



Interview with William Thomas Childs

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Wilmington (N.C.)

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Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University
Behind the Veil: Documenting African-American Life in the Jim Crow South

Interview with
William T. Childs

Interviewed by
Rhonda Mawhood

Unedited Transcript by

1. **Mawhood:** Always lived in Wilmington?
2. **Childs:** I am a Wilmington native. I was born right here and I still own the house that I was born in.
3. **Mawhood:** Where is that house?
4. **Childs:** That house is located at Tenth and Grace Streets.
5. **Mawhood:** Were the street names the same when you were born there?
6. **Childs:** Same streets. Wilmington is laid out so that Front Street is the front street, Second, Third, Fourth and all the way out going from west to east. And, of course, the streets going north and south in downtown Wilmington have always had the same names. Very few name changes have been. So that has been Tenth and Grace for a long time. Sometimes the streets will run into another name. As for instance, I live on Tenth and Grace. Where I live it is Tenth Street. Where it used to be after it crossed a couple of blocks north used to be Dickerson Street. Ninth Street was Ninth Street until it got to about Redcraw or until it got to maybe Chestnut Street or Grace Street and then it became Anderson Street. But by and large they are Ninth and Tenth Streets.
7. **Mawhood:** Were your parents from Wilmington too?
8. **Childs:** My mother's family is from Wilmington. They are natives. My father was a South Carolinian. He came to Wilmington working on the Atlantic Coastline Railroad and he worked for many years on the railroad. He retired from the railroad but shortly before he

retired he went into the ministry. So he became a preacher. He became a minister, a preacher, I think while I was away in college. I think that's when he really became. But he had been reading and thinking and that kind of thing and had been a church person all of his life. I think that was just a natural direction for him to go.

9. **Mawhood:** What about your mother?

10. **Childs:** She came from a family of Hendersons. They are natives. You know I have a niece who is in New York and she is really in the theater but she's done a lot of research. And she sent me an excerpt from, I can't remember now what library it was, but it had a little story that related to my grandmother here who I think it indicated she was a slave and some of her recollections about her living on a property near what is now Third and Market. I have that excerpt at home. I didn't bring it. But I don't know what it is doing in the library where she was to find that research.

11. **Mawhood:** And was her name Henderson?

12. **Childs:** Her name was Isabell Henderson.

13. **Mawhood:** And did you know your grandparents?

14. **Childs:** Oh, yes. I knew my grandmother and I know my grandfather. I knew my grandmother and she had, let me see, three daughters. She had four daughters. My natural mother died early. She died around 1926 or 1927 or somewhere in there, somewhere between 1925 and 1927. And my father later married her sister. So my aunt became my mother.

15. **Mawhood:** How old were you when your mother died?

16. **Childs:** I must have been about five or six.

17. **Mawhood:** When you were a child and you knew your grandmother, did your grandmother talk to you about the past and her life?

18. **Childs:** Oh, sure. Well, she talked, it was a close family. They were all around. Yeah, they talked about occurrences. They did not really want to talk too much about the riot of 1898. They did not like to talk too much about that. There was, of course, they knew, had a lot of information about it. But they did not like to talk about it. Back then when I was coming along there was what they called grown folk's talk and children's talk. And there were certain things that grown folks talked about that they didn't want the children to be hearing and talking about. Do you understand what I'm talking about?

19. **Mawhood:** Right.

20. **Childs:** Yeah. So we got some of those things by possibly accident or overhearing and that kind of thing. And, of course, they were shall I say positive people that looked forward rather than back. And very little about 1898, very little, did I ever get from my grandparents or anything like that. They did not talk to us about those things. I do know that on the street where she lived was lived also about in the middle of the block a man who held a pretty important position in the city. I'm not to sure whether he was a police officer. I think he must have been prior to the riots.

21. **Mawhood:** A black man?

22. **Childs:** Oh, yes.

23. **Mawhood:** Do you remember when you first started knowing that the riot had occurred in 1898?

24. **Childs:** I did not really know until I started going to school. And I later learned there was a real traumatic kind of thing and many blacks who lived through that era were quieted. They were not expected to talk too much about it. As you probably have read, a lot of blacks were driven out of the town. A lot of them during the riot hid and when they thought things were a little calm then they came back to where they worked and didn't want to raise any further problems so they didn't do a whole lot of talking about it. But someone did. Someone wrote about it and somebody talked about it. I was just not that - I later talked with a person who was living during that time and he was an interesting person. He was an old minstrel man. He played the trumpet. And he used to talk about what happened, some of the things that happened on, for instance, Fourth Street and some of the things that some of the people were doing. But he talked about it pretty freely. And I guess, like I say he was an old minstrel man. I believe he was with the silent screen show. And, of course, he had a far different perspective, you know, than my folks would.

25. **Mawhood:** Why is that?

26. **Childs:** Well, his lifestyle was different. He was an entertainer, for instance. And they told stories and they were more open. My folks, my grandmother, if she was and I think that this article indicated she was a slave and she talked about those things and her daughters had children but they washed clothes. They were laundresses. Very few of them worked out in

people's houses. I don't know of any of them that worked in people's houses. I don't know of any. But they all did laundry for people. And a lot of times I had to go and deliver that laundry. Had a little cart and I would go and deliver that laundry. But they, let's see, I had an uncle who was an accomplished brick mason. I had an uncle who was a fisherman. He knew how to fish.

27. **Mawhood:** Was that his job?

28. **Childs:** He did a lot. I really don't know of any other job that he had. I know that he did leave Wilmington at a time and go to work in the steel mills I think in Duquesne, Pennsylvania. Yeah he went in that area because that was the opportunity at that time. Later on people went from here to New York. But this was prior to that kind of migration. He went to Duquesne, Pennsylvania and worked in the steel mills. But the difference between them and Archie, I call him Archie, Archie Blue, Archie was a jovial fellow and he took a lot of pride in working with young folks. He worked at a boy's club. And he liked to teach the youngsters how to blow the trumpet and we played checkers all the time. He liked to play checkers. Not only with me but, you know, a lot of us who were in the club. And his perspective on life was just different.

29. **Mawhood:** What did your parents think of Archie telling you these stories?

30. **Childs:** They didn't mind. You know they figured that it's kind of like people teaching their children about sex. They don't know how to do it and if somebody else that they, you know, feel is responsible can do it or will do it, that's alright. So they didn't have really any objection. They probably didn't know how to talk about it. They didn't know how to talk

about it. I'm not too sure, well my father wasn't even here at that time. See he wasn't even here at that time. And my mother's family just didn't know how to talk about those things. But Archie did and I guess other males knew more about how to talk about it and that kind of thing as opposed to females. There were things that females didn't talk about if you understand that.

31. **Mawhood:** So how did Archie talk about the riot?

32. **Childs:** Well, his memory was about the relations that were supposedly forbidden, the relations between whites and blacks, the social, sexual relations that occurred. And he just recaptured it, just talked about it, you know, how, of course, that could and did lead to serious problems. But it was natural. And I guess out of what Archie told me sometimes later on in my own life I devised a philosophy that one cannot successfully legislate human morals. One can try. But one cannot. Whatever is natural that is where we are. And if it is natural for people to be attracted to each other that's what's going to happen and I don't care how many laws you enact. Just another law to be broken.

33. **Mawhood:** If Archie talked about sexual relations between blacks and whites did he talk about the dangers in those relationships?

34. **Childs:** Oh, yeah. He talked about the fact that possibly they knew about the dangers but there always are the adventurous and the carefree people. And they let the devil take hand the most. And there always have been those people and there always will be. Today we eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die. And that's an ancient philosophy.

35. **Mawhood:** I just find it interesting because it was so dangerous for black men to have any contact with white women. And here's this man in a boy's club talking about it.

36. **Childs:** He was just relating what was going on. He observed it and that's the way he was.

He didn't necessarily endorse it. More or less he was recounting what was going on. I'm not sure that, I don't know of any time in his life that he had been or was attracted to anything like that. But he was an observer and was just relating, you know, what was going on. And some of the things that went on, some of the conflicts, he talked about an incident over on North Fourth Street. I can't remember but the incident resulted in a confrontation. And I'm not too sure that it grew out of any kind of relationship between white women and black men.

But whatever it was developed into a confrontation and a conflict over on North Fourth Street and I think I later read something about an incident that occurred over on Fourth Street during that, leading up to and during that riot period. But he remembered. He was a story teller and he was an interesting story teller.

37. **Mawhood:** Did he use the Wilmington riot as any kind of dividing point in the history of the city?

38. **Childs:** What Archie told me about that was like a historian would say. He did not put any significance, he thought of, I remember this, he thought of both the men and the women who engaged in that kind of behavior as trashy. I remember him saying that. He saw both of them as trashy. That was his words.

39. **Mawhood:** Would they have been called trashy if they both were black or they both were white?

40. **Childs:** In his head probably. In his head probably. While he was a minstrel man and entertainer and that kind of thing he had pretty high standards for himself, how people should act. And those things that Archie was telling me were just a recollection of what just went on. He wasn't a moralist, if you understand what I'm saying. He was just a relater of the facts.
41. **Mawhood:** But he was moralizing in the sense that he told you that these people were trashy.
42. **Childs:** He told me and others. He was just recalling. He is one of the last people that I know of who had a real recollection, living people who had a real recollection of what was going on who would talk about it really.
43. **Mawhood:** What was his last name?
44. **Childs:** His name was Archie Blue. And Archie has a living daughter I believe here now.
45. **Mawhood:** So Archie was married?
46. **Childs:** Archie was married and he had, I think he has a living daughter. Yeah, he was married. He was a family man. He was a really, really interesting person. He certainly was. With his background and his experiences and his outlook and he had quaint little sayings that were real catchy. He was an interesting person.
47. **Mawhood:** Do you remember any of his sayings? I know that was a while ago.

48. **Childs:** Yeah, it was a while ago. But I told you we played checkers together. And he'd score a point on the checker board. One of his favorite sayings was don't you see, now, don't you see. That was one of his favorite little sayings. And don't you see.

49. **Mawhood:** After he'd jump.

50. **Childs:** Yeah. Don't you see.

51. **Mawhood:** Would you say that Archie taught you things about being a man?

52. **Childs:** Well, now let's see. I think that I was out of college at this time. I was out of college at the time that I had my contact with Archie. But I was over at the boy's club and I was some kind of a volunteer and got to talking with the staff people and that kind of thing. That's the very same, Archie had some influence on Meadowlark Lemon. Archie was over there at that club when Meadowlark Lemon was a member of that club and had some, most likely, had some influence on Meadowlark Lemon. There were other athletes that came through and went on.

53. **Mawhood:** I wanted to ask you about your parents. Now your mother died when you were very small and your father was working on the railroad. So who took care of you before your father married again?

54. **Childs:** My grandmother and my aunts and I told you my aunt became my step-mother. So we were not that, you know, it really wasn't all that long I don't think. I think possibly she may have done it in order to help take care of us. But we were cared for by aunts and

grandparents and close family. Our family was pretty close at that time. But most of them now are dead.

55. **Mawhood:** How many brothers and sisters did you have?

56. **Childs:** I had three natural, there were three of us who were natural brothers and sisters. My father had been married prior to the time that he came to Wilmington and there were three children from that marriage. They were born in I think Savannah, Georgia. And, of course, they went to school down there. He was a stickler for keeping his kids in school. And all of them went to, while there may not have been public schools where they came from in South Carolina and Georgia, they were sent to private schools or boarding schools as they were called, boarding schools, until they left and went north. They went and left went north. But they all were in school. And all of my natural brothers graduated from high school and from college and earned degrees, all of them except me. I mean I worked on a master's degree but I never really got a master's degree. The other two did. And I was the oldest one.

57. **Mawhood:** What happened to your father's first marriage?

58. **Childs:** She died. She died also. She died before he came to Wilmington or yeah, probably, before he came to Wilmington.

59. **Mawhood:** But he came to Wilmington and the children stayed?

60. **Childs:** Well, he brought them with him, the ones who had not grown up and gone north.

The ones who had not grown up and gone north. My oldest brother was named Lester and he was in school. He left and he was in the service in World War I I suspect. He was a veteran.

William T. Childs

The one next to him, I don't think he went into the armed services but he was in the Merchant Marines for quite a while. And my sister grew up and went to a boarding school there and she was sent to an aunt of hers in Chicago. And while I don't think she, she lived in Evanston, Illinois. She went to school there briefly. I'm not too sure that she completed any education there but she stayed there for awhile and then she went over and lived with some relatives in New York and then came back here. She's been here ever since. She is eighty-three I believe or eighty-four. Let me tell you something. Last week, this is Monday, last week a friend of mine who is a doctor asked me, well his daughter was visiting him from California. And he wanted me to bring some friends down to see his daughter and have dinner and I did. One of his neighbors who lives across the street has had his eightieth birthday about a couple of years ago. The other one says that if he lived until December he will be ninety. And he is up and around and active and that kind of thing. Then on Friday I got invited to a surprise birthday party for a friend of mine who was on that day eighty years old. And then on Saturday I was invited to a party for a friend of mine who was one hundred years old on July 8. She was one hundred years old on July 8. And an interesting thing happened. She was there and she sees poorly but her hearing is really impaired so if you want to talk to her you have to write it down and she can read it and that kind of thing. But an interesting thing happened. Her grandchildren or great grandchildren presented her with some flowers. She accepted them and that kind of thing. When they were closing out the program she said I'm going to say something. And she did. They gave her a microphone and she said these flowers that have been given to me I want someone to give them to someone who is sick in bed. I thought that was right sweet. Well, she was, during a part of her life,

she was the house mother at the school of nursing here. So she was pretty well known. She was a house mother for students in the nursing school.

61. **Mawhood:** So you're just a baby from what you said.

62. **Childs:** (Laughter) That's right. Yeah but this past week I attended some functions with folks a year or two older than I am and I've been around a while.

63. **Mawhood:** What was that like? You were talking about your father. What was that like growing up with your father working on the railroad? Was he away a lot?

64. **Childs:** Well, he was a cook for the chief engineer of the railroad. And the chief engineer traveled the whole system to check on the () itself, the () and the district officers and that kind of thing. And he was away when the chief engineer was away. He had to do all the provisions, buy all the provisions and that kind of thing and stock the cars and that kind of thing. And they were away. See the chief engineer lived here too in Wilmington. So, yes they were away but not for extended periods of time. Probably two or three days a week. That kind of thing.

65. **Mawhood:** In the neighborhood where you lived, can you tell me about your neighbors? Who were your neighbors? What kinds of things did they do?

66. **Childs:** Well, neighborhoods were far different then than they are now. They were far different then. And there was very little crime, deviant behavior, that kind of thing. And parents knew where their children were and with whom. Parents had their neighbors coming to their house and you went to their house. But there were not kids who got into trouble.

They didn't get into trouble. We are talking about an era and you'll hear probably a lot of this from all the people, where it was accepted that if you saw a neighbor's kid misbehaving that you could correct him. So that the neighborhood was kind of sort of coordinated and together and not only did they correct them but they told your parents and chances are that was just the beginning when they told them, you know. (Laughter) It was that kind of neighborhood and if you went several blocks away and you did something, like for instance, if I went ten blocks away from home and somebody, the town was so small that everybody knew everybody, and suppose I elected to smoke a cigarette. Before I got back home that was a known fact because the word - and they had no telephones either. (Laughter) But it was that kind of community. It is a far different community now but it was that kind of thing and even though the economic level might not have been the same, the communion of governing or whatever, of watching or controlling children's behavior was the same. So children played together. They probably fought together and all of those kinds of things but it was a far different kind of community than we now have. And in a sense, you had a lot of guardians. Plus the fact that and this you will probably hear from a lot of old timers, at night you went home. You went home probably because there was no where else to go but you were expected to be at home when the street lights came on. So we had probably kids who were adventurous and that kind of thing and if they got too adventurous they got reported. But kids played together and then some families might have had some differences and that kind of thing but the community was so small that just about everybody, that is, let me put it this way, on one side of town, in Wilmington there was a north side of town and there was a south side of town. Everybody on the north side of town knew everybody on the north side of town and everybody on the south side of town knew everybody on the south side of town.

67. **Mawhood:** Sounds like the blacks knew the blacks and the whites knew the white people.

68. **Childs:** Oh, yeah.

69. **Mawhood:** Did you know any white children or white grown-ups when you were growing up?

70. **Childs:** Lived right next door to a white kid. His father was a, they were from Greece. And his father ran a store on the corner. And we grew up. Nick was always over there at our house. We didn't go in his house but we played together all the time. We lived right next door. And we lived in a neighborhood where there were some other white folks who lived around the corner. Now we did not have a lot of contact with them but we did with Nick because he was right next door. And you know, a lot of smaller neighborhoods in Wilmington were shall we say integrated because whites and blacks lived very closely to each other. And there are a lot of whites who live in this town now who will say well, I grew up with they call them colored children.

71. **Mawhood:** Did you remain friends with Nick and the other white children as you got older?

72. **Childs:** Sure. Nick, his father eventually opened a dry cleaning place. He called it the New York Cleaners down on Grace Street near downtown, in downtown Wilmington. And when his father died Nick took over the establishment. Even now if I were to see him, matter of fact, I went into a bank the other day and I didn't recognize Nick's wife but she recognized me right away and we talked. She said that Nick is retired. Of course, he sold the business and he retired. She said he's doing a little bookkeeping. And I asked her about his mother.

She said well, she died. She was ninety some years old I think when she died. But up until, the last time I ever saw her in the street she recognized me and I recognized her. I mean we knew each other.

73. **Mawhood:** How were you taught to address adults when you were growing up, white and black?

74. **Childs:** Well, like I said, my father was a stickler for good behavior and we addressed everybody as Mr., white and black. There was no problem about that. That was basic. Everybody, white and black, for that matter. And he got along very well with white people. He had to I guess. There was a man and I don't remember, he was a white man, and I don't even know what his position was but he used to always tell me when he saw me about his having worked with the Coastline and having to go into the service I believe he said. And when he came back from the service he said he was walking downtown near the post office he said and he saw my father and my father grabbed him and lifted him up and turned him around and he always told me about this fellow. Oh, he got along very well with and he taught us to get along.

75. **Mawhood:** He taught you to get along () but did he talk to you about white people being racist or people treating people badly?

76. **Childs:** No, he never did that. You know, all the lessons that I learned about that I had to learn them myself. Like for instance, he never told me not to get on the trolley car and sit in the back. And it was law. I had to find that out myself. I had to get on and I'll never forget.

I got on the trolley car down at the post office one time. Got on it and not knowing any different, sat right in the front. And the motorman told me I had to go to the back. But, no.

77. **Mawhood:** You father didn't tell you to be sure to sit at the back?

78. **Childs:** No.

79. **Mawhood:** Just didn't mention anything?

80. **Childs:** No. I guess he figured that you will learn that kind of thing. He did not approve of it but he didn't dwell on it. His thing was he wanted us to be in church and Sunday school and that kind of thing, you know. And in school. In church, Sunday school and in school. And in the library. Those are the kinds of things that he emphasized. I'll never forget the time that I was small, very small and we went downtown to the five and ten cents store and there was some music playing, some music that would make you want to dance. And you know, I started doing a little dance. And without saying a lot about it he'd just put a hand on you and say, you know, we don't do that. (End of Tape 1 - Side A)

81. Tape 1 - Side B

82. **Childs:** ...that you are expected to be a clown. You're expected to cut up and dance and be a clown and we aren't going to do that. But he taught, he trained us to well, be at home and he emphasized this business about reading. I stayed in the library. The library wasn't too far away and you know, we'd stay in the library and he liked to sing and he had us in singing groups, at church that is. And school, staying in touch with all the school teachers. He knew all of them, everyone of them. And that was his emphasis. His emphasis was that and very

little did he ever say negative about anybody, white or black. Very little did he say there was a negative about anybody. I can't remember. He liked to discuss and debate with, you know, other folks and that kind of thing. But very little, very little did he, there was negative did he ever say about anybody. I guess that's probably what made him a preacher I guess.

(Laughter)

83. **Mawhood:** What happened to you that you got onto the trolley and were told to sit at the back? How old were you?

84. **Childs:** I had to be somewhere like ten or twelve I guess. I was just old enough to go away from home downtown alone, you know. And had enough money, must have been a nickel or whatever, to get on the trolley to ride back home.

85. **Mawhood:** Did you talk to your father or to your step-mother about this?

86. **Childs:** I might have but they didn't make an issue of it. I probably did but, you know, I don't ever remember any response to it. But I think possibly they figured well, now you know. And being, well, obeying grown folks, grown folks told you to do something and you'd do it, you know, they figured that now you know. They didn't say that. I don't ever remember their saying that but I think that that was the way, you know. If there had been some altercation, a refusal on my part which it never entered my head because, you know, you do what you're told to do - it just never entered my head at all. It never entered my head in the first place that I was doing something wrong to sit up there. But having done that, my guess is I probably did go back and say something about it. I cannot remember what their response was. I think they must have figured that you will learn these things and if they

become real great problems we'll work them out. And that might be a pretty good way to do it. I don't know. But anyway, that's the way we did it.

87. **Mawhood:** You were talking about your father and school also. Where did you first go to school, Mr. Childs?

88. **Childs:** Well, I started to school here in the primary grades at a school called Peabody, Peabody here. And like I said, my parents knew I guess all of the teachers. Some of them probably were distantly related. But we were expected to do what all of them said without any kind of question. Then of course, I went to Peabody Elementary School until about the fifth or sixth grade. Went to Williston School which was a junior high school at that time. Well, it was a junior-senior high school. It was probably sixth, seventh and eighth. I graduated when they had the eleventh grade was the grade so it must have been sixth and seventh. Sixth and seventh grades were the middle grades and then the eighth, ninth and tenth and eleventh grades must have been the high school grades then. But then, of course, we walked to school. School was about six blocks away, six to eight blocks away. We walked to school all the time. But where I was living it really wasn't a problem because it was just about six to eight blocks from one school to the other. There were people who were in my class who had to walk much, much further than I did. Like I say, they kept up with us at school. They saw that we did chores at home and homework at home. And then again I say, he had this thing about reading. I bet you I must have read more Tom Swifts and () and all those kinds of books when I was coming up. I bet you I must have read the whole ().

89. **Mawhood:** Did your father read to you before you started school?

90. **Childs:** No, no he didn't. You know, he read to himself. He was not that much formally educated. I'm not too sure how far he went in school but he didn't go that far. But he had this thing about reading and learning. I'm sure he was not a high school graduate because high school graduates were not that many. But he had this thing about reading, principally the Bible. He read the Bible all the time. And I did not read the Bible all that much. I've not read the Bible that much. But I did do a lot of this other reading. I still do when I can, reading. I take more periodicals now than I can ever read.

91. **Mawhood:** Did you like school?

92. **Childs:** Oh, yes, I liked school. I enjoyed school. It was, you know I guess maybe I liked school because I had to like school. I guess. But there was just, like I say, most of the teachers there knew me and my family and that kind of thing and I never remember having any unpleasant experiences at school, never. I don't ever remember having any unpleasant experiences. That doesn't mean that I didn't get into any trouble. It means I don't remember having any real unpleasant. It was just understood that you will go to school and you will try to, you know, achieve. At one time, I told you there were three of us who were natural brothers, all three of us were in college at the same time.

93. **Mawhood:** Which college did you go to?

94. **Childs:** I went to Greensboro A&T. I had a brother who went to Shaw University. And at that time, the youngest brother who was in Elizabeth City - it wasn't a state university. It was

Elizabeth City Teacher's College. I think that's what it was. He later left there and went on over to A&T and he graduated from A&T. But school was very acceptable experience for all of us really. We had no real problems about school. I had not given very much thought in graduating from high school that I would be going to college. But I didn't have to make that decision because the decision was already made.

95. **Mawhood:** How did you get the money together to go to college? Did your parents give it to you or did you work?

96. **Childs:** They got me into school. They arranged for what at that time was a NYA scholarship, back in Franklin Roosevelt's days.

97. **Mawhood:** The National () Administration?

98. **Childs:** Yeah, so I had a scholarship. So I had a scholarship that I had for the whole time that I was there and that meant that I had to work. I had to clean the buildings and generally that's what I did all the time anyway. There was an administration building. We had to clean the halls and everything and one of the science buildings I believe we had to work with. But that scholarship and remember now that the total amount, I believe it cost something like eighteen dollars a month to go to school when I was going. That scholarship did do something about it. And then, of course, in the summers you came home and you worked.

99. **Mawhood:** Where did you work in the summers?

100. **Childs:** Down on the beach, down at Wrightsville Beach.

101.**Mawhood:** And what were you doing at Wrightsville Beach?

102.**Childs:** Waiter. I was a waiter in the dining rooms down there.

103.**Mawhood:** What was that like working at the dining rooms there?

104.**Childs:** Well, it was also an experience because the people who were waiters were either students at school or teachers. Men, black men, who were on summer vacation couldn't find other jobs. That was the job that they could find that they could earn money. So the dining rooms at that time were full of waiters who were either school teachers or principals or possibly students and most of them, I guess all of them were black. All of them. And we had a head waiter who was very precise. I mean he took that business, that art or whatever, to heart. And he demanded that his waiters do the job. One other thing he demanded, believe this or not, he demanded not only his waiters to do the job correctly but they be in Sunday school in the dining room on Sunday morning. That's right. Regardless to where you came from or what your job was, he had them in Sunday school on Sunday morning in the dining room.

105.**Mawhood:** Did everyone participate?

106.**Childs:** If they wanted to work down there they did. Yes sir, if they wanted to be his waiters you did.

107.**Mawhood:** Did people know that when they took the job?

108.**Childs:** I'm not too sure that I knew it when I took the job but it didn't take me long to find out. (Laughter) And a job was a job. I mean if you want to work you will do what you have to do.

109.**Mawhood:** Do you think that the customers in the restaurant had any idea that the waiters were educated men?

110.**Childs:** I think so. I think that the people who were there, they knew that there were very few other places they could get a job. And a lot of times they may have asked. But remember now, that's the time that certain jobs were relegated to certain people. And waiting tables and hopping bells were part of, you know, the temporary jobs. Shoe making and brick masonry and that kind of thing, most of those folks were black. There were not that many electricians but there were carpenters. And like I say, shoe makers and brick masons. Movers, haulers, you know, () people and that kind of thing. But see, in other jobs that you might have been able to learn your level of achievement was limited. It was limited. And any employer who disregarded that, he would not be in business very long. If he elected to elevate a black person beyond that level, he probably would not be. So Jim Crow laws while they limited black people, they limited white folks too.

111.**Mawhood:** How's that?

112.**Childs:** If I got a business and I got a person that I would like to elevate into a job that he knows that he can do, I can't do it because I'm limited. Do you understand what I'm saying?

113.**Mawhood:** White people too?

114.**Childs:** That's what I'm saying, white people too. If the law says that I, a black person, cannot socialize with you, a white person, that means that you, a white person, cannot socialize with me. The law was just as limited, limiting to the white people was it was to the black people. They didn't know it. They didn't realize that. They didn't think about that. But it was except for the fact that there were a few white people of an elevated economic level who could afford to disregard the law. But they didn't do it openly if you understand what I'm saying. Do you understand what I'm saying?

115.**Mawhood:** In what ways would they disregard the law?

116.**Childs:** They could say I want you to come to my house to have dinner. You could have dinner in the dining room. But they could not make that really widely known, if you understand what I'm saying. I want you to come to my house and I want you to sit down here to my table and I want you to eat.

117.**Mawhood:** Did you know of any cases of this kind of socializing?

118.**Childs:** Oh, sure. There were isolated cases and there were people who had black people come to their house and almost do everything that they could do. But that was in a limited circle and they did not really want that kind of relationship to get too spread out, too widely known. Which again means that they were limited even though their elevated economic level. I mean you don't do certain things, you didn't do certain things publicly. You could do privately what you couldn't do publicly. For instance, I had a friend who worked for, later, who later worked for the chief engineer. This was after my father was gone. He insisted on taking him everywhere he went. And he went into restaurants that didn't permit black people

to go in there. But he took him anyway, you know. He could do it because he was the president of the Coastline Railroad and had a lot of money. Now, probably most people didn't like it worth two cents. But he could do it and did it. What I guess I'm saying is that when you make laws like that that limit one person you are limiting more than one person. If you say that I can't go with you to the restaurant that means that you can't go with me to the restaurant however much you may want to.

119.**Mawhood:** When you were working as a waiter when you were a young man at this time in college, what kind of things did you do for fun when you had time off?

120.**Childs:** Well, after working hours down in what they called the quarters there were card playing and just general socializing like college kids do bull sessions and that kind of thing, music that they heard and that kind of thing. But generally what a college would do, you know, have bull sessions. And in the older guys, the guys who were the teachers and principals and that kind of thing, the bell captain had some gambling games going on and they could play gambling, you know. They wouldn't permit me to do it. They drew a line as to who could do it. They had games and poker and blackjack and that kind of stuff going on. But the rest of us what we did was just sit around and we could go to town if you want to and that kind of thing.

121.**Mawhood:** What about going out with women?

122.**Childs:** There weren't that many women on the beach. You remember now, you're on the beach and the women who were down there were maids and they were not that, they were limited too about what they could do and where they could go after they got off work. And

even though there might be some maids working at a place on the beach your movement on the beach was restricted. You didn't get out there and walk down the beach. What in the hell are you doing out here on this beach! So your movement was restricted because what you were down there for is to work as a servant really. That's what you were there for.

123.**Mawhood:** Are you married, Mr. Childs?

124.**Childs:** I am divorced. I was married for about twenty years I guess and I'm divorced. Did I tell you that both of my brothers are now dead?

125.**Mawhood:** No.

126.**Childs:** Both of them are now dead. Both of my natural brothers are now dead and two of my half brothers are dead. My sister and I are the only ones, she was my half sister, (). She is the one who is eighty-three. She's about eighty-three now. We're the only ones living. Both of them died of cancer. One of them, as I said before, he was really, the youngest one died first. The youngest one died first. He achieved quite a bit. He became the director, the director of the library in the small Georgia town called Carrollton. He was the president of the Kiwanis Club. He was active in the, what he called the ALA, American Library Association. He did a lot of traveling to a lot of places in that kind of work. And the next one was a high school, what do you call, dean maybe, in the high school system, junior high school system out in California. He retired from education and he became the head of a bridge association. You know, a bridge association. He traveled quite a bit. He traveled all over the country in that bridge association. He was a bridge enthusiast.

127.**Mawhood:** Did your parents play cards when you were growing up?

128.**Childs:** I had an uncle who used to teach us card games. He used to teach us. My parents didn't play any cards. Oh, they played bingo and all that kind of thing. They didn't mind our playing and I had an uncle who taught us all kinds of little games. I knew how, matter of fact, I know how to play most card games. I know how to play. I know how to play gin rummy and bridge and whist and pinochle and the rest of them. I don't find the time to do it now. You know, I'm not too sure that I'm right about this but I think that anything that you do for recreation that you like to do, it will take about three hours to do it, about three hours. It takes about three hours to play about two () of bridge I guess. It'll take about three hours to play about two or three sets of tennis. It'll take about three hours to play eighteen holes of golf if you can get on and get off. It'll take about three hours or a little more to do anything that's recreational that you really like to do.

129.**Mawhood:** You don't have three hours now? (Laughter)

130.**Childs:** Well, I enjoyed bridge but, how do I put this, if you're going to play bridge, if you aren't going to be talking about a whole lot of other things, if you're really going to be playing bridge, alright. (Laughter) But if you are going to be sitting out there talking about a thousand other things, then you know. But I played bridge with some men who didn't go into the, they don't play the same kind of game that women play. Women like to talk about everything in the world. (Laughter) I hate to say that because you know what it sounds like but men sit at a bridge table and they play bridge. They do. (Laughter) I don't know how that sounds but you know that's what happens.

131.**Mawhood:** That's okay. We can play () too. (Laughter) I wanted to ask you about college. When we started you talked about it a little bit but we got on to work. What did you study in college?

132.**Childs:** Well, I went from here to college in 19--, see I didn't say anything about any dates.
(Laughter)

133.**Mawhood:** No, () when you went.

134.**Childs:** Well, I graduated from high school in 1937 and I went to A&T in 1937. And I graduated from A&T in 1941. And I enjoyed it. I was there. I was a member of the college newspaper, the The A&T Register, was sports editor for that and for a little bit was a member of the choral group or the glee club. And had a real enjoyable time. Like I say, my major was social sciences and history and English. Social sciences and history and English. An interesting thing that I will remember, where I went to school we were required to write a thesis. Being a history major you are supposed to write about a subject that there isn't a lot. I selected the topic the growth and development, the growth and development of the Ku Klux Klan. My advisor said that is not a subject that you can get very much done in. So I had to change my subject. But it was interesting, you know, there was a natural interest for me to find out. But he says that you will not be able to get the information that you want or need to write a thesis on this. So my thesis was on the Negro in major American wars. That's what my thesis was on.

135.**Mawhood:** And your brother had fought in the first war?

136.**Childs:** Well, yeah. But I guess that maybe I was impressed by the fact, where I went to school it was mandatory, you must take ROTC, two years of ROTC. And I was interested in war. History is full of wars, you know. And of course, I had an interest in trying to find out what black people did in the wars. And so I did that. I did the authentic research. I had a, what do you call it, a guidance person, and he knew that I was doing the research and that kind of thing and I got it in and got it accepted and do you know that not too much later than that a, shall I say a story was published in the newspaper, in a black newspaper on the very same subject. It covered quite a bit of what I had covered. I'm not suggesting at all that - all I'm saying is it was incidental. But my advisor had, matter of fact I've got some of the notes on it now. They were in hand writing and were approved and you had to check with him, you know, at different points.

137.**Mawhood:** Who was your advisor? Do you remember?

138.**Childs:** Probably the dean, the man who became dean later on. He incidently recently died at the age of one hundred. At the age of one hundred he died either in the last year or the last couple of years. He was my advisor.

139.**Mawhood:** Where did you find the materials to research?

140.**Childs:** Well, was is some information in the libraries. There were some interviews with the captain of the ROTC. There was, most of it came I guess from the library and the interviews with the captain.

141.**Mawhood:** And did you go into the military yourself?

142.**Childs:** No, I did not. I got out of school and I came back here and this, remember now, was 1941 and do you know what happened December, 1941? I'm here now because I graduated in June and I'm here and I'm working in the ship building industry. There was a ship building industry here. And I go to work there with a degree as a messenger. Remember now this was a time that where you could go and the kind of jobs you could get were limited. I had also a friend who went to A&T who graduated from there a year before I did and we were both in the same department. We were messengers. You know an interesting thing about that was they were required to post in the main entrance President Roosevelt's executive order 8802, right in the main entrance. And there was a group of young fellows working in the shipyard who were either students or graduates of MIT. They talked with us and we talked with them and one of them said you're a graduate and you're a messenger? Yeah. Said well, I want to see if we can't - he said you took some chemistry, didn't you? I said yes. He said I don't know a lot about you. He said do you know if you stick a litmus paper in the acid that it turns? Yeah, I know that. He said well I'm going to try to see if we can get you into my department. Couldn't be done. Could not be done. Having done that, I got, of course, a call to come to the Army. I went to Fort Bragg and I went through all of the tests and passed them all really. And the last test, the last, I guess test was the part that, I guess the psychological part. They asked you certain things. You ever had dizzy spells and first one thing and another. I had had some dizzy spells really but I'd never fallen out. But I came out rejected.

143.**Mawhood:** How did you feel about that?

144.**Childs:** Alright. (Laughter) I felt alright about it. I wasn't physically or mentally unable and I wasn't all that eager really to go to war. I thought that there were, you know, a whole lots of things that needed to be squared away. I wasn't an activist or anything like that but I thought that there were a whole lot of problems that really needed to be squared away. I had, my roommate in college went into the service and he lives here now. He lives in Wilmington now. He came out a major. He lives right near where we are. He's married to a white girl from France. Very good friends of mine, both of them now and they live right near here. An interesting thing about that, his name is Johnny and before he married, well he was overseas and he came back home on leave and at that time I was in Philadelphia. We used to sit up late at night with a bottle talking about, discussing his plans about the practicality of his marrying this girl. And where would he live and what would he be looking at and that kind of thing. And we did that oh, quite some time until he went back. And out of those discussions I guess he made his mind up that that's what he was going to do and he did. He married her and they lived in New York for a long, long time. And that's another interesting kind of thing. They were living in New York and somebody died in his family. I don't know whether it was his mother or his sister. His sister died and of course he had to come to the funeral. And she, of course, wanted to come and they came. But it was a real tense kind of situation.

145.**Mawhood:** This was in 1950?

146.**Childs:** Yes, this was in the 1950's. Real tense kind of situation. But we worked through it. I mean, wherever they were, I was too. And it was kind of, sort of tense kind of thing. But now they live here and no problem. Yeah, they bought a nice place, a house. He has been

sick but he and she are into gardening and they have - I took a picture recently of his rose garden. It is one fantastic - he grew some beautiful roses. His degree was in agriculture. But then, of course, he came out and he worked in agriculture for a little while until he went back into the service and he went to officer's candidates school and finally came out of the Army as a major. And now that he has time on his hands and all this kind of stuff he's gone back out to the agriculture extension place and gotten involved in horticulture and that kind of stuff. And he spends a lot of time working in his yard.

147.**Mawhood:** When you say that you felt that there were a lot of things that needed to be squared away when you were thinking that you might possibly have to go into the service, what kinds of things?

148.**Childs:** Executive order 8842. Plus the fact that when I came back and before I went to the shipyard I made application to become a postal clerk. In Wilmington there was no such thing as a black postal clerk. There were many postal carriers. And I'll never forget the interview I had with the postmaster at that time. We were talking about my application and he said something to the effect that you would not enjoy being a clerk, more or less. Of course, those kinds of conversations and I said well, maybe not but if my application is approved I will find out. It never was approved though. And so when you talk about some things that needed to be squared away that's the kind of thing they talk about. Back during those times, I came across recently since () some kinds of thoughts that I put down on paper and I just came across it. Matter of fact, I've got it here. You see how old that paper is?

149.**Mawhood:** How to change "southern white gentlemen." Giving southern white gentlemen with average training and intelligence to prove he can be trained (). You wrote this at the time you were applying to be a postal clerk?

150.**Childs:** I can't exactly remember but it was a long time ago. It was a real long time ago. Those were just some of the thoughts and the, you know, kind of attitude that I had about what was going on, the treatment and that kind of thing.

151.**Mawhood:** Would you mind if I made a copy of this, Sir? I would have to borrow it or otherwise I could read it into the tape recorder.

152.**Childs:** Do whatever you want to. I'd just like to get it right back but whatever you want to do.

153.End of Tape 1 - Side B

154.Tape 2 - Side A

155.**Childs:** I'm a pack rat and I keep a lot of stuff there and I just happened, you know, in doing this thing I came across one or two things that I thought I might need so that was part of it.

156.**Mawhood:** Thank you very much. I'll look forward to reading it, talking with you now. So you were working in the shipyard and you wanted to work at the post office and so what did you do then?

157.**Childs:** Well, what I wanted was security in a job. I wanted a job with some security, you know. And the post office appeared to be that place of security. Matter of fact, at one time

most of the carriers, no, at one time most of the carriers in the postal system here were black.

And most of them had college degrees, most of them. It was one of those things that, you know, it was just one of those places you could go and get honorable employment. And, you know, talking about whether I was enthusiastic about going to the Army, I just wasn't, not really. I just wasn't that enthusiastic about it. Of course, what I did then was, since I didn't go to the Army I decided that this was an opportunity to go and see other parts of the world, another part of the world. So I left and went to Pennsylvania. Went to Philadelphia and I got a job in a ship building company up there as a time clerk which I didn't stay long with that. Then I went to work at a place called Baldwin Locomotive Works and I was what they called a gang leader. My job was to ream out piston boards. Do you remember the steam engines that went and the piston thing goes like that? Yeah, well those had piston rods and they fit into boards and that kind of thing and our job was to ream, they had to be precise and our job was to ream out those heads so that those rods would fit in there and there would be no loose thing. Everything had to be fitted exactly. And I had a group. They called it a gang, that we put on these boards up there. I had a picture, I don't believe I brought it with me, of a big group of us. There were very, very few, the number of blacks was about, let's say if there were a hundred people there were about seven blacks I guess. And that's how conspicuous you were. I got the job as the leader because I had a college education I guess. But sooner or later after the war, of course, 1945 or 1946 or something then of course there was not the demand for locomotives because that plant made locomotives for engines all over the world, France and Russia and the South Pacific or Pacific coast. They just made locomotives for everybody and of, course, business was booming during the war but right after that there was not the demand so there was a big lay-off. And I stayed in Pennsylvania for awhile and I did

some substitute teaching up there. And then I came back to North Carolina and I worked as a teacher here for a short while. I worked as a teacher 1947, 1948 and I enjoyed the work. I really did. I enjoyed the work. I organized a group of kids who were very smart and published the school paper. I didn't do it by myself. I had some help and I had the cooperation of the principal and the enthusiasm of the kids and that kind of thing and the work was great but I left at the end of a year. And the reason was that the little town that I was working in was a real small rural town and I just wasn't ready for a real small rural town.

158.**Mawhood:** Where was that, Mr. Childs?

159.**Childs:** That was in Harnett County in North Carolina, a little place called Lillington. That was the county seat.

160.**Mawhood:** Lillington?

161.**Childs:** Lillington. It's the county seat of Harnett County. I really did enjoy working but like I say, I really wasn't fitted for a small rural. The community expected certain things of you like be in church on every Sunday and give an account of your whereabouts and that kind of thing. I just wasn't really ready for that kind of thing. And I came back to Wilmington and for awhile there were a bunch of ships stored in the Brunswick River. They were Merchant Marine ships. They were moth balled over there and I had a panel body truck and I used to work over there but I used to carry workers over there also. And I did that until I had a friend who was a school teacher here. He was a band master and a school teacher and he said to me, he said look, I understand that there's an opening, there's going to be an opening down in the city hall. That the guy who's there is going to leave and go into the

school system. He's going to be assistant principal. And I think that you ought to take a look into it. And I said okay. The next time I saw him he said did you do anything about that. I said no but I am. And the next time I saw him - finally, he said look, go down there and see about it. And I did and I suspect I must have been hired right on the spot almost really, on the spot. I then became a juvenile court probation officer and the attendance counselor officer for the board of education. I had two jobs in one. And I worked those two jobs for about, well from 1948 until 1964. And you know, it occurred to me that the white system had a juvenile court probation officer, white, and it also had a county attendance officer, white and I decided that both of them are full-time jobs. And there is a need, just as much need for a full-time person in both of those jobs as there is for the whites. So I talked really, the board of education was ready to employ a full-time attendance counselor.

162.**Mawhood:** 1964?

163.**Childs:** In 1964. So I went to work for them in 1964 as a full-time which of course, made it essential for the city to hire a full-time juvenile probation officer and they did. But I only worked one year as an attendance counselor before the state adult probation system saw me and felt that it was time for them to hire a black state probation officer. So I went to work for them and I was one of eleven black state probation officers in the whole state. There were about eleven of us I think in the whole state. And I worked for them until about 1973 when they were under the Department of Corrections, adult probation system was under the Department of Corrections and at that time they were thinking about a new experimental program. They had some grants from the federal government. This was Lyndon Johnson Great Society thing and they were looking for ways to improve the criminal justice system

and that kind of thing. They had the idea that what they were going to do was to set up an evaluation system in the criminal justice system so they devised the program called the Self Improvement Center. There were five centers in the state of North Carolina. There was one in Wilmington, there was one in Durham, there was one in Winston-Salem, there was one in Charlotte and there was one in Asheville. And I was the director of the one here in Wilmington. And like I say, it was a grant program and as soon as the grant ran out the state had the option of picking it up and carrying it on or letting it drop. Well, the state says we don't have the money to do it so they let it drop. And then, but I had the option of remaining in the Department of Corrections as an adult probation officer where I came from. But I elected to leave that department and go back into juvenile court work. And I became the first black chief court counselor in the, what do you call it, in the juvenile justice system in the state of North Carolina. I became the first black chief court counselor and I kept that job until I retired.

164.**Mawhood:** When did you retire?

165.**Childs:** I retired in 1987.

166.**Mawhood:** Did you enjoy that work, Sir?

167.**Childs:** I surely did. I enjoyed it because it gave me the opportunity to work with black people and white folks for that matter too. But you know, the criminal justice system is an intimidating institution. And people who come into that system, a lot of them are intimidated. It's an intimidating kind of thing. But it gave me an opportunity to work with black people to let them find out that all of it isn't negative. That there is something that you

can get out of it to help you, you know. You can get some benefits out of the resources that are available. And I learned that from my experience in working with the juvenile court prior to that time. And that was the opportunity to get back into it, to make it work for people that it might not have worked for, you know, previously.

168.**Mawhood:** What kinds of things would you say that people could get out of it?

169.**Childs:** Well, in the juvenile court system there are no criminals. People are delinquent.

They were either delinquent or, what do you call it, something else, they have a term for it. And if one got into the system a lot of time it came out of ignorance. And that was an opportunity to explore the resources that the community naturally has, to show what resources there are in the community that can be of benefit. And that's really what our program was about.

170.**Mawhood:** Would you say that your clients, in a sense, changed over the years that you were working in the system?

171.**Childs:** No system, you know of course, is perfect but we were able to what I call redirect the behavior of a lot of people. You know, there are a whole lot of terms like rehabilitation and all that kind of thing but what I saw was the changing, the redirection, of direction that a person was going and it came about because of ignorance. You know, I didn't know these things were here. I didn't know that this could be done. I didn't know these kinds of things. And we didn't win them all but we did pretty good.

172.**Mawhood:** Do any of your clients, I don't mean for you to use names, but do any of them stick out in your mind?

173.**Childs:** Well, of course when you are in a position like that you see so many and the way that I do it and I'm pretty well known around the area because I was so visible in that position and people that I don't even know now tell me about what we were able to do for them, you know. I have people call me now who say look, I need your help. I say look, I'm out of this thing. But it's like teachers. You never know when you are really impressing somebody. It's like social scientists. You're putting it out there but you never know when it's taking seed and you're really making an impression. And sometimes in later years it comes back. You did this or you did that and teachers get this all the time. Preachers sometimes get it and counselors and that kind of thing. They get that kind of thing all the time. Because you do in those kinds of positions and you make an impact and it's the way that you approach it, you know. Most people believe, a lot of people believe, that those kinds of positions mean power. And that's the most negative thing that can happen to a person when you get this power. People are looking for folks who can have some kind of empathy with them rather than, you know, you've got to do this or that. And we did pretty well with it I think.

174.**Mawhood:** Would you say that your relations with police officers changed over time?

175.**Childs:** No, police officers kind of sort of when I was working with juvenile probation officers early on, the police officers considered us as one of their arms. Every time, for many years in Wilmington, every time a police officer arrested a black child they called me. Every time that they arrested a black child they called me and it was my decision usually as to

whether he would go back home or whether he would be locked up or that kind of thing. And so, you know, really what we were at that time was an arm of the police department. Whenever police came across complicated cases where the kids, when they came across a case maybe of a break-in or something and it's more than one kid and they began questioning them and they said that this person was involved and to go ahead and pick up this kid and sometimes they spent all night long getting a bunch of kids but we felt that it was better to do that way to get all of it cleaned up rather than do it half way. And usually those kids went back home and the parents were advised of what they were into and all these kinds of things, you know. And you got a whole lot more done. Parents didn't send them out there to do those things but then, of course, they were adventurous. And kids got this thing about if you do it I'm going to do it too or if I do it, I expect you to do it and that kind of thing. Like I say, parents weren't aware of it but once they were aware of it they did something with our help to try to correct it. So yeah, it was really a awarding kind of thing. Sometimes when kids persisted in getting in trouble they and their parents knew that they were the problem, not the system. But they understood that. One of the interesting things that I did in my mind was enforcing the compulsory school attendance law and that was really interesting.

176.**Mawhood:** How come?

177.**Childs:** Well, I have said this any number of times but I started out in that job with the conviction that every black kid needed to be in school whether he wanted to be or not. If I saw them on the streets I'd pick them up and I'd carry them to school regardless to what they said that their excuse was. And a lot of time their excuse was I didn't have any shoes. But they were out on the streets. And my conviction was that whether you want to be there or not

if I force you into school that something of value has to fall off on you sometime during the day more than would have fallen off on you had you been out there in the streets. And that's the way I pushed it for a long time. And I had a reputation of picking them up and taking them to school. But then later on it occurred to me that if I picked up a child on the streets who did not want to be in school and I took them there and put them in the school that I might be robbing some other child of the time that it took that teacher to correct this child. I might be taking that minute or that two minutes or five minutes if he came and distracted that teacher. So it was a dilemma and I'm sure that I ever resolved it. I'm not sure I ever resolved that.

178.**Mawhood:** Do you remember what it was that made you start seeing that differently?

179.**Childs:** Yes. I know that there are kids that go to school to learn and there are parents who send them there to learn. And I know that a moment's distraction is a moment's distraction. I was in and out of the schools all of the time, you know. And it just occurred to me that I might be stealing something from you. I never got it really resolved because I do think that whether you want to be in that environment that something of value will fall off on you whether you resist it or not. You will learn something of value if you're put in that environment. I still think that. And I still think that if I force you to go that I'm robbing somebody else.

180.**Mawhood:** It is a dilemma.

181.**Childs:** Yes, a dilemma. So still that's the way it is.

182.**Mawhood:** I'd like to ask you just a couple of more things before we break. One is about your writing how to train a southern white gentleman, so called. Did you share this with anyone when you wrote it, Sir?

183.**Childs:** I've never shared it with anybody at all, never. It's just something that you write, you know, and you put down. That's the first time that, well, I'm a pack rat and I go through that stuff every now and then. I just found it and that's where it is.

184.**Mawhood:** Did you act this way towards southern white men, that is, what you say in this document that you must require them to address them by your name and so forth?

185.**Childs:** Yeah. Black folks have to learn how to cope, how to get along. They have to learn how to get along and maintain some similance of dignity. Not everybody does it the same way. But you have to learn how to get along in this world and hold your head up. And understand that there are certain things that you will accept and certain things that you won't accept. Sometimes people do things out of ignorance. Sometimes they are not aware of. Sometimes they are following a pattern that's been set by somebody else who probably was ignorant and sometimes somebody who was intentional. But it is not uncommon now for some white people to see a black male with a coat and tie on to immediately call him Reverend. Now, right now, immediately if he has a coat and tie on he's Reverend. You see? As if possibly only reverends, black people, can wear coats and ties. And I'm not surprised that it might happen anytime. Now it is a relations thing. It is how one race sees the other race. And black people, and white people too for that matter, have to set a standard of what they will or will not accept. And I guess maybe that's what all of that came out of. People

will treat you the way you permit them to treat you. People will treat you the way you permit them to treat you and you don't really have to be all that antagonistic. But you can make it pretty clear to me what you will or will not permit me to do.

186.**Mawhood:** You had mentioned also, I'm switching a little bit here, church earlier and your father becoming a preacher or a reverend. I got the impression maybe you weren't quite as involved.

187.**Childs:** (Laughter) You've got that right. I go to church right now because my mother wanted me to go to church. That's being honest about that thing. One of the worst whippings I ever got in my life was because of church. And that was because it was an Easter kind of thing and we were expected to participate in the Easter program. We were sent to the rehearsals and we fooled around and didn't pay a lot of attention and that kind of thing and had the nerve on the day that the program was going to be presented, well, we went some place else, went playing some place else until the absolute deadline. Then we went back home and my people were upset as they could be but they got me dressed and hustled me up there to that program and I didn't know my lines. And that fixed that. But that's because really I wasn't all that interested in being in that thing. I had to attend church and Sunday school until I was able to go away from here to college. When I went to college I did not go nearly as regular. That doesn't mean I didn't go at all. That means that I didn't go as regular and that means also that I did go to Vespar programs that were interesting and that kind of thing. But it was kind of sort of a relief to not have to go, if you understand what I'm talking about. And again, when I got grown and that kind of thing was on and I did not go to

church and I was here and my mother said to me something about going to church, I said well, it ain't going to hurt. (Laughter)

188.**Mawhood:** Do you believe in God?

189.**Childs:** Oh, sure. I don't believe in a lot of the revolutionary rituals that go on in churches and that kind of thing. And there are any number of them. How do I say this, today's church is truly revolutionary from where I'm standing. The whole program has changed. In other words, there is the energetic gospel program going on in the churches. Now, I believe if that's the way you want to express yourself, okay. But I am not quite into that. And while I can tolerate it I just am not really into it. I can get more out of a philosophical sermon than I can out of a fire and brimstone sermon, if you understand what I'm trying to say. And that is the reason that I don't go quite as often really. Because again, that is the trend in my church anyway, the drums and the gospel shouting and all that kind of thing. It is the trend. I never thought I'd live to see the day that they'd have a gospel choir in the Catholic church.

190.**Mawhood:** And you're Catholic, Sir?

191.**Childs:** No, no, no, I'm not a Catholic. But I'm saying they have. But that's the trend. No, I'm an African Methodist Episcopalian, AME. But I go and I tolerate it. That's what I call myself doing and you know, the joining hands and the waving and the hugging and all this kind of business, I guess they see it as the way to salvation, I guess. I'm not quite sure all of that is the way you get there. And you know, it does not make me any less reverent. It just means that I'm slow to catch up with the trend.

192.**Mawhood:** What, if I can ask you, what would you say would be the way to salvation?

193.**Childs:** I think, again, one of the most impressive services I remember ever going to was at college, really, a Vespar service where a speaker was philosophical. But with his philosophy he could make you understand that there is a spirit. He could make you open your head and mind and heart up. That was more impressive to me than the one who is waving his arms and stomping his feet and screaming and yelling and all that kind of business, if you understand what I'm talking about.

194.**Mawhood:** Un-huh. I wanted to ask you one last thing. Sometimes people don't like to talk about this but you mentioned it earlier, which is I was wondering, you were talking about your friend Archie talking to you about Wilmington and about race relations and so forth and you said that it was like people telling, people teaching kids about sex. That parents don't necessarily want to do it but they want someone who they like to do that.

195.**Childs:** Most parents walk around it or try to.

196.**Mawhood:** Who taught you about that, Mr. Childs?

197.**Childs:** I guess my peers. I guess my peers because you know, when I was coming along it was a taboo subject. It was taboo. I guess, well, let me say this, my father did without telling me what he was trying to do, bought a book and put it in my way without comment. But where I really learned what I learned about sex I guess was from my peers. Yeah, I think, again, he wanted to, he wanted to () but like a lot of other parents did not know how to go about it. So I really think that there's where most youths learn a great deal about what they

know about sex, from peers. They may not learn the right things but that's where they learn what they learn I think. You know, that's what I think.

198.**Mawhood:** How did they talk about it? How did young people talk about it?

199.**Childs:** They talked about what boys expect, what girls expect and how to go about it.

What is expected of you as a male. And what is acceptable and what's not. That boys probably are expected to get away with a whole lot more than girls, probably. They don't go as far as that club that we've read about over in California somewhere. They don't go quite all that far and that kind of thing. But you learn what their experiences are and have been. That's where I think a lot of youth learn what they know about sex.

200.**Mawhood:** Did you get the impression that many of your friends were having sex without being married?

201.**Childs:** At what stage?

202.**Mawhood:** I guess when you were teenagers and in your early twenties?

203.**Childs:** Well, most of my friends at that time, I was thirty years old before I ever got married. Most of, single people consider that a way of living, you know. And as time has gone on, more and more openly. Since the sexual revolution more and more open. Surely there are things that are tolerated by the community today than there were before. I think that, I'll tell you exactly what I think, I think that sex is overrated. I think it's a natural function. I think that it has been going on no more now than it ever has. I think that we know a whole lot more about it. I think that people are openly admitting a little bit more than

they did before. It's something just like two things. When I was an attendance counselor here we had on record more truancy than we had in surrounding counties. That's because we had records of it. They had as much truancy over in Brunswick County but they had no record of it. Do you see what I'm saying? There was some other point that I wanted to make but I've forgotten about but oh, we have today I think no more child abuse and spouse abuse than we've always had. People are reporting it more. I think it's always been there. I think that especially racist and power hungry people have been guilty of abusing people all the time, you know. It's a, what's happening now is more people just are reporting it. It doesn't mean that there's anymore. Means that more people are now able to say that I was either sexually abused or physically abused.

204.End of Tape 2 - Side A

205.Tape 2 - Side B

206.**Childs:** You know I told you that I wanted to study a little bit about the Klan. I really have an idea that a lot of people who are in the Klan are naturally abusive people really. And I think that they did a lot of abuse right there in their own homes. That they beat up on their wives and children and that kind of thing. And they got a common place there to go out and do some more of it. That's what I think. I think that from what little bit I've read, I've been able to read, that they are pretty abusive people. And I think that their victims more than the people that they lynched have been probably right there in their own homes. That's just what I think. The abusive people - and it's a good thing probably that people are now coming out and reporting this abuse because there have been wolves in sheep's clothing. There have

been the pious ones. There have been the pious ones who have been really abusive people. And they are the first ones to jump up and say we don't tolerate this kind of thing. I think that some of them are being exposed now. I think that's the way it ought to be because innocent people have become victims because of this I think. They're the ones that scream we don't tolerate this and something ought to be done about it!

207.**Mawhood:** Thank you very much, Mr. Childs.

208.**Childs:** I don't know whether it makes any sense or not.

209.**Mawhood:** It does definitely, thank you. ...people you admired when you were growing up.

210.**Childs:** (Talking about scrapbook.) Joe Lewis, Jesse Owens. Do you know Jesse Owens?

211.**Mawhood:** Yes, un-huh.

212.**Childs:** I guess that's () the Nicholas brothers.

213.**Mawhood:** Cab Calloway.

214.**Childs:** ...was at Duke. This is a guy who, one of the first black aviators.

215.**Mawhood:** Hubert Julian.

216.**Childs:** Yeah. Louis Armstrong. (). Those were some of our models then. Joe Lewis and his mother. () who was an opera star who is a Wilmingtonian. He was one of the first black congressmen.

217.**Mawhood:** Oscar ().

218.**Childs:** Is that Joe Lewis, most of those?

219.**Mawhood:** Un-huh.

220.**Childs:** This guy was an actor.

221.**Mawhood:** Richard B. Harrison.

222.**Childs:** Richard B. Harrison. That's Joe Lewis I guess or Richard B. Harrison. That's more of his family at his death. ().

223.**Mawhood:** () and then () Hall.

224.**Childs:** Yeah. I started this scrapbook when I was in high school so you know that these folks are old.

225.**Mawhood:** John (). What was it that you admired about these people?

226.**Childs:** They had achieved in a world that wasn't easy to achieve. They had achieved in a world, again, that it wasn't easy to do it. They had some special, extra, in order to do it.

227.**Mawhood:** Do you remember when Lewis won?

228.**Childs:** Oh, yeah. I really am not a great boxing fan but he was, yeah, he was the champion. There was no question about it. I mean, you know, he was just the champion. And I guess, you know, Jesse Owens for instance, scorned by Hitler and that kind of stuff

and achieved in spite of all of these things that those are the kinds of things that make you, you know, use them as some kind of a model.

229.**Mawhood:** Do you remember people talking about when Jesse Owens, when Hitler refused to shake his hand?

230.**Childs:** Yes, I was reading at that time. That was back in, what was it 1940?

231.**Mawhood:** 1936.

232.**Childs:** 1936, yeah. I was in high school at that time. Yeah, I remember that well. That was before the war though, wasn't it? Yes. Oh, yes I remember those things and they were impressive events. Well, I know you've got to go and you've got a lot of things...

233.End of Tape 2 - Side B