. Every year there's a Blue and Gold Ball, because those were our colors. And that--. All the students from all the grades, all the classes, come together for a fundraiser for a scholarship. So we still have good relationships with most of the people we went to school with.

WB: And they do Newsome Park Week. And Newsome Park Day.

KB: Yeah, Newsome Park Day. There's a Newsome Park Day that's been organized, I guess maybe for about twenty-some years. And people who used to live in Newsome Park get together and have a little festival. Mm-hmm.

SR: I guess when the school started to desegregate, or (47:05) for you, from your experience--. Did you guys, actually you two--. As you guys interacted with whites more often, did you guys feel like they had, they lacked the, I guess, respect for authority that you guys had to since you were in Newsome Park, or--.

KB: It was different.

SR: Ok.

WB: Yeah, it was different.

KB: It was different.

SR: How so? Did you think they were--.

KB: First of all, I don't think the white kids really respected the black teachers.

SR: Mm-hmm.

KB: And I'm saying that from when I was teaching, not as a student, because obviously I didn't experience that as a student. So you had to work hard to get the respect of the students. But, there was a difference. And you see, black kids grew up knowing better than to disrespect a teacher.

SR: Mm-hmm.

WB: Or to talk back.

KB: Or to talk back. And so you didn't have it visa versa, you see.

SR: Since you have experienced some teachers or maybe even co-workers that were kind of disrespectful in that way, did you know if their families were involved in any manner of like--.

For a student, like if their parents had influenced them to believe that way? Did you ever encounter that, like an angry parent?

KB: Sometimes, yes. When I first started teaching, I had several run-ins with parents who felt like I couldn't tell their kids what to do. I was a very firm disciplinarian because that was the way I had been raised. And it was, I think, a little bit more than some of them were used to. And so, several times with parents, yes.

SR: [To Mr. Brown] How about you? Work ethic, in the shipyard--did you see like any noticeable differences between whites and blacks?

WB: There were some differences. I mean, I just think when I was in the Apprentice School you could tell that they would say something back to the instructor, where I wouldn't dare say something back to the instructor. Or would say something behind their back, and I wouldn't dare say that. They were just--I think they were just raised a little different.

SR: Mm-hmm.

[Pause in recording]

KB:[Describing experiences of discrimination for herself or her family] My aunt that was in the [military]--I had an aunt that served as a WAC. You know, they had a battalion of black women that they sent over to France, and she was sent. There's a book out about them, and she's included in that book. But she had such horror stories that she would not even participate in the telling of the stories because she felt like she was so mistreated.

SR: Mm-hmm.

KB: But I don't think, I had any real horrible experiences--. The only problem I had was, once, I went to the to the library to check out books, and I wasn't allowed to check out books. I could

read them in the library, but I couldn't check them out, and so that's basically what I did, go to the library.

BP: Was this when you were a student?

KB: Public library, the public library. Mm-hmm.

SR: Do you feel like there were any positive experiences you guys had with the Civil Rights Movement as a whole? Something even secondary, that you got over time, or anything of that nature?

KB: Individually no, but I think it's generally understood that things are much better to me when people get along. But it comes from understanding. And I think that most of the problems during the Civil Rights Era were because, of course, people didn't understand each other.

WB: They didn't communicate.

KB: Didn't communicate.

WB: Didn't communicate with each other.

KB: And didn't want to be told what to do.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: And I think once there was a level of understanding, even though it's still not great, that understanding helps you to bridge some of those differences.

WB: Because racism is a learned behavior. We're not born with it. You're taught it. And I think maybe that has changed and not so much is being--

KB: Some.

WB: Some; not being taught as much as it used to. So if it's a learned behavior, and if you're not taught it, then you don't know it. Look at babies: put them together and they grow up together.

They don't know any difference between Manny, Moe, or who they may be. But when you're taught that way, then you act differently.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Anyways--.

KB: I never had any significant bad experiences. Not at all.

SR: As a whole for--or maybe Newport News in general--. As I guess the Civil Right Movement went on, did you guys feel like you had more access to city places? Like was there--. I mean, I guess it's Patrick Henry Mall, but that whole area. To my understanding, it was predominantly white. What was it like actually interacting there?

KB: You mean like shopping?

SR: Yeah, just in general.

KB: It's really interesting because there was uptown and downtown.

WB: [simultaneously] Downtown.

KB: Jefferson Avenue was where black people shopped.

WB: That's right.

KB: Washington Avenue was where white people shopped. You could go to Washington Avenue to shop but you were watched. You were always questioned, "Have you got money to pay?"

WB: And I remember that when my Daddy got in line to pay, and they would call him Wayland. A white man would come behind me, they would call him Mr. Lewis. And we were known by our first name and they were known by Mr. or Mrs. That's just the way we were treated.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: You may have bought the same stuff, with the same money, but you were treated different.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: And how long did this treatment last??

KB: Forever [laughter]. It seems like some of it is still going on. It does. It really, really does. But eventually, those two things kind of broke down when you went to the first mall, which was Old Newmarket. We called it Old Newmarket. That was the real first shopping mall. My father was a bricklayer on that project, too. And so people were forced to go to the same stores, and it made a difference.

WB: Buy the same things and deal with the same people.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: Yeah.

KB: Mm-hmm. Because when there was a Washington Avenue, you didn't go to the movies on Washington Avenue. You had to go to the black movies. You didn't go to the white movies, you went to the black ones, although we had four.

WB: We did.

KB: We had four.

WB: I think--.

KB: I think our first date, you took me to the Palace.

WB: Yeah [laughter].

SR: What was the Palace? Is that a movie theater?

KB: A movie.

SR: Ok.

KB: Yeah. But it [theater] had formerly been all-white.

SR: Mm-hmm.

KB: It was not a good movie. I walked out.

WB: I know you did. It was Mary Jane or something--.

KB: *What Ever Happened to Baby Jane?*

WB: Tell them about when we used to go to movies up the back steps.

KB: Yeah, but that was not here.

WB: Oh, ok.

KB: That was not here.

WB: We bought popcorn from the back steps [laughter].

BP: Would you say that, sort of from what what you're describing, would you say that on some level it might have gotten worse before it got better? Maybe, from in your day-to-day life, once you guys were forced to integrate, when they started to make these new--. Do you think there was some tense years maybe?

WB: I'm sure there was some tense years, yeah, when it started.

KB: I'm sure there were, yeah.

WB: There were some tense years--

KB: But, we never had to deal with it so much. [To Mr. Brown] Do you think?

WB: No, not really.

KB: Our parents--.

WB: My father, yeah.

KB: Our parents did.

WB: My father did, my mother did. Definitely more than I had to.

KB: Yeah, yeah.

WB: And when I went through, I just endured. I mean, you just keep on going. Think about quitting or stopping, absolutely not. You just press ahead.

SR: Do you--. Actually, to rewind for a second, in what year were you guys married?

KB: 1968.

WB: April the 20th. The day after my birthday. I had to get old enough to marry you.

KB: Be quiet, you tell that story all the time [laughter].

WB: That's not true [laughter].

SR: Do you guys feel that since you were a couple even before then--

KB: We weren't though.

SR: Oh, you weren't?

KB: We were just friends.

SR: Oh.

WB: Just friends, yeah.

KB: That went to the same school, and went to the same church. Our first date, he had already graduated from high school.

SR: Ok.

KB: But, we were still going to the same church, so he asked me out one Sunday.

WB: Sunday was a good day.

KB: It was a good day.

WB: Yeah, you said yes [laughter].

KB: He had a car [laughter]. Nobody else had a car! [laughter] I'm just telling the truth. [laughter]

SR: Yeah [laughter]. Oh Lord [laughter]. I guess--. Well, moving past your marriage. Since you guys got married do you think it made it easier to suffer any of this? Were you able to support each other, do you think that was something else that benefitted you guys?

WB: Yeah.

KB: Yeah, I think so because things that were not quite comfortable for you at work, you bounced them off each other. And then what I was going through was nothing like what he was going through. And--.

WB: And then when I started working, I officiated basketball.

KB: Yeah.

WB: For about twelve to thirteen years, I worked in the ACC, the Southern Conference, and the [MEAC]. But I would come home and tell her, because I would go to meetings, and you'd put your work in. But you weren't advancing. So I would come home and tell her, and she would tell me to either quit, or keep on going.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: We just kept on going. I was the fourth African-American to referee the ACC, and third in the Southern Conference, and first in the--. What was it called? [To Mrs. Brown] I got that bag.

KB: Metro.

WB: The Metro Conference.

KB: That doesn't exist anymore does it?

WB: No.

SR: Do you feel like since everyone collectively shared this segregation, no matter how you cut it, do you feel like that there was an attitude being like, oh, you can't vent about your problems? Or rather just keep on trucking forward, as you mentioned earlier?

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: And I think it made us stronger.

KB: I do, too.

WB: Because you had to endure. You couldn't give up; you just had to endure, and keep on going.

SR: And kind of to--. Not to completely step away from that line of thought, but how do you guys feel that federal interaction from the government was, down in the area?

KB: It just was not anything on our radar screen. It wasn't anything that we paid any attention to. You watched the news. But I don't think much was happening in this area, like in other areas, you know. So you just knew that things were better here because the stuff you would see on the news happening in other places was not happening here, which was good.

WB: I think that when they integrated the schools, it was amazing. You could see the athletes begin to play with each other. And then sports bridge a lot of gaps. And that bridged a lot of gaps, not only between athletes, between the fans also, rooting for the same team, rooting for the same athlete. And I think integration was made easier by that also.

KB: And I think the only part about it that was disenfranchising was the fact that now we had to blend into--black students had to blend into--the white schools because our high schools were closed, as far as high school was concerned.

WB: Yeah, they closed Huntington, Phenix, and Carver.

KB: They closed both of them.

BP: It wasn't reciprocal.

KB: Right.

BP: The whites didn't have to blend in.

SR: Yeah.

KB: That's right. They never came to a black school. We had to go to their schools.

SR: Just another hurdle for you guys. Was it kind of hard trying to embrace that history that you were suddenly given, do you think?

KB: Well, I think--. I think yes.

BP: It didn't feel like your own history, to some degree.

KB: Yeah.

WB: Yeah.

KB: It was like whatever we had done in the past, it was over. That's all it was, memories.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Yeah. We kind of touch on this, about the national movement. What were you guys'--. Were you well caught up on the national movement of the civil rights and whatnot.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Okay. What were your guys' thoughts and attitudes on that?

KB: It just seems like, in some places, change was so hard. First of all, when you have mandated change it makes it a lot more difficult than when you have change that just happens because it's the right thing to do. Or the thing to do whether it's right or not. And I think Hampton especially, more so than Newport News, had already integrated schools well before they were forced to. I think the busing in Newport News created issues with the students, from what I could read. Not being a student, I didn't know. You could only know what you read. But I think, because it was forced, it was a little bit harder to swallow. And there was a lot more resistance, a lot more--I don't want to say fighting but--resistance is probably the best word.

WB: Yes, I think change when accepted is something different than when it's forced upon you.

KB: Yeah.

WB: That makes it much more hard to deal with.

KB: Because the students in Hampton, you could kind of see--even from when I went to work there--that they were much further along, in terms of interracial relationships with each other than they were in Newport News.

BP: Kind of expanding on that idea of thoughts on the national movement, a lot of people say they can remember where they were on 9-11, or something like that. I know it is a little bit farther back but do you kind of remember, maybe not *exactly* where you were, but maybe the community's feelings? Maybe even where you were when something like Dr. King was assassinated. Or is there a major event that--.

KB: I was at Howard then. And they--. I didn't live in a dorm. I lived in an apartment building in the black neighborhood. And I remember the fires. My apartment building was the line of demarcation between the fire and the non-fire. The--what do you call them?--the National Guard was based in my building. Tanks, that kind of thing, trying to keep the fires and the rioting from going beyond that point. So I could look out my window and watch it all unfold. Obviously, school was closed. We couldn't get out, we had to go through the Guard to get out. So that was not--. I remember it as if it was yesterday, just watching it all burn.

WB: And I was in the Apprentice School then, and you don't get much reaction when you're there by yourself. I mean you hear that, but nobody else reacted the way that I reacted on the inside, so who do you tell it to?

KB: Yeah, you just kept it to yourself.

WB: Yeah. Kept it to yourself.

KB: You couldn't react. Yeah, but there was fighting and rioting and breaking windows out of buildings and throwing rocks and Molotov cocktails, as a result.

SR: So very extreme.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: And how long did that last? Do you know?

KB: Days. Seems like it went on forever but of course it didn't. It smoldered eventually, but I think we were out of school. They closed everything. I mean they're trying to keep people from getting hurt. Several days, several days.

SR: And so at that point, I'm assuming that Dr. King was universally revered as a Civil Rights leader.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Ok. How about Malcolm X's involvement and his assassination? It might be a loaded question but--.

KB: No. Malcolm X is more revered now than then. At the time where Malcolm X was most prominent before he was assassinated he was more of a--. He was seen as an instigator.

WB: As a militant.

KB: As a militant.

WB: Yeah.

KB: And not as well respected. But, you know, history has been more favorable to him. Because he was not so much a militant as he was adamant that there should be change, and he was not willing to wait.

WB: By any means necessary.

KB: By any means necessary. Do what you have to do because we're going to get what is rightfully ours, as a people, where Martin Luther King was a lot more refined and--

WB: Non-violent.

KB: Non-violent.

WB: Malcolm X didn't care what means.

KB: No.

WB: By what means it took.

KB: No. That's right. That's right.

WB: We needed to take what we could get.

KB: That's right, that's right. It was due. We were human beings, and we were not being treated as human beings--not equal human beings. And to him it was an affront. But of course people like him were not revered--

WB: No.

KB: By anybody. Even a lot of black folks feared Malcolm X.

WB: Mm-hmm. The ones in the King movement feared Malcolm X.

KB: Sure, sure. I never met Malcolm X, but I did hear Dr. King.

SR: Where'd you hear him at?

KB: He was here in Newport News at a church, when he sort of first got started.

SR: Was he as good then?

KB: Mm-hmm. [laughter] He was a wonderful speaker, wonderful speaker.

SR: Do you think the hesitancy of some blacks to get involved with or support Malcolm X was just because they didn't want to have their jobs inhibited?

KB: Their jobs and their lives.

WB: Yeah, because Malcolm didn't mind dying for what he thought.

KB: No, no. And nobody wanted to give up their lives--I mean some people did. You know, some people don't think like that--but for the most part, people didn't want to die. Now you've got some fanatics who don't care, but at that time you didn't have a whole bunch of people who were willing to fight, and if they had to die they would. But they weren't obsessed with just being a martyr. Like we do now.

WB: Plus, they thought it was contrary to what Dr. King was doing.

KB: Exactly, exactly.

WB: Yeah.

KB: Yeah.

WB: And a lot of people didn't like that.

KB: Yeah.

BP: Yeah, I could see how, especially in places like Newsome Park where you have such a tight and beneficial community, it can be hard to branch out and be willing to join a militant civil rights--.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: Martin Luther King was looked upon a lot better than Malcolm X was.

KB: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Mm-hmm.

WB; And plus, they played Malcolm to be the villain.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: The newspapers, the TVs, he was a bad guy.

KB: A bad influence.

WB: Yeah.

KB: On black people, too.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: Yup.

SR: Yeah, do you feel like you guys had to play into that sense of--. We kind of talked about it in class. It's like respectability, white respectability, white politics of respectability, where it's like it's acceptable for us, you know, like dressing like whites and even speaking like them. Do you feel like you had that pressure, in any regard?

KB: I don't think I quite understand what you're asking.

BP: So it's sort of, it's the idea that, African Americans, sort of what you were saying had to blend into white society more than whites had to blend into blacks.

KB: Mm-hmm.

BP: Did you feel like you guys also said higher standards and things? Did you really feel like everyday you were having to live up to white standards?

KB: Every time you came out of the house.

WB: Yeah.

KB: Every time. No matter where you went, what group you were with. The only other time would be if you were with your friends in a closed setting. But anytime you were in a place where you could be seen by anyone other than your friends or your family you were performing, if you want to call it that. You were on your best behavior.

WB: Your teachers taught you that, your parents taught you that.

KB: That's right, everybody taught you that. When you came out of that house, you left it behind. You might act silly at home; you might act stupid; you may not even use appropriate English. But, when you went in the streets, you were to be what you were taught to be.

WB: We had to be the best.

KB: The best.

WB: Yeah.

KB: All the time.

WB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Over time do you feel like you kind of had to, I mean shrug that burden off? I mean, that must've been terrible what you just--

KB: No.

SR: Oppressive.

KB: Not really. As a black person you never feel that.

SR: Mm-hmm.

KB: You don't feel like you've got a weight on you. But you still feel that you have to be better, act better--

WB: Do better.

KB: Do better. All the time.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: All the time, you feel that way.

SR: So you guys feel like you don't get the benefit of the doubt?--

KB: No.

WB. No.

KB. No.

SR: I see.

KB: But the one thing that you always know is that there are people--people are on a continuum of understanding and acceptance.

SR: Mm-hmm.

KB: As a black person, you have to know where everybody fits on that continuum and govern yourself accordingly. I don't think white people do that, from what I gather. It's just whatever. Do you? I'm asking you that question.

SR: Yes, I--.

BP: Yeah, yeah I definitely, definitely know what you're saying.

SR: Yeah.

KB: Ok.

BP: It's more on you guys to identify where you are or like how you need to react to different people. It's not necessarily ingrained in white people to always be conscious of that.

KB: That's right, that's right.

SR: I feel like one thing that's a privilege, I guess all white people have, is like you can look at yourself not as a white person, and that I am just a human being or whatnot. When it comes to a lot of like African-Americans, it's like "I have to, there's no way you can make me--. You know I struggle with myself so much every day. I'm going to be discriminated against." It's a constant reminder, that's what I've heard. That it's like--.

KB: That's right.

SR: You can't just divorce it.

KB: No.

WB: No.

KB: It’s a part of you.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: Culturally.

SR: Mm-hmm.

KB: It’s a part of you. And you don’t. You always know. Whatever situation you’re in, you know where you stand because you’re black.

SR: Mm-hmm.

KB: How you fit.

SR: Mm-hmm. Do you feel as if there’s any slight improvements you’ve seen? Or, or regressions, you think.

KB: Sure, yes [regarding improvements]. Absolutely so, absolutely so.

SR: Ok.

KB: Yeah.

SR: Kind of--. Not to--. This is kind of interesting. How did you guys feel about Barack Obama’s election? And do you think it improved a lot of things?

KB: No.

SR: Ok.

KB: I think it made things worse.

SR: Oh really?

KB: It made things worse from our perspective as it relates to white people.

SR: Mm-hmm.

KB: There have been so many instances since his election where you can see that white people are disgruntled about it. I don't think white--when I say white people I'm generalizing--and there's no such thing as a general white person, like there's no general black person. But it's as if: I'll compare it to Trump's campaign, take "Make America Great Again." America's been great.

WB: "Take my country back."

KB: "Take my country back." Back from who?

WB: Or what?

KB: It belonged to the Indians [laughter] if you want to know the truth. You see what I'm saying? But it's like--. I'm going to speak for myself. It's as if Barack Obama has achieved the greatest thing in America and because he has, and he's at this position, white folks are saying: "Enough already, you're out of your place, you've gone beyond what you should've been able to go to. You've achieved something you shouldn't have, and we'll fix you."

WB: "We'll take it back."

KB: "We'll take it back."

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: Now he may have, like you said, he has been the president, but--

WB: What progress has been made?

KB: He has done a lot of things.

WB: But, they have fought him.

KB: They have fought him tooth and nail. And I mean, he's achieved as much as he can. I hope that Trump doesn't think he can change the world because he has to work within the same system. But, he will be given the benefit of the doubt because he's appealing to those persons who feel like blacks have gone too far. And that's, that's my personal feeling.

SR: So basically like the constant discrediting of who he is? [KB affirms] Ok.

KB: Mm-hmm.

BP: I think there's also a sort of branching off those kind of aspects. It's almost like now that we've had a black president, it excuses some actions from whites almost. These people say, "Well, our country has finally had a black president so that means we're progressive." It just kind of lets people forget that there are still a lot of issues.

KB: Mm-hmm. He might've been our president and he's black, but he was not respected.

WB: No.

KB: A lot of folks did not respect him as president. So you have achieved a goal, but you have not been given the benefit that that goal should have afforded you.

WB: A lot of things he wanted to do, they would not allow him to do or wouldn't help him.

KB: Just because.

WB: Just because.

KB: Just because.

WB: Yeah.

KB: What's the rationale for it? They're talking now about Obamacare. It's not Obamacare. It's the Affordable Healthcare Act.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: And you ask people the difference between the two, and they tell you, "It's a big difference." You see what I'm saying?

SR: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

KB: Don't get me started [laughter]. Don't get me started on politics.

SR: Oh, I understand. It's something that's definitely noticeable, especially from his birth certificate fiasco. That was absurd.

KB: Why was it allowed to fester like that?

SR: Indeed.

KB: Why did he have to continue to prove it? Does he know that Hawaii is a state?

SR: Yeah.

KB: Ok.

SR: It comes down to ultimately, I'm glad you guys have supported this, it's definitely just because he's black, and people use that to discredit him. So I guess to kind of tie it in is that, do you guys feel like the legacy of civil rights--because some people view it as the past--do you still think still going on right now?

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: It's just different. It's different.

WB: It's more subtle.

KB: It's more subtle.

SR: It's a new phase, yeah.

KB: Yes, it's more subtle--

WB: As I always say, you take down the signs but you didn't take them out your mind, though. It may not say white and colored on the signs, but it's still in people's minds.

SR: Indeed.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Do you guys feel like we should ask any other last minute questions? Anything you guys want talk about, or no?

WB: How do you think race relationships are now?

SR: I believe, personally, that there is a subtle undercurrent of racism that you can never--. I mean, not to say never but you cannot deny right now. There is--. I feel like the fact that Trump got elected displays that there are racist voters out there, and they, sadly, do have the power to do that. I feel like for our generation though, I think we're doing a lot better. Like the interaction--. I've rarely heard, like, true racism in my life. And if it was, it like a younger, you know, ignorant kid who might have said it. But for me, it's great. Like I've seen--. I mean, this is kind of one parameter, like inter-race relationships are everywhere and what not. I see that a lot of people are regarding--like white people are regarding--you know, black actors, intellectuals, even like sports athletes. They're revering them. I think that's good, I think it shows like--

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: It's very much acceptable now, and it's good. I think that it's only fair.

BP: Yeah. I think for me personally, I grew up going to Charlottesville City Schools. It was usually always around fifty-fifty African-American and white. I had kind of the opposite of you, Mr. Brown. I was, I think, one of two white kids on my high school basketball team [laughter]. And I remember getting a lot of questions about like "Yo, what's it like? What's it like?" They're my friends; I don't know what you mean--.

WB: Yeah [laughter]

KB: Exactly.

BP: But, going along with that, so what I would say kind of in my answer is that my personal experience has been very good. I think that I've had the chance to get a wide, diverse range of friends. And I think for a long time I had kind of missed any trailing legacies of racism and things like that. But I think that when I was taken--not taken out--but when I left that sort of environment

in my high school and things like that I started to get, not racist questions, but just seemingly more ignorant questions. People that hadn't been there and I could tell it's not even necessarily always out of prejudice or racism, it's just they went to a school that was ninety-five percent white and just haven't had--truly haven't had--the experiences that people who live in inner cities or things like that are subject to.

KB: Sure.

BP: So I think there's hope, sort of in the fact that there's not as much, I think, overbearing racism per se. But I think there is still a lot of ignorance.

KB: Mm-hmm.

SR: Yeah.

WB: And we're sitting down and talking about it. Makes a big difference too.

KB: Yeah, because there would not have been times for this kind of discussion to take place. And it's critical that people understand one another, and where they've come from and respect what it is that they have experienced, you know. And I mean people have all kinds of backgrounds, and--

WB: And we bring different experiences--

KB: Different experiences, indeed.

WB: On how we've lived and what we've done.

KB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And like I say, your school makes a big difference, where you go to high school. And then we you leave high school and go to college, you got a whole different set of people that you have to deal with who have had all kinds of experiences, from being in a little, small, rural area to a large inner-city. Because Newport News and Hampton, at the time, weren't really big metropolis, you know. But, there's not as much difference now, as there was then, that's being paid to things and relationships. I think there's all kinds of relationships. You talk

about interracial couples, but I will tell you this and you probably--. When people see interracial couples, some are very accepting, and some are not. Even most people don't think black people care. But there is a stigma, even in the black community, to interracial couples. I don't think you can find a black family that doesn't have somebody white in it. But, I bet you won't find every white family having somebody black in it. You know? I remember that one of my mother's brothers, back in what? The eighties.

WB: Oh yeah, yeah. Mm-hmm.

KB: My mother's brother had a white woman that he was dating. He's a Catholic, so his wife wouldn't divorce him, and so they lived together forever. It was interesting to see my family adjust to that. I'm not talking about here in Newport News, but from North Carolina. He was living in a little small town. Even though we lived in Virginia, I went home all the time to North Carolina, because all of my grandparents were there. And to see my family come to terms with somebody white--.

WB: Mm-hmm, over the years.

KB: Over the years.

SR: Yeah.

WB: The process took years.

KB: Because when we were growing up, when I was a child, my grandfather was a pharmacist, so we had a drug store. There was a black pharmacist and one black doctor. They had their own little section of town of about six or eight businesses on a little strip.

WB: Mm-hmm.

KB: The rest of the town was all white. And I remember going into the white drug store to get something, and the pharmacist came out and said, "Aren't you Dr. Cooke's girl?" [She

responded] “Yes I am.” “Well then does he know you’re in here?” I said, “I don’t know.” “Well then you need to go to Dr. Cooke.” He wasn’t even going let me buy what I was going to buy in that store. And then, he told my grandfather that I was in his store. But then, you’re talking about the fifties and the sixties, which is ridiculous.

SR: That’s so horrible, yeah.

KB: Yeah, yeah.

SR: Did you come back eventually, and get your thing?

KB: No, no. No, as a child you just go on. But that’s the way things were so it was hard--it is hard--for black folks to accept white folks all the time because of the experiences we’ve had, which are not the reverse of what you’ve had.

SR: Indeed.

KB: It’s very easy for white folks to accept somebody black, because you’ve never known any hostilities, or any of that kind of thing. You know that that they’re different. But, you don’t see it the same way as the reverse.

SR: Yeah.

WB: Well, we saw it when we went to Europe.

KB: We just came back from Europe.

WB: We went fourteen days in Europe, and you talk about racism. We went to where the ruins were in--. Where was that? Was it in Italy?

KB: Mm-hmm. In Rome.

WB: I went in a store, and the guy wouldn’t even wait on me.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: I was out standing there. He was talking to a couple. He said, "Well, you decide." He went back and started reading. He wouldn't even wait on me. So it's not just black and white.

KB: Mm-hmm.

WB: It's among nationalities too.

KB: That was less than two months ago.

WB: Yeah.

SR: Yeah.

KB: But anyhow.

SR: Because I remember I went to Spain about two years ago and was passing a store and there was a bunch of characters of things, and there was like the most racist blackface doll I've ever seen in my life. And it's like it's in a storefront, and you're like, "How is this ok?" But I mean--I'm not going to say, "Oh, Europe is significantly worse than the United States," because we're still dealing with a lot of stuff.

KB: Well, first of all they don't like Americans.

SR: Mm-hmm. Yeah.

KB: And then you put black American on top of that [laughter]. It's like, "You're just shoe leather, brother." [laughter]

WB: We bought a sandwich, they waited on everybody that didn't look like us.

KB: Yeah.

WB: And waited until we were the only one's left, and only then they waited on us.

KB: Yeah, yeah. Anyway, we had to eat so.

WB: They did it twice. Same place, same lady.

KB: I know. I know. I know. But, anyway.

BP: Alright, so, anything else you can think of about growing up?

KB: Oh I was going to--. Is that thing off?

END OF INTERVIEW

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