

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDING

**MEETING OF THE
LOUISIANA ADVISORY COMMITTEE
TO THE
UNITED STATES COMMISSION
ON CIVIL RIGHTS**

**SAINT PAUL'S BAPTIST FREE CHURCH
2024 GROOM ROAD
BAKER, LOUISIANA**

**JUNE 24, 1997
6:00 P.M.**

**S. MILES AND ASSOCIATES
1291 CREEKWOOD COVE
LAWRENCEVILLE, GEORGIA
(770) 513-0398**

APPEARANCES:

1
2
3
4
5 Advisory Committee Members:6
7 William P. Quigley, Chairperson8
9 Dr. Laurabeth Hicks, Committee Member10
11
12 U.S. Commission on Civil Rights13
14 Dr. Mary Frances Berry, Commissioner15
16 Melvin Jenkins, Regional Director
17
18
19

1 MR. QUIGLEY: My name is Bill Quigley, and
2 I am the Chair of the Louisiana Advisory
3 Committee for the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights
4 and we are here in Baker this evening almost
5 exactly a year from the time that we were here --
6 I think it was July 8th and 9th of 1996, and here
7 as a dialogue and a conversation on what has
8 happened on a couple of issues in terms of the
9 churches, in terms of dialogue between the
10 different racial groups, and in terms of
11 assessing where we are, in terms of whether we've
12 made some progress, or whatever, to make a
13 report.

14 Here is another representative of the Advisory
15 Committee, Dr. Laurabeth Hicks, who is from Baker, so
16 we're excited that she could be here.

17 And we have two representatives from the
18 national office, Melvin Jenkins, who is the Regional
19 Director out of Kansas City of the Civil Rights
20 Commission, and then Dr. Mary Frances Berry, who is the
21 Chair of the Commission. I'm going to ask Dr. Berry to
22 get started.

23 COMMISSIONER BERRY: All right. Thank you very
24 much, Bill.

25 First I think it would be in order to introduce

1 Melvin Jenkins. I don't know if you know Melvin, the
2 Regional Director, who helped put all this together.
3 He's been down here laboring in the vineyard, not
4 forever, but for a long time in this region, and then
5 point out that we're in Baker, which is Mayor Bobby
6 Simpson's town, so maybe he would like to, just by way of
7 opening, say a few words for us.

8 MAYOR SIMPSON: I would welcome you back. We
9 appreciate the open forum you had a year ago, and we've
10 read the -- it's been a while since we've read the
11 comments, but we appreciate you being back.

12 Welcome to our town, and if there's anything we
13 can do to assist you, be glad to do it.

14 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Thank you. And then we
15 have one councilman here, Councilman Jack Waldrom.

16 Would you like to say a word or two?

17 All right. We'll just acknowledge your
18 presence here.

19 And then because it is Reverend Pierre
20 Briscoe's church, and we want to say how much we
21 appreciate your letting us meet in your church, we would
22 like to see if there is anything you would like to say by
23 way of opening, and then we're just going to have some
24 discussion here.

25 REVEREND BRISCOE: What I would love to -- so

1 beautiful, I would like to sing a song -- have a prayer.

2 COMMISSIONER BERRY: All right. She didn't
3 know --

4 (Whereupon a song was played on the piano and a
5 benediction recited.)

6 COMMISSIONER BERRY: I want to say a word about
7 why we're here.

8 Since last year, according to the National
9 Church Arson Task Force report that just came out
10 recently, in their first-year report to the President of
11 the United States, they report on how the church fire
12 investigations are going.

13 And one of the things that's striking is that
14 only about 65 percent of the fires that they're
15 investigating -- only 35 percent have they in fact
16 identified a suspect.

17 Sixty-five percent, their record -- in other
18 words, although they say the record is about as good as
19 most arson investigations, the record is not very good.

20 If you haven't solved 65 percent and you've
21 solved 35 percent, and the rest are still open, and in
22 particular if you look at Louisiana, because in Louisiana
23 they have a list of about 14 church fires, and they say
24 they've only in fact made an arrest in one.

25 So the record in Louisiana, their own record,

1 the BATF and the FBI and the law enforcement agencies is
2 worse than it is in other of the states that they report
3 on. Only one, and this church, of course, is one of the
4 churches that they have listed with no arrest made.

5 The other thing that I wanted to point out is
6 that the National Arson Task Force report indicates that
7 there are two sources of funds in addition to whatever
8 other money is available for church rebuilding.

9 The National Council of Churches has a fund to
10 which they invite churches to apply for funds to rebuild.
11 The other is the Department of Housing and Urban
12 Development has a loan guarantee, a low interest rate
13 program, to give money to the churches to rebuild, so
14 that the ones that need to have some rebuilding done can
15 get some funds from both of those sources.

16 That's, of course, good news and some churches
17 have obviously been rebuilt, and others are using these
18 funds. But the main focus of our attention last year,
19 and when we came to the South, was we noticed how in race
20 relations seems to us that there was a great deal of
21 polarization, such as exists around the country.

22 And in the comments that we made after the
23 reports were done and in our press conference in
24 Washington, with the State Advisory Committee chairs
25 present, we asked that there be continuing dialogue on

1 race relations in the communities where these burnings
2 are taking place, because we were concerned about any
3 underlying problems or tensions that may have led some
4 people to believe that it was okay to burn churches.

5 Since last year, the President has recently
6 called for a national conversation or dialogue about race
7 relations.

8 The Commission, we've been saying for years,
9 including emphasizing it last year, and I've said it to
10 the President, that there should be a series of local
11 conversations as well as a big national conversation
12 about this issue.

13 So one of the reasons why we're making this
14 visit here this year, and in the other states, is to find
15 out what if anything has happened since last year, to
16 sort of try to take the temperature of the community to
17 find out what has happened on the racial front on race
18 relations.

19 Our SAC has met with the Governor of Louisiana,
20 and we have requested meetings repeatedly with the
21 Governor of Mississippi and Alabama, and we're going to
22 meet with the Governor of Mississippi tomorrow on this
23 subject.

24 And so we are here -- one of the things we're
25 mostly interested in is to get some conversation going

1 about what people perceive as the race relations here in
2 this community and what's being done.

3 Last year we had testimony from various
4 witnesses who talked about the lack of dialogue in the
5 community, and the need for dialogue across racial lines.

6 There were some people who talked about the
7 lack of involvement of local community on a bi-racial
8 basis or multi-racial basis, in building the churches,
9 that there were people from out of town who came in.

10 There were also witnesses who talked about the
11 fact that they thought race relations here were pretty
12 good, and that putting the spotlight on the church
13 burnings made it appear that they were worse than they
14 were.

15 So we had all that testimony, and we dutifully
16 reported this, because we report what we hear.

17 So this year we're back again to see what we're
18 going to hear this time, so what we'd like to know from
19 any of you is what is going on here in Baker and how are
20 race relations today and would there be anybody around
21 here today who would think that it was okay to go burn
22 churches or do anything like that, because they thought
23 that there was some kind of an issue of this kind.

24 So that's what we're really here to find out,
25 if anybody cares to tell us.

1 Reverend Briscoe, what do you think? What's
2 going on on the racial front here in Baker?

3 REVEREND BRISCOE: I don't live in Baker.
4 There's not too much I can say about what's going on.

5 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Okay. Well, what's going
6 on generally around here?

7 REVEREND BRISCOE: I can't see anything that's
8 going -- generally in order.

9 COMMISSIONER BERRY: From what you can see.

10 REVEREND BRISCOE: But I can -- from my members
11 that talk about -- that things is doing well, it's on a
12 racial base or whatever on that. Like I say, I can't
13 directly say exactly because I don't live in Baker.

14 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Where do you live?

15 REVEREND BRISCOE: I live in Plaquemine.

16 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, how are things
17 there?

18 REVEREND BRISCOE: I could tell you about
19 Plaquemine now.

20 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Oh, you can?

21 REVEREND BRISCOE: Yeah, I can talk about
22 Plaquemine. I live there.

23 COMMISSIONER BERRY: I apologize.

24 REVEREND BRISCOE: That's 30 miles.

25 COMMISSIONER BERRY: And so everything is good

1 there?

2 REVEREND BRISCOE: No, it's not good. It's not
3 good but we're getting by.

4 COMMISSIONER BERRY: You're getting by.

5 REVEREND BRISCOE: There's a lot of things that
6 could be improved and a lot of things we are getting
7 improved, and we are in the business of doing it now,
8 because we got unity together. Together you can do
9 things, but really not no -- in Plaquemine, like other
10 places, we have our ups and we have our downs.

11 COMMISSIONER BERRY: So what do you hear from
12 your members about the situation?

13 REVEREND BRISCOE: The situation here in Baker?
14 I guess they report that Baker is all right. I have some
15 members here that live here. They can tell you more
16 about Baker than I can.

17 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Okay. Well, they'll ask
18 them. Maybe they can help us. Whenever you get up to
19 say something, if you could identify yourselves, that
20 would be very useful. Just say who you are when you
21 stand up.

22 MAJOR SEPT: I live in Baker.

23 COMMISSIONER BERRY: What is your name, sir?

24 MAJOR SEPT: Major Sept.

25 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Go ahead.

1 MAJOR SEPT: And I live in Baker. I was born
2 and raised in Baker.

3 COMMISSIONER BERRY: You were born and raised
4 here?

5 MAJOR SEPT: Yes, all my life.

6 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Lived here all your life.

7 MAJOR SEPT: All my life.

8 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, what do you think
9 about what was going on last year at the time we were
10 here and how things have been since then, and has there
11 been any dialogue across racial lines in the white and
12 black community, to talk about racial issues here in
13 Baker?

14 MAJOR SEPT: I think one of the -- some of the
15 head people in Baker, the Mayor -- they're very nice,
16 very cooperative, but on their thinking, this problem
17 that we had, I really don't think it came from Baker. I
18 really don't. I think it was just somebody going through
19 and found the church, because this church here been over
20 60 years. We don't have no problems in Baker.

21 I mean, we been treated real nice from the town
22 -- we need this church -- go to school -- any kind of --
23 whatsoever. We have no problem, and the Mayor and
24 everybody out there told us many times that we want to
25 use anything, anything from Baker, you know, to help us,

1 we're welcome, and we have asked for different things and
2 we got them with no problem.

3 COMMISSIONER BERRY: So you think these are
4 some people from outside --

5 MAJOR SEPT: I think so too, because like I
6 say, our -- over 60 -- and -- now, any part of the state
7 you go to, you might find a few people -- you can't --
8 but I'm talking about the ones that we have dealt with in
9 Baker. We have no problem.

10 COMMISSIONER BERRY: So do you think there's
11 any need for any kind of organized discussions about race
12 relations between the white and black community in Baker?
13 Do you think --

14 MAJOR SEPT: I couldn't say yeah, because I see
15 no reason, you know. I've never seen no reason.

16 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Okay.

17 MAJOR SEPT: I have seen no reason, and like I
18 say, these church -- and my grandmother and my mother,
19 and all -- we never had any problem, and if you see -- it
20 happen all over.

21 COMMISSIONER BERRY: All over the state?

22 MAJOR SEPT: Yeah, you know, different places,
23 you know, this burning here, wasn't just here in Baker.

24 COMMISSIONER BERRY: You think maybe somebody
25 who just happened on these places.

1 MAJOR SEPT: That's -- I don't believe we have
2 no problem with, you know, Baker, you know, like that.

3 COMMISSIONER BERRY: You might want to say
4 something later, depending on who else has something to
5 say. Did you get his name? Representative Kip Holden
6 has arrived, State Representative in the Louisiana House,
7 want to acknowledge his presence. Is this your district?

8 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: Yes.

9 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Okay. Well, then that
10 makes sense. So basically what we have heard so far is
11 that there's no need for any dialogue on race relations
12 in Baker, because everything is fine and has been fine
13 forever, and therefore whoever these people were last
14 year who told us that there were some problems, they
15 didn't know what they were talking about.

16 MAYOR SIMPSON: I remember who you're talking
17 about. That was from the church on Sunshine, which is
18 outside the city limits of Baker, and their particular
19 comments were from outside of Baker.

20 They were talking about with elected officials
21 and things from outside our city, so when you say city,
22 you're talking to the folks who live here in St. Paul's.
23 They live in the City of Baker.

24 The people from the other communities, like
25 Reverend Pierre, they live outside of our area, and they

1 have church there, because he came up to me afterwards
2 and said we're not talking to you, we're talking about
3 some people that we've had some problem within Baton
4 Rouge. Who that is, I don't know.

5 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: Let me say this, and
6 the Mayor and I, we work together, although he said we
7 never come to visit -- but I would tend to think that it
8 is always helpful to have dialogue on race issues.

9 And the reason why is because without
10 communications it's just like in a marriage, if you don't
11 communicate, you can't really understand what is going on
12 in somebody's head or mind, and I tell my children the
13 same thing. If they don't tell me what's going on, then
14 I cannot really tell what the problem is or how we try to
15 reach a solution.

16 So I would not say that dialogue should not
17 continue. I think we need to maybe spread the dialogue
18 out a little bit where we have elected officials talking
19 to each other, which we do, but then somewhere down the
20 line it has to go through churches talking to each other
21 and let me give credit, because I did get up and the
22 first time I did any painting in I don't know when, I was
23 here helping to paint this church, and was proud of
24 myself. I wish we had a picture so my wife could see I
25 could do manual labor.

1 But you know, there were a number of church
2 people who came together to help rebuild the church at
3 the moment. But I think also you need to find where it's
4 not just in a moment of crisis or in a moment of
5 rebuilding.

6 We have to start also laying that foundation so
7 you have congregations worshiping more together. You
8 have people doing more together, not just in an incident
9 where we have a church that was burned, but overall.

10 The last point I talked -- the Mayor and I
11 talked about this, because I had to address a group of
12 citizens in Baker before we started the legislative
13 session, and there was some dialogue about the Baker
14 school situation, and at that meeting I suggested to the
15 people at this meeting that again there needs to be
16 dialogue between the white community and the black
17 community about the Baker school system and that whole
18 concept, because I have been hearing some things on the
19 negative side, and obviously they may not have been
20 hearing some things on the negative side, and obviously
21 they may not have been hearing them, because simply I'm
22 an African American legislator, and a lot of people felt
23 comfortable in telling me some of the concerns.

24 The Mayor and I talked about that as well as
25 about opening up the lines of communication there, to see

1 what the problems were before we moved forward with
2 trying to take care of some things.

3 Now, legislatively, again let me give they
4 credit. They have come to us. They talked to us.
5 They've pushed pieces of legislation in terms of trying
6 to do things in Baker, but overall I think if you had to
7 put the pluses and the minuses and the good and the bad,
8 the pluses outweigh the minuses and the good outweighs
9 the bad.

10 COMMISSIONER BERRY: It was my impression from
11 listening to the people last time that they were not so
12 much -- no one was complaining about the Mayor. I mean,
13 nobody got up and said -- so it was not government
14 officials aren't doing their job. That wasn't the point
15 anybody was making.

16 The point, as I understood it was, they were
17 talking about people to people communication,
18 congregation to congregation communication, and they were
19 talking about the need for more of that kind of
20 discussion, not to say we don't like this public official
21 or that public official, but what about people sharing
22 and talking?

23 And that's what -- when we say conversation on
24 race or dialogue about race, that's what we mean. We
25 don't mean, you know, two elected officials talking to

1 each other about the issue of --

2 MAYOR SIMPSON: Kip and I think we do a pretty
3 good job. I guess all I can tell you is about my own
4 personal experience about that outside of the government,
5 talk to you as Bobby Simpson, Bakerite.

6 I got to the Bethany World Prayer Center. I
7 guess our congregation must be at least 40 percent black.
8 We have cell group theory all over this area. In fact,
9 it goes all the way to Mississippi and all the way down
10 to Plaquemine, and there's quite a bit of interaction
11 there.

12 Now, so far as just this church and another
13 church, I'm not sure -- we'd have to throw that back to
14 the pastors to know how they feel there.

15 I know there's a ministerial alliance here that
16 most of our churches are a part of, and they meet -- we
17 had National Day of Prayer, which is proclaimed. And a
18 few years ago we had that at a city office. Fourteen
19 pastors from all over the city, both black and white,
20 attended that.

21 So from a government, yes, I can tell you that,
22 and from my own personal spiritual life, I know that
23 we're very inclusive in our church of everyone, but so
24 far as the rest of them, I couldn't speak.

25 COMMISSIONER BERRY: And what about any

1 tensions around the school desegregation issue? Anybody
2 know anything about that at all?

3 MAYOR SIMPSON: We've had hearings. We've had
4 a lot of hearings and I guess kind of just like the
5 legislative that started in '9 -- is that when the
6 constitutional amendment went through -- no one paid any
7 attention in '95 to the constitutional amendment.

8 It went through both House and the Senate
9 unopposed. No one took this seriously until it I guess
10 got to a point where it looked like it was going to
11 happen, and then -- because we had been having town hall
12 meetings. We had been having Council meetings. We had a
13 school education commission meeting.

14 We just had all kind of public meetings on
15 this, and it didn't get to the point where all of a
16 sudden it looked like hey, they're going to do this
17 thing. Then it appeared that some people felt like they
18 had been left out.

19 But this process had been going on for quite a
20 while. It started in '92, but it got serious after the
21 election of '95. There was a state constitutional
22 amendment that 65 percent of the people in the State,
23 along with this Parish, some 80 percent in Baker said go
24 for it.

25 And then that went along for another year

1 before it really got to the point where it looked like
2 the City of Baker might be able to have -- and that's
3 when all of a sudden when it got to the forefront that
4 hey, they may succeed in this, then we started having
5 some folks that felt like they had been left out of the
6 process, or at least that was our understanding of it.

7 COMMISSIONER BERRY: And what's happening on it
8 now?

9 MR. GIBSON: When he's finished, I'd like to
10 say something.

11 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Okay. Go right ahead.

12 MR. GIBSON: My name is Everett Gibson, and
13 this is my wife Trini, and we live in Baker on Francis
14 Drive.

15 And we represent -- opposite, and we -- this
16 school district that Baker is trying to get into. Just
17 because they have authorization to go from a state and
18 the other body, that doesn't mean they have to go.

19 And I'm concerned along two or three lines.
20 Number one is that it seems as though that the power to
21 be just want to move on this regardless. They not --
22 They are not putting out any definitive cost, what this
23 is going to do.

24 We're concerned about what this is really going
25 to cost the citizens of Baker to get quality school

1 district. Did have Professor Miller -- study, and he
2 indicated that within certain parameters of the state
3 average, but that does not include any start-up costs,
4 which we think going to be considerable.

5 Don't have any buildings, don't have any
6 equipment, and all this would have to be negotiated and
7 you're saying that you're going to do a district and you
8 don't have any cost out there.

9 I mean, to me, as I -- I'm not saying anything
10 here that I have not said up in the public meeting and
11 Bill knows that. I made these points very clear in the
12 last two or three meetings that we've had.

13 So that's the main thing, so you have to do
14 this without knowing exactly -- or pretty close. You may
15 not know exactly, but you know, you have a pretty good
16 idea of what the cost going to be, because if you're
17 going to tax the system too much, that's going to run the
18 property taxes up, and that will inhibit growth in the
19 City of Baker if we have to pay an extraordinary amount
20 of taxes.

21 We're already paying about 44, 45 mills now, so
22 if you go up to where you've got to pay three or four,
23 five times what you're paying now -- now, I don't think
24 most people would be willing to trade fourteen or fifteen
25 hundred dollars for property tax, just to have a -- Baker

1 has an independent school district.

2 So we are real concerned about that, and the
3 other concern was expressed in the meeting last -- the
4 last public meeting they had, and that was concerning
5 Baker was kept saying well, we want to do -- we want to -
6 - Baker had a public school district so the students in
7 Baker, live in Baker, can go to school in Baker.

8 Well, even -- Parish satisfied that, and they
9 say oh, that just was this year. We have no guarantees
10 that it's going to happen in years to come, so we'll have
11 no grantee.

12 Okay. So we put it back to them, what
13 guarantee do we have that once you get this system
14 started, that you won't make any balancing system to go
15 to a private school and take the money with them to
16 private school, and we're left with no school at all.

17 We can always get outvoted four to one, so we
18 have some great concerns about that, and from a
19 historical point of view, because before 1967, before
20 desegregation, Baker had no public school for its black
21 citizens.

22 They had to go to Zachary. They had to go to
23 Zachary or Scotlandville to do that. They was the only
24 city I know around here that did not provide any school
25 at all in history for its blacks. So we have some

1 concerns about that.

2 So we put those things on the table out front
3 so everything knows that we have concerns about those
4 kind of things. You ask for guarantee -- we ask the City
5 Attorney, because he give us assurance by state law that
6 they have to provide public education, and he -- the
7 Senator said no, I cannot guarantee you that. That's the
8 way he sums it up, I cannot grantee you that we will have
9 a public education system for all of its citizens.

10 So those are the kind of concerns that -- two
11 of the main concerns that we have, and the people that we
12 represent, we did not vote for. In the district where we
13 vote, we -- you know, we are solidly against it.

14 COMMISSIONER BERRY: And what's the racial
15 makeup of the district you live in?

16 MR. GIBSON: Makeup of what?

17 COMMISSIONER BERRY: What's the racial makeup
18 of the district you're in?

19 MR. GIBSON: Basically it's this Dr. Davis
20 district, so I'd say about 60/40.

21 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Mm-hmm. And what -- do
22 you see any advantages to having a separate school,
23 independent school?

24 MR. GIBSON: Well, the advantage is -- well, I
25 expressed to concern is can you avoid it?

1 COMMISSIONER BERRY: No, I mean do you -- what
2 do you think about the arguments on the other side, that
3 -- well, maybe we better have the arguments on the other
4 side. What is the argument that it's advantageous to do
5 this?

6 MAYOR SIMPSON: Well --

7 COMMISSIONER BERRY: We just heard the
8 arguments. Let's put them side by side.

9 MAYOR SIMPSON: I guess you're addressing that
10 to me.

11 And you have to go through the progression of
12 this. In '92, the first time I had ever been involved in
13 any type of election, the number one question on
14 everybody's mind that -- the doors that I knocked on were
15 what can you do about our kids?

16 In the City of Baker -- and to address his
17 second point -- the City of Baker has never been
18 responsible for the education of its kids. That's been a
19 parish function ever since the inception of public
20 education in this area.

21 So the very group that you're supporting is the
22 one that excluded you in Baker in the early 50's and 40's
23 and 60's here. That's a parish function.

24 So we've always been at the beckon call of the
25 parish for the education of our children. So in '92

1 after everybody said look, what can you do, we were under
2 a -- and you may know this, but we're under the longest
3 running desegregation suit in America, and since '82 the
4 judge has been in charge of the assignment plan, because
5 our school board would not do anything.

6 So he put his own system together. In Baker's
7 case, because our whites and our blacks are so close
8 together, because of North Baton Rouge and Baker, he did
9 a clustering system. He took the white kids from Baker,
10 and moved them to Scotlandville. He took the black kids
11 from Scotlandville and moved them to Baker, and they
12 would go two years each place.

13 At the middle school level the kids in Baker
14 had no choice but to go in to Scotlandville to school.

15 What's happening is by the time kids got to
16 high school, both black and white, those who could afford
17 it, they put their kids in private school.

18 So it got to a point where it was killing us on
19 any -- if you called our City Hall and said where -- I'm
20 moving on Johnson Street, where will my kids go to
21 school? We would say we can't tell you, it depends on
22 your race, it depends on your address, it depends on a
23 number of -- the age of the child.

24 They put it in a computer and it spits out
25 where the child will go to school. So we started our

1 process with public hearings. We started going to the
2 school board and saying listen, all we want is for a kid
3 that lives in Baker to be able to go to the five schools
4 in Baker. We don't care if you're having to bring other
5 people in to Baker to take care of problems that you're
6 having outside of Baker. Just allow -- because we're a
7 community.

8 There's not but three of us in each Baton Rouge
9 parish. It's us, Zachary and the City of Baton Rouge.
10 Everybody else is part of the parish.

11 People move to Baker because they want to be a
12 part of it. It's the hub of our community, and it really
13 was. On Friday nights the football stadium was the place
14 to be.

15 So it's a big dilemma. Everything has been
16 one. We're down, dropped from a 5-A, the largest
17 classification in the state, to a 4-A. We've seen a lot
18 of transition in our city from people that own houses, to
19 a rental type situation here in Baker.

20 So we kept going to the school board. They
21 kept saying well, we're going to do a bond issue, we're
22 going to tie it to a big mega-schools. Well, that got
23 beat 65 percent in the parish.

24 The next concept was what we have at the school
25 board now, was a CATE proposal. CATE would come in and

1 try to have this system declared unitary by the federal
2 judge.

3 So we went in. When the new board, which was
4 '94, I guess the new board went into effect, the new
5 school board, present sitting school board. We asked
6 them again, we're not worried about what you're having to
7 bring to our city, just let our kids go to school.

8 Again, the new board said no, when we correct
9 it, it's going to be parish-wide. We can't tweak any
10 lines and make sure that kids that live in Baker go to
11 Baker.

12 So that was the session of 1995, I think, or
13 the election was '95. It might have been -- it might
14 have '95. Probably February of '95. I had two of the
15 highest ranking legislators seniority-wise in the state.
16 They came to me and said what's the biggest issue in
17 Baker?

18 I said the school system. They said well,
19 basically there's nothing we can do about the school
20 system.

21 Then they got to looking around and they said
22 yeah, this is what it takes. It takes a state
23 constitutional amendment because the constitution of the
24 State of Louisiana says education shall be by the parish,
25 except in the Cities of Bogalusa and the Cities of West

1 Monroe, which were already incorporated school districts,
2 prior to the last constitutional amendment of the State
3 of Louisiana, which was -- oh, it was 70's -- but these
4 two systems had been in since the 30's.

5 So this had never been done. So it took a two-
6 thirds vote of the House and the Senate to get it on a
7 ballot. It passed both the House and the Senate
8 unanimously. Everybody just -- I think -- and Kip can
9 tell you more about that.

10 Basically I don't think anybody thought we
11 would ever get further than that. So that got it on the
12 ballot, the ballot of November of '95.

13 The State passed the '65 percent. The parish
14 passed the 65 percent, and we were in excess of 75
15 percent in Baker.

16 So we rock along there for a little while. We
17 had the constitutional amendment. The school board
18 immediately began to fight us, the buildings. There was
19 nothing in the enabling legislation that did anything
20 with the buildings or any transitional costs.

21 Some of the things that Dr. Gibson has brought
22 up, none of that was included in the legislation.

23 So it was just we'll start forward and the
24 school board start -- so as recently as June the 16th we
25 were scheduled to be before Judge Parker on the school

1 board had sued the State of Louisiana on the
2 constitutionality of the constitutional amendment.

3 Okay. So that got the state -- they wouldn't
4 sue us, because we're not a school board, and if they
5 sued the City of Baker, then we become an entity in the
6 federal deseg suit, which is what they fought all along
7 to allow us -- anyway, complication, complication.

8 So all of a sudden the school board then wanted
9 to proceed with a bond issue for this whole parish, which
10 that causes a problem because they're fighting us legally
11 and their bond attorneys won't give them a clean finish.

12 So they came to us. We've since negotiated a
13 settlement. The settlement involves giving the parish
14 another year to come forward in unitary with the whole
15 system, us included, in a bond issue.

16 If the bond issue passes, we remain part of the
17 system for a while, until 2002. If the bond issue fails,
18 then this time next year we're allowed to proceed with
19 all the questions that Dr. Gibson has asked, answered.

20 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, what do the people
21 who want the independent school district, what do you
22 expect to get if Baker had its own schools?

23 MAYOR SIMPSON: Sense of community, a sense of
24 community. I think we've been bused and moved. I went
25 to school with Major's children. We still know each

1 other 30 years later by first name.

2 In the City of Baker in 1992 our 2500 children
3 will go into 62 different schools. The sense of
4 community had been destroyed. One of the largest 5-A
5 schools in this state could not field a football team,
6 because they had to get kids on buses to get them out of
7 the City, when the school bell rang.

8 If the coaching staff had not taken kids home,
9 we wouldn't even have had a football -- you're talking
10 about one of the most prestigious high schools in the
11 state, whether you looked academically or any other way.
12 We lost all that.

13 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Is it a race issue?

14 MAYOR SIMPSON: No. I don't think so.

15 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Is there a racial
16 polarization around whether people approve or disprove of
17 this idea?

18 MAYOR SIMPSON: Most of the people that I'm
19 talking to approve. I mean, I'm talking City workers
20 that live here.

21 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Let me ask --

22 MAYOR SIMPSON: And I'll tell you that Dr.
23 Gibson --

24 COMMISSIONER BERRY: -- Dr. Gibson the same
25 question.

1 MAYOR SIMPSON: -- does not, but if --

2 COMMISSIONER BERRY: He doesn't live in Baker?

3 MAYOR SIMPSON: And I think if you'll ask some
4 of the other folks that are here --

5 COMMISSIONER BERRY: I will. I'll ask them
6 too. I just want to find out whether -- I'm just asking.

7 MAYOR SIMPSON: Yeah.

8 COMMISSIONER BERRY: I'm trying to find out if
9 there are any racial tensions, and if there are, what
10 people are doing about them, and this obviously seems to
11 be a hot issue. I don't know if it's a race issue but
12 it's a hot issue.

13 MR. GIBSON: Could I follow up just a moment?
14 You know, you have to understand the issues and that's
15 one of the problems we have, if you don't understand the
16 issues, you may not be for or against until you have an
17 education process.

18 And that's what it's going to take as far as we
19 are concerned, but the people that we are around in our
20 neighborhoods and other places around where we vote, they
21 have indicated that, you know, this is -- this could be a
22 real problem, you know, because we don't have any surety
23 of what's going to happen in the future.

24 So I don't want to call it a race issue, but we
25 don't see the advantages of it, especially when we don't

1 know the cost, and the cost is one of the big things too,
2 if there was some definitive costs that you could afford
3 and quality, not just a school system, but a quality
4 school system.

5 Mayor did a little study about the finances and
6 he came up with like \$7 million to do the whole district,
7 and you know, that does not include any start-up costs or
8 anything like that, and food service, buses, buildings,
9 equipment, and you know, it's going to take a lot of
10 money.

11 COMMISSIONER BERRY: So if the financial
12 questions were answered, you'd be for it?

13 MR. GIBSON: Well, I'd still have some
14 reservation, you know. I've still got some reservation,
15 but that would allow a whole lot of the concerns,
16 especially some of the other people that we are talking
17 to.

18 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Okay. Sure, I appreciate
19 it. I appreciate that. Thank you for coming.

20 MAYOR SIMPSON: We're sorry, but we do have a
21 Council meeting at 7:00.

22 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Thank you very much.
23 Appreciate it.

24 MAYOR SIMPSON: Be glad to follow up and I
25 think you're aware that --

1 COMMISSIONER BERRY: We will. We'll see what
2 everybody here has to say. We appreciate --

3 MAYOR SIMPSON: And if there's something that
4 you need to follow, we'll probably be up there until 8:30
5 tonight. You know where City Hall is. Come on. If not,
6 just have Kip come by and deliver the message to me.

7 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Glad you raised the
8 schools issue. Seems to be a hot point.

9 MAYOR SIMPSON: It is but, Kip, I don't know --
10 there was a 20-page amendment in this year's legislation.
11 We have entered into a binding agreement that we're
12 trying to get made part of the consent decree, that
13 answers every question that you have. Every question
14 that has to be answered publicly before we are allowed to
15 go forward.

16 The enabling legislation didn't allow it, we
17 could have been cut off, had the education of kids
18 without buildings or anything else. This has all been
19 taken care of in this document, and hopefully --

20 COMMISSIONER BERRY: We'll take a look at it.
21 Thank you.

22 MR. GIBSON: One other point, Dr. Berry, if you
23 don't mind --

24 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Okay. Well, then I want
25 to see if anybody else here has a comment on --

1 MR. GIBSON: Yeah, very briefly, just one brief
2 on that point. You see, the whole thing before we got to
3 where we are now is they act as though Baker was not a
4 part of East Baton Rouge Parish, so what they ask them to
5 do something special just for Baker. All the other local
6 areas could ask the same thing, but you see, you're part
7 of a parish, then you have to do it in a unified manner
8 rather than just doing something just to satisfy one
9 entity within the parish.

10 That's all I wanted to say.

11 MR. QUIGLEY: Just to call a couple of the
12 names of the people that are here that feel like saying
13 anything, that if you -- suggest you were going to say
14 something earlier.

15 MR. PORCHE: I took the low side, you know,
16 because he's my elder. Always giving respect.

17 COMMISSIONER BERRY: I see. Okay. All right.
18 Well, now if you want to, why don't you now?

19 MR. PORCHE: Give me something, pertaining to
20 what?

21 COMMISSIONER BERRY: The schools issue, what do
22 you think about that? Identify yourself first.

23 MR. PORCHE: My name is Sullivan Porche. I'm a
24 Baker resident. I've been here about 15 years.

25 Saying something about the new school system

1 that Mr. Simpson is trying to implement and he had a good
2 suggestion about the cost.

3 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Dr. Gibson?

4 MR. PORCHE: Yeah. And I agree with him
5 totally, but also I agree with our Mayor too, because to
6 me he said -- he answered him -- seems to me like he
7 answered him, yet he was going to answer all of the
8 questions later on before it comes to a complete vote.

9 My recollection might not have been right. It
10 seems like that's what he's saying, so in essence further
11 up down the road, that's when everything will be cleared
12 up, and for my children, yes, I want them to go -- well,
13 not my children now -- my children have been to Baker --
14 my grandchildren.

15 I would like all my grandchildren to go to
16 Baker, because all of them live in Baker, and to say
17 Baker be independent or part of the City, I feel it
18 doesn't matter if they're getting a quality education.

19 If the education is quality, the teachers is
20 quality, I wouldn't care what type of system they have,
21 long as the education is quality, my kids are going to
22 learn.

23 That's the bottom line to me.

24 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, how many -- if
25 anybody knows this, what percentage of students here do

1 in fact go to private academies or private schools, when
2 they go to high school? The Mayor mentioned that large
3 numbers do --

4 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: You mean in the City of
5 Baker, in --

6 COMMISSIONER BERRY: In the area --

7 MR. GIBSON: Article in today's paper, there
8 are 19,000 parochial and private school student in the
9 East Baton Rouge Parish, and public schools runs about
10 fifty-four, fifty-five thousand. So that's roughly about
11 twice, three times.

12 COMMISSIONER BERRY: And are most of the
13 private schools desegregated?

14 MR. GIBSON: Yes, a lot of parochial, because
15 there are heavy parochial -- historically here in East
16 Baton Rouge Parish, Catholic schools too, but most of
17 them --

18 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Are there private
19 academies too?

20 MR. GIBSON: And you have private academies,
21 quite a few of them. I think most of them are
22 desegregated, but if they're like -- give scholarships
23 and things to come over and --

24 COMMISSIONER BERRY: I see.

25 MR. GIBSON: Play football.

1 COMMISSIONER BERRY: The other thing I wanted
2 to ask is -- I won't ask you, Representative, because you
3 didn't say anything about the schools, so I assume you
4 don't want to say anything about --

5 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: I think there's
6 probably a question as to whether or not if the school
7 system was taken over, they may move back to somewhat of
8 a segregated system, and maybe that's what nobody really
9 wants to talk about here.

10 And there are some concerns there, to make sure
11 that there is still equal access for all children and not
12 in a system where you -- a lead system, then the people
13 you may not want, they are cut out of the district and
14 forced to go somewhere else.

15 So I think that is going to be a very big
16 question to afford equal access to all schools regardless
17 of race.

18 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, one of the things
19 that we've discovered in doing hearings in the South --
20 we just did one in the Mississippi Delta recently, and
21 these forums is that very often people will not speak
22 directly about race. You can spend three hours with
23 people, just like we're doing here at this forum, and if
24 you didn't know any better, because like if you hadn't
25 been anywhere around here, and I have, so I know better,

1 like if all you knew was the discussion that you heard in
2 the room, you'd think well, my goodness, there's a place
3 where they never even heard of race relations or racism
4 or anything.

5 Why is it this sort of tip toeing around, even
6 talking about the school issue, when everybody knows that
7 there's a segregation issue involved in it, which is
8 about race? Why is it that no one wants to discuss it
9 directly and have it, you know, act as if, you know, it's
10 everything else in the world, and we don't want to talk
11 about that?

12 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: I think a lot of times,
13 you know, people don't want to then get the label of
14 being called a racist, you know, because -- or a trouble
15 maker in the community, or you know, rebel rouser, or
16 whatever label they put on them, and then you also talk
17 about a small town.

18 And when you talk about a small town, although
19 it's the East Baton Rouge Parish, you can create a lot of
20 different factions in this whole thing, so it's not like
21 to make it explosive, because there are some blacks who
22 side with the Mayor on this issue, and there are some who
23 don't.

24 So that could be a dividing line, and there are
25 some who will probably say well, you know that guy that

1 lives over there, he shouldn't be saying that about the
2 Mayor and this proposal.

3 And so it creates all kind of division in the
4 process.

5 But it goes back to the original point I had.
6 There needs to be dialogue, and that dialogue is not
7 there, in my opinion to the degree that it should be, and
8 I think the concerns are voiced by Dr. Gibson should be
9 addressed, and you know, like the Mayor brought out the
10 point about well, we got all of it through the
11 legislative process with the constitutional amendment,
12 and then people began to react.

13 But at the same time if we get all the way
14 through this school process and people find out on the
15 back end what has happened, then they may not have time
16 to react, and before you know it, you got a school system
17 in place and many of the concerns expressed may have been
18 talked about but never addressed.

19 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, you hit on something
20 else that I think is very important generally. Some
21 people would argue that to ask for a dialogue about race
22 means that you are creating racial tensions, just by
23 saying people should talk about it.

24 And at that point you shouldn't talk about it,
25 and people said that about the President's initiative and

1 said it when we ask for local conversations about race,
2 and that even though everybody knows there's a race
3 issue, maybe we just don't talk about it, because there
4 will be people divided because it's not even that people
5 are divided in terms of all blacks believe in this and
6 all whites believe in that, but there is a racial
7 dimension to whatever the issue is.

8 And so the argument is don't talk about it,
9 maybe it will somehow be better if you don't, and then
10 other people say well, if you don't talk about it, and
11 you're never going to deal with it, because how can you
12 and how can you vote -- I don't know the answer.

13 MS. GIBSON: I think someone mentioned -- asked
14 the question -- I think you did, Dr. Berry, if in fact
15 that was -- race issue in terms of the school system.

16 I don't know specifically the racial of black
17 at Baker High School, but basically the majority are
18 black. They are black.

19 We know that Bethany Christian Church that he
20 is a member of has a lot of blacks who go there, but
21 basically we're looking at the issue -- Baker High is
22 mostly basically black, and I think that is really the
23 source right there, it appears.

24 COMMISSIONER BERRY: So what would happen to
25 the school under the plan? Does anybody know?

1 MR. GIBSON: It's -- they're projecting it
2 would be 50-50. ~

3 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Oh, I see.

4 MR. GIBSON: That's the projection.

5 MR. JENKINS: In other words, it would reduce
6 the number of blacks? It would bring in more white
7 students --

8 MR. GIBSON: Yes.

9 MR. JENKINS: -- into the school system?

10 MR. GIBSON: Yes. Predict some of them going
11 to parochial schools would also come back, the whites
12 that fled.

13 MR. QUIGLEY: We also have Mr. and Mrs. Stewart
14 that are here that are teachers. I don't know if they
15 have -- Dr. Stewart.

16 DR. STEWART: A member of our organization.

17 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Right, retired teachers.

18 DR. STEWART: I've been here since '78 and I
19 retired in '83, and I retired from Louisiana in '72, so
20 I've been around a long time and I've been in education
21 most of that time, and it's interesting to me, as I hear
22 people talk and emotionalize, and it's based on generally
23 you and me -- what I've been hearing all this while, even
24 when I was teaching, is the you-me question, and mine and
25 yours, and my attempt to get for mine what mine should

1 have.

2 And I don't think that's what education is all
3 about. I believe in good leadership and leadership tends
4 to bring the population to an awareness of what is good
5 for you and the things that are not so good, and then
6 they draw the leadership together and agree.

7 And once we have agreed, we tend to promote
8 based on that. I can't help but go back to Thomas
9 Jefferson when he said anyone who expect to be free and
10 ignorant, expect what never was, never will be.

11 We tried everything in the book from the
12 beginning of our education movement when we came from
13 England, we tried everything -- the school, this kind of
14 school, we've tried everything.

15 None of it worked. And I hear this noise right
16 now about some of those same things that we tried back
17 then, and it didn't work. I'm just as convinced now that
18 they won't work as I was when I read what they did back
19 then that didn't work.

20 You need people working together for a common
21 school. You need people who understand what the word
22 education truly means. We had the Seventh Order
23 principals to serve as our guide at first.

24 Number one, the command is on the principals,
25 but now listen what we do. We put all of our education

1 on reading, writing and arithmetic, and we call that
2 quality education, and it's not.

3 That's one of the tools that enhances the
4 possibility for getting a true education but a true
5 education is understanding the total world of society.
6 Bringing to the awareness of people what the outside
7 world is and what we need to do in order to live in it.

8 When I was a child, the world was a big thing,
9 definition for education grew out of that big concept of
10 what it was.

11 But today the world is so small, I can jump
12 almost to the other side, and to sit here and try to
13 isolate myself and pretend I can create a self-contained
14 education without involving the other members of our
15 society is ridiculous.

16 That is down right ridiculous. And I hate to
17 see people keep talking that kind of language, and I wish
18 somebody -- I bet somebody just -- our definition for
19 education needs to be revised.

20 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Dr. Stewart?

21 DR. STEWART: Yes.

22 COMMISSIONER BERRY: I agree with just about
23 everything you said. As a matter of fact, I agree with
24 all of it. I agree with everything you said, but I
25 wanted to ask, do you have any views on the desegregation

1 plan?

2 DR. STEWART: I have views.

3 COMMISSIONER BERRY: That you wish to share?

4 DR. STEWART: But it's going to be on that same
5 basis. I don't believe whites and black can operate
6 separately and have a strong education system.

7 COMMISSIONER BERRY: So we should have
8 desegregation?

9 DR. STEWART: I don't believe that's possible.
10 You've got a fight on your hand that you can't win. I
11 don't believe any war has ever been won. We win a battle
12 and conquer someone, but the war is still on.

13 And it's going to be the same thing in your
14 education system. You're not going to win this until we
15 see education as it is and promote it just like Thomas
16 Jefferson said, until every child is educated, we will
17 not have a democracy.

18 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Okay. We're going to hold
19 that point and we'll come back to you in just a minute.
20 If you'll just hold that point.

21 MR. QUIGLEY: Mr. Montgomery.

22 MR. MONTGOMERY: I don't have anything.

23 COMMISSIONER BERRY: You don't have any views
24 you wish to share?

25 MR. MONTGOMERY: No, I don't. I came in late -

1 -

2 COMMISSIONER BERRY: We have some other folks
3 sitting there. The school plan or anything else that's
4 going on? Anything else you feel like saying? Schools -

5 -

6 DR. SEPTS: My name is Dr. Ernest Septs, and I
7 too live here in Baker, and prior to Dr. Gibson's
8 comments, that was one of my major concerns before it was
9 discussed as a result was just being in groups about
10 Baker getting its own school system, because many of us
11 were concerned about the additional taxes or the expenses
12 that were somewhat under cover, that other people really
13 didn't know about.

14 As of now, we still know -- and we find that
15 many people in the area are not aware of the possibility
16 of having to pay additional taxes. They just feel that
17 we, you know, might get an independent or a school system
18 in Baker alone.

19 However, I have always been concerned about a
20 quality education, but I sat and I listened and I heard
21 various individuals speak and some of the concerns were
22 why people don't say certain things, but there are
23 various reasons why people don't say the things.

24 And I learned from my experiences many times
25 when you speak, people feel that you are focused, you're

1 rebellious, and many times you don't speak just to speak,
2 when you can justify by what you say and it has merit,
3 but then when it comes to promotions and other things of
4 this nature, you are out. You don't worry about it. I
5 don't care what you know, in many cases we use the term,
6 it's not what you know, it's who you know, because you're
7 just going to be left on the back burner, and I'm serious
8 about this, and many times now even myself and maybe it's
9 not a good policy, think that I used to share order.

10 I just sit back now, you know, and --

11 COMMISSIONER BERRY: I've got your point.

12 DR. SEPTS: Yes, and let them slide on by,
13 because in many instances, you know, it's going to come
14 back to haunt you in some form or fashion.

15 But in terms of schools here -- again, some of
16 the things were mentioned -- it is true and I for an
17 example is one of the ones, even though he said that it
18 was the school system -- I was bused from Baker to
19 Zachary. I went to Northwestern. See, we passed Baker
20 High over here, and we went to Northwestern in Zachary.

21 Of course, we had Zachary High, because we got
22 to pass Zachary High before we got to Northwestern High,
23 and these are facts.

24 But I do pray to God and put God in the lead
25 that things will work out.

1 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Let me ask you a question,
2 Doctor, before you sit down. I like the points that you
3 made and I understood your points, but as you were
4 talking I was trying to figure out how the President is
5 going to have -- President Clinton -- how he and his task
6 force are going to have national town meetings where
7 people engage -- those communities where people engage in
8 open dialogue about race, when our experience has been
9 because of constraints -- I mean, not everybody is as
10 free or as crazy as I am.

11 So especially when people live in small towns.
12 You can't expect people to get up and say all kinds of
13 stuff that's going to be in the paper and TV, and the
14 radio or whatever, because they have to live in the town
15 after you're gone. The town meeting is over.

16 DR. SEPTS: That's true.

17 COMMISSIONER BERRY: They're still there, so I
18 was just sitting there trying to figure out how, when you
19 were talking, I was thinking, you know, the President
20 thinks, you know, we're going to have all these great
21 town meetings, and everybody is going to get up and say
22 anything they think about.

23 DR. SEPTS: And that's so true.

24 COMMISSIONER BERRY: And I'm just wondering,
25 and I think that probably what is going to happen is the

1 same thing that happens -- the only time we get people
2 protected is the Commission itself has subpoena power,
3 not the State Advisory Committees, but the actual full
4 Commission, when I'm sitting with them like we did over
5 in Mississippi Delta, and we subpoena people, and when we
6 subpoena them, they are under order of paying a penalty
7 to swear to tell whatever they want to tell, and also
8 they -- what they say is investigated.

9 So under that kind of compunction some people
10 feel protected by the subpoena, and other people respond
11 when they're needed, but in the absence of that, to go
12 someplace and expect people to stand up in public and say
13 what is on their minds and hearts, ultimately I guess it
14 depends on who it is and where it is, so I don't expect
15 you to say anything about that.

16 I just wondered why -- stand up and tell you
17 that I was just trying to figure out how to convey that
18 to the President.

19 DR. SEPTS: Well, I appreciate that but many
20 people have not been as forceful as you, because you
21 succeed in a lot of us --

22 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Right, I understand.

23 DR. SEPTS: We haven't had that extent -- but
24 seriously, not necessarily here in Baker, but I'm
25 speaking, you know, parish-wide, and in other areas, and

1 groups in our area -- I'm sure they can attest to many of
2 the things that I am saying.

3 Many times when it comes to promotions and
4 things, it's not what you know, it's who you know. You
5 know, if you're on buddy-buddy and many times -- so I
6 just come as a result of -- he's not going to agreed with
7 certain things.

8 It's not that I'm disagreeing just to disagree,
9 but if the sun is not shining and somebody says the sun's
10 shining, I don't think the sun is shining. I mean, it's
11 just that simple.

12 DR. STEWART: I agree.

13 DR. SEPTS: Thank you.

14 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yes.

15 DR. STEWART: I know you're not ready to do
16 this -- because we pretty well been ready to go -- a
17 program. And I'm convinced that unless we do do
18 something else a little different, it looks like it won't
19 work well, put it that way.

20 We should take some cognizance of what people
21 in the parish get -- they organize conferences and
22 committees to study for -- and those committees work,
23 even -- one time for eight-year study to bring out the
24 educational needs of youth, and that was considered one
25 of the top studies of our nation for education.

1 But since we are moving so fast, we don't have
2 time for that, but we could hold conferences, work
3 conference for leadership, not for the ordinary people,
4 but for the leadership, to come together on what this
5 thing is we're talking about.

6 I keep hearing the word quality education, but
7 I don't hear anybody tell me what that is. They had
8 definitions back then, and you could define what they
9 meant when they said education, so we just use the word
10 quality education. I don't know what that is, unless you
11 tell me.

12 I know what I would mean -- why don't we look
13 at the total individual and bring somebody together, the
14 top people and decide what it is we're going to do here
15 in quality education.

16 MR. QUIGLEY: I would like to make just a brief
17 report on what has happened on the state level. We did
18 say since the last time we were here, we did meet with
19 the Governor, Mr. Jenkins and the Louisiana Advisory
20 Board, which the Governor heads, for lunch and he was
21 very, very nice and very polite to everybody.

22 You know, I'm honestly not that sure that he
23 understands the ideas of civil rights issues and
24 dialogue, and that, because his ideas about dialogue are
25 a little bit different I think than most of the people on

1 the Commission.

2 But he was polite and open to that, and he
3 helped, you know, raise some money for some awards for
4 some of this. I do know at the State Legislature that
5 they increased the penalties for hate crimes and for
6 arson of churches and that, so that's some real progress.

7 I do know in New Orleans and other places
8 around the state they have had some community forums on
9 the church burnings and the like.

10 I think there has been a little bit of
11 awareness raised by the efforts of the Civil Rights
12 Commission and the Black Caucus and various other civil
13 rights groups around.

14 I think as a member of the Commission it's
15 surprising how far we still have to go, that people in
16 our conversation with the governor in particular, he
17 seemed very nice and very sensitive, but in all honesty
18 very unaware of an awful lot of the issues, and I think
19 we can see these coming up in our state now in terms of
20 these mothers and children getting cut off of welfare, in
21 particular, in some of the issues of jobs and education
22 and the local issues, as well.

23 So that there has been a few things that have
24 happened in the interim, but I think the Commission needs
25 to take notice of -- but I think the fundamental issues -

1 - I would like to hear what you think -- I think the
2 fundamental issues are not all that much different than
3 they were a year ago.

4 COMMISSIONER BERRY: That's a good question,
5 way to put it -- is how much, if anything, has changed
6 since last year?

7 MR. PORCHE: Can I say something else?

8 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yes.

9 MR. PORCHE: I was talking about the school
10 system, but getting back to the church issue --

11 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah.

12 MR. PORCHE: I didn't say nothing about that.

13 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Yeah, getting back to
14 that.

15 MR. PORCHE: What I want to say is -- a lot of
16 these faces -- I don't know a lot of these faces. Maybe
17 this meeting brought them here, you know, but we have a
18 saying about -- in our church, who is a good neighbor?

19 A good neighbor don't be white or black. It
20 don't have no color. And, you know, it's good to have
21 new faces here. It's good to have them here.

22 But when our church got burned, I mean, some
23 people might have some negative things to say about our
24 Mayor -- I haven't been knowing him like maybe some of
25 you all, 20, 30 years, I haven't been knowing him that

1 long.

2 But see, to me I judge a person's merit on how
3 he treats you, and when our church got burned, like all
4 these new faces I see here now, I didn't see them back
5 then.

6 Mayor Simpson, regardless what they say about
7 him, I got to say positive, because that's how I received
8 him, positive. He came -- we didn't ask him to come to
9 our church. He came to our church and didn't come by
10 himself. He brought the policemen, the head policeman,
11 fire department, different people to our church to help
12 us, and we didn't ask for that.

13 Donate -- how much he donate, a thousand or how
14 much -- donate -- we didn't ask for a dime, but he did
15 that out of kindness. Now, maybe he did it for some --
16 for merit or whatever. I don't know what he did it for,
17 but I'm saying he did it because he wanted to help the
18 black community, he wasn't going to tolerate racism or
19 whatever in his town.

20 And that's how I received it. Maybe a lot of
21 people might not receive it like that, but you know I
22 received it just how he give it to me. That's how I
23 received it.

24 And he didn't just offer help. They brought
25 help, just like he said, they came in painted. I mean, a

1 lot of them come in to help. I mean, didn't ask for a
2 dime, and just recently -- this year and last year people
3 still sending us money to help take care of our church
4 and everything.

5 And I'm not going to tell you that racism is
6 not bad in Baker, okay. Racism is bad everywhere. I
7 mean, just -- it's not just here, it's everywhere, and
8 I'm not going to tell you all whites is racist, just like
9 I'm not going to tell you all blacks is racist.

10 You have it on both sides, I don't care how you
11 look at it. That's how I see it, and to straighten out
12 all this mess, we're in the right place right now to
13 straighten it out, but we know for a fact it's not going
14 to be straightened out till our Savior comes back.

15 So we got to live here the best that we can,
16 abide by what I have right here, you know, and just have
17 been saying, you know, nobody don't think this here can
18 help solve any problems, but for me has been a deacon of
19 this church, I know for a fact we can solve problems in
20 my family, and I believe that's where the problem starts,
21 in your own family.

22 Then it spreads abroad. How can you talk about
23 straightening out something in Baker community, if you
24 can't even straighten it out in your family? That's
25 where it starts at. It starts in your family. Charity

1 starts at home, and it spreads abroad.

2 And to say the school system -- I don't know if
3 the school system ought to change, whatever, all them --
4 I don't know all them figures, you know, like you all
5 were shooting out there. I don't even know a bunch of
6 scripture to shoot out there, but I state the scripture
7 that the Holy Ghost bring to my remembrance, that's how I
8 say the scripture and that's how I speak.

9 But now, you're going to have something bad to
10 say about me probably too, you know. I am on nobody's
11 side. The only side I'm on is the good Lord's side, and
12 that's how I try to treat everybody equal. I don't look
13 at black or white because I got some white friends treats
14 me way better than my own color, and I guess you can say
15 vice versa.

16 So you can't really say about racism that, you
17 know, all white people is racism or going back in
18 circles, but I believe you see my point.

19 Thank you.

20 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Let me ask a question. Is
21 there a Human Rights Commission in Baker? We talked
22 before about whether there was one and whether the City
23 had set up one, and whether there was any intention to do
24 so.

25 Has there been any discussion insofar as any of

1 you know who live here in the City, about setting up a
2 Human Rights Commission to look at human rights issues in
3 the town?

4 MS. GIBSON: No, not that I'm aware of. I know
5 I had mentioned it when you were here before, and the
6 Mayor said that we do not need any commission to do this,
7 and I would like to also react to what the gentleman has
8 stated, that he's getting into personalities.

9 We are not against the Mayor on anything. We
10 are looking at issues as they are, and I think that's
11 what we have skirted so long, you know, bypassing the
12 real issues.

13 In order to solve any problems, we must head
14 the issue on and attack it and try to work it out,
15 because denying what is not, is not going to solve any
16 problem. We must accept this as a fact and we need to
17 work on it.

18 As soon as we accept that we do have problems,
19 then we can do something about it, but not before, and we
20 are not in to personalities, saying that the Mayor is
21 bad. We are looking at issues in general.

22 I think that's the way it is. I heard, I
23 believe from Mike -- that he said that how we may feel
24 about the Mayor. We don't carry any hard feelings about
25 the Mayor. We are looking at the issues in general,

1 what's going to affect all of us, you, me and everybody
2 else in Baker.

3 We're trying to make you aware of the
4 situation. That's all it is, so that when it does come
5 up, no one indicates this to me -- but you must be aware
6 of something before you can solve it, go about solving
7 the problem.

8 MR. QUIGLEY: I guess we promised everybody we
9 would try and end around 8:00, but we'll try to bring the
10 conversation back again to the idea, not whether
11 Representative Holden is doing a good job or the Mayor or
12 school board or anybody, but in terms of how is the
13 community served, and come back to that question again.
14 In the last year have things gotten better? Have things
15 gotten worse? Have things, you know, stayed pretty much
16 the same? I guess that's really the question where we
17 are.

18 MR. GIBSON: In Baker the issue has been around
19 the school deseg problem, and as representative -- I have
20 been to all of the public meetings and I have spoken out
21 just like I'm speaking -- said the same things there as I
22 said here, and so that they will know that we put these
23 issues on the table up front, and not after it's gone by,
24 and I think what the sentiment on the other side is that
25 we want to even now, when we hear the Mayor and other

1 people about we are going to do it, but they have already
2 predestined that they are going to do this, it's just a
3 matter of when.

4 You know, 1998 or 2002, whichever -- but the
5 idea is we're going to do it without, you know -- then
6 when the people find out exactly what is -- going out
7 there too far, you see, and before you really know what
8 it's going to cost, and then you're out there saying
9 you're going to do it, now you feel obligated to do it,
10 because you say you're going to do it, and you know, so
11 that's where we are, so our job is to educate the people.
12 I know we need to do a better job of that, because we've
13 got some studies also of what it will cost, and our
14 figures are way different from what he has indicated it
15 might cost.

16 MS. GIBSON: That's one of the things that
17 we've tried to do. We were initially not informed. It
18 appears that the Mayor had gotten other people who were
19 not knowledgeable, you know, of what is going on, and
20 then to satisfy them, but nothing came in to us.

21 We had to find it bits and pieces through the
22 back door, because I believe he may have been of the
23 opinion that let them know it, they might block what we
24 are trying to do.

25 So after we became knowledgeable, then we

1 started doing our research.

2 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, let me ask a
3 question. In any of the public meetings that have taken
4 place, has there been any discussion of the segregation
5 or race issue in the public meetings, or has it all been
6 about how much is this going to cost and that going to
7 cost, and is that going to be -- I mean, I'm just trying
8 to find out how open the discussion has been about the
9 issue of segregation as it relates to this question.

10 MR. GIBSON: None except what I bring up.

11 COMMISSIONER BERRY: But by and large it's not
12 been a topic of discussion on the agenda every time in a
13 public meeting where people openly debating what they
14 think is likely to happen in terms of segregation or not,
15 or the impact on the racial makeup of the schools or
16 anything else in --

17 MR. GIBSON: Well, they satisfy themselves --
18 if there's a racial -- you know, this is what we want, we
19 want to get Baker like it was back in 1920, my
20 grandfather went to Baker, my father went to Baker --

21 COMMISSIONER BERRY: How was baker in 1920?

22 MR. GIBSON: Huh?

23 COMMISSIONER BERRY: How was Baker in 1920
24 originally?

25 MR. GIBSON: Well, it was -- it was -- a one-

1 way street, but I'm saying that's the attitude that -- at
2 the public meetings and we want -- I finished there and I
3 want my children to finish there, my grandchildren to --
4 we want it back like it was. That's the message I hear
5 when I'm at the meetings.

6 MR. JENKINS: Is there a conscious effort in
7 any of the discussions about to stay away from the race
8 issue?

9 COMMISSIONER BERRY: In the public meetings.

10 MR. JENKINS: In the public meetings.

11 MR. GIBSON: Yes. If I didn't bring it up, it
12 would never be mentioned.

13 MR. JENKINS: But is there an underlying issue
14 on race?

15 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, we have the State
16 Representative say there was, but --

17 MR. GIBSON: It won't be -- I would think so
18 but it's not mentioned.

19 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, why do you think --

20 MR. GIBSON: I think --

21 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Why do you think the
22 people who are arguing for and against it in the public
23 meetings do not routinely discuss it in terms of the
24 racial issue? If that's a factor, at least mention it or
25 say something about it.

1 MR. GIBSON: People are uncomfortable talking
2 about race.

3 MR. PORCHE: It's probably being mentioned but
4 on -- like he -- the way he's saying it, like an
5 undercover way of doing it. They're not doing it openly.

6 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Oh.

7 MR. PORCHE: That's how I perceive it.

8 COMMISSIONER BERRY: But does everybody in the
9 room get the point? I mean, does everybody who is in the
10 room know that that's what it's about, just like we're
11 not talking about it? Is that the point?

12 MR. PORCHE: Sure.

13 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Now I understand. So it's
14 like everybody knows but we're just not talking about it.
15 Okay. All right. Now, I understand.

16 MS. HICKS: For the first time I saw this
17 racial that we were talking about, the large number of
18 blacks attending high school -- attending school in
19 Baker. I didn't know until I saw it in the paper that
20 there were 70 percent blacks in Baker High School, but I
21 saw symptoms that talked about how there was a shift in
22 the number of persons attending the schools in Baker and
23 why was it that all these students from Scotlandville and
24 I know are there, I mean initially, were coming here.

25 Why did we send them back to Scotlandville?

1 When I saw that racial for the first time, because I
2 thought it was at least a 50-50. I really thought it was
3 less -- then I myself assumed that I knew where the
4 problem was.

5 And yet that's the kind of thing that nobody
6 will come out openly and say oh, you know, I know why the
7 problem is. You want to send these black kids back over
8 there where they were, the school where they were, so
9 that means that getting those people in there is a very
10 different kind of thing.

11 But it takes a while to get there. This person
12 was talking from the heart and got this person going.
13 That's the kind of thing that happens, but it takes a
14 while to really get down there where you say the
15 President wants you to get down there to finally say
16 well, look, it's race. Whatever you want to call it, it
17 finally gets there.

18 So it takes a long time.

19 COMMISSIONER BERRY: It takes a lot of pulling
20 of teeth and a lot of talking around the issue and
21 dancing around it and never mentioning it, until finally
22 somebody will say wait.

23 MS. HICKS: And some people don't understand
24 because we're so busy sometimes searching yourself and
25 saying, you know, am I really the racist -- am I really -

1 - am I the only person seeing that -- and the light comes
2 on and you don't share it.

3 COMMISSIONER BERRY: And then if you can talk
4 about it, then you can discuss it and try to resolve it.
5 If you don't ever talk about it, just go away from the
6 meeting and it's never discussed.

7 MS. HICKS: Right.

8 COMMISSIONER BERRY: And it just goes on and on
9 and on. That's the problem. Wow, I'm feeling better,
10 that at least we're trying to get some issues out here.
11 That's what this process does.

12 Yes, ma'am. Anything? You don't have to stand
13 up, if you want -- sit on back down. Sit down. Sit on
14 back down.

15 MS. STEWART: I'm Iona J. Stewart, and I don't
16 think we would be discussing this succession from the
17 parish if it had not been opened up to the state. There
18 were people who voted for this who are not living here to
19 work out whatever problem they say we have.

20 My thoughts are that we should improve every
21 school, make each school a magnet school, and see that
22 all children who attend, attend and do what they are
23 coming there to do.

24 Now, it may mean that we might need to
25 encourage some social -- of people to work with some

1 children to give them what we call group citizenship
2 qualities, traits or whatever, but that's one thing that
3 to me has not been imparted in the schools, citizenship.

4 And that would cover all -- most what the ails
5 are, if a child knows he's supposed to be doing, and not
6 infringe on the other person's rights, and spend his time
7 developing himself.

8 And so I think our leadership should work on
9 improving that of the school and it won't matter who is
10 in it. Need to have a little competition -- if a child
11 is bright, put him in better -- if a kid is having
12 difficulty, give him some special work where he can be
13 fed into the mainstream.

14 There's no way people can be self sufficient if
15 they have not learned what to do to be self sufficient.
16 You'll always have what they call the under, whatever,
17 but if we bring this situation up, equalize it, we won't
18 have a problem.

19 MR. GIBSON: I would like to make a statement
20 on that too.

21 MR. QUIGLEY: Before you do, we have a couple
22 people that haven't talked yet, just to give them a
23 chance, see if they want to talk. We have two gentlemen
24 that came in and a woman in the back. If you have
25 anything to say?

1 MR. BURTON: My name is Jessie Burton. I'm a
2 citizen or a resident of Baker since 1976.

3 And I've been listening to the comments that
4 have been made since I've been here, and I tend to agree
5 with Dr. Hicks here. I think as far as the school system
6 is concerned, I think that maybe the problem is that the
7 majority -- the percentage of black in relation to white
8 and the proportion -- so I think the major problem is is
9 that black students from Scotlandville are coming into
10 Baker to go to school, and I think that this is the major
11 concern.

12 I don't think the City is receptive to that.
13 And I also find that -- I have a child to go to Baker,
14 and I think that there is a lack of concern, a lack of
15 genuine concern for the educational growth and
16 development of these children because of the background
17 of environment that they come from.

18 They are not accepted by this community. And I
19 think that the logic behind it is that if we can send
20 these children back to their environment, then we can
21 have the kind of school system that we want.

22 I also think that there is a lack of concern
23 for cultural differences in this town, and the education
24 leadership are not willing to put forth the effort to
25 bring about the kind of racial cultural sensitivity

1 necessary to provide the children that attend -- I know
2 high school kids -- the kind of training.

3 I don't think that the commitment -- the
4 commitment is not there to provide them with the kind of
5 education that they need to really function in a global
6 society, you know, so I agree that I think the primary
7 problem hinges on acceptance of the school population
8 that is the schools in Baker now.

9 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, I just want to
10 interject this, that now that we're getting down to here
11 the rubber meets the road on the school issue, this is
12 not unique. Across the country you have people that are
13 opposed to desegregation and tired of it as an issue.

14 First of all you have black folk who are tired
15 of all the stress and strain of it and how it turned out.

16 You have white folks who are tired of it and
17 you talk about having a sense of community again, and
18 having things go back the way they were.

19 So it's not surprising that this would be an
20 issue here with your longstanding in the parish school
21 desegregation suit, and people who have tried to get the
22 courts to declare the school district desegregated so
23 they could get rid of the court order, so there's nothing
24 unusual about it.

25 I mean, there are all these contentions here.

1 But on the side of folks who worry about -- I mean, is it
2 a valid worry for people, and I'll use the Mayor as an
3 example, because he was talking about it while he was
4 here -- somebody else had of, I'd point to them --
5 wanting a sense of community, wanting to say well, if
6 these people are from Scotlandville, is that -- or
7 wherever they're from, they shouldn't be coming into
8 Baker and we should have a sense of community here, that
9 there are all kinds of values to be preserved.

10 And one of those is that's the value --

11 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: There is something
12 that's happened in the school system in East Baton Rouge
13 Parish. When you look at the schools that were closed,
14 primarily those with schools in the black community, so
15 whereas there's a community concept, in many cases we
16 don't have a community school to come back to.

17 The same thing with Scotlandville High, and
18 I've had this beef with the principal and am fighting him
19 now -- I graduated from Scotlandville High.

20 But we ask for a sense of community, because
21 when they took over the school, they changed the school
22 colors, tore everything down, got rid of the trophies, so
23 I sent them a letter saying look, if you go back to a
24 community school, can we at least be known as the
25 Scotlandville Hornets again, and have our colors, black

1 and gold?

2 And you would have thought I had blasphemed
3 God, when you saw the answer I got back from the school.

4 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, I see your point.
5 You're saying that it's all right to be for community,
6 but if you're going to say these are the values we hold
7 dear, maybe we should put together everything's community
8 the way it was in 1920.

9 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: Right.

10 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Or with some equalization
11 of funding, but I see your point and I understand.

12 MR. GIBSON: That's not going to happen. Now,
13 see, either you're a part -- each little community is
14 trying to isolate themselves. That's not going to work
15 now. You know, there are at least 12 or 15 different
16 communities could demand the same thing Baker is
17 demanding.

18 How you going to desegregate, everybody staying
19 in their own neighborhood, and then students in
20 Scotlandville got to be bused 15 and 20 miles out to
21 Central in a hostile atmosphere to get, just get an
22 ordinary education.

23 So when you close most of the schools in the
24 black community and everybody -- we want our community
25 schools, but the black -- schools to go back to --

1 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, his point was why
2 not create them, if I understood it, if you're going to
3 do this, why not create community schools in the black
4 community again, as the price of doing this, if that's
5 what you really want to do.

6 Was that the point or did I misunderstand?

7 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: Well, I think it's a
8 combination. I think it's picking up both of them, yeah,
9 but again yeah, we can create them but they're not going
10 to spend that money to build a bunch of schools again in
11 the black community, because if you look at the series of
12 articles in the paper over the last week or so, they're
13 talking about how much it's going to cost to refurbish
14 the existing schools.

15 I mean, a lot of them are in very poor
16 condition, so they won't come back and build a number of
17 schools, so we don't really have anything to go back to.
18 But on the other hand it creates a quasi community
19 concept by letting part of the school become magnet and
20 the other part community, and they say this is a
21 community school concept, but they really won't let you
22 go back to the community school concept like you knew it,
23 where you had the school's colors and all of those things
24 that mean a lot to a lot of people, just like the people
25 at Baker said well, all of my children and grandchildren

1 graduated from Baker, they're the Baker Buffalos, they
2 would never let us go back to that right now without a
3 fight.

4 COMMISSIONER BERRY: I understand. So it's a
5 lose-lose situation?

6 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: Right.

7 DR. STEWART: We have argued that -- people not
8 performing well at the other -- we want to separate --
9 but I'm convinced -- I've taught some of the worst
10 students you could ever think of -- those students end up
11 making honor roll -- I'm convinced you're going to have
12 two percent of our population who can't do his work when
13 he's assigned to it and taught how.

14 The only reason a child falls behind is when
15 somebody neglects him, and then when we castigate him,
16 and we shove him to the side, but if you bring them in
17 and make them a part of this total society, they will see
18 it just like everybody else sees it, and they will begin
19 to operate within that life situation, just like
20 everybody else.

21 So what has happened in the past, and I wish
22 we'd quit arguing that point, that certain students can't
23 perform. We draw the bell curves and we show them and we
24 just do everything to crush their little minds. We tell
25 them they've got a problem.

1 I told a psychologist once -- I said when did
2 he find out he had a problem? When you told him. He
3 didn't know he had a problem.

4 So if our nation as a whole, if I state under
5 the umbrella of the nation, would operate to achieve
6 common goals -- everybody is given the same leadership to
7 the same group of people and that they were one of them.

8 MR. FURGESON: I was just going to comment, and
9 I think that there's a lot of substance to what has been
10 said, but too in reference to what Representative Holden
11 said here, I think what our school -- what Baker school
12 system wants is what they had, you know, a long time ago
13 when they wanted Baker children to go to Baker school,
14 and when they had that opportunity -- and it wasn't
15 accepted to him, because students -- and I understand
16 that black students in Baker went to Scotlandville, went
17 to Zachary and all the other places. They couldn't go to
18 school in Baker.

19 So why, you know, all of a sudden that now, you
20 know, Baker is the place for all of its children. I
21 think that there's a question of control here too, you
22 know, you want to control, you know, the destiny of
23 education here in Baker.

24 You know, if you can get these people out and
25 our children in, we think that we would have a sense of

1 control, and I think the other thing -- that if the lack
2 of genuine concern for the educational growth and
3 development of all children regardless of who they are
4 and where they come from, I think that if that attitude
5 wasn't embraced by the current administration and
6 officials that are here now, I don't think that we would
7 have this problem.

8 MR. QUIGLEY: According to the records there's
9 still two people, a Mr. Carpenter and Ms. Braxton, that
10 if you -- we invite you to say something if you want, but
11 you don't have to say anything.

12 MR. CARPENTER: Just trying to -- I understand
13 you're talking about the school system --

14 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Right. We started out
15 talking about -- we're trying to figure out whether race
16 relations in Baker are the same as they were last year,
17 different, better, you know, anybody notice any change?
18 Are there any issues -- we first had discussions about
19 there weren't any issues.

20 And then finally we got the school issue. Then
21 we got schools aren't really an issue of race. Then we
22 got yes, there is a race issue.

23 So we're just going along here, bubbling along,
24 trying to figure this thing out. So it could be about
25 anything.

1 But our main question is, you know, is it like
2 last year, better, same, you know, what's going on?

3 MR. FURGESON: Baker is basically like the
4 other speaker says, following the trend of the nation in
5 education and everybody is focusing in on its own
6 community -- with the Supreme Court decision just the
7 other day -- impact of the schools.

8 You're going to see more and more of that kind
9 of thing, focusing in on what you have, and to make --
10 better than what somebody else -- and also to shut out
11 those who may be different from what you are -- you're
12 going to see more and more -- and the leaders, especially
13 in black communities, to try to bring these things into
14 focus and make an impact as they made an impact for
15 community based schools -- we have to make an impact with
16 our own kids.

17 We somehow join -- and I came up in the civil
18 rights movement, participated in some of the activities
19 that were to get us just to sit at a lunch counter -- but
20 it seems as though somehow we left -- we forgot about
21 that there's a continuance process and we are much to
22 blame as other people that we just forgot about that this
23 is a continuing process, and that we should continue on
24 and push toward getting what we should get, getting our
25 fair share, and so in the 80's, late 70's and 80's, and

1 early 90's we just relaxed, and this is where it's
2 happening here and now, that because we relaxed we didn't
3 keep the country -- keep -- to the fire. We lost ground.

4 And it's up to us to speak out and demand that
5 our children receive the same kind of quality education
6 as everybody else.

7 If you look at on the line -- you might refer
8 to another line -- efforts of many group discussion in
9 Baker as a racial type thing, but I don't think that
10 anyone dare come out like -- you know, your public
11 meetings and say that this is a racial issue because of
12 the way those things are put before the public. And
13 they're not put in a racial issue -- in the 60's the
14 things were put out there, I knew the difference in
15 whether it was a race issue or not.

16 I knew the difference in whether I could go and
17 sit -- go in the front door or the back door -- that's
18 not a question now.

19 The question -- the issue you can go in the
20 front door, but what impact can you have inside there?
21 And if you can't change -- you can't make your -- make it
22 better for your children inside there, it doesn't do you
23 any good to be in there. You have to be able to make a
24 difference.

25 As a great politicians talk to us about

1 Scotlandville magnet, not only should we bring our
2 students who are in Scotlandville to Scotlandville
3 magnet, but we have to assure that they are going to get
4 the same kind of quality education as the magnet schools
5 do.

6 And, of course, I speak from a point that my
7 son goes to Scotlandville magnet out of the Baker
8 community. And will likely continue and graduate from
9 Scotlandville magnet next year.

10 That's because of the kind of education we have
11 in that school -- so if -- our concern -- we have
12 expressed our concerns and also getting -- and work with
13 whatever the situation is, I say it's in Baker, whatever
14 Baker is going to do, get in there and make it look the
15 way we want it to look. That's the way we have to deal
16 with education across the country now.

17 And in any situation -- we've got to make it
18 look the way we want it to look. As we sit back and we
19 let it look -- let it take on another different format,
20 then we're going to lose out, because we have to make it
21 look the way we want it to look.

22 MR. QUIGLEY: I might just make a couple of
23 observations.

24 One is -- do white people live in Baker? I
25 just wonder in terms of you know, the turnout of the

1 meeting here tonight, you know, I'm sure they have some
2 white pastors and I'm sure they have some white teachers,
3 and I'm sure they have some white community citizens and,
4 you know, the Mayor has come out. I'm not talking about
5 the Mayor or the Councilmen, but one of the things I know
6 for our Commission that's always troubling is that civil
7 rights and racial justice is never a white issue.

8 You know, it's not just in Baker. I mean, it's
9 everyplace, and I think that that was one of the things
10 that we saw at the hearing a year ago, and that's one of
11 the things that hasn't changed is that, you know, burning
12 of a church or you know, using code words when we talk
13 about race things, or fighting about different things,
14 you know, that is not a thing that by and large white
15 people will talk about honestly, openly.

16 Certainly won't talk about it in a mixed group
17 like this, of people they don't know. I don't know --
18 I'm sure not everybody in this room knows everybody else
19 in this room, so I think in terms of where we are and
20 again, I'm not singling out Baker, because I think that's
21 the same thing all around our state, but I think that is
22 a disturbing thing and a sad thing, and I think if we're
23 going to have a national dialogue, that one of the things
24 -- why do we have to -- if the national dialogue is about
25 where do black people fit in society, that's not a

1 dialogue.

2 The question is when are white people going to
3 talk about civil rights and when are white people going
4 to talk about what segregation has done to white people,
5 and when are white people going to talk about what does
6 it mean to white people to have a black church bombed,
7 and when are white people going to talk about what does
8 150 years of segregation mean to white people?

9 I mean, that's part of the dialogue that we
10 haven't started. And all these other things we're
11 talking about are nice, and that's important, and if
12 we're really going to talk about dialogue -- if you look
13 at this church, it's a black town.

14 COMMISSIONER BERRY: It's 71.7 percent white,
15 and 27.6 percent black.

16 MR. QUIGLEY: I don't mean to --

17 MS. GIBSON: When you were asking about
18 attendance, I have a question about the communication.
19 When did you all send your communication out to various
20 churches? For example, the reason why I'm asking, we
21 just got ours Sunday, and it was dated June 18th, and we
22 just received it Sunday.

23 You know, many times -- gotten a prior notice.
24 I'm not trying to justify --

25 MR. QUIGLEY: I understand.

1 MS. GIBSON: Get it on Sunday, and something is
2 on Tuesday, you know, prior commitments --

3 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Well, that may be the case
4 but last year they were sent out well in advance and the
5 turnout was pretty much the same in terms of the folks
6 who showed up. So I think that Chairperson Quigley is
7 right on point there, and I do think that he is on point
8 again, when we ask if we're going to have a national
9 conversation or a local conversation about race, who is
10 going to be in the conversation? And how can you do
11 something about the issue when only one group of people -
12 -

13 DR. SEPTS: That's the only way it's going to
14 be addressed is to talk about it.

15 COMMISSIONER BERRY: So it's going to be one of
16 the really tough problems, trying to figure out how to
17 get everybody to talk about it. Maybe the President can
18 do it better than -- he seems to be able to -- go ahead
19 now.

20 MR. JENKINS: One quick question. In terms of
21 race relations in Baker, quickly can you tell me what you
22 think should be done to make Baker a model community in
23 terms of race relations for the state?

24 If you had the wherewithal in an executive
25 order, what would you do in terms of race relations?

1 MS. GIBSON: First we're going to have to have
2 dialogue.

3 MR. JENKINS: Okay.

4 MS. GIBSON: That's number one. And whatever
5 unfolds from that, that's going to be the answer.

6 Dialogue is number one.

7 MR. JENKINS: Which follows up with a question.
8 Are you comfortable with the level of dialogue concerning
9 the independent school district thing or what should be
10 done to increase the dialogue?

11 MR. GIBSON: People, they're saying what they
12 want heard, and they're getting an echo back from the
13 white community, you know, this is what -- but the true
14 facts about the things that I mentioned, especially about
15 cost and other things like that, that's not being
16 addressed as it should.

17 And but it just -- saying what they want to
18 hear. They don't ever say that we are going to do this
19 if we are -- they always put in the declarative form, we
20 are going to do this, so their mind is already made up,
21 this is what they're going to do, regardless of what the
22 cost may be, you know. So --

23 MR. JENKINS: In terms of race relations would
24 it be helpful to the community if there were a body put
25 in place to be a conduit for dialogue on -- not only on

1 race relations, community relations?

2 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: Let me go back to one
3 point. It's almost like the tobacco agreement that the
4 attorneys reached and other things.

5 I think what you really have to do is put a
6 representative group together in a room and maybe four
7 off this negotiating team and four off this negotiating
8 team, in terms of the differences -- I'm just going to
9 address that school system now.

10 And let them get in there maybe with the media
11 to try to see what things can be hammered out and worked
12 out together, which may begin to address some of the
13 concerns that's been brought up, but as long as it's
14 well, we'll let you know on the back end what's in the
15 process, then you know, you're going to constantly have
16 questions about what is really taking place, or you know
17 with this issue of the Baker school district.

18 And it's like okay, we finished today. If we
19 didn't work out everything today, we'll be back tomorrow
20 and try to hammer out and see what things we can work out
21 in commonality, then there may be some things we may not
22 be able to agree on, but at least it will bring you
23 closer to a point versus where you are today.

24 MS. GIBSON: Now, the next thing, who is going
25 to select these individuals? That's another question.

1 You've got to be council -- I'm not speaking in terms of
2 --

3 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: No, but --

4 MS. GIBSON: -- looking at dialogue.

5 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: No, but I'll throw it
6 back out here if Group X is -- has a position that
7 they're concerned about who is going to be in this
8 negotiating, then let the group that has opposition
9 select four people as representative of the body and the
10 position, and then the people who are for the Baker
11 school system will select the four people they want at
12 the table.

13 But I mean, that's just a suggestion that I can
14 see that might be able to at least get some talk going on
15 the issue.

16 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Could I ask just one more
17 question? That's a good suggestion to consider, but in
18 your point about who gets the control, is important, but
19 it's a good suggestion in terms of a way to get something
20 going.

21 There's always a question about who gets
22 involved and who controls who gets involved.

23 But let me ask you one final question here on
24 this, and we'll think about all these matters.

25 Would you say that it's the case that there is

1 a distinct lack of interest in who perpetrated the church
2 fires this year at this time? In other words, I told you
3 there are 14 that took place in Louisiana, and the ones
4 that have took place in this area too, and as we go
5 around -- that's the other thing I'm sort of interested
6 in tangentially. Is it like one of those issues that
7 happened and now it's over and now we've moved onto
8 another issue?

9 Or people just assume that whoever did it was
10 somebody who did it for the reason that they did it and
11 if it's the word we don't speak, race, then maybe that
12 was it too, but we've moved on and now we're not
13 interested in discussing that any more?

14 What's the sense about that? Is that an old
15 issue that's over now or what?

16 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: Again, and in this
17 business you find out a lot of times it's crisis --
18 management by crisis, and once it happens everybody
19 rushes in and wants it done and everybody can go out and
20 deal with their own thing, and I think that's happening
21 here.

22 And we still have not gotten past -- well, what
23 are some of the root causes? Why would somebody be
24 perpetrating these wrongs upon a church, and then why
25 isn't again the dialogue broad enough so to address some

1 of the concerns of those sick minds that's out there?

2 None of that is going to happen. Even at the
3 legislative end, they've passed bills on hate crime and
4 that got through. The only opposite was somebody
5 concerned about sexual orientation, you know. But they
6 didn't mention race at all.

7 But on the other hand, when the bill came
8 through dealing with increasing the penalties for arson
9 for a church, there was virtually no discussion, and it
10 passed and that was it.

11 But again, there was no dialogue about it.
12 Everybody just probably felt well, as long as we don't
13 say anything, nobody would figure out that we have an
14 ulterior motives or call us whatever they want to call
15 us.

16 So I don't know what to say, and maybe some
17 others -- I don't know how we keep this as a front burner
18 issue.

19 And then let me also add that this is an issue,
20 but you've got other issues out there -- people just
21 concerned how do I make my day-to-day living?

22 COMMISSIONER BERRY: Sure. Sure.

23 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: And so now they're
24 going through a balancing act, but they're going to make
25 their day-to-day living based on people with a better

1 attitude about race and those things, which will foster
2 other promotion that's going to give them that better
3 living that they are trying to seek.

4 But the dialogue still is not as full as it
5 should be, and I don't really know what it's going to
6 take to spark it, and unfortunately the same thing with
7 Governor Foster signed that order to take away
8 affirmative action.

9 We marched massively, largest march on the
10 state capitol in history, and then all of a sudden it
11 just sort of faded in the background. And I don't know
12 how to keep that going and going and going, unless there
13 are organizations out there that get a lot more involved
14 in the process and start enumerating things that we need
15 to address in order to move beyond where we are now.

16 MR. FURGESON: I would just like to comment on
17 the question and saying that -- and I think somebody said
18 earlier, before you could solve a problem, you have to
19 accept the fact that there is a problem, and I think that
20 what happened in those instances that the powers to be,
21 you know, came forward and say, as the Representative
22 said, that that was just an isolated incident and these
23 were just a few sick people who did this, rather than
24 come out and say that there's a real problem, you know,
25 we're going to put forth -- we're going to put forth some

1 goodwill to show you that there's not really a problem,
2 that this was just an isolated incident, and you know,
3 and we're going to go on with the things as usual.

4 MR. BURTON: What has happened is that we do
5 not have a handle on what prompted -- we do not know, we
6 do not have in our arsenal an understanding of what might
7 cause the problem.

8 So we can't continue to fight what -- the
9 unknown. I'll just refer back to the civil rights when
10 we knew that there were certain things you could and
11 could not do, so then the next step was to go and try to
12 do that.

13 Right now it's a ghost type thing. We don't
14 have anyone investigating it to the extent that we find
15 out -- we don't have the united groups that we had at one
16 time to continue to fight.

17 The other thing on dialogue, at one time it was
18 great therapy for white and black to dialogue about race
19 relations. Now we try to steer away from it, black and
20 white, they steer away -- try to go the middle of the
21 road type thing, rather than get deep in this side and
22 that side.

23 We have got to the point that we negotiate now
24 -- negotiate -- stood up and for right or wrong and we
25 negotiate.

1 So on the issue of the churches, it's still a
2 phantom type thing. It's a ghost type thing, and until
3 we can say that this is racially motivated and we can get
4 behind it, then this is going to be put on the back
5 burner until we decide -- we have to create the emphasis
6 on the issues, or we have to find the truth of the issue
7 and work hard to resolve it.

8 I'm just baffled that across the country this
9 happened and we haven't had -- the President made some
10 statements about it. Even our Mayor says I'm going to
11 see that we get the church built back and that kind of
12 thing, but I suppose that we accepted that -- that's
13 goodwill from the other side of the tracks.

14 And we have to move on.

15 MS. GIBSON: And that creates in one's mind a
16 situation -- whatever the points are that we would want
17 to talk about that are utmost in people's minds, that
18 would come to a point where you will not be stepping on
19 rotten eggs.

20 REPRESENTATIVE HOLDEN: Let me just sort of
21 clarify my point. I think the Mayor indicated that they
22 had to negotiate something with the school board in order
23 to get to where they are now. And those were not done in
24 any big public forum.

25 They got behind closed doors and negotiated and

1 they had people from both sides. That's the only thing
2 I'm saying is a similar concept probably needs to be
3 adopted in this situation, where they have people from
4 both sides in a room trying to hammer out an agreement
5 that all the parties would be satisfied with.

6 MR. QUIGLEY: On behalf of the Louisiana
7 Advisory Board I would like to thank you all for coming.
8 I'd like to thank our Chairperson, Dr. Berry. I'd like
9 to thank Mr. Jenkins, and we'd very much like to thank
10 the people at the church here for hosting us, and if
11 anybody has any thoughts afterwards, there's ways that
12 you can supplement this.

13 We can give you the address if anybody would
14 like to submit anything to Washington to talk about it,
15 and would you like to close this up, Reverend?

16 (Whereupon, the invocation was recited.)

17 (Proceedings concluded at 8:00 p.m.)

C E R T I F I C A T E

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10

STATE OF GEORGIA:

COUNTY OF GWINNETT:

I, Ralph L. Ledford, a notary public in and for the State of Georgia, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a true, complete and accurate transcript of the proceeding held.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, this 29th day of June, 1997.


Ralph L. Ledford