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Kenneth Young

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December 6, 1983

Dear Mr. Young,

On March 12, 1985, you were interviewed by Jim Deeter for the Marshall University Oral History Department. At this time, we would like to get your final approval in order to make the interview available to the public. If you would like us to send you a copy of the transcript, please let us know and we would be happy to send you one. If we do not hear from you, we will assume that you do not wish to review the transcript and we will make it available in the Morrow Library Special Collections.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,
Barbara Smith
Barbara Smith, Director
Oral History of
Appalachia Program

AUTHORIZATION FORM: Please check one of the following options and return to Marshall University Oral History Department, Smith Hall, Care of ~~Dr. Barbara Smith~~, Huntington, WV 25785-2678.

Mrs. Gina Kates

- Release the transcript without my review
- Release the transcript and ~~send me a copy~~
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JUN 14 1984

Ans'd *JK*

Signature

Kevin M. Young

Date

6/11/84



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ORAL HISTORY

GIFT AND RELEASE AGREEMENT

I, KEN M. YOUNG, the undersigned,
of Institute, County of KANAWHA, State
of West Virginia, grant, convey, and transfer
to the James E. Morrow Library Associates, a division of
The Marshall University Foundation, INC., an educational and
eleemosynary institution, all my right, title, interest, and
literary property rights in and to my testimony recorded on
MARCH 12, 1985, to be used for scholarly
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(initial)

DATE 3/12/85

Ken M. Young
(Signature - Interviewee)

5422 Raven Circle
(Address)

CROSS LANS, WV. 25313

J. A. [Signature]
(Signature - Witness)

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DATE Ans'd

Young, Ken M.
3/12/85
KCTC-8

KANAWHA COUNTY TEXTBOOK CONTROVERSY

TAPE #8

AN ORAL INTERVIEW WITH: Dr. Kenneth Young

CONDUCTED BY: Jim Deeter

DATE OF INTERVIEW: March 12, 1985

Jim: This is Jim Deeter, interviewing Dr. Kenneth Young (Ken) Ken Young at the I guess it's COGS, (WV College Graduate Studies) in Institute, West Virginia on March the 12th, 1985. This interview is in reference to the Kanawha Valley Textbook Controversy in 1974 and '75, and this particular interview will be used primarily at the Oral History in research for a thesis in the History Department at Marshall University. And Dr. Young, let me begin by asking you to just share something about your background, where you're from, where you went to school and how you came to this place and so on. Just...talk about yourself.

Ken Okay, yeah. Briefly I grew up in Texas. I was born in Texas and spent my earlier part of my life in Texas, went to high school there, went to, got my bachelor's degree at Texas State College at the time and then got my master's later, it was called North Texas State University, in Denton, outside of Dallas. And after completing my undergraduate degree I worked in the Dallas public schools for six years as a teacher and became frustrated and wanted to go in to administration, and so I took a job at a little small rural school district in east Texas, Farmersville, and was a principal there for one year in order to get some administrative experience. And at that time the job corps program just began in the United States under the Johnson regime, and so I was asked to help develop the curriculum for the job corps program (mmm-hmm), so I moved down near Austin, to a town called San Marcus, where they had a, one of the major job corps centers there. And uh, worked there for a year as a curriculum specialist. And uh, my wife's hometown was San Angelo, Texas, and in visiting there the superintendent of the schools on a visit asked me if I would be interested in coming to San Angelo to become principal of a uh, open space, innovative school they were gonna build. And the more he talked about it, the more exciting it got. So I agreed and so he offered me a job on paper as a vice-principal, and uh, of a school and so that year, I spent that year developing the plan and staff for this school. And then became principal of John Glenn Exemplary High School and I was principal there for uh, after we opened for three years, and then some people from northern Virginia, Prince William County, asked me if I would be interested in coming up there to help them uh, that they were gonna in a high growth area and that they were building a lot of schools, and they wanted to use the same teaching methodology and facility construction that we had in that school. And they offered me a uh, doubled my salary, so I agreed that, yes, it was time for me to move. So I moved to, my family moved to uh, northern Virginia. And I have, at that time, I had a son and a daughter, and so we moved to northern Virginia and I worked with the Prince William County schools as a director of staff development and program development. And then in my work there I uh, ran into an old friend of mine who had uh, come to Virginia Polytech Institute, which is Virginia Tech, down in Blacksburg, and they started a doctoral program and he encouraged me to come back to school and so I did. I resigned from my job and took a year and went back to Virginia Tech and got my doctorate in educational administration. And while I was there, I met the in my uh, experiences there I met Dr. Kenneth Underwood, who was at that time, just appointed

superintendent of Kanawha County school system. And uh, he asked me if I'd be interested in moving up here, and I said, well, I'd also been offered a job with Virginia Tech in higher education and I kind of had mixed feelings. And so he talked with the president of COGS and COGS had just officially become an institution of it's own; prior to that it had been a branch of WVU. And uh, so they in talking with Underwood and Dr. _____ they agreed on a joint appointment, where I would be uh, employed on paper with the college of graduate studies, but that half of my salary and half of my responsibility would be with the Kanawha County school system. And that sounded like an exciting kind of job, 'cause I'd get the best of both worlds (mmm-hmm), so I took that position and worked with uh, Kanawha County schools and COGS for two years doing that, and then the Textbook Controversy came along and uh, I knew that Dr. Underwood was gonna leave because of the turmoil, so I at that time, asked Dr. _____ if it'd be possible for me to go full time with COGS and he said, yes, and that was 12 years ago and I've been here ever since. (mmmh)

Jim: You, so you came to Kanawha County to work for the Board of Education and on paper for COGS (right), and your primary responsibility was curriculum?

Ken: The first year with Kanawha County board it was I was an administrative assistant for really just planning and development. He was going through a lot of reorganization change in the school system and uh, then at the beginning of the next year was when the textbook thing started and his uh, associate superintendent for instruction uh...Warner, was uh, he left and went to Minnesota or Chicago or somewhere. And so Dr. Underwood asked me if I'd take that position during, to finish out that year. And uh, so I agree that I would take the position of associate superintendent, and kept him kind of

Jim: That was during, during the controversy?

Ken: Yes, mm-hmm.

Jim: So you were here about 2 years before the controversy actually happened, is that...?

Ken: Mmmmh, yeah. Two years, yeah. (how do you...?) I came here August of 1973.

Jim: Okay, and the controversy began a year later, really. (mmm-hmm) Less than a year, it was May of '74....

Ken: When it first started, yeah.

Jim: What do you recall about your firstbeing cognisant of the controversy, so called controversy? What were the things you remember early on?

Ken: Yeah, the first issue that came about was the uh...a group of uh, parents called the board and that they were upset with some

of the textbook adoptions. (that was in what, spring of '74, April, May, June?) Yeah. Mmm-hmm. After the teacher committee selected the books and everything had been approved by the board and so forth. There was a group of parents that objected to some of the pictures and words and things.

Jim: Did they call you personally or....?

Ken: No, they....I remember Dr. Underwood calling a meeting and he says, we've got some objections, what are we gonna do? We've got a number of the...the committee had approved them and of course, as in the past, the administration you know, went with whatever the teacher group did, so the plan was to put the books on display or in public display so we could give more people an opportunity to see if it was just a small group of parents or wide number of people who objected. And so they did that. They set up a room over across the street in the building that's right across from the office, and invited people to come in and look, and uh, the momentum started to gain in terms of resentment about the material in some of the books. And also about the same time the uh, the uh, the coal miners were renewing their contract as they do ever so often, and uh, this was going on too, at the same time. A number of other political issues were going on in the county. Prior to Dr. Underwood coming they had closed uh, I don't know, 50 or 75 little one-room schools in the county, which upset people all over the county. And when Dr. Underwood came in, he also closed a number of small schools, continuing to consolidate and build newer facilities and consolidating. But when you did that, you had to close the small community schools, which upset parents and many of the people felt alienated, loss of power uh, schools were being taken away from them, all of those kind of frustrations that citizens feel. And some of that got involved in the textbook controversy and these people felt like that they could use the textbook issue in order to get their voice heard and hopefully to be more of a, have more voice in their kids education. And then as is true in most social disorders, a number of external groups saw this as an opportunity to get on the band wagon and get some visibility and at that time then, we had a number of groups, communist groups, Klu Klux Klan, from all over the country, moved into town, set up shop, and began to take advantage of the disturbance and turmoil, emotions of people, and started using people for their benefit. A number of religious groups did the same thing. (mmm-hmm) They saw it as a way to increase their membership.

Jim: All right. So, in early '74 this, these, this group of parents called the board of education, expressing concern (right), about some of the textbooks. I understand there were about 318 total. This was language arts.

Ken: Yeah, it was a large adoption and there were a number of "standard" grammar, literature books, and then there were you know, a large number of supplementary kinds of books for different levels.

Jim: You were an associate superintendent, assistant superintendent of schools?

Ken: Associate superintendent, for curriculum, that's right.

Jim: And you were actually involved with curriculum? The choice of curriculum? (mmm-hmm) Were you actually involved in the choice of these textbooks, the language arts textbooks? (no) But you were, were you familiar with these books? (yes) Uh, let me....

Ken: In general, (yeah), I didn't sit down and read 370 books. (no, I understand that) I knew, I knew the publishers and I knew the uh, the uh, we had uh, we had just gone through identifying similar to what the master plan has done now. Kanawha County was one of the few systems in the United States that had identified the objectives and the outcome that we wanted kids at each grade level to achieve. And it was a massive, it started before I came there, but it was about a two year project. And teachers all over the county worked day and night (laughingly) developing a uh (did this...) continuous plan of curriculum, K-12.

Jim: And these books were designed to achieve these goals and objectives?

Ken: Well, they were selected as the best available to help teachers. (mmm-hmm) You know...teach those objectives.

Jim: Do you recall any of the objectives that you remember specifically?

Ken: Well, they were mostly cognitive kinds of skills, mathematics and science. In terms of this particular series uh, really it, it was not, the approach that we, the curriculum that we designed was not different than what was being proposed in other county or any other state.

Jim: The uh, one of the objections I read about and heard about was the language arts series or the curriculum that was being chosen, uh, did away with traditional uh, forms and values, not only moral things, but I'm talking about language and writing. In other words, the uh, I read some things that said they were, they said if my ethnic background allows me to use the word 'ain't', or if I want to construct a sentence that doesn't necessarily fit a certain pattern, that's okay. Is that true? Is that basically true?

Ken: Now, the curriculum that we of course, a curriculum of a school is a "what". Okay? (un-huh) So the what did not identify those things. Now, in terms of the "how", how you do, how you teach something, and what philosophy you have, because of that period of history we just came out of the '60's, and there's a lot of, there was a lot of and of course, this is the main reason for the objections of the books, is that many of the books did reinforce the fact that there were different cultures, different

values, different beliefs, and uh, evidently the people here, from the various cultures, saw this as an intrusion into changing their children's values. (mm-hmm) But uh, the stated, written objectives and outcomes did not uh, identify or suggest that approach. It was the materials that suggested that approach. And this was what really upset the parents, is because it did. A number of the high school suggested or supplemental reading books were very uh, had a lot of street language, uh...many of the pictures even in the elementary literature books were multi-ethnic pictures.

Jim: In other words, a picture might show a black child and white child (sitting down together), eating lunch or whatever.

Ken: Sure, yeah. And this of course, being a very conservative close culture here in the Kanawha Valley uh, generally speaking, they just, that really upset people. (mmm-hmm) And then when you know, when they ...when that happened, then they would start looking for more things. (mm-hmm) And uh, even you know, as a person in my values, my own personal values and where I'm coming from, after some of the objections were raised, then I started examining the books more closely. And I found a number of books that totally you know, upset me in terms of my values. And uh, but the problem was at that time it has since changed a little bit in the textbook selection process, but if you uh, if you went with a series, you know, you bought the whole boat or you didn't buy any of it. (mmm-hmm) And so as a result, the teachers in selecting the books felt like this was the best series to do what, what they felt should be done, so they were willing to take some of that stuff (mm-hmm).

Jim: It brings up an interesting question (sure), that's been mentioned before in some other interviews. Someone told me that buying textbooks was really and I'm using their word, "a joke". Because uh...the book publishers are obviously competitive and they want the business. There's a million dollar plus business in Kanawha County alone in textbooks (we filled a warehouse full) yeah, and so it's obvious there's a lot of competition for this particular plum, and someone mentioned to me that this ...what the textbook people do is to wine and dine the teachers who were on the textbook committee, and they don't really get a chance to look at the books that well, but they show 'em some pretty pictures and kind of show them basic excerpts from the books and but there's no real getting into the substance of the material, because there's not enough time. Is that true or not?

Ken: That's not true, that's not true.

Jim: So they, during this time....

Ken: They lock themselves up and they spend hours and hours and hours you know, it's really a, it's really a tedious task, but what they do, they develop a set of criteria on which they're gonna use to select books, and they look for books that meet those criteria, and they keep weeding them down until they come ...now

I'm sure everybody's ... I'm not naive enough to say that people are not human, and I'm sure they are influenced. If they, it's just like you and I in our cars. If we've had success with a Chevrolet, we tend to buy another Chevrolet, and if a teacher's had success with McGraw-Hill or Addison-Wesley or whatever, they're gonna be biased (mmm-hmm) toward that, because they're familiar with that.

Jim: Well, I'm not suggesting that the teachers were (yeah) were being bought (yeah) or being given money under the table (no, no). What I was suggesting (but they were probably influenced), yeah, well, what I was suggesting was that they for lack of time and resources, could not go through all the textbooks and perhaps that was a problem.

Ken: No, they have nearly a year (mmmh) when they're selected, to pore over the books before they uh, before they make a decision.

Jim: Let me get back a minute to Dr. Underwood. What was his reaction during the early part of '74, when the parents began to call in about books they were bothered with? Did he express anything to you personally?

Ken: Not a major problem. There again we had a, what we call a cabinet, which was the top administrative staff, and when we would meet, either he or anyone there would raise up problems and concerns that they felt ought to be addressed that was going on. (mm-hmm) And again, that, he did raise that as a problem. One of the coordinators had said that there's a problem evidently, with the books, we had better take a look at it. His approach was you know, not to, not to get all upset, because it is a large county and we have one of the most diverse populations probably in the school district of the United States. You really analyze the cultural diversity in Kanawha County, and uh, so what we decided to do was to develop a plan that we would send the books out at the beginning of the year for examination, because here we had, we had bought nearly a million dollars worth of books.

Jim: At this time, the books had already been purchased?

Ken: Uh, well, I don't know what period of time you're talking about.

Jim: Early '74.

Ken: Summer, in the summer they had been purchased ('74?) yeah, because they were gonna be distributed you know, in September. And all of the books were not here okay, of all the adoptions you're talking about. (mm-hmm) And uh, only you know, only some of the books were in and they were being processed and shipped out to schools and it's a long drawn out process when you have that many options in as many schools as you have in Kanawha County. So that process was on-going. So we developed, Dr. Underwood suggested that the strategy we should use would be that since all of these books will be new, that we would send them out to the

parents and even insert a form in the books, that the parents, we would ask the parents to review the books and uh, of their child, and uh, if they had any objections to document it on a piece of paper and have their child bring it back. And uh, since most of the books that were objectionable were in for students in elective courses in high school, uh, however they were. Like I say, some of the books that people objected to because of the pictures or ...but it was a, it was really an interesting sociological phenomenon that happened. A number of groups used uh, very, very neat propaganda techniques to uh, to upset people and get people emotional; they would quote from one of the uh, say senior elective books, some of the street language and they would say this is in all the books, and you know, like I say, there were what, 200 and something different books. Many of the books were standard grammar, standard english literature books, that what was kind of ironic was all the other counties around us had adopted.

Jim: All the other counties around adopted these books?

Ken: Right, and of course, not one word and of course, they didn't say anything. You can't blame them. (mmm-hmm) 'Cause they didn't want the same kind of turmoil that we had. (right) But it was kind of ironical or ironic that we were sittin' up here catchin' all the heat and uh, I guess maybe 60% of the school districts in the United States had done the same thing. (mmh) And uh, but you know, again, if you're being attacked, that it doesn't do any good to say somebody else is doing it, too. That doesn't make you right. But uh, it was really a, it was really interesting in terms of looking at mob psychology and due process as to what happened with the ...they immediately got the number of the small church, religious groups, got on the band wagon, because again they saw this as a way to increase their church membership and contribution in their little small communities.

Jim: You don't...are you saying that all the church groups that got involved were motivated by that particular issue?

Ken: No, no, no, some of the people were genuinely opposed to you know, they violated their beliefs and values. (mm-hmm) But it was uh...even if a small percentage of the people who seriously objected to the books, in the beginning, what it did was to whip up or encourage hysterical emotional reaction to the problem, rather than saying you know, what do we, at the board office, after the uh, September books went out, well, they never did go out. Okay? Because that's when people came out and started boycotting and picketing the schools. So we never did get a chance to get the books out to the people, to let the people see (mm-hmm). And so everybody's decisions were being made based on heresay. (mm-hmm) And of course, you know what that does. You can say anything you want to and you can get stretching it or abuse it, and that's true of both sides of the board and the parent groups that were opposing. And uh, a number of attempts were made to try to get people to specifically identify what was objectionable, so that could be looked at, you know, from an analytical point of view. But the rational model didn't work,

because everybody was emotional. And no one was interested in the rational model. Another factor in this that was very strong that Dr. Underwood was from out of state, and I don't know if you're familiar, how long you've been in West Virginia, but if ...it's true of most rural cultures and very true in appalachian cultures that outsiders are just...a threat and I can understand that, because what outsiders have done to "the environment and the people". So that cultural phenomenon was there and some groups wanted to use this as a way to get rid of the outsider superintendent, so they got on the band wagon. There was so many motives, if you really sit down and look at uh, after the process got going, there was so many motives that got mixed up in (mmm-hmm) the process that the text objection to what was in the textbooks was really, really kind of got lost. (mmm-hmm) And no one was really interested in solving that problem because all these other issues and like I say, the miners went out on strike, and they were already mad at the coal companies. And so they used this as a way to whip them up, and we talked to coal company officials and we talked to day and night we had groups trying to meet with and trying to reason with, and you couldn't because they were operating on

Jim: It's interesting because uh, they, the other side, the people I've talked to on the other side, suggests that you all, on the administrative side, would not communicate. They could not communicate with you and you just got done telling me that you couldn't communicate with them.

Ken: Right, that was a problem.

Jim: So there was a problem there (sure), a communicative breakdown (mmm-hmm)....

Ken: But people didn't want to communicate.

Jim:is that true on both sides?

Ken: No, I think at the board we ...we tried...we, that's why we're there, we're public servants and we're trying to find out what the problem is (mm-hmm) okay? And so that we could resolve the problem. (mm-hmm) Uh...we were caught in the dilemma of having invested taxpayers money, a million dollars or more, in textbooks, and those were stacked in a warehouse at Crede. So what do you do? You try to work through it and you try to salvage as much of that as (right) that's possible. And so that was the dilemma we were caught in. And uh, we ...we were...matter of fact we set up all kinds of committees and groups and I personally met with all of those ministers and....

Jim: Oh, you met with each one, or most of them personally?

Ken: Yeah, as groups we had meeting after meeting.

Jim: How did you find them as a group? Were they

Ken: Some of them were. Some of the people were rational but most of the people were emotional. And they came to the meetings not to hear, but to tell. It was a one-way communication. And they were not, they were not even willing to try to develop a uh, compromise, if you will. We suggested arbitration as a process, we suggested all kinds of techniques. And at that point in time the battle was so heated that uh, that uh, they uh, many of the, many of the people who opposed the books in leadership positions community and ministers, just, it just became a win-lose situation. There was no, no way you could make a win-win situation.

Jim: Would it ever, in your mind, could it ever have been resolved?

Ken: No. No, not after uh, September.

Jim: You're saying that it would have...it was gonna happen no matter what.

Ken: Right. If it hadn't been textbooks, it would have been something else. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: You made mention in this...

Ken: It might have been a personnel policy or whatever's going on right now.

Jim: You made mention in your article for the Phi Delta Kappa, which I think was written December '74? (I believe it is) Well, anyway, I'll note that, but you say that ...that this controversy surfaced when a small segment of the community began to protest the purchase of certain language arts textbooks. In your mind, then, you're convinced it was a small group (definitely) that began this whole thing?

Ken: Yeah. It was a small nucleus of people who ...who found some of the material to be objectionable to, you know, what they believed and what they valued.

Jim: Hmm-hmm. Uh, I want to talk about this (okay), this cultural aspect. Small segment of society you said were the core people. And then you suggested to me that this started to snowball. I'm putting words into your mouth (yeah, sure), it appears of being snowballed and by September you say, there was no chance of it ever being resolved. (right) It was just....

END OF SIDE 1

Jim: ...alright, the question was, how much was this cultural influence...what big a part did the cultural influence play? In other words, you said this is a very diverse county, and it is. I agree. There...what's been termed as the hillers and the creekers, the easterners and the westerners and some people called eastern Kanawha County bornagainia. What part did this cultural thing play in this controversy, do you think?

Ken: Well, I think it was a whole ...it's what made the problem in my opinion, to become one that was insoluble after ...after it reached a certain point of intensity. It's because of the diversity of the culture. If it had been one culture, you can deal with one set of values and you can have a compromise or you can have a solution (mm-hmm). But in just like in America, okay, we live in a very uh...pluralistic society and as a result, it's very, it's very difficult as any politician will tell you, to uh, to try to meet the needs or uh, even identify the values of the diverse culture that we had at the time.

Jim: I have a hard time, and I'm just expressing my own opinion (sure), putting a handle on what all the hubbub was about, why everybody got so upset. I've seen some of the material that or excerpts from the material, and I object to some of the material. (yeah, I do, too) And you told me earlier that you did. Would you uh, I was gonna ask you but it might not be a fair question, because after the fact, would you have been comfortable with your children being introduced to that kind of material in elementary or secondary schools?

Ken: Well, the one, the materials that were required, I didn't object to it. But the materials that, some of the materials that were to be offered as uh, special reading or whatever in, in the elective courses, I would have, as a parent, if my child had been that age at the time. But you have the, the thing is, you have the option of you know, as a parent or child, you have the option of not participating in that, if you know ahead of time.

Jim: Do you think that, and I'm asking you to speculate again (sure), that's part of history, I think. Do you think at the time if you had said as an administrator, you and Dr. Underwood, and you being specifically involved in curriculum, had said alright, we'll take a look at these, a second look at these books and we'll take all the textbooks out that are objectionable and do you think...how do you think that would... (we said that)...oh, you did?

Ken: Yes. And the problem became, at that point in time, it was those books. And that was what, what did you say? I've even forgotten... (318 basically) okay, different books. And uh, the objection you know, may have been 20, 25 books. Okay. But the problem in people's minds were that it was 318 books. And regardless of what you said, you were no longer trusted (mmm-hmm), so what you said carried no weight. And the people who wanted to ...to use this and even people who were opposed to the very idea of introducing this uh, were not uh, they would not allow anyone

to believe that it was only a small number of the books. And so the, in people's minds in the county, in various segments of the county they were convinced that the books, which meant 318, were tainted. (mm-hmm) And there was no way to (no compromise) do that.

Jim: How did Alice Moore handle all of this? I know she was deep involved and she probably was the first to publicly begin to

Ken: She...she supported the group of parents that, small group of parents, that initially objected. (okay) She wanted to make sure that those people's objections got heard. She was very

Jim: Did you ever talk to her personally? Did you ever suggest to her or try to get her to help you reach a compromise in this thing? Where you could you know, get whatever was objectionable out and retain at least the basics?

Ken: Yes. At board meetings in terms of what ...that was suggested by the board, and she went along, but we could not get the people, leadership of the people to come together to deal with that. Now, we finally did, uh, I don't know, don't remember when it was, but it was on up in the year. It was like October or November. That's when one of the board members resigned and Doug Stump came in. We finally did get a group of "the opposition" and we also identified the people who had supported it. We formed a committee, and we met nights up there at the Crede Warehouse going over THE books.

Jim: oh, I hadn't heard about this. I heard about a series of meetings in the basement or the Christ Methodist Church in Charleston where Dr. Underwood and several board members, not all, but several board members met with a uh, anti-textbook people and pro-textbook people tried to, over lunch, tried to resolve some of this.

Ken: That, that, yes, that was the first attempt. And when that broke down, then we, the next attempt was to have this open meeting and have all the books, have samples of all the books for every person on that committee. And have them go through those books in sight.

Jim: Now, the parents were involved in this, right?

Ken: Yes, we had parents, we had teachers, we had both...we had some teachers who were on the committee (mmm-hmm), who originally selected the books, on that committee. I can't remember now, we had a whole room full. It must have been thirty people, 25-30.

Jim: You actually pulled textbooks out (they had a set of every one of 'em) and looked at 'em?

Ken: Looked at 'em, right there on their table.

Jim: Were you in some of those meetings?

Ken: Yes, I was in every one of them. (alright)

Jim: What were some of the things that were accomplished in those meetings? Or not accomplished.

Ken: Uh...some of the people did see that it was the objections, many of the objections were limited to a small number of the books. Uh...other people were there, not because of the books, but for their own agenda. They had an agenda. Either they wanted to get rid of Ken Underwood, they wanted to change the school system, they were uh, upset uh...with government in general, and this was the closest vehicle they could use to get their frustrations out and there were very frustrated people out there. And they saw this as an avenue to, you know, beat the government back over the head.

Jim: Was this, excuse me, was this actually expressed, verbally? Or did you just get that feeling?

Ken: Uh...not, not, not the way I stated it, but indirectly (mmmh) okay, indirectly some of the people. And for some only a few that was a problem. You had a diverse, so many diverse groups and entries. We also had like I say, very, we had representatives of a number of national subversive groups.

Jim: Yeah. I was gonna mention that earlier. You mentioned in your article in the John Birch Society, (right) Klu Klux Klan (right), how deeply were they involved?

Ken: They had offices here and they were sending out literature and they had uh, they were building members.

Jim: And they actually were working?

Ken: Even admittedly. They had, you know, they were hiding. Now, originally they were, but they ...after they got established, then they came out indefinitely. They'd say that we're from the Klan and this is what we believe, and (inaudible)...John Birch Society.

Jim: One preacher was quoted as saying during this time that he supported the Klu Klux Klan being here, because they were at least anti-communist, anti- and I use this word uh, very uh, historically, anti-nigger (right), anti what else, you name it. And he support...and that's, that's a hard pill for me to swallow. I you know, personally I....

Ken: But it was like they were forming a coalition against the enemy, and we were the enemy, as far as the public was going.

Jim: It appears then, from what you've told me, that the school board or the administration at least was making an effort to resolve this thing. (yeah) Someone told me recently one of the opposition, one of the anti-textbook people that he felt that the group, the anti-textbook group was so fragmented and so, everybody

had as you mentioned, their own agenda (yeah) that they could not get together. They tried to get together a couple of times on their own at one of the restaurants in Charleston and everybody wanted to air their own opinions and they wanted this, and they wanted to do that. So that surfaces a problem. Do you, did you have that sense that there was this group and this group and this group and this group?

Ken: Oh, yeah. It was evident, that every time we had one of these meetings down at the board office, and we would invite the various outspoken leaders from the various communities in, there were just no way, because one group would be willing to try this approach, and this group would be diametrically opposed. Yeah, they were all "together in being opposed". (mmh) And so it was, like I say, if it had been one specific...if it had only been a religious issue, you know, on a set of moral beliefs, then I think the problem could have been resolved much quicker.

Jim: Do you think the word 'censorship' has been used over and over again? As an educator, as an administrator, as a man who spent your, most of your life working in education, all your life, and specifically with a lot of curriculum, do you feel it was an attempt at censorship?

Ken: Uh...not really.

Jim: In other words, you hear book burning, these people want to burn all the books and all this sort of thing (yeah).

Ken: Yeah, some of the people would definitely like to censor everything. (mmm-hmm) They uh...just last week a woman in a grocery store beat her child over the head with her purse, just really upset me, it was a teenage girl, for chewing gum. Now, she would like to censor not only what kids read, but everything they do and so forth. So you have that, but in a public school you have to have some alternatives. The problem is ...in public education, and it's getting worse, as with a pluralistic society, it's very difficult to offer the alternatives for the different constituent groups, the new prayer thing is a good example. (mmmh)

Jim: The...my information is that Alice Moore ran for the school board on an anti-sex platform. (right, initially) In 1970. She came on the school board on that issue, and it kind of appears that was the thing that she really watched out for, that was her baby if we might use that term. (mm-hmm) Uh...and one educator expressed to me that he felt it was the school's responsibility to train the children in that area, because uh, a recent study or a study at that time from Purdue, I think it was, suggested that 80% of the American people was not training their children in that area. (right, general education) Yeah. My question is, is it proper for the school system to assume that responsibility and secondly is it from your perspective in 1974-75, did you feel a sense of responsibility in...in presenting material that ...that

uh, contributed to the understanding of a pluralistic society and different ethnic groups. Did you feel that responsibility?

Ken: Sure, I was a public official.

Jim: So you're suggesting....

Ken: We were mandated by federal law to do it. Okay? For one thing. (you're talking about desegregation?) Right. And multi-cultural education.

Jim: But when you, and I don't want to get into a philisophical discussion but it's interesting, I'm enjoying this. When you take a book like _____ and you make it an elective, I mean, that's strictly a choice. Now, I'm not suggesting that it was required reading for every first grader. (right) But you say to a high school senior, here's a book if you want to learn about black culture, here's a book you ought to read. Now, that man I...I...know, I've heard Eldridge Cleaver speak in person. That man was a subversive. He would, well, he's been accused of being a communist or was, who was deadset in his book. He wants to destroy the fabric of America. He wants to tear down what we have. How can that help a high school senior understand another ethnic group?

Ken: Well, you can, but you can have a high school senior understand that you know, that that's what Eldridge Cleaver's doing. It's the same reason that the Bible which all of these groups supported, you know, talks about Satan (mm-hmm), you know, it's the same principle in terms of learning. Now if teachers had taught Eldridge Cleaver as gospel in the way, then ..then, then that would have been "wrong". (okay) But having the material, you know, it doesn't do any good, as a matter of fact, you're doing kids a disservice if you throw the book in the trash. What you ought to say is here's what the book is and here's what the guy stands for and we need to understand there's people like that in our society. (mmm-hmm) But most people, unless they're educated people, can't deal with that. (mmm-hmm) They can't understand that educative process.

Jim: Do you, do you see maybe during that time, was educated people, sophisticated people, and if I can use that word, trying to deal with inarticulate people, uneducated people?

Ken: Well, sure it's ...more enlightened people were trying to say, just like the sex education, we know today you can go down here and interview anyone who works in the welfare system and works in the uh, mental health system, who works in the juvenile court system, and everyone who's in a leadership position will tell you that there needs to be sex education. (mm-hmm) But if you go out here in some of these communities and you say we're gonna offer it and it's required, you're gonna have another blowup, just like we had. (mm-hmm)

Jim: Well, that's, that again is another topic but it's interesting. Uh, Alice Moore was reported to have in a board meeting one night, you may or may not have been there, asked a english teacher to read a poem from a book or an excerpt from a book that she was proposing as a textbook and this teacher red in the face, embarrassed, refused to read that segment of the book, and Alice Moore said in the meeting, and I'm paraphrasing, she said, "there is a perfect example of some of the material and it's so bad this woman won't even read it". Were you in that meeting?

Ken: No, I wasn't...I don't recall, I might have been. But uh, but many you know, a lot of things happened like that. And as I said earlier, some of the material was that objectionable.

Jim: And you personally would have been in favor of removing those books? (sure) I think Dr. Stansbury told me that uh, when the objections were really getting hot and things were really getting wound up, that they removed 8 textbooks, the board decided to take 8 textbooks (8 of the _____ books, right), most objectionable, and throw them out. And also, he further suggested to me that the printed material being circulated by the anti-textbook people quoted most of the stuff that was taken out of the 8 textbooks that were taken out (yeah). Would you agree with that?

Ken: Yeah, definitely. And they implied that this material was in all the books. (mm-hmm) Which is....

Jim: Well, I have copies of that material, and I would (sure), I see that, I see that in there, too. Uh, let's move along then to the thing as it begins to wind down. How did this thing finally get to the point where it started to go away? I know you as an administrator were probably praying it would go away soon, but how did this thing start to resolve and what really happened to get it wound up?

Ken: Well, a lot of the actions and behaviors helped to solve...solve itself. For example, when they started bombing, okay, bombing schools and bombing the central office, and then a lot of people again, time takes care of a lot of things. And many of the people who started out as highly emotional and irrational started to see what we're doing is probably just as bad as what we're fighting, and so there was a lot of, a lot of soul searching and that kind of thing went on. (mmmh) And the very fact, also, that the administration and the board of education did remove you know, the majority of the books and then the uh, the books that they did put back in school they gave every parent the option of saying that they wanted their child to use them or not use them. So we provided, you know, every means that we could to ...to resolve the problem without throwing a million dollars worth of books in the river.

Jim: I also had ...have read, or someone told me that Mel and Norma Gabler, some fellow Texans, (yeah, sure), were here (they were) and involved. They suggested that to Alice Moore during

some communication they had during this period, that they from that time on, when they ordered textbooks to specify Texas-type textbooks and they also suggested that the publishing companies that published textbooks had two sets of books, one set of books that they were the Texas-type books with all the profanity and all the objectionable things taken out....

Ken: All the ethnic.

Jim: ...all the ethnic things taken out, and on the other side they had the textbooks that were sent to other parts of the country that didn't object. Is that true?

Ken: It is now. It wasn't then. At that point in history, it hadn't reached a point where the textbook publishers wanted to spend that kind of money, but they knew, and this grew of course rapidly, all over the country. There had been a few small instances prior to Kanawha County, but primarily this one was the one that set off the nation-wide approach. And so the textbook people knew that if they were gonna sell books, that this was what they're gonna have to do.

Jim: Uh...and I'm just kind of, I know this is just hit and miss, but there's things coming to my mind as we're talking, I was told there was a man by the name of Gold Goldabber, who came here, he was a teacher in Miami, teaches at a college or university in Florida, and he has a system to arbitrate conflicts. Does that name ring a bell with you?

Ken: No, the name doesn't, but what you're talking about does.

Jim: Yeah, this man has devised some kind of arbitration system where he brings the two groups, the two opposing groups into a room, or actually 2 1/2 days, they spend 2 1/2 days together completely isolated--I was told this by Elmer Fike--he mentioned that Mr. Goldabber, or Dr. Goldabber had come in here after the thing was over (mm-hmm) to get the two sides together. It's really interesting. I think it's ironic that when the thing really when he should have been here was in the summer of '74 before the thing, and now...

Ken: Well, I'll tell you this, too, we even had the office of Education uh, because of a lot of subversive kinds of things that were going on. We even had the Justice Department and the U.S. Department of Labor willing to send some of their top arbitrators in, and there's communications somewhere on record to that fact.

Jim: Was it ever tried? (the uh, the uh...) The arbitration?

Ken: No, we couldn't get the group to agree, you know, we...

Jim: You attempted to get them to say, let's sit down and (sure) and arbitrate, an independent arbitrator...

Ken: They didn't want to arbitrate. It was a win/lose.

Jim: You think that philosophy's pretty uh, was that prevalent throughout the time, the win/lose, either you win or lose, no in between?

Ken: Yeah, yeah, (you think that's what kept it going?) until people finally found out, you know, that the kids in the long run was gonna be hurt. And then they were willing to go through the process, (inaudible)...they actually said, yeah, we're finally willing to sit down and look at it.

Jim: But that never really accomplished anything.

Ken: Yeah, it did (oh, did it?) yeah. That uh, really is what started defusing the problem.

Jim: The meetings at Crede in the warehouse?

Ken: We, enough people came out of that experience, even though the reports were still for and against in terms of voting and there was some minority reports and all this kind of thing. We tried to handle it in a, in a professional way, but uh, what came out of it in truth was a lot of people changes their, changed their insights and opinions and so then after that process, they went back and influenced their constituent groups.

Jim: And things began to....(calm down)...things began to calm down, and people got afraid of the violence and things just kind of died out. Okay, let me conclude by asking you a few questions in retrospect. (sure) Did this controversy do anything to help? (no) Wasn't helpful in any way.

Ken: It didn't help the people, uh, who were uh, frustrated about not having any say in public education. It did not, it definitely did not help what educators were trying to do for kids. It was totally destructive, in my opinion.

Jim: Someone also said...

Ken: For both groups. (for both groups) Well, you...last week you see where the group in Alum Creek are opposing the school board in closing their community school. And it's, they have a different culture there, and their gonna be infused into the "hillers" culture, if you will. Okay, higher socioeconomic...different culture. It's gonna totally uh, alienate and in my opinion again, based on _____; it's gonna totally ruin the opportunity those kids have in ...for getting an education. But what I'm saying is, all the textbook controversy and all of that, did those people no good, because they still have no voice in public education.

Jim: Mm-hmm. It's kind of ironic, I was told that after, now this is 10 years later, that's one of the reason's I'm doing this thesis, because now we've got a ten year waiting period and we've looked at this thing...that uh, Dr. Stansbury told me they're trying to get parents involved in textbook selections in the last

10 years, and he said just gradually it's gotten now they can't get a, they can't hardly get parents involved in(she's just going to lunch), I find that ironic that 10 years later that parents aren't, they're kind of lethargical about it. They don't really seem to want to get involved.

Ken: The reason they don't is again it's our whole method of involving the public in decision-making. They know they're just being placated. They were placated then, and they're gonna be placated 'til they have no voice in decision-making in public education.

Jim: Is that good or is that bad?

Ken: It's bad, it's their public schools (yeah).

Jim: So you kind of agree with them (oh, yeah), that they need more input into the public school system. (sure)

Ken: They have to, if it's gonna be a public school (right).

Jim: Do you think educators agree with that, basically, or

Ken: No, because they're in power positions and they're threatened by that. (mmmh) It's a loss of control. It's the same thing with the legislature. It's the reason we don't have more democracy.

Jim: Yeah. Could this thing, this textbook controversy, been handled differently?

Ken: I'm sure it could, but at the time, uh, you know, given the issues and the uh, period of time in history I think if I were superintendent in the school system today and uh, a similar incident came up, I think I would definitely handle it differently, just based on what we've learned in that, and what other school systems

Jim: How would you, how would you handle it differently?

Ken: Well, one of the ways that I do would be I'd have total involvement. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: You would, when you say total involvement, you would have....

Ken: In selection and uh, in you know, in the selection process of the materials. Plus I'd have more communication and hopefully at least the opportunity for more understanding about what the school system's trying to do. And also, I'd ask the people what they'd want done. (mmm-hmm)

Jim: Uh...that was tried, I understand, during the controversy in the fall and winter of '74 and '75. Parents were asked to get on

these textbook committees and(they were for a while)...and then

Ken: It kind of (inaudible)....off.

Jim: Wonder why?

Ken: Because people...it's the same reason people don't show up for PTA meetings. You do the first few years, when your child's young, and then you find out that, that it doesn't really make any difference if you go or not. (mmm-hmm) Because you're not going to influence the system. The system's already set. So...

Jim: So it's the frustration, (yeah), of not being able to....

Ken: Well, you get tried, because people ask you to participate and be involved, and then when you try to participate and be involved, all they want you to do is support what "they want to do." And so it's a self-defeating process. Let's just face it.

Jim: Well, one final thing. You may not have the information that will help me in this, but I'm wondering if textbooks today in Kanawha County reflect this controversy in 1974 and '75, do you have any knowledge of that?

Ken: No, I don't know. I've been out of the schools...but I'd be willing to guess if you can go into not only Kanawha County but any school system and find books today that were, that are a lot worse than what the people then were objecting to, in terms of language, in terms of ethnic uh, presentations, values, you know, you mentioned earlier you thought about doing something on the idea of humanism. I know for a fact that that influence is definitely in our school. And the only way it gets there is through textual materials.

Jim: Educators who have been introduced to that....

Ken: Yeah, have been trained or brought into that concept or philosophy and then they use techniques and strategies and materials to reinforce it.

Jim: This is off the subject I know, but Dr. Dewey said, who is the secular humanist, I think, back in the '30's, made the statement that our objective is to get the kids away from their parents. We want to ...that may be an unfair statement.

Ken: I can't buy that.

Jim: But I read an article one time and he was quoted as saying, and I can't remember all the phraseology, but there was a statement that he said that we want to get the kids into our hands, that we want to mold them, we want to shape them.

Ken: Not John Dewey. I've got most of John Dewey's whole works. Most of John Dewey's whole philosophy was that the only way that

you get kids to learn are in their own family values and cultures and that any experiences you have in school has to be in line. (mmmh) That's his whole, now he was greatly misunderstood, (that may be it), but if you look at, if you look at his works, he was totally a uh, as an educator, I totally agree, that people learn based on their prior learning, and their values. And uh, the uh, you know, I'm against the humanism movement personally. My values are my beliefs, but I wouldn't ...if you had a school run the way John Dewey would want it run, it definitely would not be. It would be based on whatever the values, beliefs and culture of that little community is. So that in Kanawha County, if you got uh, what, 14 high schools and a ...let's say 400 schools, you'd have 400 different schools.

Jim: Well, I guess I'd agree with that, too. I thank you for your time uh, Dr. Young. And this will conclude the tape on the review of the Kanawha Valley Textbook Controversy. And uh, we again thank you for your time.