

(INTERVIEW ON EDUCATION)
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED NOVEMBER 1991)

(Billups) On Canfield, one block over, was St. Antoine. There was a butcher shop. And the butcher shop was typical, complete with the butcher with the sleeves on his white coat. I think his name was Scwartz, but don't quote me on that. I was five years old and I was standing on the corner experimenting with four letter words I had heard, and I didn't know what they meant. I just heard them and thought it was the thing to do. I was standing right in front of the open shop door. And suddenly, I was up off of the sidewalk. Something hit me across my backside, and it was Mr. Scwartz. He had me by the scruff of my neck and he walloped me twice. Wow, my teeth were shaking. My middle name is St. Clair. He said, "St. Clair, if I hear you talking like that again, I will tell your mother." Well, now that's invoking the ultimate in punishment. Tell my mother? He could have beat on me all day, and I will never, never say a word when I went home. First of all, my mother would know if Mr. Scwartz hit me, he would have a good reason for it. He hit me twice and I will always remember that. I think that's the reason I avoid four letter words, unless I'm looking around to see if Mr. Scwartz is still around. But, if I had gone home and said to my mother that Mr. Scwartz hit me, the very first thing she would have said was, "He had a reason, you must have been doing something." And if he had told her, I might not be here today.

(Earlie Poole) I think sometimes we have given people

(INTERVIEW ON EDUCATION)
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED NOVEMBER 1991)

too much or we feel that the children have gotten, I don't want them to live like I did. We fail to realize that they need to earn some of it.

I went to Northwestern as a student. We had more Whites there than we did have Blacks. As time went on the areas built up with more Blacks. Then more Blacks got into schools, and they began to offer different curriculums. Instead of wanting us to take a college preparatory course, which they called it, they wanted us to take sewing and cooking, which was valuable, but it wasn't that which would allow us to go to college. They didn't give us the background to go to college, so, very few of the people were really prepared to go to college.

They did say, "Where would we get a job? Who would hire us as typists?" I remember that very well.

(BILLUPS) I started school at four years old at the Trowbridge. It was an integrated neighborhood... Jewish and Black. The boundary lines were pretty clear. If you got to the east, on the other side of Hastings, you found the Polish Catholics attending those large Churches around there.

I then went to Northwestern High School. I finished, and because money was in short supply I didn't go to college. I was fifteen when I finished and I didn't get into college till I was twenty years old. There was a five year interval, during which I took post graduate courses. When it came time

(INTERVIEW ON EDUCATION)
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED NOVEMBER 1991)

to register, I might have been sixteen. The principal, Mr. Frost looked at my application and he said, "St. Clair, would you sit down and wait until I talk to you?" He said, "Now, you're a boy. Boys don't get jobs in business too often, and you're colored. Where do you think you're gonna get a job?" There was nothing mean. It was just a question. He wanted to know whether I was going to waste my time.

(Earlie Poole) I don't think they did it to be unkind, I think it was just the signs of the times. If you want a job, where you gonna get a job? And they weren't really hiring too many Black in the schools, as a matter a fact, because we didn't have but maybe two Black teachers at that time, anyway. There was a Miss Denmark, who was a teacher over on the West side where I was. But we didn't have too many so you didn't even think of that. If you didn't get A's and B's, then, there was nothing for you. So that was part of it, I suppose. I don't think it was malicious I think it was just the signs of the times. And even in picking people to go to concerts. They were very choosy about who they picked.

As I went through high school at Northwestern I found lot of problems at Northwestern. We were beginning to integrate the area, and that was causing a lot of problems at Northwestern. We had a principal who was very anti-Black. He was determined that we weren't going to go. They would even have operas, and we couldn't sing in it, and we had very definite good voices, and would have been very qualified. He

(INTERVIEW ON EDUCATION)
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED NOVEMBER 1991)

canceled the picnic one year because we had wanted to go.

Don't you think that the neighborhoods in our day coming were more stable than they are today? On your way to school you met everybody and you knew everybody. If you had PTA the parents were there, and you baked cookies or whatever. You were more involved.

You changed your clothes and you did your homework, that was what you did. And then you did your chores. And you didn't stay up. We had a radio but you didn't have too much of it, at that time, because by the time your mother and dad listened to it you didn't have time to listen to it anyway.

(Billups) Television has had it's impact on education like I don't think many people realize. We didn't have a television. You came home and did your homework, and I did my chores. We had two stoves, what we called a base burner where you had to put coal in the top, and the ashes had to be taken out. I had to cut wood and bring in the soft coal for the kitchen stove which we cooked in.

It was not uncommon for all of us to sit around the dining room table. It was a sense of unity. My three sisters and my brother, we were all working on our lessons.

(Earlie Poole) When we grew up there was a father in the home. He went out to work. He came back from work, you sat down and had your dinner and you took your bath or you did what you had to do because there was a head of the house. And in the morning you got up and you had breakfast and you

(INTERVIEW ON EDUCATION)
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED NOVEMBER 1991)

combed your hair, you got ready for school.

I blame it on Social Service. I guess I shouldn't do that because I have a daughter who works in Social Services. But I think we have given them too much and not demanding something in return for it. Now, I didn't go for this idea that they would help mothers and then the people would come out and go in your house at night to see if there was a man hanging around or some of that type of stuff. But I think they gave 'em too much. It's not enough to take care, mind you, but they don't use it wisely and I think that today they are able to be idle. We looked for a job, we had to work. But these mothers don't work now.

(Billups) It was usually a two person family. The mothers, in those days, were not career women, going out the door even before the kids went off to school. They were there. They were a stabilizing force. But then you had, also, the revolution of the '60's, the social revolution. This has changed. There's an attitude on the part of many people.... "I'm entitled... give me, and I don't have to measure up." You even hear people saying, "Because I am a minority group member, I don't have to meet these requirements because I have been deprived in my background." And you find an attitude of where people are not willing to spend the effort and the time in applying themselves to getting ahead. We have a built in source of paranoia that says... "They're against us."

(INTERVIEW ON EDUCATION)
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED NOVEMBER 1991)

(Earlie Poole) We didn't know to be angry. We had been given nothing and so we didn't know that we could be angry at that time. When they were telling us just to take sewing and, we didn't know to be angry or to fight back because we were just Black. We didn't expect to do anything else. This was just what was expected. There were a few who would challenge. But those of us who just went to school, and parents were just ordinary people... we didn't know to fight back. And what could you fight? You couldn't fight the system.

(BILLUPS) I became a region Superintendent in '67..... So, that would be about 3 out of 8. Now that was down considerably from the last time they had such a survey, which says that the neighborhood had changed and with it the aspiration. The whole society changed.

And sometime when we touch, as we are now, on personal experiences and such, we're looking at another part of the elephant, in many respects, where each one.....I'm looking at my experiences.... a school teacher, an administrator, etc. On the other hand, other people see it as their right they've been deprived of and I understand that.

We had a program called "decentralization". This was intended to involve communities more in the management of their schools. It was a ten year experiment and that the affect of it was to impose another level of bureaucracy. No more responsive to the needs of kids and parents then the similes of school administration. You had people who set

(INTERVIEW ON EDUCATION)
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED NOVEMBER 1991)

themselves up and they wanted to control things and it was a pure evil trip.

We had, for example, in my region for it was all Slavic. My region board based on schools, Pershing, Osborn, over on the far east side. And all of them, only one had attended public school, only one of them. They had all attended parochial schools. And, so, their background there, and many of them were, well, the chairman was a policeman. There was one year of college in that entire group. So, that was a limited group.

We had a twenty-seven million dollar budget and we were making decisions on how to spend large amounts of money and the most that many of them had was a modest home over there. I guess what I'm saying is it was a dismal failure just because people, what we had hoped was supreme, didn't rise to the top.....

I had heard that. In my experience, of course, obviously, I wouldn't have been involved in anything of that kind. The bussing was the last ditch effort to integrate schools, which was surely worth it, because you had 85% Black. And how can you integrate less than 15% with 85%. So the result was a costly effort. Now if this had happened in the early fifties or forties, or if it had involved a metropolitan area, but it was limited by court order just to the City of Detroit. So, you put kids on the buses and took them away from the neighborhood school concept. And here they are,

(INTERVIEW ON EDUCATION)
(VERSION 1.0 REVISED NOVEMBER 1991)

going all over hells half acre, half an hour here, half an hour coming back, and what was the result?

