

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

***HISTORY OF THE COBB COUNTY BRANCH OF THE NAACP AND CIVIL RIGHTS
ACTIVITIES IN COBB COUNTY, GEORGIA***

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INTERVIEW WITH DON JOHNSON

COBB NAACP/CIVIL RIGHTS SERIES, NO. 34

CONDUCTED BY STEPHEN BRIGGS and JOHN McKAY

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Kennesaw State University Oral History Project
Cobb NAACP/Civil Rights Series, No. 34
Interview with Don Johnson
Conducted by Stephen Briggs and John McKay
Tuesday, 20 October 2009
Location: Mr. Johnson's State Farm Insurance office, Marietta, Georgia

SB: Can we begin with a little bit about you background? Can you tell us where you were born, your full name, and who your parents were?

DJ: My full name is Donald Johnson. The only person that called me that was my deceased wife, Brenda. I was born in St. Louis, one of nine children. I had eight siblings and attended public schools there in the St. Louis public school system and went to undergraduate school at Northwest Missouri State College. I got my bachelor's and master's degrees from Northwest Missouri State College which is now known as Northwest Missouri State University. I got my doctorate in education from the University of Missouri in Columbia. I alluded to my deceased wife; we were married thirty-six years. She passed, it'll be three years in December; she had a brain tumor. Since then its good news; since then I have remarried to Eva Joyce; and we've been married about five months now. I have three adult children and two granddaughters and a third one is on the way. I have Alyssa and Olivia, and I don't know the third one to be named. Since I've been married, I said three grown kids, but now two additional sons, so I have a total of five kids, all grown.

JM: That's great. Was there anybody in your life who was a particularly strong influence?

DJ: Several. It was my Dad for the values he taught me, my Dad, my high school counselor, and the college president of undergraduate school; those three were the three persons that really instilled in me the type of person I am today. Dad, Hezekiah Johnson, was the one who taught me a value system, the hard work, the integrity piece, being on time, no excuses, et cetera. The high school counselor, Mr. Catlin—what he brought out in me was more of that attitude that you can do it. You do have a skill set and you can do well, et cetera, et cetera, you can make a difference in your community or whatever. When I went on to undergraduate school, President Foster just took that to a whole new level. Dr. [Robert P.] Foster was the president of Northwest Missouri State [1964-1977]. What I mean by that, he just guided me professionally. That's one of the reasons I have my doctorate degree. I wanted to emulate him to be a college president, et cetera. So, Dad, the hard work, the value, keeping your promises; Mr. Catlin got me out of the shell that you can make a difference; and then President Foster—we have been friends forty years, and any career decisions or anything like that I relied on Dr. Foster and sought his counsel for that.

JM: What time was this, 1960s, 1970s?

DJ: Yes, it was in the mid-1960s. I graduated from high school in 1967 and then that's when I went on to undergraduate school at the Northwest Missouri State University. That's

when we start having a relationship with President Foster. One of the very special things, he offered me a job after I graduated from Northwest Missouri State College to be on his administrative team.

JM: Who is this again?

DJ: Dr. Foster, President Foster. It was in the mid-1960s until now. He passed about two years ago. We stayed friends, and I had a career path of higher education and strictly because of Dr. Foster. Very special.

SB: Wow. Were the schools still segregated when you went to school as a youngster?

DJ: Northwest Missouri State had a student body enrollment of about five thousand students, and they had less than fifty black students, so, yes, it was [virtually segregated]. It was quite an experience coming from the inner city of St. Louis from a predominately black high school. The student body at the high school I attended had about twenty-four hundred students, and then going to Northwest Missouri State in Maryville, Missouri—they had about five thousand, so it was interesting. It was a culture shock. There were not any blacks that lived in the city of Marietta. There were not any black faculty members during that time, and I think they only had about fifty black students.

JM: Can I ask for clarification, do you mean the city of Maryville?

DJ: Yes, city of Maryville. Northwest Missouri State University is located in Maryville, Missouri. So yes, it was a different cultural experience. I think the value systems that my Dad taught me really helped me to matriculate there, the hard work, not making any excuses, et cetera, doing your best, doing more than what is required. Those were those fundamental values. Yes, there was a different cultural experience, but you just said, “Look, you can do this. I expect you [to stay there.] You can’t come home. You’ve got to graduate.” When it became challenging and I felt like I wanted to quit or make excuses, I thought about my Dad.

SB: Your Dad embedded that in you?

DJ: Yes. And he passed when I was a senior in high school. So I was a young man when he passed. He died of stomach cancer. April 1, 1967, that’s when he passed. I didn’t start Maryville until like January of 1968.

JM: So he was already a strong influence.

DJ: He was; that was it. Even today, I think some of those same principles and values, I have instilled in my sons. Being respectful, showing up on time, keeping your word, if you say you’re going to do it, do it, not making excuses, et cetera. With seven boys and two girls, nine of us, he was just a non-nonsense type of man. That really drove me because my secondary school experiences—I didn’t do well academically. I mean, I was not valedictorian or whatever; I did not do well.

SB: Just got by?

DJ: Just got by. Then that's when Mr. Catlin, the high school counselor, just started mentoring me. "Johnson," he used to call me, "Johnson, you can do better than this. You can do this. Your grades are not indicative of your ability." And that's when I started making a change because he kept on saying it. I used to go by his office often.

SB: And he knew your father?

DJ: Yes. Mr. Catlin is the one that personally took me to Maryville. They had a counselor's day there at the college for all the high school counselors in the State of Missouri. It was some kind of conference, and he drove me up there. I didn't have the financial resources, so he drove me up there and underwrote the cost for the hotel and the meals and et cetera. He's the one that really talked to the president about me.

SB: How old were you when you came to Cobb County?

DJ: Probably about thirty-six. I have to think back. Yes, I was thirty-six.

SB: When you came to Cobb County, could you see the contrast as far as the schools, the impact of the formerly segregated schools? Were they adequately funded, and could you see these differences between the treatment of white and black students?

DJ: I knew when I first came to Cobb and that was . . .

JM: Was that about 1985?

DJ: Yes, about '85. My deceased wife was an educator, and she was employed in the Cobb County School District as a reading specialist. So, we knew about the schools that had a large percentage of black students—maybe Osborne and South Cobb High School, et cetera. I didn't answer the question; did we see the disparity or anything?

SB: Yes, obviously it was integrated by then, in '85.

DJ: Yes, it was '85, but when we came here, my sons attended Big Shanty Elementary School, then Awtrey Middle School, and eventually both of them graduated from North Cobb High School. During that time they had a small percentage of black students.

SB: So as far as when you came to Cobb County, the race relations did you see, in the mid-1980s the contrast between whites and blacks as far as comparing opportunities for African Americans?

DJ: No, not really. It goes back to our upbringing and the expectations of our kids. There could have been some differences, but we just expected excellence out of our sons. My upbringing was parallel with my wife's upbringing. So, yes, there was some difference, but we didn't tolerate any of it. We just expected our sons to do well, and they usually did pretty well. I don't know if that answers your question, I mean, as far as in the student government, opportunity to participate in Model United Nations, all these programs were available for all the students, and they took advantage of them.

SB: Did you see it in other people, other African Americans or did you see the contrast?

DJ: Yes, I saw it. A lot of the African American students were not as engaged in the programs. But going back to what Brenda, my deceased wife, and I taught our kids—we taught them to get involved. That was it. So, yes, some of them did not get involved as much. A little background: both of us were St. Louisians, but we left St. Louis and moved to Pensacola, Florida, and then moved from Florida to Charleston, West Virginia, because I was in labor relations with a different company. We moved around, and we didn't get involved that much. If we were there at PTA meetings, we knew our kids' teachers, et cetera. We expected the teachers to teach, and we would be the parents. Yes, there was some disparity in treatment with kids if they got some disciplinary action. If the kids got in trouble, maybe an African American student got more days suspended than a white student. Yes we saw that.

SB: You being from Missouri, compared to the southern states you didn't see a lot of that.

DJ: Right, right. I was born and raised in St. Louis, and really having the Northwest Missouri State College experience, and then my wife went to school at Harris Teacher's College in St. Louis. Then I did graduate work at a major university, the University of Missouri in Columbia, which has about thirty-five thousand students. So to compete on that level, [I give credit to] the influence of Dr. Foster. So, when we moved from St. Louis, yes, there was discrimination and dual classes, et cetera. But we were taught the opportunity is there, and you need to take advantage of it. We instilled the same principles in our sons. When we selected schools, we expect our sons to behave—and they did behave—and take advantage of educational opportunities.

SB: What made you get into the insurance business?

DJ: That's a good question. As I reflect back, it was my former agent, a guy named Gaddis Young. State Farm was aggressively during that time because of the demographics trying to get blacks to be owner agents. My agent . . .

SB: When was this?

DJ: I started my agency on March 1, 1986, but I've been a State Farm policyholder for years. I had my insurance portfolio in St. Louis and transferred it to Florida and West Virginia. So, the answer to your question, how did I get it, my agent said, "Don, you would be ideal in this business! Why don't you consider doing this?" I wasn't really all that

motivated about it, but he kept on encouraging me, so it was truly a blessing. Now one of the questions, how did I get to Marietta? I was in the private sector. I left the educational enterprise. I had a principalship. After I got my degree from the University of Missouri, Columbia, we moved back to St. Louis, and I was a high school principal, and my wife was an elementary teacher. Then I interviewed with Monsanto Company. Monsanto Company is the first ones that made Astroturf. I got hired on with them, and I moved to Pensacola, Florida. I've always been very aggressive. I didn't stop. But I was intrigued in teaching. I did some graduate work. But we left St. Louis and moved to Pensacola. Back in the South, we still demanded excellence. My kids were small, but we demanded excellence. Quincy, the older son, was the only black in one of the elementary schools he went to. Devin was a Floridian; he was not born [in Missouri]; but we still demanded excellence; the same values that were taught to us we instilled in them. Then I got promoted from Pensacola to Charleston, West Virginia. That was a culture shock, moving from Pensacola, from a non-union facility to an organized facility, a union plant.

JM: You didn't want to make that move?

DJ: No, it was a career move. But it was a big transition. You go from Pensacola, in the South, kind of laid back, to Charleston, West Virginia, and that was a union plant. That was very hostile, very adversarial. The bargaining unit was the Steel Workers of America, and they were just mean and angry and anti-management, oh, man. But my mentor said, "Don, if you want to move up the company, you've got to get some union experience." So I went there and stayed there. So we were there from a career perspective, but from a—you had asked the question—from a quality of life, we didn't like it. My Brenda did not like it, having our son the only black in the school. The SMSA, the Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area, contained only a small percentage of blacks.

JM: And this is in Pensacola?

DJ: No, this is in West Virginia. To make a long story short on that, I left Monsanto, and a lot of people are not aware of it, I joined Lockheed. A headhunter, a recruiter came in and recruited me and said you have the skill sets for Lockheed. Your question earlier, how did I get in the insurance business, I was in Human Resources at Lockheed, and then I got recruited with State Farm, from Lockheed to State Farm. That's how I opened up my agency. Does that make sense?

SB: Yes. You already had an interest in it before?

DJ: No, I was with Monsanto, and then I moved here to work at Lockheed. I was working at Lockheed, and State Farm was recruiting blacks. My local agent here was talking to me about being an agent with State Farm.

JM: And that's Gaddis Young?

DJ: That's Gaddis Young.

- JM: It was the Lockheed job that brought you to this area?
- DJ: Right. I was recruited and joined Lockheed. That was a great experience. If you worked in the private sector, and then you go to a defense contractor, it's two different animals. Defense contractor is more governmental regulated, and in the private sector you have a lot more autonomy and et cetera. The experience that I had with Monsanto was excellent; the experience I had with Lockheed was excellent; but it was just totally different. It was different. So when Gaddis Young was saying, "Hey Don what do you think about a different career," I was receptive to it because I made a family decision to move from Charleston, West Virginia because Brenda was not happy, if you understand, my family was not happy from a quality of life. So we moved here to Marietta, Georgia, so we were happy here.
- SB: As far as getting involved in the real estate business, how did you do that? You have all these credentials.
- DJ: Yes, it was just really the hard work that Hezekiah—that's my Dad's name; he used to be called HK. As I understood having your own agency with State Farm, it was just really establishing centers of influence. The realtors were a good match twenty-three years ago, it was ideal. The housing market was outstanding, et cetera. Atlanta was just a great place to start a business. It really was. State Farm's brand was the largest homeowner insurer in the industry, and we still are today, so it really was engaging with realtors. I got involved with the Cobb Association of Realtors, the Young Realtors, the Women's Association of Realtors—I was an affiliate of the year. It was a good collaboration. Everything is about relationships. They felt comfortable with me as a professional. People were moving into Cobb County. It was just growing like, I think in 1995 we had a little less than five hundred thousand people. Now in '07 we've got a little less than a million people, so it's almost doubled. It just grew. And the realtors were an ideal as far as networking. As I got involved with the realtors, with the Mortgage Bankers Association, mentoring organizations—I think I'm a teacher by trade, and it was just really serving. My dad always said, "Make a difference in the community where you live." So when my sons were small I was a Cub Scout master, I was a Scout master, my wife was a den leader, so we've just always been engaged. It's just been good.
- SB: A lot of options.
- DJ: Yes. As a result of that, people do business with people that they like and trust. You've got the same value system. As a result of that, I was just getting business. I mean, people were just saying, "Hey, call Don, call Don." This community has been great for me, really great.
- SB: You could have gone in any direction and you would have been all right.

DJ: I think as I reflect back—being in education, being an administrator, I was a college instructor, being in labor relations, that means you’ve got to persuade. Having a staff job, not a line job, with Monsanto taught me, having a staff job you don’t have line responsibility, so that means you’ve got to use your communication skills, your persuasion skills all the time. You cannot tell anybody to buy an insurance policy; you’ve got to give them the data so they can make a decision. I think it was just really good preparation to be a business owner. As I reflect back, I know I benefit greatly, but I think by being a teacher, being a principal, being in Human Resources, labor relations, all those other disciplines helped prepare me to be the type of professional I am today because I can talk with an executive at Lockheed or IBM. I understand their benefit package because I did some re-engineering, downsizing, and I know their benefits. I can talk to somebody that cleaned the school because I was in the business. Everybody is important. So I knew it, and I think it just really prepared me. I didn’t plan it that way; it just happened; I’ve just truly been blessed. It allowed me to be able to interface with a lot of different people, on different levels and things like that and it just helped me.

SB: Lots of open doors. The Cobb Chamber of Commerce, tell me a little bit about that.

DJ: Oh, that’s been great. With anything my Dad used to say you get what you put into it. So I had two tours with the Chamber. The first time I just paid my membership and was not engaging, and I didn’t get the return. I very seldom went there. So the second time I’ve been engaged with the Chamber now about twenty-three years. The first time I was just paying my membership and I thought people will call me. Then I said this is not smart. I’m paying the membership fee. You’ve got to get involved. That’s when I started getting involved with the Chamber. They had an ambassador program, the Cobb Chamber, and the ambassador program was a program that you go out to be an agent for the Chamber, somebody who recently joined the Chamber, and tell them that they just made a good investment by joining the Chamber. What’s a better way to get new clients? I mean, it took me awhile, I wasn’t that smart, but after I did it . . .

SB: A business move.

DJ: I mean, really. I had my Chamber hat on, they would see me. I had a name tag that I carried. I told them about, you know, you get a reduced fee for your insurance, and they’ve got all these educational classes with the Chamber and when we met and et cetera, and that the Chamber is divided into area councils and et cetera, et cetera, and by the way, then they would say, “Oh, Don, you’re with State Farm. I’m closing on a house.” Or, “I need some life insurance.” Or, “I need whatever.”

SB: It just fell in your lap.

DJ: It was just there. I mean, these were decision makers; these were the presidents of the companies and CEO’s, and it worked so well I quit doing it. That’s kind of joke, but sometimes when things go well you get the big head and you quit doing it, but that was a good one. So by them, the ambassador program—I worked that, and that was good as far as a marketing venue for me. Then I got a little bit more involved in the East Cobb since

my agency is here. They have area councils, so I became involved in my community. I became the chair of the East Cobb Area Council. I served on the board many years. Then I got involved in the Rotary as far as giving, all these, and then I was the Rotarian of the Year, and I've been serving on the board of directors. It's the economic engine for the community. The Chamber has been good. I get asked, and I tell them the two stories. I had two tours. The first tour, involvement I didn't do anything, and I didn't get anything. The second time, I've been head of the membership drive for the Chamber; I've been a chair of the Small Business; then something that HK said, "If you're going to do it, you've got to get involved." By getting involved then people like you, trust you, respect you, and the result of that is I got business out of it. If they have the same values, and they trust you, then you get business out of it. So the Chamber has been an excellent experience for me. The First Monday breakfast and I still attend the classes and et cetera, so it's been great.

JM: Their website lists you as a special appointee for State Farm. What does that entail?

DJ: What that means is on the board of directors, the chairman of the board of directors, they have different people that they can appoint, that they have good influence to serve as an advisor. Let me illustrate a little bit better. When I was the chair of the Cobb Chamber East Cobb Division I'm automatically on the board, okay, and there are about three or four board members from the East Cobb area council that serve on the big board of the Chamber. You've got all these, you've got the East Cobb, the North Cobb, et cetera. The chair of the board of the Cobb Chamber gets to appoint people. I'm not as much engaged after my wife got sick, with the East Cobb; I kind of backed off. They still wanted me, they felt like my contribution—so I was appointed by the Chair of the Cobb, Dr. Lisa Rossbacher, she appointed me. She's the current chair. She's the president of Southern Poly. So she appointed me because of my involvement in previous years on the Chamber and my engagement in the community, et cetera, et cetera.

Now some of the other things—as a result of the Chamber, I was asked to serve as the chair of the United Way for Cobb County, and I think we raised at that time a little less than nine million dollars. So I was the chair, and I had a board, and as a result that opened me up to the thirteen metropolitan counties, so I was the chair of the United Way Cobb. That was an easy one to serve because I gave this talk when I was a commencement speaker—I don't know if you knew that I was a commencement speaker at KSU for the summer commencement.

JM: When was this?

DJ: This past July, just three months ago. I was a commencement speaker for the three colleges: the College of Humanities and Social Sciences, the College of the Arts, and the College of Science and Mathematics or whatever. But I was telling the students, "You've got to get involved in something." Here's the point that I'm making. You've got to get involved in a cause or something that's greater than you. So when I was asked to serve on the United Way to head up that campaign, it was easy for me to say yes because when I was a young lad growing up in St. Louis, there was a United Way agency that my

brothers and I used to play at. It was called the Wesley House. It was an after school program, recreational program, educational program. So I just visualized United Way as the Boys and Girls Club, the Red Cross, all the great things, so that was easy. That was easy for me to do because I benefited from various United Way agencies. That one exposed me to the chair of the entire United Way for all the thirteen counties. He was the CEO of United Parcel, UPS. I was on his cabinet, and so I got a chance to interface with him and other people outside of Cobb. I would not have probably met the CEO of United Parcel if I was not involved with United Way, so that exposed me to that, and he gave me that little card over there; that was his little gift when I started. That's the United Way. That was a good experience.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

SB: You mentioned a bit earlier about the Kennesaw State University, and I just wanted to see your involvement, if you could go a little bit more in depth.

DJ: I started having a relationship—I think Kennesaw is an excellent value. When my sons were, I think maybe in seventh or eighth grade they had a math and science summer camp, and they were blessed to be selected into a two-week experience at the university. This was maybe fifteen years ago when my boys were selected to be participants in the program. The director was a guy named Dr. Army Lester; he was over that. That was the first time that I started being associated with KSU when my sons were involved in it and I was involved in it. I took them there; I got to know it; so that's when I started learning about the university. I've taken classes there, computer classes to keep my skills current, so I've done that. We started a youth mentoring organization called BUY, Inc. I was one of the founders of that. That is a youth leadership development organization; we started that about seventeen years ago. Kennesaw is a partner. They allow us to have classes there at the university. My wife served as a reading instructor at Kennesaw. She worked with student teachers, so it was just a good fit. With those that I enumerated: my sons in the summer math and science camp; the youth development, BUY, that stands for Blacks United for Youth Cobb, Incorporated. It's a non-profit 501c3, and it is three tiered, leadership, scholarship, and mentorship. We had classes there at the university; the university was very receptive; we have different modules there on the campus; so I just think so much of the university. Our church, the church that I attend, we have an annual Kennesaw State University day. I attend Zion Baptist Church. The day I was asked to be the commencement speaker for the summer—that was really an honor. That was an experience; I was honored to do that. When Dr. [Daniel S.] Papp was selected as president of KSU he formed a Citizen Advisory Committee and the purpose of that is to be auditors for the university. If anything we are stakeholders making sure that we are delivering those services. We meet once a quarter; and he got the mayors of the various cities to serve on that board, the mayor of Marietta, Powder Springs, Austell, and Chairman Sam Olens is on the board; it's a fairly good board to make sure that the

university is doing what they're supposed to be doing. So I got to know Dr. Papp in working with him. Just recently I was asked to serve on the Foundation board; I serve on that. We're having our fortieth anniversary for the Foundation this coming Saturday, the 24th. So we're having a big program. I just was approved to serve on the trustee board for the university about a year ago. So my association with the university has been good. I think eventually after I retire in the insurance and financial services, I read and I write, and I think I would like to do some teaching. What I'm really passionate about, you can tell where a person's interest lies on how they spend their volunteerism, so it's really youth programs and senior citizens. I'm very much active in youth programs and senior citizens. I don't have any plans on retiring soon, but I would probably like to do some teaching. I think Kennesaw is an excellent university, excellent, good value.

SB: It doesn't seem like you'll ever retire.

DJ: I'm having fun.

SB: Army Lester was a teacher of mine in science.

DJ: Right. I think he's a professor of biology now. We attend the same church, but that's how I got to know Dr. Lester when my sons were selected in math and science and the university was trying to get more African American students to get engaged in those disciplines. One of my sons, Quincy, graduated from North Cobb and graduated from Georgia Tech. He was a double engineering major there. The other son from North Cobb went to West Georgia University. He's in sales, marketing and business.

SB: Have you seen, as far as—I'm going off the topic of Kennesaw a little bit—but have you seen racial barriers? You discussed the business field; have you seen racial barriers in the business field?

JM: Have you seen the racial barriers in the business in the Cobb community change since you've been here?

DJ: Yes.

JM: Can you explain that process?

DJ: Going back to my early observation, the value system, the hard work, and delivering a quality product. I guess when I started my agency in '86 with State Farm, I think, yes, there were and have been in East Cobb some challenges, but if you deliver a quality product, if you're a professional, you know what you're doing, you do the things that HK taught me, show up and show up on time, keep your word and this and that and have a strong financial organization to back you, you're going to be successful. Yes, there are some biases and prejudices. I'm not living in a vacuum. There is, but I think if you work hard and do what you're supposed to do, I've found that people don't really care. I really don't.

JM: That's great.

SB: I've lived here since 1992, and I'm going to ask you this question because since the 1990s there's been a large influx of African Americans moving into Cobb. Why choose Cobb County?

DJ: The demographics have increased. Why Cobb County? I think from the quality, first, young families move into a location strictly for the schools. That's probably really the most important decision. If they have school-aged kids, they want to be in an area that has good schools. Cobb is a good school system. Now, I worked with Cobb on the SPLOST—Special Purpose Local Options Sales Tax—so on the first one I was with, that was when Senator Isakson headed that up and Earl Smith. In SPLOST Number 2, that was David Connell, and then SPLOST Number 3 that was just approved, that was with the person that's Otis Brumby's son-in-law who works at Johnny Isakson's office, he was on his campaign or something. In answer to your question, why would blacks move into Cobb, it's because of the schools. And, why east Cobb, it's because of the schools. You've got Walton, one of the best schools in the country, and then you've got Pope, and you've got Wheeler, magnet schools, you've got Kennesaw, I mean, Kell, et cetera, it's strictly the schools. That would be the reason why.

SB: This is a bit current. This is October 1. I saw an article with you and Winston Strickland. What's your relationship with him, and have you been influential to each other?

DJ: Yes, we're friends, and he's my barber; he cuts my hair. That's one of the things. I think I've been in Cobb for twenty-five years, so we're friends, real good friends. He's supported me, and that article in the paper, being my barber, I frequent his restaurant for the good old soul food et cetera. Yes, he's a good friend. And he's been here in this community for over forty years. When I first got here he was one of the persons that you should get to know. Charles Ferguson was one that was very much engaged in the community. Hugh Grogan was on the city council. So Hugh, Charles Ferguson and Strick. Dr. Fisher was another one who's been here, so that's really it. Black parents aren't any different than any white parent. Black parents want good schools for their kids too, so it's the same decision-making process. They see what the test scores and things like that, the teachers there, the academic standards of the teachers and et cetera, so they want the same thing. Now there may be some economic challenges; they might not be able to afford a house over in East Cobb or whatever, but I think schools really drive the decision. That's why a lot of people live in Cobb and work in other communities, because of the schools. No doubt.

SB: This is kind of an in depth question based on a bit of history, but what do you think had the largest effect—this is something questioning through Dr. Scott's class; it's one of the overall questions you ask yourself, learning about integration and Cobb County and that. But what do you think had the largest effect on integration—the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Brown vs. Board of Education, Voting Rights Act of '65, and why are there such large gaps in the racial tension, dealing with African Americans going back to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendment. I know it's a long question, but as far as why are there these

setbacks? You've got the Thirteenth Amendment and then the Fourteenth and then it goes to the turn of the century, it kind of set back. Around the turn of the century of course you have a lot of racial tension, and then the Tuskegee experiment should have opened the doors, and there shouldn't have been any questioning. And then after World War II, of course, the African-American contribution to that, it shouldn't have taken so long, but then there was always another ten years. I guess my question is, what do you think had the largest effect?

DJ: Is the question what is the largest effect as far as African Americans making a contribution or what is the impact, why is it that there is contribution and then there's a delay, there's a delay in it?

SB: Yes, I guess it's kind of a double question.

DJ: I think if you dissect it starting with the former, I think you look at those warriors, those soldiers that in the mid-1960s, in my generation, Dr. Martin Luther King, Andy Young, Maynard Jackson, Shirley Chisholm, Barbara Jordan, those are really outstanding, competent people. Some were in politics. The high school I attended had outstanding faculty members; they demanded excellence. They just said, maybe integration really hurt blacks because you had black teachers that demanded [excellence from] blacks. I read an article in the *Wall Street Journal* not too long ago about this one person who graduated from public schools who was black and did not have one black, male teacher. That was appalling. I mean, you go through thirteen years, whatever number of years it takes to graduate, and he did not—and this was recently—have one black, male teacher.

JM: Neither did I.

DJ: We can dissect that. There are a lot of reasons for that, maybe the benefits or the recognition, et cetera. But there are some good things about it. Now you've got the most influential man in the whole world; that's President Obama. So now that is significant. I thought I would never see that in my lifetime where an African American would be the President of the United State of America. I told my sons that you can do anything you want to do, but I didn't believe that. So I think that is an accomplishment for President Obama, but it says something about the conscience and the character of the country. If you can perform, you will be recognized. I'm not naïve to think—it's appalling that this Congressman from South Carolina has just been totally disrespectful to the president when he called him a liar. That is deplorable, and I don't think that would have been done if he was a white person. I don't think that. Disregarding politics, it's just being disrespectful to the position, the most influential person in the whole world, regardless of the politics, that's totally disrespectful. And that says a lot. And the thing about it, it says that even the contributions for this Congressman have gone up because he made that statement. That's bad. That is bad. That just says we're not there yet. It just goes back to being totally disrespectful. You don't stand up in a meeting and talk to the President. Nobody does that to President Papp, I mean, you don't even do that to Dr. Scott. You don't stand up to your professor and say, "You're a liar." I mean, and no consequences. Nothing.

- SB: We look up to people in that position.
- DJ: Yes. To build the race relations, that says a lot that someone felt comfortable to say that in an open forum like that. So that's just bad. I totally disregard; just because of the position it shows disrespect. It goes back to my value system that you've got to be respectful to people and you've got to be respectful to the President of the United States.
- SB: You actually mentioned something else, going back to the overall question that has to do with the class, what we've learned so far, we found that integration did not always have a positive affect. I don't know if you experienced that coming from Missouri, but first-hand sources, some of the people that we've gone to . . .
- DJ: Yes, the literature, excuse me for cutting you off, the literature will support that the academic achievement of African American students went down due to integration. You got better tools, books and whatever, but the commitment or the expectations from the teachers, the requirements went down. I went to an all-black high school, and those teachers were demanding. Now something from an earlier question, what used to frustrate my wife when she was in the school system in Cobb County is that the teachers were not as demanding of the students. If the kid so happened to be black, if he did not create a problem, let him sleep, I mean, let him sleep. Whereas a black teacher may say, "Now, look, you're not going to sleep in my classroom." You cannot give me that you had to work last night or come from a single parent family or all these excuses. Whereas, the white teachers might think as long as he slept, where he didn't create any problem, let him go to sleep and tolerate that, where in some black schools the teacher would not accept that. Now some black teachers would probably do the same thing. If the kid is disruptive they would probably let him sleep too, and it goes back to the expectation of the faculty. Does that make sense?
- SB: Yes, definitely.
- DJ: My wife used to say that she saw that. She experienced it being an educator in the school system; there were dual standards. Where she was in elementary school, she was a third grade teacher. The parents know who the good teachers are. She was always sought after because she was demanding, both from the black parents and the white parents. If you had a reputation of just being easy, the parents said no. The parents sought her out because she was demanding. She demanded and required that the kids do their work and turn it in and required that they behave and et cetera. I don't know how we can mandate that, the commitment, the passion and plus, if the teachers do not have the support from the parents, what can you do? You see what I'm saying? I don't know if it would be Fred Sanderson's problem—he's the superintendent of schools—if this kid is not taking advantage of all the opportunities. You can say it's a race problem but I think that's just a cop out. So a lot of the responsibility goes to the parents, and the expectations.
- SB: Yes, because you've earned every title, but what we saw was a lot of African Americans felt like they lost a sense of community when the schools integrated. It was actually an

eye-opener to me going to the Rosenwald School in Acworth and speaking to City Council member Tim Houston who experienced integration [when he transferred from the Roberts School to Acworth School] and saying that he lost a sense of community and that the value and the quality wasn't there once it was integrated. Do you believe it's a view of most African Americans?

DJ: Well, if you read the literature, I think the attrition rate is higher for black students than white students, and I think the accomplishments of blacks, if you did a study, if you looked at it, you all are historians, if you looked at pre-integration and post-integration, the literature will support that the educational institutions are not graduating as many students in the sciences and math and things like that. Does that have a correlation to integration? I don't know. I think a lot of it has to do with the expectations of the parents. I think the biggest thing, just like my wife and my deceased wife, we were instilled at a young age about the importance of education. So I think a lot of it, you can't blame totally on integration. There are some different types of racist things that are occurring, but if the parents are not involved in the educational experiences of their kids, I think that has a lot to do with it too. There are a lot of other social issues, but I think the parents play a major role, major, major role. Then you get into the economics about it, but most of these kids are being raised by a single parent family, and that is bad, especially for young men. A mother cannot raise a boy to be a man. They can't; they just really can't. So you need to have a man in the household to really raise a man. You cannot. A mother will do the nurturing, support and try to provide, but the responsibility, being polite, be a man, there's got to be a father. What's deplorable is that there are not many men in the household today. That just perpetuates the problem. The mothers are doing probably as well as they are capable. Now is that an educational, is that an integration problem? No, I think that is a cultural problem. That's what President Obama ran on. He just ran on excellence in everything. When he was speaking a month ago his talk was not directed toward the African American community. He was talking about academic excellence for everybody, and that was more inclusive. We need to articulate that message more and more, be more engaging in this.

SB: Keeping the families together.

DJ: Right.

SB: All right. Well, it's been great, and I really appreciate your time. Anything else to add?

DJ: No, I don't have anything. Okay, well, give my best to Dr. Scott.

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