

Conversations with Theodore C.
 (“Ted”) DeLaney, Jr.

VI: “Desegregation in
Southwestern Virginia:
An Oral History Project

With David S. Peterson, Interviewer

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Transcription: Barbara Muller

Video Production: Dave Pfaff

Series Editor: David S. Peterson

Peterson: Welcome. I'm David Peterson, professor of Renaissance history here at Washington and Lee University. It's August 31, 2018. I'm here with my good friend and colleague, Ted DeLaney, for another one of our conversations about his remarkable career at Washington and Lee University and his remarkable life in Lexington. Ted, I'd like to focus today on a research project that you've had some interest in, I believe, for a number of years, going back at least to the time you wrote a thesis for Holt Merchant on the desegregation of Lexington. I gather this project has grown and expanded over the years, and I wonder if you could summarize briefly how the project and your interest in desegregation evolved.

DeLaney: First of all I would back up a little bit because it was not a thesis, it was an independent study paper, and the independent study paper focused on the displacement of black teachers, local black teachers, during the desegregation crisis. I did not experience desegregation. I was in sixth grade when *Brown v. Board of Education* was promulgated and, when I finished twelfth grade, schools in Lexington and Rockbridge County and most of Virginia were still segregated. So my younger siblings experienced desegregation but I did not because full desegregation of schools does not occur in Rockbridge County and the City of Lexington—well, the Town of Lexington, at the time—until 1966. So it's fully fourteen years after the *Brown* decision. Virginia's policy was “we will close our schools rather than desegregate.” The nickname for that was “massive resistance,” this whole idea that everybody would be punished in Virginia, white and black, by closing public schools to resist desegregation. That was state policy. That state policy persisted for two or three years after the *Brown* decision, but then was very, very effective in different but more moderate phases of preserving segregation until the mid 1960s.

Peterson: Okay. Could you explain where this idea of “separate but equal,” to which *Brown* versus Board of Education was a response and a sort of rebuttal, where did the idea of separate but equal schools originate?

DeLaney: The idea of separate but equal schools originated with the Supreme Court in a test case that occurred in 1895 called *Plessy v. Ferguson*. Essentially what the Supreme Court does is that they agree to hear a test case that had been completely contrived both by the railroad interest and by civil rights activists in the city of New Orleans. The attorney, who had been a union officer in the Civil War, Albion Tourgée, is quite an interesting white man who represents Homer Plessy in this case. Homer

Plessy was what in New Orleans would have been called a Creole, really a misuse of the term Creole which, for New Orleans, means mixed race, a mixed race man whose features were essentially that of a white man. Tourg e's argument in this case was that race is an arbitrary distinction and that Homer Plessy should not be denied his rights because of African-American heritage. The Supreme Court rules in this case that separate or segregated train cars are legal, but legal only if they are equal. The problem with separate but equal is that that is not the way it is enforced. The equal part of it is almost always ignored after 1895.

The important concept here, however, is that the same decision and some movement toward that decision generated the earliest of the civil rights organizations. In the 1890s, you've got the formation of the Afro-American Council and the Afro-American League. After that, there was W.E.B. DuBois' attempt to form a civil rights organization, something he calls the Niagara Movement. By 1910, as a result of these segregation laws that are evolving, there's the establishment of the NAACP, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. So there is a very, very long view that scholars take today of the civil rights movement, rather than starting with the 1960s when, suddenly, things are being desegregated. It doesn't come out of nowhere in the 1960s. It's a long struggle that begins in the 1890s, and part of that struggle in the 1890s was the result of this Supreme Court case. If we can fast-forward, however, to the mid-twentieth century, you see the court moving away from this. As early as 1938, there is a Supreme Court ruling called *Gaines versus Canada*. There's a guy named Lloyd Gaines who applies to law school at the University of Missouri and is denied on account of his race. Missouri offers to send him to Washington to Howard University School of Law rather than have him admitted to the University of Missouri. The Supreme Court says "absolutely not" because he has the disadvantage of not having a peer group that he's trained with, that he would end up practicing law with, and that he has a constitutional right to be a part of the state and the state's only law school. They order the admission of Lloyd Gaines. The tragedy of Lloyd Gaines is we don't know what happened to him. He disappears from the face of the earth. He never ends up matriculating. That's the earliest decision that goes in the opposite direction.

A few years later, I think the case is 1941, there's a case called *Alston versus Norfolk City School Board*. In the *Alston* case, this guy named Melvin Alston, who had been a teacher in Norfolk, sues to get equal pay for black teachers. Much to his surprise and delight, or to the surprise and delight of a lot of other people, the fourth circuit court of appeals, of which Virginia is a part, upheld the idea of equal

pay for black teachers. The Supreme Court let that decision stand. They decided they would not hear an appeal to that decision. All through the '40s you've got some real interesting things that happen.

One of the things that is most interesting that most Americans don't know is in the '40s there's another case called Morgan versus Virginia. It's like an early Rosa Parks case. There's this woman named Irene Morgan who boards a Greyhound bus in Gloucester, Virginia, where she had been visiting her mother. She's going back to Baltimore to join her husband. She has just had a miscarriage. It's a hot, summer day. The bus fills up. She's sitting in the back in the seats that are reserved for blacks, but bus drivers would call for those seats if the bus filled up with white passengers. She's ordered to get up. She refuses. She's arrested. She's fined a hundred dollars. The Supreme Court in Morgan versus Virginia gave the win to Morgan and ruled that segregation on interstate commerce was unconstitutional. There's a positive win that inspires as early as 1947 Freedom Rides to test the court's decision. We could go on and on. There are two desegregation cases that deal with graduate school in 1950 where the court rules in favor of the black plaintiffs. And so nobody had any doubt that the court was moving in the direction of Brown.

With the court's movement toward Brown, the interesting thing with Washington and Lee history is that the lawyer who had argued the most cases before the Supreme Court in his lifetime ends up being the lawyer for the segregationists in Brown v. Board and he's one of our graduates. He ran for president in 1924. His name is John W. Davis. There's a huge portrait of him over in the law school. A moot court competition is named for John W. Davis. John W. Davis is, ironically, on the wrong side of this decision. He is up against a young black lawyer who had been going to the Supreme Court for years when he knew that John W. Davis was going to be arguing a case, to learn from watching John W. Davis, and that was Thurgood Marshall. Thurgood Marshall, this young upstart who is the head of the NAACP legal defense fund, wins the case in Brown v. Board of Education. So for somebody who went to Washington and Lee, add John W. Davis to the equation, and the Brown decision becomes even more famous, especially since John W. Davis is one of those people in our past that we still honor and commemorate here on the campus.

Peterson: That was a very useful summary. I wonder if you could summarize a little bit now, sort of run in parallel, your particular interest in the desegregation of southwestern Virginia.

DeLaney: First of all, what I needed to do is find a way to commemorate the Brown decision.

Commemorating the Brown decision was a part of being a member of what was called a Martin Luther King Commission of the Virginia General Assembly. They decided that they were going to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of Brown v. Board.

Subsequent to that conversation was a conversation that took place between me and George Carras who, at the time, was the Provost for Grant Writing. George Carras explained that there was an alumnus, a progressive alumnus, who had never given money to the university who might give money if there was a project that he agreed with ideologically. He asked me if there was anything I could come up with and I said, "Well, we could do a forum of scholars who reflect on Brown v. Board. If we did it a year in advance, then maybe we might even be able to get national attention with it." At the time, we did not have the strongest publicity office. The publicity office, I think, just sort of sat down on the job with it, so we didn't get the advance publicity that we needed. We did have the forum. This alumnus gave ten thousand dollars that was used pretty much to pay the honoraria of people who came to be participants in the forum. So we did that in 2003.

By that time I'm really interested in the Brown decision and I'm interested in some of the scholarship that is a part of the Brown decision. Coincidentally, as a result of my appointment to W&L in 1995, teaching civil rights is within my bailiwick. I'm teaching civil rights courses, I bring scholars to the campus to talk about Brown v. Board, and so 2003 goes off, but we don't get the recognition that we want. The General Assembly gets back to me a little bit later and their question is, "What is Washington and Lee going to do to commemorate the Brown decision?" "We did something last year and I have no more money." But they still want me to do something and so I'm thinking about something that can be done on the cheap.

What I perceived was a community gathering in Lee Chapel of people who were teachers, parents, students, et cetera, who experienced Brown v. Board or, probably more accurately, who experienced school desegregation. For that purpose I brought in to the campus a real star, that being Linwood Holton, who had been the first Republican governor of Virginia. He was elected in 1970 and was, I think, the class of either '41 or '44 Washington and Lee University, truly a grand human being whose son-in-law, by the way, is Tim Kaine. Linwood Holton was a Republican and still identifies himself as a Republican, although I would say a very, very moderate to liberal Republican. Linwood Holton was the main speaker that evening and there were people from the community who shared their stories of

segregation and desegregation. I was able to get funding from the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities for that program under the condition that there would be an oral history project that would stem out of that gathering.

The gathering was fun. We had a good time with the gathering. A lot of the white citizens who were there were surprised to hear memories of blacks from the desegregation era who had no bitter memories of segregation and also made the argument that we had a good time when we were segregated. I mean, black folks didn't think of themselves as victims, but lived in a society where we enjoyed our community and we enjoyed one another. That was the first time that a lot of people had heard that kind of thing and let me know that.

So the Virginia Foundation for the Humanities gave me a grant that was roughly the same size of the grant as the alumnus,¹ but their bookkeeping is such that I never spent the full ten thousand dollars they gave me, so I didn't get the full ten thousand dollars. Washington and Lee contributed richly to the research that followed with the Robert E. Lee Research Scholar's Grant. I had any number of students who worked for me who were able to benefit from pay, and those students said they had never earned that much money in their lives. In those years, 2004, 2005, 2006, they got roughly three thousand dollars for eight weeks of summer work. Some of the students who worked for me during the school year either did it for pay or they did it for [Hist.] 403 course credit.

It became a project that I got wrapped up in, a project that I got wrapped up in that reminds me of the conversation that you and I had over email this past weekend. That conversation was you wanted to look at these oral histories and some of the other material to prepare yourself.² I noted in one response that I wasn't giving you any secondary sources to look at. People in our profession always need a skeletal framework upon which to hang primary sources. To have oral interviews that are just out there on their own doesn't tell the story. The problem with those oral interviews is that, forty years later, people do not remember the specifics. They do not remember court rulings. They do not remember actions that were taken by the local government or the local school board. All they remember is their own general ideas about what was happening. The oral histories immediately signal to me that I need to be doing, at the very least, newspaper research, because the newspapers are full of the specifics that

¹ See Elizabeth Piper, "Five Questions for Ted Delaney," in *Virginia Humanities* newsletter, July 6, 2015.

² The Special Collections Department of Leyburn Library contains four boxes of interview transcriptions in the second series of the "Theodore C. (Ted) Delaney Collection," WLU-Coll-0525.

people don't remember forty years later. Even though I give them questionnaires in advance to trigger their memories, some of the stuff that I get from them is disappointing, because some of the stuff is wrong. It is wrong either chronologically or there are stereotypes or whatever. This prompts the idea that there needs to be more manuscript research, not only reading secondary materials, but also reading school board minutes, reading town council minutes, reading city council minutes, and this kind of thing. It evolves into a much more extensive and traditional kind of historical study than an oral history project.

Peterson: In a sense, you got pushed back into political and institutional history.

DeLaney: Exactly, but as someone who was trained mostly in social history. There's a hell of a lot of social history in school board minutes. It all depends upon who the clerk of the school board is. Oftentimes the clerk of the school board is doing something that is probably the correct thing according to *Robert's Rules*, and that is recording only motions and then the vote on those motions. But some of the minutes that I read were scary because the minutes were too explicit. They even dealt with discipline of specific students by name. There were often times in reading school board minutes that you have to stop and scratch your head. It's like, "this should not be in the minutes." This is confidential stuff. Families should not be singled out in this way. It would all depend upon the clerk. I think that an indiscreet researcher might get caught up in dangerous territory with the use of some of the information that should not have been in specific school board minutes.

The thing that I would like people to get most out of the school board minutes, what I was thinking about earlier this morning, is that if nothing comes out of this interview I want this to be central to our conversation. If you look at the school board minutes, where I start in the 1940s or I am recording these minutes in the 1950s, there is a movement as early as the 1940s toward the equalization of black schools. This movement toward the equalization of black schools is caused mostly because of the national political climate and not because of court rulings.

In the post-World War II period you have the Truman administration, for instance, who is pretty much endorsing civil rights to the extent that you've got a breakup of the Democratic party in 1948, where Strom Thurmond bolts the party and runs on a Dixiecrat ticket because Truman is too liberal on civil rights. You've got Truman who's desegregating the army. During the Truman administration, there are commissions that Truman also appoints to deal with racial problems in the United States. During the

Truman administration, at least people are beginning to think about equal justice.

There is also the experience that white soldiers had in the liberation of Europe at the end of the war. And that this was done with the help of all-black fighting units in the United States army. These young men who come back from the war have a completely different idea. Some of these are Virginians who come back and they think that the state needs to start moving away from this hard line on segregation. There is this movement, certainly not an even movement, during the 1940s toward school equalization.

The interesting thing is that this is driven largely by black citizens. You see these black citizens from black PTAs, who essentially are begging school boards for improvements in the buildings for black schools. Some of those minutes I shared with you over the weekend. The thing that's important to remember about this is that Jim Crow segregation is so complete in the four counties I studied that these people are going into a situation that is a culture that is completely different from the culture that I understand with you. You are my friend.

Peterson: Thank you.

DeLaney: We are equals in the History Department. We have both been the Head of the History Department. This is not the situation that these people in the 1940s are facing when they go to the school board meetings to beg for improvements in buildings or even for extra teachers. These people have to be, first of all, very deferential. These people have to have their heads lowered. They have to have hat in hand. They have to be overly polite. The people they are addressing, they have to use titles for, like Mr. and Mrs. and Dr., but they are not getting titles in return. They are being called by their first names. And so you've got a situation where these people are taking on a stance that is as deferential as possible so as not to offend these people that they are begging to repair our schools. Give us a cafeteria. Give us an extra teacher. Oh, that roof is leaking really badly. Oh, in Botetourt County you've got a building that is about to be condemned it's in such bad shape. Please give us a new building. What you have here is black agency in a way that is certainly tweaking a conscience response from these white people who are sitting on the school boards.

It's very, very necessary to remember that these black folks are taxpayers and that they're going to these school boards with the complete realization that those boards viewed them as inferior, viewed them as not equal. Those boards really are not concerned so much with black education because it's a time when

the United States is not evolved to the point where there is any concept of equal opportunity in professions or in education for black people. And so I just marvel at the fact that these people have the courage, and they also have the humility, to go and prostrate themselves before these school board members in order to get improvements in their schools.

Peterson: Since you invite me into the conversation a little bit, as someone who grew up in California and didn't live in the South in the '40s and the '50s, I would say that one of the things that surprised me, you mention black agency. I'm sure there was a great deal of deference on the part of representatives of the black community and perhaps some condescension on the part of the town elders or officials, but what surprised me reading some of these minutes that you gave me a little sample of was the extent to which the white city officials actually seemed to be yielding to some of the black requests, looking around in the budget to find some way that they could seal the leak in the cafeteria ceiling or drinking fountain repairs. I guess one school didn't have a roof. They promised they would at least find tar paper to put over the roof. I wasn't prepared for that. I had always imagined a situation in which blacks were in a position of having to take what they got. There seemed in these minutes to be at least some negotiation, some flexibility. I think there was some councilman on the Buena Vista city council who said "we have a moral responsibility."

DeLaney: Part of that is because of the population. There are several different Virginias in the 1950s at the time of the Brown decision. I studied Rockbridge County, Augusta County, Botetourt County, and Roanoke County. They're contiguous counties. The black population of those counties is relatively small. The part of Virginia that I studied you would call the white belt. The idea of desegregation does not threaten white hegemony in those counties, and so the relationship between blacks and whites is nonthreatening. In Rockbridge County, the black population is less than 8 percent. In Botetourt County, the population is 8 percent. This is very different from the counties in south side Virginia or Tidewater Virginia, where those counties range from 40 percent black to 70 percent black. The demagogues in Virginia's political leadership cast their rhetoric to those white people who live in the black belt, and the black belt is pretty much akin to what it would be like to live in the Mississippi Delta. It's a threat to white hegemony because of the size of the black population. And so in the counties that I study, the whole idea of desegregation ends up being sort of boring when you compare it to Birmingham, Alabama, which has got all of this violence. Violence tends to be sexy and get people really interested. There is no violence.

The demographics are important. The demographics in Buena Vista are particularly important because they are illustrative of why separate but equal doesn't work. In 1950, Buena Vista's population is roughly 5,214 people, of which 216 are black. How does one provide separate but equal schools to less than thirty black kids? So Buena Vista has a two-room schoolhouse that teaches grades one through six and they have two teachers. How do two teachers teach grades one through six? When the students over there reach seventh grade there's a bit of a problem if you have one, two, or three students who are high school age because, from its very onset, Buena Vista is an independent city, which means that it's not just a part of the county. They can't just automatically send their kids to Rockbridge County's only black school, which is in Lexington. You've got to pay tuition to send those students there.

What happens in the most amazing joint meeting of city council and the Buena Vista school board in 1955, right after the second Brown decision that adds "with all deliberate speed" to the first decision, is that people over there are seeing the economic and moral problem with the dictum from Plessy v. Ferguson "separate but equal." Number one, they can't afford it. In fact, few areas in the white belt can afford to provide truly equal, separate schools for black students. That council-school board meeting is incredible where you have people who seem to almost get on a roll with the idea "let's desegregate." It's not until the city attorney breaks their bubble, "that's not going to happen. The governor's not going to let us do that." Pretty much the state policy is "massive resistance." "We will close our schools rather than desegregate." If you were to fast-forward and read the minutes from the Buena Vista school board in 1960, they're ready to desegregate in 1960, but they can't, so they don't do it until the rest of the state does.

As a Lexington native who grew up listening to people look down on that community over there that's six miles away, Lexington's not as progressive during the desegregation era as Buena Vista is. Lexington's not talking about a moral responsibility, but Lexington also has, at that point, the largest black population in Rockbridge County. The second largest black population in Rockbridge County is in Glasgow. Even though there is this large black population that largely moved to Lexington from the county because of Lylburn Downing School, there's no threat to white hegemony in Lexington either. The developments in Lexington and Rockbridge County and Buena Vista are very interesting, but once again it all depends upon, and I don't want to let myself get sidetracked here, but I think that we see some of this today, this whole threat of changing demography as a threat to white hegemony. This is exactly what did not go on in the counties that I'm studying because there is no threat to white

hegemony in those counties. The black population is small.

Peterson: So the city councils are in sort of the odd position of being ready to desegregate. On the one hand, there are orders coming down from Washington, and I notice there seem to be meetings with people at UVA and discussions of how exactly to go about desegregation. There were sometimes pledges that were required. You've got to respond to a national set of ordinances that are in direct contradiction to a more local, state set of ordinances. There must have been an awful lot of calculation.

DeLaney: Well, there's a lot of politics that goes on and the politics that goes on is very difficult to understand. The Attorney General of Virginia is an ambitious man named J. Lindsay Almond. He ultimately will become the governor, although he's sort of an outsider with the Byrd political machine. Almond gives an interview to a group of reporters in Richmond two days after the Brown decision in 1954. I read this interview in the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*.³ The interview was very, very difficult to understand because he's saying to these reporters that he sees that it is completely possible for Virginia to obey the Supreme Court while maintaining separate schools. I did a lot of head scratching over that one because what the Supreme Court said in the Brown decision was that separate schools are inherently unequal. That's not what Almond is talking about at all. Almond is talking about obedience to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, and he's talking about obedience to *Plessy v. Ferguson* after the Brown decision. Of course, there is a manifesto that's signed by Southern politicians that denounces the court's ruling in *Brown v. Board*, that wants to get rid of that ruling altogether. There are people who argue that, rather than based on law, it's based on a sociology experiment, et cetera. The whole idea that somehow you can obey *Plessy v. Ferguson* on May 19, 1954, is absurd, but this seems to be the direction that Virginia is going in.

Almond manages to get nominated to be the Democratic candidate for governor. This is a time when Virginia governors still can't succeed themselves, so he's going to follow this Governor Stanley, who had been the governor who had originally dealt with desegregation. He's going to follow him into office, and Almond does not have the moral courage to do what the Byrd machine wants him to do. Almond orders the closure of schools in three Virginia locales, Charlottesville being one of them, Warren County being the other, and Norfolk being the third one. A federal judge rules that as governor

³James Latimer, "Separation in Schools Hinted as Still Possible: Idea for State Stresses Equality of Facilities; Official Skirts Details." *Richmond Times Dispatch*, May 19, 1954, p. A1, cols. 8-9; p. A4, cols. 1-2.

of Virginia, you don't have that authority. Those schools will be reopened. Harry Byrd wants Almond to dig his heels in and go to jail on principle. Almond is not willing to go to jail, and so those three sets of schools are reopened. Under Almond, the whole principle of massive resistance begins to break down. Once again, they are so fearful of losing the large white solidarity that they have in the south side and in the Tidewater, where blacks are being denied the right to vote, and where blacks are also fearful of going to register to vote. Even though they represent 40 to 70 percent of the population, it doesn't really matter. They're not going to go out there to vote anyway. Virginia ends up coming off as the leader of Southern states, with their concept staring the federal government down, and for a long time they're successful in what they're doing.

Peterson: We've talked about the politics a little bit. You alluded to the difficulties of working with oral reports. You've turned to newspapers. You've turned to town council minutes and so forth to get a chronology or a timeline of basic events. I've had the same experience in Florence. You have to go through the legislation before you start reading the diaries. Your oral interviews are sort of like asking people to compose diaries, memories of the past, on the spot. There must have been some oral interviews that just astonished you.

DeLaney: There were, and some of them that angered me. Number one, when you have a project this massive, you can't be doing all the interviews yourself. My students did a great job. My colleague Alison Bell helped to train them. Alison Bell also helped to formulate the questionnaire that we sent to people in advance. The students were really good. The students were incredibly good.

I had a person who contacted me, somewhat offended, that she hadn't been asked to be interviewed, someone I had known all of her life

Peterson: That's interesting, There are people seeking an opportunity to be interviewed?

DeLaney: She's black, okay, and blacks were more likely to want to be interviewed than people in the white population. This woman lied to my students and I was really angry about it. I tended to debrief students when they came back and, as I said, I'd known this woman all of her life. She said that she found that desegregation was no big thing because her mother was white. I said to the student, "She said what?" Her mother could have passed for white but her mother was not white. I know her mother. My mother could have passed for white but she didn't. I was so shocked. Then I went to the tape itself

and listened to the tape. She didn't even use the word white. She used the word Caucasian. Her mother was Caucasian. What do you do with an interview like that? Right at the onset, that's a lie. That wouldn't have taken place if I had been doing the interview because I would have called her on it. I don't think that she would have ever said that to me. What happened to that tape? It went in the trash can. You start off with a lie in an interview, then the researcher who knows better can't use that.

There are larger problems with this project. The one thing that I know is that the most—aside from Buena Vista's school board, and we don't know what the general population over there was thinking about desegregation—but the locale that we know that was most liberal in my study area was Waynesboro, and Waynesboro because there were two large factories there. One was GE and the other one was DuPont. Waynesboro was the only locale in the study area that had what was considered a moderate group—although they were all white and they did not want black members—the Committee for the Preservation of Public Schools. They were willing to accept token desegregation rather than close schools. The people who were high up in those factories over there, DuPont and General Electric, were appalled by the massive resistance policy. Some of them were clear. “Had we known that Virginia was going to come off with this harebrained policy, we would not have opened these factories in Virginia. We are trying to bring people in who are well educated, who are a part of our mission to provide a good product, and we can't guarantee that they're going to have schools to send their children to.” Excellent point. That is the only locale in Virginia that overwhelmingly votes to deny state funds for private schools. It's an alternative to people sending their children to desegregated schools. So, the thing that I have to struggle with is what moderate means in this concept. You've got this organization. It's all white. “We don't want to scare the segregationists away from belonging, but we hope that we can teach them the foolishness of closing schools to preserve segregation.” Waynesboro is that locale That makes Waynesboro completely unique.

The interviews from Waynesboro are also interesting. One that I did not share with you that I probably should have over the weekend was an interview by a man named William Perry, who had been the principal of the Rosenwald School. Julius Rosenwald is a historic figure, a Jewish businessman, who was the president and CEO of Sears Roebuck. He was a friend of Booker T. Washington who gave philanthropic grants for start-ups for black schools across the South. Depending on the size of the grant, the schools were named after him. Lylburn Downing gets a thousand dollar grant, I think it is, from the Rosenwald fund. The school in Waynesboro, theirs is named. Julius Rosenwald was a fantastic human

being.

Rosenwald School, according to William Perry, who was the principal, was not accredited and it was not accredited because it didn't have a science lab. Every year William Perry would go to the school superintendent and he would explain that historically black colleges expect the students they accept to be coming from accredited schools. You've got to build us a science lab. He goes before the school board in 1961 with the same request that he annually has and, much to his shock and surprise, "you don't need to worry about that. We're going to build you a new school." Nineteen-sixty-one. You're going to build a new black school in Waynesboro in 1961? The writing is on the wall at this point that schools are going to be desegregated. Of course, the one thing that the school board and the superintendent know is that's probably going to be the case, but you have a new building, you can still use that building and that building can be just worked into the integrated school system once it occurs.

The oral histories can be fascinating, like William Perry's. But on the other hand, the oral histories tended to appall me. One of the common things that white men said in the oral histories is that desegregation was great because the black athletes started winning all of our football games. That's stereotyping. Not all black guys are good athletes and not all white guys are bad athletes. But the black guys started winning our football games for us is something that, as a scholar, you have to scratch your head and say there's something wrong with making statements like that. The other thing that is problematic is memory. You're asking people to remember across forty years and so the things that they remember or don't remember are oftentimes problematic.

The biggest problem for me was getting the people who were segregationists to talk to me. They want to be interviewed anonymously, but they don't want me to know their name either. Even though I can guarantee them anonymity, I have to know my sources. I can't get them to understand that. A funny thing happened. I was presenting this research and the problems with this research at the Virginia Historical Society. At the end of the research, this very large young white man comes charging down the middle aisle and he says to me, "Sir, I know exactly where you can find the voice of massive resistance." I looked at him and he says, "Boxes 101 through 103 of Governor Stanley's papers, and you can pull them by locale." That was probably the most amazing thing that I have ever seen.

I went to Governor Stanley's papers at the Library of Virginia and, sure enough, he saved all of the angry letters from segregationists that came in to his office. There they were and you could see exactly

the locales they came from. Some of them were wretched. Some of them were absolutely wretched. Some of them focused right on “well if you bring the sexes together in the same school, then it's going to lead to amalgamation of the races. There's going to be sexual mixing among these teenagers.” One school principal from Roanoke, who was a woman, had a series of letters that she wrote over the years to several different governors. I remember one of her letters where she is certain that black students are going to be introducing venereal diseases to white high school students or white middle school students, for that matter. Some of the most troubling letters made me wonder would these people have written to the governor if they'd had any idea that these papers would be available for people who were the age, say, of their grandchildren to freely read at the Library of Virginia. There, again, I found the letters to be problematic. How would you use them? Would you be setting yourself up for a dangerous situation if you were quoting some of these letters and some of these letters that would possibly be read by the grandchildren of the people who wrote them? It's a small place and I'm studying four counties.

Peterson: An interesting dilemma because they're part of the public record now.

DeLaney: They are part of the public record.

Peterson: But the people who wrote them may have assumed that the governor would read them ...

DeLaney: And toss them in the round file. He did not toss them in the round file. They got sent to the Library of Virginia and the Library of Virginia is analogous to the Library of Congress. It is the library for the General Assembly but it serves the whole state in other ways as well. They're part of the public record and some of them are so vile, so absolutely vile, that they were disgusting enough that you just did not want to use them.

Peterson: Just pure, unbridled racism.

DeLaney: Oh yes, and the people who would deny that kind of racism are people that I have a real problem with. What basis do you have to hate so badly that you're going to write stuff like this? In any case, that ends up being one of the problems.

Peterson: Does your sample get skewed, white people being more reluctant to come forward and be interviewed?

DeLaney: It skewed it as much as that I have an overwhelming majority of white respondents, which is fine for a locale where the demography is overwhelmingly white. The problem with the white respondents is that they're cheerleaders for desegregation. Now, one of the things that I know is that some of these people have had to have changed their minds. It's out of vogue in the twenty-first century when you're being interviewed, "Oh yes, I wanted to see things stay segregated, but for thus and so reasons I changed my mind." Not a single one of those interviews say anything like that. Not a single one of them.

Perhaps the most interesting set of interviews—and I sent you one-half of that this weekend—was by a Roanoke woman, who is an interesting lady. Her son calls home and says that he's going to have dinner that evening with a white family in a very, very white part of Roanoke.

Peterson: I remember that.

DeLaney: The mother thinks he's lying and she says, "Bring your black ass home. You're telling me a lie," et cetera. He becomes this great friend of this teammate who is white. The teammate's mom and dad grant me an interview and they do it anonymously. All of a sudden, I've got these two interviews that fit together like a jigsaw puzzle. I realize the white family is talking about this black kid whose mother doesn't believe that these people are this nice. The man in the white family is a very prominent person and I will not go in any depth because I don't want to reveal the anonymity here. But what I see when I look at these two sets of interviews, the white interview and the black interview, is the black student and his white friend are dragging their families along with regard to the reality that desegregation has occurred. The white family seems to be more believable in this regard than the black mother is, because the white family is indeed hosting this kid for dinner. Not only is the white family hosting this kid for dinner, but the kid is doing sleepovers with his buddy in their house, much to the black kid's mother's disbelief.

Peterson: She's convinced the Klan is going to come in.

DeLaney: Oh yes, she is sure he's going to get lynched. I know this lady. And I have never told her that I had an interview from the white family but their names have to be kept confidential. She used their names in the interview. Then, of course, the ethical dilemma is, OK, there's one person who's a part of the story who has used their names but I promised the other people anonymity. I can't reveal

their names. A delightful situation to be in, a delightful story, but to what extent do you easily tell these stories? To what extent do you put any weight on these interviews at all?

Let me give you another example of a problem. It's really funny. A 75-year-old retired black school teacher gave me an interview. It was just an absolutely superb interview. She taught at Natural Bridge Middle School. Desegregation of the teachers and the students were simultaneous. At one point in the interview she said, "And everything went just fine until my son, who was a football player, and the football team decided to have a sit-in in the principal's office to demand black cheerleaders." All of this was very vivid and very interesting. Cheerleaders were the only problem across the state of Virginia because they didn't have faculty advisers. They were elite groups of white girls who were not only excluding blacks, but they were excluding working-class white girls from the cheerleading squads as well. So I'm intrigued by all of this and then, a week later, she calls and tells me her son is visiting and he's available for an interview.

Her son is very bright. He's legally blind. He lives in Charlottesville and he goes out of high school—he had been the football player she had talked about—he goes from high school to the Vietnam war. And so I'm finishing up the interview with this man and I said, "There's one thing you've not talked about." He said, "What's that?" I said, "When you and the football players did a sit-in in the principal's office to get black cheerleaders." He looked at me, very puzzled, and he said, "That never happened." I go home and I think "the mother doesn't have dementia. She has good memory." I believe her to be an honest person and I also believe her son to be an honest person. Then there was the realization, in my own memory, what had happened with the story. What she described happened at Lexington High School, not at Natural Bridge High School. Somehow that Lexington High School incident had gotten superimposed on her memory.

Lexington High School had a football player who had at least fifteen minutes of fame on the national stage. He went from high school to the Pittsburgh Steelers. His name was Steve Davis. Steve Davis was a football team by himself, he was that good. But the players at Lexington High School—I don't remember whether my brother was one of those people who did that, but my brother was on the team at Lexington High School—the players did a sit-in in the principal's office to get black cheerleaders and it made the local newspapers. So how does this happen with this teacher's mind and memory at Natural Bridge?

Peterson: Memory plays tricks on us, doesn't it?

DeLaney: It does indeed. There is great reason to be cautious when you're using oral history, because oral history can cause you to go down the primrose path of writing stuff that just is not right. It's not correct.

Peterson: We're getting a little short on time, but I did want to ask you whether there were any surprises for you in reading the interviews of African-American respondents?

DeLaney: I think that there was a lot of nostalgia in reading the interviews that I understood full well. Black teachers were especially nurturing. Black teachers were also demanding, i.e., the basketball coach who would go to the telephone when he discovered one of his basketball players was absent. "What's wrong with you that you're not at school this morning? Take your shower because I'm going to be at your house in ten minutes to pick you up to bring you to school." That was the way black teachers typically operated and that was a favorable memory for most people who went to all black schools.

What happens is, with some of the interviews, the expression is that we lost more than we gained. The problem with arguing that we lost more than we gained is that we gained equal opportunity and equal opportunity to access to a lot of things that we didn't have before. Culturally, yes, we lost. The black high schools across the South were like the black churches. Black families, black students, black alumni felt an ownership of those places. But to argue that we lost more than we gained is to lose sight of the forest for the trees. It just is not right.

I certainly could be nostalgic for the joy of having gone to an all black school where I did not face the problems that I faced as a parent with my son [Damien] growing up. For instance, when we lived in Asheville, North Carolina, and I sent him to a parochial school, thinking that I felt more comfortable about his well-being in a Catholic school than anyplace else. One time I pick him up, he's ten years old, and he's obviously upset about something. He says, "Dad, do I have to ride the school bus anymore?" I said, "Yes. My school is eight miles from yours. I can't drive you back and forth to your school." He looked very dejected and I said, "What's going on?" "I don't want to tell you." Well, the wrong thing to say to this parent. I said, "Yes, you are. You're going to tell me what happened." "Dad, every time I get on the bus I get from these eighth-grade boys on the bus, 'no niggers allowed on this bus.'" This is 1987. This got to be such an ugly thing before it was over with that I thought, "I never had to deal with

this kind of thing in school.” Even when he was in school here in Lexington, there were similar problems that we were having to deal with that neither his mother nor I had to deal with. His mother grew up in the military and commanding officers weren't going to have that kind of crap happening in military schools. In all black schools there was not this kind of thing.

The bus was owned by Asheville Catholic School. These teenagers, these eighth-graders who were on the bus, were out of line. The principal handled it wrong. I can remember, though, that my parish priest must have held the phone for an hour while I just exploded over the telephone. Then he said, “You know, you have to talk to the principal about this.” Throughout his grade school in the South we were dealing with race problems. I never had race problems in school. My peer group or their children who were saying we lost more than we gained probably were having or had had the same experience as me in having to deal with what their own children were dealing with in the public school system. That is the tragedy of it all. That can inspire “we lost more than we gained.”

Peterson: Thank you, that was a wonderful interview. I learned a lot from it and I look forward to speaking to you again very soon. Thank you, Ted.

DeLaney: Thank you.

[End of interview]

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