

SRC 25

Interviewee: Reverend William Barnes

Interviewer: Ben Houston

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H: It is June 26, 2003, and I am here with Reverend William Barnes. Thanks very much for meeting with me, Reverend Barnes. Can we start with simply saying when and where you were born, please?

B: I was born July 17, 1931, in Nashville. I have spent most of my seventy-one years now in the same part of the same city. I have been here pretty much all my life, except for some years in the Army and a couple of other trips.

H: And you specifically desired to come back to Nashville to do your work?

B: Yes. I kind of became a Johnny-one-note as an adolescent. I got very interested in the Jesus story when I was fourteen or fifteen. The way it fell out for me was that the story was an account of how God addresses the healing of a broken creation, and what seemed to me true, and still does, is that in Jesus, God was strengthening the weak links of the chain for the sake of the strength of the whole chain. I believe that and believed it then, so it kind of pushed me on to a Johnny-one-note life. [I went to] Vanderbilt as an undergrad and [spent my] summers as a student at Vandy [and] in Chicago [with] Students in Industry, a Christian approach to labor-management issues, working in factories. [We lived as] a group at George Williams College in south Chicago. The next summer, [I participated in the] New England student Christian movement at Martha's Vineyard, where we had jobs in hotels pot-washing, bell-hopping, waiting tables and so forth but meeting at night for seminars to discuss, oh, the economics of hotel life and work and a certain amount of dehumanizing, that you evaluate people by their tip and not their knowledge and whatever. So, those things. Then after my junior year at Vandy, I was so broke that I joined the Army in 1953, just after the conflict in Korea was over. I stayed two years. I was a cryptographer, [putting] messages into code and then breaking them out of code. I worked at the Pentagon for a while and then for the second year at SHAPE [Supreme Headquarters of Allied Powers in Europe] headquarters in Paris, France. I was kind of a jock at the time. I was assigned to Special Services and played [battalion] basketball and [post] baseball. The only reason I mention that is it really let me travel all over Europe fairly [extensively]. I got out of the service in the fall of 1955 and finished then my senior year at Vanderbilt, 1955 and 1956, and then went to Yale Divinity School from 1956 to 1959.

I took a year on a motor- scooter in Europe, looking at urban and industrial problems in the life of the church. It was still close enough to the end of World War II that there was a huge amount of experimentation going on in the life of the church. Industrial missions, [worker priest movement], things like that. I then

came back in the spring of 1960. I came back because I really thought that since my focus for so long had been the poor of the city, having worked for a time in east Harlem when I was a student at Yale at the East Harlem Protestant Parish, [with] people like Bill Webber and Bill Stringfellow and some of those names, [and I] really saw what the city could become when people had to live close to factories [where they worked]. That is what the tenements in east Harlem were really all about, their proximity to work. My feeling in the South was that we still had the option of the “ounce of prevention” instead of the “pound of cure”. Southern cities developed mostly post-automobile and didn’t have to pursue that same concentration of labor, tenements and slums in quite the same way. I came back in 1960 and told the superintendent that all I had done was inner-city stuff, and so I was assigned to five country churches between Winchester and Fayetteville for two years in Huntland, Tennessee. That is another whole story. Talk about a bull in a china shop, I had never been in a rural area and I had never been to a revival and that sort of thing. There are some interesting stories about that.

H: A little bit of a culture shock.

B: Oh! Well, for them, too. So, I had a friend in Chicago and I wrote to him, and it looked like I had an opportunity for a church in Chicago. When I announced that, [the Nashville District Superintendent] found me a place here in 1962, a parish called Carroll Street, three sides surrounded by a [public] housing project. I stayed at Carroll Street four years. I had the opportunity to start the first really significantly integrated congregation in Nashville in 1966 at the beginning of the Edgehill Church, where I stayed for thirty years through lots of ups and downs, urban renewal, War on Poverty, civil rights movement and all those things that were hitting so hard in the mid- and late 1960s, as well as the early 1970s. After that, still Johnny-one-note, I took a job as an organizer for the Industrial Areas Foundation [IAF—The Purpose of IAF, which is organized in dozens of cities, is to unite congregations into “number power” to push for identified social and political change. Saul Alinsky was the unforgettable founder and he recruited and trained organizers at his center in Chicago] here. The local affiliate was Tying Nashville Together, TNT which I did for four years and got very interested in writing a book about [my] experiences. So, I left TNT, and that brings me kind of up to date. I had a couple of other little part-time stuff. It has been a Johnny-one-note life and one I am really grateful for.

H: Why don’t you spend some time describing Nashville of the 1960s in terms of climate and culture and politics and society.

B: I guess my first thought about that is, it was a city in transition. Having grown up here and having lived in a totally segregated society, [with] childhood memories of the main street downtown where the theaters were segregated, a black person

had to go in a different entrance down the alley and up to the second balcony. Segregation in public transportation. I remember even some scenes of violence as a child over that issue, over whether black folks would move back to where they belonged when the trolley or the bus was crowded. It was a totally segregated society. There were never any black kids who were in school with me at the time, from grammar school all the way through high school. So, I grew with up that, [but] even as a child, [I was] never comfortable with that. It was such a contradiction of what a human being is versus how certain human beings are treated. When I came back here in 1962 to be the pastor at Carroll Street Methodist Church, again, as I said, surrounded on three sides by public housing, there were a number of transitional things were going on. The civil rights movement was certainly one of them. I missed most of the Vanderbilt stuff. I had [left] in [1956], and I got back here in 1962 and got very involved in the movement. Certainly, Baxton Bryant and the Tennessee Council on Human Relations was a big part of that, taking me not only to marches and demonstrations in Nashville, but in other places as well like Memphis and Somerville and so forth.

The War on Poverty was a heavy thing at that time. It began in 1964. Just a huge amount of controversy locally around the issue of “maximum feasible participation” of poor people, who makes decisions, are there going to be resources to make any serious changes, tension between federal programs, Kennedy’s Sargent Shriver [Kennedy in-law and administration official] versus people like Beverly Briley, who was the local mayor and who told me and two other visitors in his office when we were complaining about the War on Poverty’s supplies here, he said, there will never be a federal dollar [spent in] Nashville that I don’t have to control [over]. It was really a nationwide phenomenon of the idealism from Washington of a War on Poverty. I remember hearing Shriver saying in 1964 that, by the end of the decade, there would be no more poverty in America. He was that [confident]. But when you began to apply that locally and where structures began to be extremely critical of local government, local police, local mayors and so forth, you get a really difficult situation and ultimately, I think the localese won. Left a legacy of some interesting decision-making groups and so forth, that basically the War on Poverty was the war on the poor finally. So, the civil rights movement was going on. The War on Poverty was going on. [A] very important [development] was the federal urban renewal program. Very significant issue, since when we began Edgehill in 1966 starting this new church, that community was right on the threshold of the execution phase of urban renewal, which dislocated 2,300 families with huge implications for race relations, as well as relationships with low-income folks. Those were some of the things that were going on at that time that really had an unusual focusing, actually, partly because of [Reverend James] Lawson’s work and Vanderbilt’s role in that saga.

But Nashville was really quite an important place for the movements. It was just a great time for being the pastor of the first really significantly integrated congregation in Nashville, as far as I know. There were all kinds of dynamics associated with that, as well, and being a congregation, that was from the beginning when it was fifteen people for the following thirty years when it was something just over 300, always between 35 and 40 percent black membership, always with black leadership as well as my own. That certainly was a part of the movement of my life, as well, plus just being an inner-city pastor in a low-income area where crime and drugs and housing issues [were intense and accumulative].

H: We will have to spend some time on each of those in turn. Before we get into the TCHR, I am interested in hearing about some of those dynamics of the first integrated church. How did that play out?

B: I don't know if you want to repeat this or not, but it reminded me a little bit of people enjoying making love but ashamed of the baby when it comes, [such was our denominational leadership]. Another thing was going on in the United States in the 1960s. There were a huge number of urban riots and demonstrations that resulted in some violence and some riots. Churches began to experiment with urban projects. In some ways, that is part of the context of Edgehill and the beginning of my work in that congregation. Grants, resources, generosity for urban projects probably reached an all-time high. Denominations were willing to invest in urban projects. It was partly the invitation to me to try to begin a new congregation [near] a really intersectional area between black and white communities, but about a block and a half into an all-black community. We had meetings while I was still the pastor at Carroll Street, meetings through the following spring of 1965 and 1966. People, black pastors as well as white pastors, encouraging this beginning of this institution. It didn't always have the support of the Methodist hierarchy, especially on a local level. It got started, and it wasn't very long after we began [that the milk began to sour]. For instance, we started a draft-counseling center there. That was another big thing, big piece of what was going on, Vietnam and taking sides and demonstrating and so forth. We were the only draft-counseling center in the state at that time. It was mostly run by Nelson Fuson, who was a [local] Quaker. That was in some ways sort of the beginning of the disenchantment of the denomination. When a member of the church and I did a speech in Pulaski to the annual women's meeting and I mentioned the fact that we had a draft-counseling center, which was there to make people aware of what their legal options were, it was almost no time before I was getting calls from the district superintendent and a number of others, why are you doing this, and this is a terrible thing to be doing and so forth.

H: And their issues centered on the fact that it was not the church's place to be intervening in political [matters]?

- B: Yes. Well, those kinds of efforts, as you know, Ben, were associated with the anti-war stance in Vietnam. It wasn't what we were doing, but that's the way those things get looked at. Like today, it doesn't take much to look anti-patriotic [during a war]. So, that was sort of the assumption, and conflict began, conflict over the church's strong entrenched stand against some of the injustices of urban renewal. Plus, we were deeply involved in the civil rights stuff. On Saturdays, we would take carloads down to Somerville, where one of the last big civil rights efforts [in Tennessee] happened. So, bit by bit, there was a good bit of souring of the milk of this congregation and what it was doing, and I think probably the *coup de grace* came about 1971 or 1972, when a group of gay folks began to use the church building on Sunday afternoon for their worship services, and the beginning of the MCC, Metro Community Church, targeted predominantly gay people. So that race and taking some contrary stands about the War on Poverty and urban renewal and some of those things, it was not hard to become *persona non grata* in that kind of setting. For example, twice in our annual conference, strong efforts were made to disconnect Edgehill from the Methodist Church, to a large extent over the gay issue. That was the focus of one of those [conferences], and then another was more general after the war, after the draft-counseling center and joined races and some other things. There was an accumulation of issues that kept us rather unpopular with the denomination and some other local church leadership here, as you can imagine. But that was okay because we believed in what we were doing. It was always an interesting dynamic, the relationship between being in a black community and having children's programs and so forth, and at the same time getting more publicity than we [needed] about the gay issue. To keep those two in tandem, [in balance,] it is a miracle we survived at all. But we did.
- H: How do you look back at the sort of interpersonal dynamics of those first steps of bringing, you know, Martin Luther King said that Sunday at 11:00 was the most segregated hour, and yet, this is an example of whites and blacks coming together to worship. How did that play out on a personal level?
- B: This is an opinion, and it may be paradoxical, too. I think in the 1960s, it was probably easier. Martin Luther King, the emphasis on integrated society preceding the black separatist movement. It probably was easier for people to see the need for something like that. I don't know if we could start an Edgehill in quite the same way today. I mean, we could, but it would not be easier. It would probably be a bit more difficult, things being what they are and the housing patterns being so segregated, as they are still, as well. You know, to be in a predominantly black community, black folks didn't have to go three miles to get across white neighborhoods. It was also close to Vanderbilt and Peabody and Scarritt. I read a book about that time. It said, most integrated churches are interims between all-white and all-black. The exception were churches near university complexes.

H: Really?

B: Because you had a stable white island. It didn't change in the transition from white to black. We were close to a very large university complex in a predominantly black neighborhood in the throes of urban renewal. A lot of housing projects. It just worked, plus it was very important always to have other black pastors. We tried to make that, in the beginning a co-pastor, a black and white, before the Methodist church in [1970] merged its black and white jurisdictions. We did not get cooperation from the white bishop at that time to make that happen, and it really hurt us in the beginning. Some of the black folks who were coming were counting on that. Plus, we were cut fifty percent by each of the three judicatory funders [District, Conference, National]. I went to work at Scarritt teaching. They paid the church for my services. We got two black field work students, Jim Maye and Quincy Scott, who transferred to Vanderbilt Divinity School when Oberlin Seminary merged with the VU Divinity School. What I am saying is, we were really careful to have strong black leadership. The music was definitely diverse. We sang freedom songs and spirituals. The chief musician for decades was Marjorie Campbelle, a black woman who taught music in public schools. Plus, we really worked hard to welcome and love people who came from the neighborhood. Those were just some of the dynamics that, I think, in spite of what at that time was the bishop's inconsistency about certain types of support there, made it work. We really came to love each other. As I said, the worship was kind of a hodgepodge. Nobody got everything they wanted, but nobody left with nothing. There was a lot of feedback, a lot of inclusion of neighborhood issues in the worship service. Some things were put together to make it work at a time [when], you know, five years after that, ten years after that, many of these experimental congregations were dying.

H: Certainly, I want to ask you later about the rise of black separatism and the vestiges of white racial attitudes Nashville-wide, but did you see that within your congregation? Could you see the rise of black separatism and perhaps leftovers of white paternalism within your congregation?

B: The issue of white paternalism is always, you know, whether it is there or whether you perceive it as being there, that is always the case. But a lot of that was happening in the [civil rights] movement. Stokely [Carmichael] and all that was going on in the second half of the 1960s, but it didn't really seem to penetrate too much. I mean, somebody would come up to me [like] the barber in the neighborhood and would say, what's a white man doing here in this neighborhood? And I said, well, I was born here in 1931; when did you start? And it was good to have been able to say that truth, that I wasn't just an interloper. But when Stokely came to town, he spoke at this War on Poverty project we had called The Block, where we converted an old grocery into this pretty sleazy-looking little night spot, where a group called The Princely Players, a drama and

music group, did stuff in black history that almost could not go on anywhere else in town. Truth about some parts of black history in this country and their music. This group is still together to this day, [still performing]. So that the manifestations of black pride were incorporated into the life of, not only the congregation, but the neighborhood as well. The Block did extremely well. The fellow who coached the drama, a fellow named German Wilson, was fired from his job at Cameron [School], and he went to Philadelphia. This pastor of St. Anselm's in north Nashville, we were sharing The Princely Players with him on a grant from the OEO War on Poverty, and he was accused of running a "hate whitey" school. A couple of local policemen went to Washington and told the McClellan Committee that terrible things were going on. Jim Woodruff was his name. He, too, with German, they both went to Philadelphia. There was a lot of white fear and hackles about black separatism. But most of the stuff that went on at The Block focused on black history and black pride and music and so forth, which is why white folks were there, too, came to the performances. So, even as the black separatism grew stronger, somehow this island stayed inclusive. I am sure there were black folks who saw that as a pernicious anomaly and so on. You know, I had to learn myself that there is a racism with condescension, that just because of the awful history we have had, it still doesn't make black folks always right. As a white liberal, I guess, at the time, that was my inclination, and I had to soon learn that the only authentic thing was to give an authentic response and to say, you are not telling the truth, whether you are black or white or you are shucking and jiving or whatever else. So, there is a racism of condescension that you have to overcome as well as a racism of exclusion.

- H: Why don't we back up a little bit and talk about how specifically you became to be involved with the TCHR upon your arrival in Nashville.
- B: I came back to Nashville in 1962 to be the pastor of Carroll Street and just felt that I just had to be involved in the Movement and the demonstrations and so forth. There weren't very many white pastors doing that then, and I am sure that it was through one of these demonstrations that I probably met Baxton, and he came to me with his concerns about the War on Poverty and how that was being handled here locally. So, in both those areas, here came Baxton. In spite of [my] being a Nashvillian, still somewhat of a newcomer in 1962, back to the city after the Army and the Divinity School and so forth, and here was a guy who was really on the cutting edge of things and could challenge me to make stands. I soon became a member of the board of the War on Poverty here and had an opportunity to participate in a lot of tension in that between the goals of the program versus the local appropriation. In those two areas, both in the area of demonstrations as well as the area of OEO and the War on Poverty, I was very taken to Baxton, and we became good friends, and I was very supportive of what he was doing.

H: Talk about some of the specific projects that through the TCHR you involved yourself with then.

B: I think of things like who makes decisions about the War on Poverty. Baxton was a strong exponent of the Washington ideology that there should be maximum feasible participation and on boards and projects, the three-legged stool, the private, the public and the low-income people who are affected. It was quite a revolution at that time in decision-making. Baxton believed it, and I believed it. In a number of ways and places, controversies developed. Rallies were held. Speeches were made. Places like, I remember, First Baptist Capitol Hill, where Kelly Smith was pastor. So, that was one of the things. Another issue was the role of the Tennessee Council in organizing demonstrations, not only in Nashville but in other places as well. Baxton had a really significant role in organizing the demonstrations in Somerville. I remember participating in that and taking a walk from McFerren's Store down to the square and standing on the steps of the courthouse one Saturday while the 18-wheelers were in first gear circling around the square trying to block the sound, speaking into a bullhorn. [It] was picked up by the Sunday morning *Tennessean*. One couple saw that and joined the church at Edgehill as a result of it. Most didn't, but... But Baxton and I were not only good friends, but I became the vice president in middle Tennessee. Jim Lawson was the vice president in west Tennessee, and a guy named Bill Power was the east Tennessee person, who, I think, served time as chairman of the overall board. So, it was getting into that stuff and walking and hearing, you know, picking up the opposition and the comments and so forth. The more opposition there was, the more determined you became, that this had to be done, that it was right. You know, there were huge issues at the church at Carroll Street before Edgehill. Abel Muzorewa, who was the bishop from then Rhodesia, [now] Zimbabwe, later became, for a time, prime minister. His children were refused entrance into a confirmation class in a Methodist church near the Scarritt campus where he was studying. A terrible shame and embarrassment. The pastor felt, we are not ready for this yet. So, I invited [the bishop] to come and preach for me at Carroll Street. He preached in the fellowship hall, which was on the ground floor. Remember, this was surrounded on three sides by public housing. At that time, public housing was segregated.

The [public housing] around Carroll Street was all white. Right across the street to the east from Wharf Avenue, [was Napier Homes,] which was 450 units of all black. It wasn't until Kennedy issued an injunction that no federally subsidized housing should be segregated that it began to desegregate. Bishop Muzorewa preached in the fellowship hall, and folks started looking in the window and a crowd gathered, a mob really, screaming, yelling, cursing. Then the door flew open, and eggs were thrown in the building. So, I locked the door and pulled the shades down and let the folks out the east entrance of the building. He and I sat in my office until the crowd quieted and dispersed. I still remember walking out of

the church building. I-40 [highway] was being built across there. We went across I-40 to the parsonage, which was on the other side, and I still remember so vividly the sound of eggs cracking under our feet as we walked out, [I and] this wonderful distinguished African church leader. I mean, there were feelings as well as experiences. There were situations like that. Notes on windshields, cursing out by members and policemen and stuff like that. Those were the kinds of things that I could always talk with Baxton about. We really were friends as well as co-workers and all that. We did a number, a variety, of things together. Testifying in a federal court case about a fellow who was accused of draft-dodging. Holding a demonstration in a local restaurant because they wouldn't let long-haired people in. There was a whole bunch of human relations issues that we got involved in.

H: It sounds like a lot of the activities were sort of *ad hoc* and for specific causes. Were there any sort of sustained programs that the TCHR was involved with? I have the North Nashville Project and the South Nashville Project, things such as that, Voter Education Project perhaps later.

B: Although it was somewhat *ad hoc*, I think a sustained effort to be on the front lines and to participate in the demonstrations certainly was a consistent addressing of the whole freedom issue and the desegregation of public facilities. That all seemed like one thing to me, even though it had different locations and different circumstances.

H: How would you characterize the effectiveness of the TCHR in doing this work?

B: I think that sort of thing, as connected with other parts of the Movement, hastened at least, and most really, involved a change in the access to public facilities. I mean, without sit-ins and demonstrations and confrontations, would it have happened? I don't know if it would have happened solely by court cases. It is hard to point to any one turn of history, changes as a result of the Tennessee Council, but in Nashville, you needed an organization that had white folks in it with black folks who paid whatever costs needed to be paid to do that sort of thing, and I have no doubt that that confrontation pretty much hastened the access to public facilities. The Movement is still going on. Access to affordable housing and health care and some of those things are still very much with us. The access to facilities, C. Vann Woodward, the Yale historian, wrote an article. It was in *Atlantic* or *Harper's*. He said that the civil rights movement was a baker's dozen years, that it was 1954 to 1966. The Civil Rights Act came in 1964, [the Voting Rights Act in] 1965. But the baker's dozen years ended the public accommodations phase. If you went on from there, then you really got into systemic stuff. It didn't hurt white folks to sell more hamburgers, but if you moved on into education and into health care and housing, some of those systemic issues, it was going to cost them money. His notion was that [of the locked] white

wallets and Vietnam upstaging most everything else for resources and so on, that that was the end of the civil rights movement that focused on public accommodations, and [that part] was basically won. Methods were related to goals. Demonstrations and such, he said they worked to desegregate public facilities. I remember there was a skating rink in Nashville that had white folks in the early part of the evening and then took the bus to projects to pick up black folks from 9:00 on. Well, the congregation I was a part of, we filled the church bus up with [neighborhood] black kids, mostly from Edgehill, and went out and got in line in the early part. He closed the place. We did the same thing the next night, and he closed the place. The next night, he closed the place. The next night, he opened it. He couldn't keep closing. There wasn't any question about the power and presence of pressure of that kind of action at a time when the Supreme Court had spoken. It did definitely hasten the access.

H: So, would you agree with Woodward's assessment, based on your perspective from the local level?

D: Yes, I do think so.

H: The white wallets zipping up?

D: Yes. If you took the civil rights movement beyond public accommodations, it really would have cost money, and it should have, but that is where it stopped. Now, was Vietnam a handy out? Could we have done both? There are a lot of questions about that. I think things definitely tightened up. To have shifted into another key, into these systemic issues, where are you going to take a demonstration to protest housing segregation or educational segregation? It is not like taking it to a restaurant. King did some stuff in Chicago in housing and so forth and did the Poor People's March, but it never gelled. [End of Side 1, Tape A.]

H: Talk a little bit about the fact that Baxton Bryant was so controversial among the TCHR membership.

D: I hesitate, because there were some really fine people who objected to Baxton's leadership. You know, he was an Arkansas Razorback. He was just sort of the Falstaff, threw his head back and laughed, and it was wonderful to be on his side in some of those encounters. I just think that his decision-making in the light of rapidly changing circumstances, his lack of more orderly democratic decision-making process, plus I think the whole conflict pattern set poorly with the folks who had any significant piece of the Nashville establishment. There were liberals in that establishment, but they had a hard time with these confrontations, and he just seemed to relish that. At the restaurant Pancake Pantry down in Hillsboro Village where this long-haired friend of ours was turned away, it was December,

and when Sam got turned away, Baxton said, hey, here is a good opportunity to put a little picket-line outside this restaurant. A couple of us went inside to plead with the manager, but he thought we were communists. So, Baxton put his Santa Claus suit on and stood at the door of the restaurant and discouraged children [entering]. As the evening wore on, we were out there, and folks [inside] started making faces at Santa Claus. Some were obscene or whatever, and Santa Claus put up with that for a while. Then Santa Claus sees them eating their blueberry pancakes, and he starts picking his nose and [feigning] eating it. I don't know whether you have eaten blueberry pancakes watching Santa Claus eat his boogers or not...[Laughs]. That is when the manager called the paddy wagon. You say, what did people object to? That wasn't a daily thing, but Baxton was not averse to confronting people, verbally or otherwise. Nashville has a gentle intelligentsia in all of its universities and colleges. It set all right with some folks and didn't with others. Plus, he could have certainly been more democratic in deciding on where to demonstrate or what to do. His feeling was, his rationale was, things are changing rapidly and they are here this moment and they are gone a half hour from now. We have got to get with it and identify with the oppressed. For people who do business in a slow-calculating, orderly way, that is hard to stomach. I don't know if I'm oversimplifying that issue. I am sure that when you talk with [attorney] George Barrett, he may have some other ways of looking at that, but that is the way I saw it.

H: So, people like George Barrett and Martha Ragland, who were more accustomed to moving within different circles....

B: Well, it was either the sort of crudeness of Baxton's ways or his at times undemocratic decision-making. He tended to decide on the spur of the moment and in some ways to commit the organization without people really having a chance to slowly calculate.

H: As I understand, there was some sort of debate or disagreement over the employment of Moran and Associates. Can you bring that down a little more to earth?

B: I remember what you said, but there is a lot of rust on those wheels, and I can't remember.

H: It had something to do with fund-raising, contracting out for independent fund-raising or something to that effect?

B: You will have to get the details of that from George. I don't remember the details of that.

H: Okay. What sort of relationship did you feel that the Council had with the wider

Nashville community? Was it amenable? Were they sort of laughed at?

- B: I think on a zero to ten, it probably would have been a three or two. I think the protests within the board, I don't mean that it was reactionary, but I think it was a little chagrined at what was happening and how it was done, these confrontations and demonstrations. It wasn't just what was being done on the streets. Baxton had some juicy comments about public officials and so forth picked up by the papers, and that just added to the astonishment that somebody would use his life that way to speak to public officials and so forth. I think that while the [critics] including George [Barrett] and Adele [Schweid], [long time] good friends of mine, while they were basically supportive of desegregation and the civil rights movement, it was personal and idiosyncratic with Baxton, that he was going too far or too crude or whatever else. But if that was a six, the Nashville public was probably a three concerning the Tennessee Council. I am sure it would have been deemed by the average Nashvillian as being too radical.
- H: I know you only have a few minutes left before your next engagement. Why don't I just sort of touch on a few quick things. As I understand it, there was some sort of a boycott of the Methodist Publishing House at some point in the 1960s. Does that ring any bells?
- B: Yes. I remember I participated in that demonstration. It was over hiring practices. It was over racial representation in various categories of labor at the publishing house where everybody who was minority who worked had a low-paying job.
- H: Okay. What about the Fellowship of Southern Churchmen? Can you talk a little bit about your involvement with that group?
- B: Yes, a little. Of course, that was Will's thing [Will D. Campbell; Nashville activist and preacher, formerly of the National Council of Churches]. He headed it up. I don't know what all to say about it. It was the camp in North Carolina, probably the first place where blacks and whites could be together, near Asheville. Will just always took this extreme – in a good sense – identification with excluded and marginalized people and individuals. It was shocking to some, even some black friends, that Will would be a chaplain to the Klan. Will, you know, [had a theology that said] "we're all bastards, but God loves us anyway." Will was different from Baxton, much more gentle, diplomatic, and still quite outspoken. When Baxton left the Tennessee Council in 1971 or 1972, somewhere in there, Will got a grant – I think it was Will – for the Southern Churchmen to make Baxton's work in Canada [working with Vietnam draft-dodgers] possible, *Luke 4:16* or whatever it was called. I was on Baxton's board. Baxton's thing was that he was the bridge of reconciliation between young fellows who fled to Canada [during] Vietnam and their parents who were still in this country. So, that is what he did. He and Will were in the same office. It was always comedy in the presence of the two of them

together. They were so different and loved each other and played off each other. I don't know too much more about that.

H: Okay. Well, why don't we call it quits, then, since you are a busy man.

B: Yes. Let me do that.

[Beginning of second interview.]

H: It is July 1, 2003, and this is part two with Reverend Barnes. Reverend Barnes, I indicated that this was an issue of key concern with me, and I would like your thoughts. The fact that Nashville prided itself on its moderation as a southern city. Could you explain what that word means to you and what you think of it today?

B: I think, in the final analysis, when you pull extremes on both sides toward each other on a spectrum, I think that Nashville, certainly initially in the Movement, was very intent on keeping its historic segregation stance. On the other hand, Nashville has another side, its churches, its universities, a number of strains in the body that say compassion and concern and suffering with the other person. I think that, in a city of moderation, that that second strand moves a bit further to the center of the spectrum and becomes more powerful. The more obscene and radical and violent the response to the Movement was, the more it surfaced, that side of Nashville, too. It is like when Sheriff [Jim] Clark [sheriff who assaulted civil rights marchers in Alabama, in 1965] and the dogs and the hoses, the bombing in Birmingham and King's imprisonment and so forth, those things call forth not only a response from the northern part of the United States, but there is something in the southern culture as well [which] that sort of radical response draws forth and moves more towards center stage and, I think, exercises some power.

H: Some people have observed that Nashville was very modern in its political sense, but perhaps more conservative in a social and cultural sense. Would you agree with that?

B: I don't know that I would agree with that. I think the political was very, very much melded into the cultural. I don't think there was any one segment of life in Nashville which stood up and said, hooray for the Movement and the other part said no. I think it was an amalgam. I think the culture provided some compassion and thoughtfulness and civility as well as political. I have a hard time really separating those areas of life.

H: Talk a little bit about the segregationist mind-set in some Nashvillians like Donald Davidson and others of his ilk. How do you explain that mentality to someone like

me who is of a different generation? Is there such a thing as a thinking segregationist?

- B: I think certain things happen historically that create a culture and a mind-set. An example would be, I remember reading [Arnold] Rose's condensation of Gunnar Myrdal's book, *The American Dilemma*, where Rose was saying that the prohibitionists, the anti-segregationists, the prohibition of slavery was as strong in the South as it was in the North. It was a time when slavery was ceasing to be profitable. Then in 1832, the cotton gin was invented, and so the issue became an economic issue and not simply a religious or ethical issue or whatever. In the absence of economic swelling, slavery may well have disappeared in the South at the same time it did in the rest of the country, but I think that suddenly it became profitable to have slaves. The cotton industry was on the way. I think that when you sift a practice into the beneficiaries of the economy order, it gets a little diffuse after a while, in the sense that you can say slavery had an economic turn. What happened to the churches and the ethical people? Well, I think the economic issue had a lot to do with swaying that. You know, the denomination of the Methodist church split, a northern part and a southern part. Presbyterians and others did as well.
- H: So, how would you connect that to Jim Crow, considering that segregation was often economically inefficient?
- B: What I see is that Jim Crow, in my understanding, was a kind of attempt to nullify any economic liberation. You didn't give the acres and a mule. Jim Crow, really, I think, was a reversion back to that protection of economic superiority. You know, poll-taxes, you don't vote, and all that kind. It was a kind of a defensive movement to reverse that flow of history that came after 1865.
- H: So, it might have been inefficient for, say, governments to maintain separate schools, but for individual businesses and white owners, it was profitable in that sense, because it was less competitive.
- B: Sure, and I [am] glad you point that out, because I think when you talk about a double system of schools, nobody can say that is very economically efficient, but where the prerogatives of the, maybe aristocracy is too strong a word, but where the prerogatives of the southern elite were threatened, it wasn't a nightmare economically. It was inefficient and wasteful, but a segregated system protected the prerogatives of the halves and the more fortunate, so that there wasn't any real contradiction between a dual school system and economic well-being. I think folks saw that. You and I see that, but I think white folks then would have seen that, a segregated school system, as a way of not threatening, but protecting, the prerogatives of segregationist whites.

H: Talk a little bit about how Nashville reacted to the Black Power movement.

B: Initially, it certainly was extremely defensive. Let me give you an example. I am trying to think, it would have been the year of 1967 or 1968. The War on Poverty started in 1964 and was a very contentious thing here locally. Maximum feasible participation, the threat to the prerogatives of southern local politicians and so forth. What I am getting at is that there was an Episcopal African-American priest names Jim Woodruff who was a priest at St. Anselm's, the Episcopal chapel for Meharry and Fisk. At that time, at Edgehill Church where I was pastor, we went into an abandoned grocery store in the process of urban renewal and with a lot of good help from an African-American drama teacher at nearby Cameron High School went in a fixed that place up, and it was kind of a nice sleazy nightclub atmosphere, and it was called The Block. We are going to hang around The Block. We had also helped to develop a black singing drama group called the Princely Players. The Princely Players really were the best, if not the only, show in town in presenting black history, which was a concomitant of the whole black separatist movement. Jim Woodruff was going to have the Princely Players a certain number of nights a week and we at The Block were going to have them a certain [number of nights], pretty much of a split, I think. He also had as a part of the funding grant a school that he conducted during the day, again primarily focusing on black history and black music and so forth. At that time, there was a phenomenon called the McClellan Committee in Washington. Senator McClellan was conducting from a very conservative, reactionary stance hearings in Washington on the War on Poverty as being a misuse of funds. The accusation was made here that St. Anselm's was using federal money to conduct a "hate whitey" school. Two local police officers, Bobby Joe Hill and John Sarachi, went to Washington and testified to the McClellan Committee that that in fact was happening here. The program at St. Anselm's was cut loose. It was nullified, no more money for that. The interesting part is that the Princely Players then were able to be every night [available] at The Block. They were a wonderfully talented group, still existing and still working. One of the leaders was Robert Smith, a local African-American attorney here now. So, they performed at The Block, and The Block was packed full every night. William Kunstler once spoke there. Stokely came through town. But at the same time, the city was extremely uptight about these black history recitals, even the emphasis on black music. The black spiritual, "Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around," songs that were translated into current liberation thought.

There was a white attorney here, Charles Galbraith, whose son was involved in the drama efforts that were being made toward black liberation. He was a character in some dramas. That just hit the papers and spread like fire. So, what I am describing is a lot of negative local reactions to the whole notion of black history and black pride. I still think of that time with gratitude toward people like the Princely Players. I do know that at that time, the mayor of Nashville called the

Episcopal bishop and, I believe, Lane Denson, who at the time was a clergyman at Christ Church Episcopal, in his office and asked if there was a way to dispense with or get rid of or transfer Jim Woodruff. I guess the end of this chapter of what I am saying would be that I think they told him that they wouldn't go along with that. Then not too long after, Woodruff moved to Philadelphia and, along with him, an African-American drama teacher at Cameron, German Wilson, who had helped with the rehabilitation of the old grocery store and in the training of the Princely Players. He, too, lost his spot with the education system here, and he, too, moved to Philadelphia. I think since then, Jim Woodruff has died. I think German is still very much active.

H: Was that Mayor Briley who tried to do that?

B: Yes. That was my understanding of things.

H: How do you feel that informal race relations have changed in Nashville as opposed to institutional segregation? How has day-to-day interaction between the races changed through the 1960s and 1970s?

B: There are lots of ways to talk about that. I think it was James Baldwin who, somewhat way back in the Movement, said that comparing the North and the South, that in the South, it doesn't matter how close a black person gets as long as they don't get too high, and in the North, it doesn't matter how high a black person gets as long as they don't get too close. That probably had a great deal of accuracy, at least some years ago. I am willing to debate the accuracy now, but I think it has changed in the South. It is okay not only to be close, but to be high. I think one qualifies a statement like that by pointing to the continuing segregation of housing patterns. Nashville comparatively does well with other cities. In the number of integrated blocks, I think we are third or fourth or something like that in the nation, cities our size. I have heard Mayor [Bill] Purcell recite those figures as well. There is a great deal of appreciation for people like Sam Howard and Howard Gentry and African-American persons, [State Senator Thelma] Harper and others who have reached points of power and influence in the city [and state]. We still have not had here, as in Memphis, a black mayor, but as a person who grew up and lived here, I have certainly seen changes that would have been beyond imagination thirty-five years ago in Nashville. I think we are definitely making good headway.

Last week, when [Rosalind] Carpenter was announced as the director of the Urban League and had a reception honoring her over at the Adventure Museum, a good cross-section of the city's establishment, black and white, was present to cheer her on. So, things have changed in that respect. On the other hand, you get reports, especially from a big HUD [federal Department of Housing and Urban Development] study, showing that in terms of housing segregation, there

still is an amount of steering. [Two or] there is not as much discrimination in housing when it points to home ownership. Banks and mortgage companies have figured out ways to make money and get people qualified. But there is still a significant issue in renting, where people do testing. A black person goes in, there's no apartment. Three days later, a white person, oh, yes, sure, we've got it. That still goes on. I don't think there is any question about that. The testing process pretty much reinforces that. There is still a great reluctance to live on the same block next door to black folks on the part of white Nashvillians, though, again, that is changing some. It is certainly changing. I have never as an adult lived in a segregated neighborhood or city street and wouldn't. But, at the same time, there is a huge issue within our schools that, the more we lean toward leveling the playing field for lower-income and African-American minority students, the greater the tendency of white folks to move out or to move to more private schools. Now, does that have to do with race or just the educational quality for your children? Does it have to do with the housing prejudice, that you move out and get a better deal? I don't think there is much question, but that stew has got a big piece of racism stirring around in it.

H: Any thoughts about this question of informal race relations drawn from your experience of having the first integrated church in Nashville?

B: I still suspect that, when you compare education and the daily workplace, I suspect that churches are still among the most segregated. That Sunday morning hour is very segregated. Again, there are lots of reasons for that. The power of the development of a religious culture. The power of the church being the only institution where you [historically], as a black person, really exercise power. There are just a number of aspects of that that make the issue of black and white churches cultural issues as well as racial issues. Last Sunday, a Buddhist temple opened in Bellevue. There are Hispanic [churches]. There are different cultures as well as different races involved. In the 1960s when Edgehill took shape, there were a number of factors that pushed that. Integration was really center stage a lot. Martin [Luther] King and the whole judicial and legislative structure. We knew the terrible results of racism. Segregation is inherently discriminatory, as said by the Supreme Court in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. There were a number of pressures that made integration, and especially the desegregation of public facilities, which on the face of it was so terrible.... When that was solved, the public facilities issue, and we talked a little bit last time of this analysis of the "baker's dozen years," there is no question that, in the 1960s, there were some pressures that aren't quite the same as they are today for integration. Even though it was one of Martin King's primary goals for American society. There still is the desire on the part – I think of organizations like the NAACP and others – to see that segregation is very counter to the self-interests of minority people. There are others who feel the opposite. There are black parents in Nashville who are much more interested in being close to their

local schools than they are having their kids bused in order to be diverse. There is a tough tension going on between diversity and proximity, even now. You can't draw the lines of demarcation simply by skin color. It was easier in some ways then to marshal the forces for an integrated church. Edgehill is certainly not the only one now. I go to another congregation for worship, and it is almost 50/50, Hobson United Methodist in east Nashville. It is more of a trickle than a flood, and where it happens, it is oftentimes because of desegregated housing patterns, such as they are. But it is still a very segregated hour for the most part. It is still the dynamics of white flight. You know, we have got a long, long way to go. I think the efforts being made in housing and urban development towards smart growth and diversified housing, especially income diversity and so on, is going to move us more toward a society where housing represents choice instead of necessity.

H: Since you are so passionate about housing, why don't you talk a little more about that in Nashville in the 1960s and 1970s. What were some of the obstacles to bringing about that phase of the civil rights movement?

B: Housing in the 1960s and 1970s, really all the way back to the 1950s, to understand the increase and the solidification of housing segregation, one really has to understand federal policies. One has to understand urban renewal, the development of [large] tracts of land in the city, eminent domain, the taking of properties for the sake of widespread development. Bottom-line was that many minority houses were demolished for the sake of that kind of development. Poor people's houses were demolished. The answer for rehousing persons then was public housing. Public housing was the least expensive. I was told by a former director of the Nashville Housing Authority when I was asking, why are you putting all these public housing projects, why are you packing them all together, here in the Edgehill community at this rate? His answer was that the feds give us so many dollars per square foot, and besides, if we have a certain density, we get wholesale utility rates and so forth. So, it was a kind of economic answer that he gave. That was true, but not totally true. We launched an effort and got some changes made in Edgehill, from more public housing to more diversified types of 235s and Turnkey 3s instead of more public housing. There was some leeway. Now, was that a race and class issue? Solely an economic issue? It was probably all those things wrapped up together. But in the 1960s and 1970s, federal policies, you know, I may have mentioned this when we talked before, but after World War II, the main generators of new housing and with all of those hundreds of thousands of service personnel returning to civilian life, some tools had to be in place to help them with housing. The main tools were FHA and VA, the Federal Housing Administration and Veterans Affairs. They gave assistance. FHA insured loans that maybe traditional mortgage companies would not have insured. So, they had protection. They had coverage. At that time, there was just a flood of suburban expansion. With FHA and VA doing much of the financing or

insuring, in the years following World War II, this flood of suburban expansion, only 2 percent of the FHA loans were to non-whites. 2 percent. In the FHA guidelines, there was a phrase warning against extending mortgage to "inharmonious groups." Now, there was a lot one could say about that, what that meant in terms of exclusion, but it was happening on a quite large scale. Until 1948, even restrictive covenants were legal. Then the Supreme Court in 1948 said, no more restrictive covenants; they are unconstitutional. Incidentally, it was several years after 1948 before that took shape in FHA rule books.

Still, after World War II and this flood of people home, this flood of new housing, the GI Bill, FHA, VA loans, we are building a segregated society in terms of housing patterns. When you build a big public housing project in the middle of the city, that isn't going away in a generation, especially with so few other options. Even programs like Section Eight, where at least one aspect of that is, you get a voucher and you go look for a house that rent-wise and so forth is appropriate. One of the criticisms that HUD made of Nashville some years ago was that our Section Eight housing choices were not very diversified. They were much too inner-city. I think that happened probably in a lot of places. But talking about housing in the 1960s and 1970s and talking about federal policies, there is no question that the way race and class prejudice shaped policies during those critical expansion years, we will be living with that for yet another generation or two, at least. It is just very sad to think of what we have done with low-income housing.

H: You said, in terms of the War on Poverty, that there was some tension between the Nashville leadership and wanting these federal dollars, but also resisting the government. Could you amplify that, please?

B: Yes. Well, the way that came up, three of us went to see Mayor Briley, wanting more competent leadership in the War on Poverty programs here. In the process, we got to discussing the principles of that program, the representation of the "client" population in the boards and agencies that were making decisions to the people that he served who were less a part of the decision-making. It was really incompetent leadership, we thought. In the discussion of maximum feasible participation and some of the policies that were coming from Washington regarding this program, that is when the mayor said, there would never be a federal dollar to come into this city without his permission or the permission of the local government. We would not be bullied by these liberal expectations of Washington and Sargent Shivers and John Kennedys and those people. That was sort of the mentality.

H: The other side of that, presumably, is federal dollars *will be* allowed that I [meaning Briley] am able to control and steer.

B: Oh, sure. Nashville, Ben, did extremely well in pulling down urban renewal dollars. We did very well. Bob Horton, rest his soul – Bob was a good friend of mine – Bob did a very good job with Mayor Briley in writing proposals and getting urban renewal dollars funneled through the National Housing Authority. We had one of the first urban renewal projects in the United States with Capitol Hill.

[End of Interview.]